

“Are you talking to me?” A qualitative study of Facebook use by two police forces

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The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

Lead Partner



Other force participation



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facebook



Let me tell you a story....

- I have given a man a tattoo. I did it with ink, a matchstick, and a needle. He was a big strong man, aged around 30 at the time (I was 18). It was a design of a lot of mushrooms creeping up his arm, to cover old initials of Scottish political parties he no longer wanted on his body. For him it was a painful process, he had to drink a lot of whisky to numb the pain. We only ever got half way through the design, so it probably remains, to this day, unfinished.



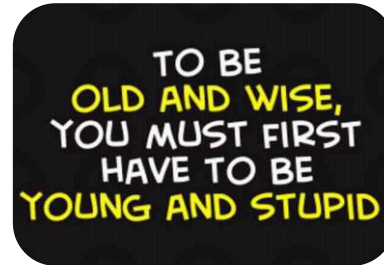
Ways I could be positioned in the story.....



Lazy

Neutral

Couldn't you be bothered to finish the job? Sounds like you are a little lazy & not committed to seeing things through



Irresponsible

Sounds like you didn't think this through, what about the blood you came into contact with? Was he too drunk to consent?



Kind

Sounds like you helped him cover old tattoos he wanted rid of.

'Networked Narratives' Page et al (2013) & 'Small stories' (Georgakopoulou, 2008)



- Social networks of people **jointly create** identity through interaction in a particular context
- The initial speaker can **set up a particular position**
- That position can be **challenged, revised and co-constructed** by others
- Social networking sites afford the opportunity to 'co-create' the story
- Given police agenda to reassure the public and increase trust its possible that co-created stories are an **opportunity for engagement**
- Traditional "**big story**" research is interested **in just the told story** – what do the 'characters' from the story do?
- "**small story**" research interested in stories not just as tools for reflection but also as functional in **creating positions** with conversational partners (Bamberg, 2016)
- How people "do" narratives becomes a **process we can observe** (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008)

How identity is constructed and revised through Networked Narratives on Police owned Facebook sites

- Strategy in Engage (NPIA 2010) “wherever possible to respond to content posted by others, whether positive or negative” (p.3)
 - Consistent finding – very little evidence of continuous dialogue (Brainard and Edlins, 2015)
- Bypass the “frame” of traditional media – be in direct control (Leiberman et al, 2013)



Method

- 6th – 12th June 2016 all new threads and their comments, 2 forces
- No disasters or major events
- Metropolitan force has a visitor thread, rural force – visitors can comment but not initiate posts
- Rural 43 postings, Metropolitan 44, visitors 10
- Engagement = Number of comments, added to number of reactions and number of shares
- Used most engaged with story from each site



Most engaged with Postings – Metropolitan force	Amount of Engagement
Gemma Dawson* found safe and well	4181
Police have released a CCTV image of a man they wish to speak to in connection with a vicious assault at a nightclub in Bolton	2051
Police have released images of a man they would like to speak to in connection with a rape at a nightclub in the city centre	195
Rock and roll aint noise pollution for these horses patrolling last night s AC/DC concert	193
Great work from officers in Cheetham Hill.	174

Most engaged with Postings – Rural force	Amount of Engagement
Last week we told you about officers seizing a green Lamborghini	2209
We're appealing for information to locate 38 year old Helen Canterbury* from Caerphilly	1744
Gwent Police are appealing for information following a fatal road traffic collision that occurred at 2am on Wednesday 8th June 2016	850
The family of 30 year old Eddie Smith* from the Bristol area who sadly passed away following an RTC on the 4th June 2016	623
PDs Dexter and Krissy have definitely got that Friday feeling... Here they are cooling off	553

Most engaged with postings on Visitor Stream (Metropolitan Force)	Amount of Engagement
A Greater Manchester Police PCSO who nearly died after he was stabbed in the neck whilst on duty will receive an MBE in the Queen s Birthday Honours	177
An area has been cordoned off by Greater Manchester Police (link to “residents left in the dark over serious incident in the street”)	68
Statement from [police officer name] following use of Hillsborough photo on internal Greater Manchester Police poster	8
Greater Manchester Police have released a compilation of dash cam footage	6
Does the 101 number work in Manchester? I’m trying to report a mobile phone theft	5

Analysis procedure

Five steps to explore three levels of positioning advocated by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008)

Level 1: Positioning of characters in the story

1) Analysis of how the characters (in the told narratives) are positioned in relation to one another

Level 2: How the speaker positions themselves and how they are positioned by other people

2) Analysis of the accomplishment of narrating within the interaction

3) Analysis of how the speaker is positioned within the flow of interaction in the ongoing talk within an institutional context

4) Analysis of how the relations between the interactants are managed

Level 3: How the speaker positions themselves vis a vis dominant discourses

5) Analysis of how interactants construct themselves and each other positioned with regard to master narratives (or dominant discourses)

Gemma Dawson has been found safe and well. Thank you everyone for sharing

Step 1: The told story

Police version professional, neutral, concise,

the public **reposition** Gemma (party girl or victim of social media campaign), her family (caring or over reacting), and the search (as either appropriate or nannying)

e.g. as a party girl *“How many *Garys did she have?” “she was in a ket hole”*

e.g. as the passive victim of an inappropriate social media campaign

“Adults don’t need to report back on every movement we make! Jesus not like she not been heard from for a week it was less than 24hours . So why dont u show her sone [sic] respect as being a grown woman”

Gemma Dawson has been found safe and well. Thank you everyone for sharing

Step 2: How people achieve narrative

Police – Story ending, includes the facebook community in the story – makes collective.

Community

- Minimal effort - **Just add an evaluation** *“Great news better safe than sorry. Good work GMP.”*
- **Tell a related story** – to gain authority for your opinion allows the navigation of blame without being directly critical

“I went out and didn't return for nearly 24 days I came strolling in the house like nothing was wrong to find a police officer sat in my living room with a photo of me my mother had to describe all the tattoos on my body to him he turned and told I would of been on the tele if I hadn't come back home when I did!!! Since then seeing how terrified my mother was because she didn't have a clue where I was I always make sure she does and I certainly don't go out for 24 hours anymore!!!! So no her family and friends aren't over reacting what I did was selfish and would never do it again!!!”

- **draw attention to more sinister alternative endings** that may have been the outcome of this story

“I sort of get where you're coming from here but from a parents and friends point of view it can be very worrying. 2012 I helped in searching for [victim name] who was separated from his friends and sadly his body was discovered in Manchester's canal. The police are still in search of the killer of a young lad who was murdered 2 years ago. Both at Heaton Park.. As a mum myself.. I wouldn't rest till I knew they were home and safe. Its far better for this girl to be embarrassed than being yet another statistic.. p2”

Gemma Dawson has been found safe and well. Thankyou everyone for sharing.

Step 3: How the speaker is positioned in the flow of interaction

No revisioning carried out by police, all by the public.

Some **reinforce and even extend** the police position, e.g. reinforcing the success of social media

“The power of social media great news. X” (page 3b)

“Such good news- probably with the help of social media – job well done GMP” (page 2b)

others **reformulate the story in a benign way** that does powerful work to undermine the social media campaign.

e.g. benign reformulation *“Not heard from for 15 hours as a 26 year old gets a GMP Facebook post.”*

Gemma Dawson has been found safe and well. Thankyou everyone for sharing.

Step 4: How the relations between interactants are managed

- little argument directly with the police
- between the contributing community there are personal insults and the use of categorisations to form groupings of “others” from which contributors see themselves as differing.

PPT1 “Excuse me its you lot commenting on my post not the other way around. If you dont like it dont put it all over social media. Jesus its like the womens institute have ganged up on me. Over night is still only a few hours she wasnt even gone for 24 she a grown woman she can go out party n not call home”

PPT 4 “No one has ganged up on you, you are making ignorant comments without any knowledge on the situation.”

PPT1 “Not saying i do know anything about her but i know reporting her missing after a few hours is over-reacting . Esp as she is safe and well.”

Gemma Dawson has been found safe and well. Thankyou everyone for sharing

Step 5 – How interactants construct themselves and others relating to master narratives (or dominant discourses)

- Happy endings
- Police as ‘source of safety’ versus police as ‘over protective’

The notion of the police as a positive force, that provided a happy ending is both supported by some commentators but also repositioned by others as being over protective and controlling.

“we like happy endings x”

“Jokers u lot, best get to Boots cos sounds like y’all running low on cotton wool.”

“Cant even put ya self on the missing list for a day anymore with out ya face being all over social media . #OverReacting”

“Last week we told you about officers seizing a green Lamborghini after numerous reports of antisocial driving on Cromwell Road Newport. This morning the driver of the same vehicle was arrested on suspicion of drug driving after providing a positive roadside drug test after a collision with another vehicle on Corporation Road.”

Police post **neutral and professional**. Police only names driver, officers and the reporters of antisocial driving, with the officers and reporters working together positioned ‘against’ the driver. Uses **temporal lengthening** to emphasise the repeat nature of the drivers antisocial behaviour.

Step 1: The told story

Commentators use **insult** e.g. *“Douchebag” “What a Donut”*

categorisations around ‘junkies’ and ‘dealers’ *“throw the book at the junkie” “how else would he afford such a vehicle??!!” “what other way would someone from Newport own a Lambo!!!! dont need to be a copper to work that out!!”*

These created ‘other’ **categorisations are then navigated** *“junkie for smoking weed” “Drug tests aren’t 100% accurate, he could have been eating poppy seeds that day, fool”*

They also **reposition** the **driver as a victim** of jealousy *“Hes off the road leave it now. If this was anyone else with a less expensive car theyd get theyre license taken off them and a fine thats it. Leave the poor guy alone”*

a hero *“no need for the attitude now is there? Fair play to the Lambo driver with his car hardly having a mark on it.”*

or the victim of another bad driver *“It could’ve been a sober accident, they do happen mind, it’s a very sunny and bright day, light in their eyes, it could have been the Fords fault.. Innocent till proven guilty”*

Reposition the police as having a vendetta *“I think this is someone's personal vendetta rather than enforcing the law simply. I mean... They just got someone who's gonna bomb the euro matches in France, and you're after lambos? Come on... Serious stuff happening out there, real crimes.”*

Step 2: How narrative is accomplished

Police publish a '**news update**' – which justifies its telling

Community supplement with **additional sightings** – allowing positioning of the driver as irresponsible

“and so he should be as he almost ran my mum off the road last week with his careless driving”

Community **thicken the narrative backstory**

“I know they took the guys orange one day before he took his green one out then lol” “apparently its not even his car he rents it” and “they’re hiring them weekly apparently”

Off topic narratives were also brought in to challenge the police story and **tell a different story**

“sounds fishy to me, they catch you out last week next thing you have banged them for drugs # corrupt police”

“and here comes the hipsters”

“Hipster? I haven’t long had a police officer sacked for brutality and assault for him not liking the look of me. Police are nothing but jokes.”

Step 3: How the speaker is positioned in the interaction

No revisioning is carried out by the police

Plenty of critique of the police editorial decision to run the story repositioned by some community members as boastful or inappropriate

“The only issue I've got with this is that you're not showing photos of every car seized and every driver who has tested positive for drug or drinking offences. Keep doing your job, that's great but keep the pissing contest off social media.”

Police portrayed as devoting resources to this campaign as opposed to others (more worthy)

“Tell us something new Gwent police. This is old news now. Try going after the poor lady that's missing near the 14 locks there's only 2 officers looking”

Some positive repositioning of the police

“Completely see where you're coming from, except that if you have a little browse on Gwent Police's Facebook page you can see various photographs of cars that have been seized for a variety of different reasons including positive roadside drug and drinking tests. But for obvious reasons this car and the orange one are receiving much more publicity than the others”

Step 4: How relations are managed between the interactants

Unsubtle

Personal insults

Reactive

"Read my post again you bellends"

Proactive (goading)

"Waiting for the comments from young girls defending them and blaming the police again" "You mean young air headed tarts with not real aspirations in life"

Threats

- *"I know [perp name] is no one to laugh at" "You want to make a fool out of [perp name] ? Im sure he's more than happy to broadcast his video of a Sgt lying."*

Self versus other categorisations "

your all haters same as Gwent police only take the car so they can drive it der selfs" (page 15)

"well done gwent police, I wonder if the negatives have ever had anyone killed by a driver under the influence"

Subtle

- repositioning of the police through hypothesised narrative outcomes
- *"The police act within the law, they've done that and got a result. You'd be screaming "Nazis" if they go around snatching cars at a whim"*

Step 5: Master and counter narratives

From the police

- Police as organised and consistent, suspect as repeatedly antisocial

From the community

- Police as trustworthy versus corrupt

“sounds fishy to me, they catch you out last week next thing you have banged them for drugs #CorruptPolice”

Conspiracy versus no conspiracy

- *“There is no green paint on that fiesta at all its all black so please explain how he hit into him?”*
- *“the lambo rode up on the tyre raising the lambos wheel and causing the tyre to come in contact with the bodywork of the fiesta, that would account for the torn up lambo tyre and the messed up fiesta bodywork. No conspiracy just logic.”*

Conclusions

- Police sites are not yet *truly* a dialogue
- Police sites mainly used for information distribution **not collaboration** (although collaboration is happening between the facebook community)
- There is some evidence of **frustrated community engagement** (e.g. demands, direct questions asked)
- New media being used as if it were old media (matches research carried out in US and Australia (e.g. Brainard and Edlins, 2015 ; Kelly and Finlayson, 2015))
- **Identity work is now being done by the community** rather than the traditional media – have we just swopped one “frame” for another?
- What are the opportunities for **interacting more dyadically**?

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