

Twitter for City Police Department Information Sharing

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the use of Twitter by city police departments in large U.S. cities (cities with populations greater than 300,000). The purpose of our study is to determine what types of information are shared by city police departments over Twitter and to determine how the public uses the information shared to converse with the police departments and with each other. We read and analyzed 4,915 posts authored by 30 city police departments that have active Twitter accounts. The analysis shows that city police departments in large U.S. cities primarily use Twitter to disseminate crime and incident related information. City police departments also use Twitter to share information about their departments, events, traffic, safety awareness, and crime prevention. To a lesser extent, city police departments use Twitter to converse directly with the public and news media. We also sampled four weeks of public-authored tweets, totaling 1,984 tweets, that contained police department Twitter usernames and found that a majority of these tweets were retweets of police authored tweets; public-authored tweets also mentioned police departments in discussions or were used to send direct messages. This paper furthers our understanding of information sharing by city police departments as well as public redistribution of this information through the use of social media tools.

Keywords

Twitter, microblogging, law enforcement, social media, user generated content, communication patterns, content analysis

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