

## Review



### **Policing and Social Media: Social Control in an Era of New Media.**

By Christopher J. Schneider. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. 159 pp. ISBN: 9781498533713.

While reading this book, several recent examples of news reports, both positive and negative, on police use of social media came to mind. However, the one incident that kept replaying in my mind was when an officer from the Kensington Police in PEI, Canada, posted a warning on their Facebook page to drunk drivers. This warning stated that in addition to receiving the usual charges, anyone caught drinking and driving would be forced to listen to Nickelback's *Silver Side Up* album in the police cruiser as additional punishment. The officer posting this remark meant for it to be both humorous, as Nickelback's music is often joked about as being "bad," and at the same time highlight the importance of not drinking and driving. Some in the public understood that his post was meant as a joke but others saw it as making light of the serious issue of drunk driving. Nickelback fans saw it as yet another slight on music they enjoyed. In the end, the officer apologized to Nickelback and removed the post from Facebook. However, by this time the post had already garnered worldwide attention (Ross, 2016; Sinclair, 2016). Schneider's book provides a starting foundation to better understand the risks and benefits associated with incidents such as these.

Utilizing media logic as a theoretical framework, Schneider's argument is that the logic of social media is shaping and changing police practices. That is, as the police increasingly utilize social media, the institution of policing is fundamentally altered. In particular, the use of social media by police allows for new ways to interact with citizens and present a constructed narrative of themselves and events to the public. At the same time, the interactive nature of this new social media environment raises questions about the ability of police to socially control situations. Chapter One and Two of the book outline and provide support for these arguments. Chapter One broadly discusses a changing media landscape in relation to policing. In particular, this chapter highlights how new recording technologies and social media have allowed the public to instantaneously post pictures, videos, and critiques of the police online. In turn, the police, no longer having almost exclusive control over the narrative, must now instantaneously react and respond. It is this change that police must adapt to. Chapter Two further bolsters Schneider's arguments by tracing the historical use of social media by the police starting with their presence on, and use of, MySpace as well as other social media platforms. This examination demonstrates how policing is increasingly being rethought through a lens of social media platforms and content.

The remainder of the book focuses mainly on three case studies. Chapter Three examines the Vancouver Police Department's use of Facebook during the 2011 Stanley

Cup riots. Chapter Four focuses on how the Toronto Police Service present themselves publically via Twitter. Chapter Five examines how YouTube was utilized to present the police shooting of Sammy Yatim to the public before the Toronto Police Service was able to frame the incident. Drawing on four years of research, these cases are examined utilizing a qualitative media analysis. For the most part, Schneider does an excellent job at detailing these cases and linking the findings to the larger arguments put forward in the book. However, at times these cases seem to reach beyond their intended illustrative purposes. For example, there is an implication that the Toronto Police Service's use of Twitter tells us something about how other Canadian police services present themselves to the public. Given Toronto's somewhat unique approach to allowing all officers their own social media accounts and that a range of police services across Canada were not consulted, the generalizability of this case study to other locales is questionable. This is a minor concern as the overall text is persuasive and well written. However, there is still very much a need for future research to move beyond isolated events and particular police services in order to see if Schneider's theorizing holds up across a range of police services.

Overall, the book has very few weaknesses. My only substantial critique of the book is that Schneider's analysis is limited to texts. At times, the author makes claims regarding police intent without conducting interviews with officers about their own social media use. While text analysis is a completely valid methodological approach, interviewing officers would have provided a more well-rounded picture of the impact social media is having on policing. Additionally, and while not necessarily a weakness, the focus on texts revealed much about how citizens viewed the police and the criminal justice system more generally. While this data was used to illustrate how police no longer control the narrative, it also indicated that citizens do not have a solid grasp of criminal justice issues and research. For example, young offenders were identified online, which is generally prohibited under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. If policing is indeed being shaped by social media logic, it would have been interesting to discuss in more depth the risks of having a potentially uninformed public help to shape what this logic looks like.

Although focused on Canadian policing, I consider this book an excellent foundational text for those interested more broadly in contemporary police communications as well as the changing nature of policing in general. The arguments are persuasive and help to better understand the challenges police face as they enter this social media environment. To return to the example I opened this review with, the officer was indeed utilizing the logic of social media to engage with the public. That is, he was attempting to be relatable by drawing on pop culture and humour to bring attention to the important issue of drunk driving. When a critique was levelled at the post online, the officer reexamined and removed the post. This type of instant critique and response is the new environment in which policing plays out. While the humour of the officer might have missed the mark for some in the public, this example is better understood within the context of the arguments laid out in Schneider's text. That is, police are adapting to, reflecting on, and changing how they interact with citizens and the new social media environment is helping to shape what contemporary policing looks like.

## References

- Ross, Shane. (2016). Kensington police officer apologizes to Nickelback for Facebook post. *CBC News*. URL: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-kensington-nickelback-apology-1.3879808> [March 28, 2018].
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