

## **The use of social media within police education**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The Internet is going through a major change with the introduction of social networks. This change could have profound implications for the way we use the Internet, for the way we do business, for the way we learn, for police work and for police education.

**Design/approach** – The paper describes changing police work by the introduction of social media and its implications for police education.

**Findings** – Police students who are educated based on the principles describes in this paper, including the use of social media, do not merely gain insight into the ethical aspects of the use of social media but they also learn to cooperate and to give and receive feedback; both are important competencies for the training and education of policemen.

**Practical implications** – This paper describes the use of social media by the Dutch police and the implications social media has on police education. It provides an answer to the question: How do you incorporate social media into police education, taken into account a proper

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didactical approach and implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)?

**Originality/value** –This paper also shows the need and the opportunities to incorporate social media into police education.

**Keywords:** : implementation, learning environment, participatory learning, police education, social media

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## **Introduction**

The Internet is going through a major change with the introduction of social media applications such as Blogs, Facebook and Twitter. Social media applications are used more and more in our daily personal and professional lives and it seems clear that the way we use the Internet is rapidly changing. This change could have profound implications for the way we use the Internet, for the way we do business and for the way we learn. 'The information revolution, which sneaky occurs this decennium, has far-reaching consequences for the police and for police education' (Boer, 2009). 'Many educational institutions are becoming increasingly aware that such social media applications can be effectively integrated into their learning programme and lifelong learning delivery systems. However, currently very few are actually using these applications to innovate their training systems' (Toole et al., 2010).

The Police Academy of the Netherlands is the central organisation responsible for police education programmes and knowledge management regarding the police profession in the Netherlands. The traditional focus on the exchange of factual expertise has been replaced by an approach that concentrates on the acquisition of competences in professional practice. Police education and training is supported by Blackboard. In this virtual learning environment (VLE), all teaching assignments, keys, grids and announcements can be found. Communication through e-mail is also possible. Students of the Police Academy experience more satisfaction in using Blackboard than those in other vocational institutes of education (Vrieling, 2009). In addition to Blackboard, the Police Academy uses a variety of simulation programs. Besides that, teachers often use YouTube videos to serve as teaching material. In addition to being an education centre, the Police Academy is also a knowledge centre for and run by the police department. In police training, the emphasis lies on acquiring competences, whereas to police knowledge the focus is on sharing knowledge with each other and jointly

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developing new knowledge. The knowledge function aims to improve and update day-to-day professional practice as well as to develop the policing profession.

Nowadays, it is no longer the teacher or the student who remain central in the learning process but the learning process itself has become significant. A learning process, which is independent of place and time. In addition, 'the choice of what technology is situation dependent. A triangle between teacher, student, and content. What content, which pedagogical approach and with what technology. Why and how?' (Hudson, 2008).

With the introduction of social media and the consequent changes in police work, the question arises how to make students deal with social media. The Police Academy can already be found on Twitter. This paper describes the use of social media by the Dutch police and the implications social media has on police education. It provides an answer to the question: How do you incorporate social media into police education, taken into account a proper didactical approach and implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)? This paper also shows the need and the opportunities to incorporate social media into police education.

### **Changing police work: Police and social networks**

The police is an information-intensive organisation. Police work is about data, information, knowledge and intelligence. Only a part of the information can be found in police information systems but a mass of information can be found on the Internet. In order to support police work and to make proper use of information on a strategic, tactic and operational level, space for innovation will be necessary. Police workers will have to get involved in the discussion about today's information systems, future information strategy and

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internet strategy and the corresponding information services of the Dutch Police. Police employees will have to get the space and the possibilities to think along about innovative applications that support police work in the right way (Rijssel van, 2010).

Web 2.0 has its impact on the police force and on police information channels. For instance: The plane crash on Hudson river. Social media were at the forefront of breaking and disseminating news. It provides an invaluable real-time running commentary on events, which, when taken together with the factual accuracy, analysis and commentary of the mainstream media, provides a fascinating and rich account of this major incident. Moreover, from felons on Facebook to tips through Twitter, social media is being used more and more by law enforcement agencies, and not just to fight Internet-related crimes. ‘We are talking about solving crimes that are happening on the street and in your community. However, many police departments that have embraced social media are still trying to figure it out. Most agencies are not significantly proactive with keeping up with content and updates, said Terry Halsch from CitizenObserver.com, developers of the tip411 system for police agencies. There are some limitations because of uncertainty of how secure information is, how can it be efficiently maintained, [and] the risks and liabilities of entering the world of social media (Cohen, 2010)’. Legal experts agree that public information sources such as Facebook can be legally used in criminal or other investigations. In this way, information posted on sites such as Facebook can be used by the police and by university officials to prosecute users.

The Groningen Regional Police Force make use of videos on You Tube. According to the Groningen Police Corps, YouTube is ‘one of the strongest means to cooperate with citizens in order to identify criminals’. In May 2010, the Groningen Regional Police Force launched their own channel on You Tube. Since then, seventeen videos have been put online that were viewed about 150,000 times. Eight cases were solved thanks to tip-offs from the public or because suspects had turned themselves in at the police office. These cases involved

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a taxi driver, petrol station and drugstore robbery. The Groningen Police supplied 150 policemen on the beat with a Smartphone, which has a built-in camera and video. The Corps wants its policemen to be in direct communication with other colleagues, partner institution members and with the public. This allows the police to transform into a network organisation (Duijneveldt van et al., 2011) because networks will be connected to each other. With tools like Twitter, real-time information can be exchanged. The Dutch police and especially policemen on the beat make frequent use of Twitter for prevention and tracking purposes (Zorko et al., 2011). Since May 2011, 258 Dutch policemen on the beat (about 9%) use Twitter professionally. According to Suster (2010) Twitter's biggest power is information sharing. Up to May 2011, one policeman made as many as 4000 tweets. The Utrecht Police District has the most followers (more than 5000) of the 26 police districts (Balance at 01/05/2011, source: Utrecht University study commissioned by Police & Science).

There are people who use Twitter to report a collision because they find it difficult to call the police. Ultimately, Twitter is a fast communication medium: a tweet is often retweeted and messages can be sent quickly. In practice and in daily life, police students have to deal with the Internet and social media. Therefore, it is important that they are also motivated to explore social media and understand its ethical aspects during their education. Is it advisable for a policeman to be known or recognized in social media? What does one twitter or not twitter? In December 2010, a Dutch District Chief was suspended for improper use of Twitter. Another report concerned the theft of a woman's cell phone in an Amsterdam cafe. Within two days, the woman's boyfriend was able to trace details of the suspected offender by using his own phone. To his own amazement, the policeman who had taken down the report did not take the boyfriend seriously. The latter did not understand the situation. A ping program, installed standard on Blackberry, makes it possible to access information about the thief's name and photograph. Ping is an application with a unique code that is linked to

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the telephone and not to a SIM-card as with a telephone number. As soon as a thief starts using the application, its former owner can trace him or her. In this way, the boyfriend succeeded in tracing the suspected thief's data. According to professor Stol of the Police Academy, the technical expertise of the average policeman is far from adequate, as a result of which cases are unnecessarily shelved. However, the police do provide specialists when needed. 'Police work has always been labour intensive. The technological evolution, through which a great deal of manual labour has disappeared, has not affected this labour intensiveness. Most police capacity is invested in everyday police patrol work, like emergency patrol and community beat patrol. The character of policing in a certain district depends on what police officers do (and do not do) while they are on patrol. Consequently, police management is managing what police officers do and do not do. Managing police work and improving the quality of policing therefore first of all requires a good insight in what police officers do. Police management requires knowledge about what determines what police officers do (Stol, 2006)'.

One of the most important characteristics of these second-generation applications is that everyone can participate by uploading texts, links, photos, and video films. These enriched websites are indicated with 'user generated content'. Civilian initiatives and Web 2.0 sites flooded the police with a lot of information. How to fence this information on proper interpretation? The Police should anticipate on Web 2.0 who can support investigation (Smilda, 2009).

The Police Academy of the Netherlands organized a seminar entitled 'Social Media and Apply Now ', on Friday, May 13, 2011. Prof. Dr. P.E.W.M. Tops, member of the Executive Board, distinguished in his introduction about the importance of social media for three aspects of police work. First, the digital world adds something to the work of police. 'There is everything there and it is the core task of the police to create order in that world'.

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Second, social media include new forms of communication that the image of the police co-determination. With the use of social media, the police can bring balance to the image of her that exists. The third aspect is the use of social media to improve the quality of the operational policing improvement. Thus, social media support the detection and make the maintenance of public order more efficient and effective and reinforcing the catch in the act.

The next paragraphs supplies an answer to the question: How do you incorporate social media into police education, taken into account a proper didactical approach and implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)?

### **The Future of Learning Institutions in a Digital Age**

Davidson (Davidson et al., 2009) states that ‘the single most important characteristic of the Internet is its capacity to allow for a worldwide community and its endlessly myriad subsets to exchange ideas, to learn from one another in a way not previously available. A key term in thinking about these emergent shifts is *participatory learning*. Participatory learning includes the many ways in which learners (of any age) use new technologies to participate in virtual communities where they share ideas, comment on one another’s projects, and plan, design, implement, advance, or simply discuss their practices, goals, and ideas together.

The above insight into the Future of Learning Institutions in a Digital Age combined with the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering et al., 1987, 1999) might be an excellent way to use the Internet for learning and teaching in police education. The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education were a huge success when they were first issued in the mid-1980s, and they have continued to be refined and used in a variety of ways since then. These principles have inspired several lines of

research. The results support the extension of five from the seven principles of good practice in classroom-based undergraduate education to web-based graduate education. These findings suggest that principles of effective classroom teaching may be used as a starting point for developing and teaching web-based courses (Baars et al, 2005; Hutchins, 2003; Arbaugh et al., 2006).

### **The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

#### **These principles are:**

1. Encourage *contact* between students and school; frequent student-school contact, both inside and outside class, is an important factor in student motivation and involvement (Baars et al., 2003). The student's intellectual capacities will increase. The Internet makes it more accessible for students and teachers to ask questions and to give *feedback*. The Online College distinguishes some hundred ways in which Facebook can be used in your classroom/an educational setting. Facebook is not just a great way for you to find old friends or learn about what is happening this weekend; it is also an incredible learning tool. Teachers can utilize Facebook for class projects, for enhancing communication, and for engaging students in a manner that might not be entirely possible in traditional classroom settings (Pempek et al., 2009). The advantage of the usage of Facebook in education is that it is fast and provides feedback on a larger scale than through a traditional virtual learning environment. The security can be guaranteed, through the privacy settings. Students mostly have already a Facebook account and it is not necessary to be friends with them. There is also a Facebook for

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educators. This is a guide created for teachers on how to establish a professional image while using Facebook as a social networking application (Phillips, et al, 2011).

2. Develop *reciprocity* and *cooperation* among students. School should create and encourage opportunities for collaborative learning among students. Collaborative learning stimulates the involvement of learning. According to Kessler (2010) Twitter increases student engagement. Students in the study who were asked to contribute to class discussions and complete assignments using Twitter, increased their engagement over a semester more than twice as much as a control group did. According to Buchem (2011), it provided a certain degree of intellectual readiness and a set of exploratory skills, microblogging can become a serendipitous learning space. Hart (2011) describes a Guide how to use Twitter for social learning - that is to build a community, communicate, collaborate with others, as well as share information and resources. In addition, it looks at how it can be used for to support formal social learning events and programmes. Dunlap (Dunlap, et.al, 2009) describe the use of Twitter to encourage free flowing just-in-time interactions and how these interactions can enhance social presence in online courses. Willi (1999) brings the human needs to shape and leave tangible signs in any environment to the foreground. The significance of these needs and even more, the need to fulfill these needs with success usually brings about a drive in humans to form intensive and effective relationships with their environment. In that way, one will also attempt to reach out for the other person, trying to get into contact with interpersonal relationship. Participation is also made possible through a wiki (Hazari et al., 2009). The Wiki platform constitutes the learning portal that integrates learning contents from all of the learning modules in the learning environment, making them accessible in a structured way. It does not only serve as knowledge repository, but also as working environment. The Wiki is an

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activator in the learning and teaching setting in terms of blended learning – in both phases of online and actual presence (Blees et al., 2009).

3. Encourage **active** learning: Students should actively work with their knowledge and skills. Interaction is an important feature of an active on-line way of working. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) emphasize the importance of interactivity and learning-by-doing. Interaction is essential in order to receive feedback on the learning process. Feedback is a relevant factor in the interaction between student and teacher as well as between peers. Next, it is important that an assignment is geared to the student's perception of his or her environment. This can be made possible, for instance, when data is used coming from the students themselves. Students tend to become more motivated developing their own product. If this product (for instance a traffic control plan) is really actually used (at school or in real) then it will work extra motivating (Ploegman et al., 2008).
4. Give prompt/immediate **feedback**: School should provide appropriate and prompt feedback on performance. Students need assistance in assessing their actual competence and performance, and they need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. Such feedback should be an ongoing process in collegiate settings; it is essential to the student's learning process. The Internet offers the possibility to give students feedback in different ways. A digital portfolio makes it possible to assess on the learning process, to see if there is proof that the learning goals have been reached. When guiding the personal development of citizens to police officer writing week journals gives input to the students' reflection report. A great power of writing week journals is the process of continuous reflection which gives time and space to create new ideas (Hartnell-Young, 2003). The fact that the week journal is on-line refers to the easy access teachers have to it, since they can use it for

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consultation at any time by just going into the Internet. This allow them to easily access and read the week journal without having to collect them in, and provide feedback by attaching written comments to individual entries (Lopez, 2006 ; Xiang, 2005). Students can put their week journals in their own thread in the discussion board of Blackboard or in their own Weblog. With the proper supervision of Weblogs, the ability for students to receive feedback and critiques to guide and monitor their academic achievement can surely be an effective assessment tool (Lee et al., 2006).

Periodically, students should also be given the opportunity to reflect critically on what they have learned so far. Experience becomes knowledge through reflection, which is enhanced by timely and appropriate criticism (Brown et al., 2005). Learning to reflect is a competence of growing importance in higher education (Andernach, 2006).

Learning is the result of active construction of knowledge, coupled to personal unique foreknowledge. This couple is necessary to save this knowledge in the long-term memory. Learning is the development of meaningful concepts, in a realistic context.

Reflection and feedback at the learning process are of vital importance for the development of Meta cognitive skills. Learning always takes place in a social context and learning you do together (Kral, 2005). Reflection is among the main reasons why people blog and is described by numerous authors (Thomas, 2005; Koa et al., 2006).

5. Emphasize *time on task*: School should create opportunities for students in order to enable them to practice good time management. This includes setting a realistic deadline for students to complete assignments and to use class time for learning opportunities. A teacher's support is made effective when clarity on the overall aim, time investment, and choice of literature is provided. As a result, students are able to learn more efficiently. Furthermore, students tend to lose time by searching for resources on the Internet. However, on-line communication can be efficient if you

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organise it well. Using social media applications accelerates the learning process and encourages effective use of time.

6. Communicate ***high expectations***: School should set and communicate high expectations for student learning. Such will turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy and students will often endeavour to meet the challenge. When a student has a clear awareness of his/her own expectations, he/she will work harder. Creating a website, working with students from other countries through virtual teams, displaying assignments through a site can be sources of motivation and excellence (Jain, 2003).
7. Respect ***different talents and ways of learning***: School should create learning opportunities that appeal to the different ways students will process and attend to information. A variation of presentation styles and assignment requirements will allow students to highlight their own personal and unique talents and it offers them different ways about how to learn on an individual level. In general, Human Dynamics (Seagal et al., 1997) distinguish three categories learning styles namely students who are mentally centred, emotionally centred, or physically centred. The mentally centred student proceeds in a linear way and does so mostly alone. He/she gathers information and he asks him/herself what the use of this information is, next he comes to a product. The emotionally centred student starts immediately. The process looks chaotic. He/she proceeds by trial and error. His/her product gradually improves but is never finished. He has an eye for detail. The physically centred student gathers a great amount of information, many details and after a (long) time he completes his product. That is the end; they do not change it any more. Students differ in talent and style of learning and they should be offered the possibility to show their talents in a way that suits them. Social media applications allow students to work at their own pace. Social

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media can provide for different learning styles, independent working of students and personal responsibility (Baird et al., 2006).

### **Implementation**

The past decade has seen unprecedented investment in the use of new technology. The role of educational technologies in improving educational practices and outcomes has been criticized as over-hyped and insignificant (Amiel et al., 2008; Haydn, 2006). The management of Institutes should wonder if they pay enough notice to the important role of the process of implementation of new technology. 'We should think of e-learning and learning technology as enablers, not as a strategy. It is not the technology which makes learning challenging, but the way it is used and implemented. It is the highway, not the destination; the means rather than the end' (Rosenberg, 2006). 'As well as strengthening the integration of social media in lifelong learning delivery, it is also important that the vocational education & training (VET) sector and adult training institutions themselves think about how the inclusion of social media applications can benefit their management structure. It is important for management to be open to the new structures facilitated by social media tools and to consider shifting from a hierarchical management model towards a flat hierarchy and self-organised teams. This would help to ensure that social media applications actually work within the institutions. This view suggests that the organisational culture has to be transformed into a more open business and learning structure. The implementation of social media tools will further facilitate the employees to actively co-develop their organisational processes. The working processes within the organisations will consequently be more owned by their members' (Toole et al., 2010). According to Shelly Blake-Plock (2011) no business can afford to ignore social

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media, no school will be able to ignore it. For our students, the value of social media will prove not to be how many followers one has but with how many leaders one engages.

Ultimately, the school that ignores the connection will be the school that we will identify as a failing institution. This counts for the Police Academy as well.

On the other hand, is there a growing gap between learners and teachers in the way they use the Internet? (Atwell, 2011). Do the manager and the teacher participate in social networks like Facebook and Twitter? 'The modern executive, manager, teacher or trainer can't really call themselves a professional without at least a knowledge of social media. Social media is not the answer to every problem, but it's undoubtedly a useful and powerful advance in learning' (Clark, 2011). How many of the seven principles mentioned above are used in the classroom? Are teachers aware of the important role of immediate feedback on performance and the opportunity to incorporate and organise appropriate feedback through social media? Albrini (2005) shows the importance of the teacher's own point of view and his/her experience with new technology. If an institute introduces the Internet for learning and teaching without sufficiently formulating the different goals and without a teacher's experience how to actually use the Internet, there is a risk that the use will be under utilized or even abandoned because of the lack of user acceptance. If there is no master plan present and without the introduction of a pedagogical and didactical component, Internet learning and teaching will provide no extra value to education. Participation of the management is crucial. Furthermore, the use of the Internet should be put on the agenda of the job evaluation program and teachers should be asked about their conduct in relation to its use. Besides that, there is a need to develop learning and teaching training through the Internet (Simons, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

In view of the above, it can be stated that police students who are educated based on the aforementioned principles, including the use of social media, do not merely gain insight into the ethical aspects of the use of social media but they also learn to cooperate and to give and receive feedback; both are important competencies for the training and education of policemen. Moreover, the learning process itself motivates students because of the context of real life experience. A police officer should always be aware of a digital world that can be used for prevention purposes and also for identification and detection. This digital world should be a part of their education. Participatory learning fits with the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, and with proper attention paid to its implementation it might be an excellent way to use the Internet for learning and teaching purposes. This paper shows the need and the opportunities to incorporate social media into police education. Therefore, the use of the Internet should have a prominent place within the field of learning and teaching in police education.

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