
Social Media Study in European Police Forces: First Results on Usage and Acceptance

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Main Findings

- Usage:
 - 50% of surveyed officers use social media at work; 93.5% had experience with social media (private and/or work-related)
 - Half of the users do so frequently (once per day or more)
 - 10.3% of officers are unaware whether or not their police agency uses social media
- Acceptance:
 - General acceptance of social media was moderately to highly positive
 - Degree of acceptance depends on (1) *perceived fit with the task*, (2) *perceived usefulness for own police agency*, and (3) *perceived usefulness for the own job*
 - Differences in the degree of acceptance were found according to (1) *the type of job an officer does* and (2) *the user's experience with social media at work*
- Acceptable purposes:
 - What is perceived as an acceptable purpose differed by (1) *country* and (2) *primary task* of an officer
 - Overall trends: main acceptable purposes were informing the public and community outreach; the least acceptable purposes were recruitment and in-service training

A note on the interpretation of the results

These findings are based on a preliminary sample of 316 participants. This preliminary sample contained a very high number of participants experienced in the use of social media (94.5%). Views from non-users remained under-represented. Our findings are therefore likely biased towards those individuals comfortable with social media use. Similarly, participation was uneven across countries possibly slanting the results towards countries with a higher interest in and acceptance of social media. Given these limitations and the small sample size, the preliminary results from the first phase of our study are clearly not representative of European police officers in general.

The study is still ongoing. In the subsequent period, we aim to obtain broader participation also of non-users and across European countries to allow a more balanced view on acceptance and usage by European police officers. The survey is accessible at: <http://erim.3uu.de/uc/pbayerl/8558/>.

Purpose of the study

The topic of *social media* triggers strong emotions in European police forces. While some embrace social media as a fantastic opportunity, others feel that the dynamics of social media are alien and potentially even dangerous. To shed light on this 'love-hate relationship', in July 2012 we started a Europe-wide investigation in the context of our European-wide project "Comparative Police Studies in the EU" (COMPOSITE, www.composite-project.eu).

This ongoing study is the first comprehensive overview of social media use in European police forces, and provides important insights for our understanding of differences in acceptance and usage.

Our goals in this survey are to:

- *Map the current use and acceptance of social media in police forces across Europe and*
- *Identify factors that influence the degree of acceptance and use of social media by European police officers.*

In the following we report first results on data collected from July to September 20th, 2012.

Methodology

The study is conducted in form of an online survey. Open invitations were sent by CEPOL (www.cepol.europa.eu) to its country contacts. As of September 20th, we have received 1069 reactions to the survey, of these 316 yielded usable, i.e., complete data (30%).

Participants

Reactions came from 21 countries (see Table 1 for an overview). We received most reactions from Poland (60), Slovenia (37), Cyprus (19), the Netherlands (19), and Greece (16). Numbers for these five countries are sufficient to allow a statistical comparison. For the remaining countries we received too few reactions (7-1 surveys) to allow analysis on the country level.

Most participants worked primarily in crime investigations (29.2%), followed by community policing (13.3%) and administrative functions (10.7%). Roughly a quarter (26.9%) conducted other primary tasks not listed in the survey (see Figure 1). 74.7% of the participants were male, with a majority between 36-50 years (50.7%; 21-35 years: 43.0%; 51-60 years: 6.3%).

Table 1: Countries represented in the sample

	Frequency	Percent
Poland	60	19.0
Slovenia	37	11.7
Cyprus	19	6.0
Netherlands	19	6.0
Greece	16	5.1
Belgium	7	2.2
Romania	7	2.2
United Kingdom	6	1.9
Estonia	4	1.3
France	4	1.3
Hungary	3	.9
Denmark	2	.6
Portugal	2	.6
Bulgaria	1	.3
Germany	1	.3
Ireland	1	.3
Lithuania	1	.3
Slovakia	1	.3
Spain	1	.3
Sweden	1	.3
Other	1	.3
[not provided]	122	38.6
Total	316	100.0

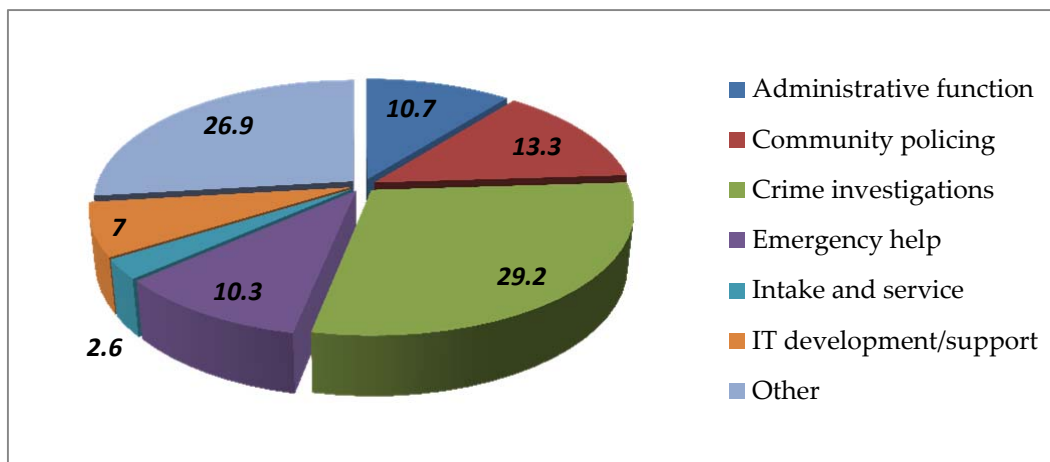


Figure 1: Sample distribution according to primary task

Aspects investigated in the survey

In detail we looked into the following aspects:

- Extent to which individuals would be/are willing to use social media (i.e., degree of acceptance)
- Extent to which social media are perceived as useful (a) for police in general and (b) for an officer's own work
- The type of purposes social media use is deemed acceptable (based on the 2011 categorization in the IACP social media survey)
- Extent of fit between social media use and (a) an individual's own task, (b) the values of the police agency (organizational identity), (c) the values of police officers in general (professional identity)

To differentiate between disparate groups within police forces we further asked the following information:

- Country (drop-down menu)
- Primary task (community policing, crime investigations, emergency services, intake and service, administrative function, IT development/support, other)
- Individual usage (no, private use only, work-related use only, private and work-related use)
- Usage at agency level (yes, no, I don't know)
- Gender
- Age group (< 20, 21-35, 36-50, 51-65, > 65)
- Rank (open question)

All questions were asked in English. On average it took about 10 minutes to complete the survey (median: 8 minutes).

Preliminary Findings¹

Extent of Usage in the Sample

Police officers' *experience* with social media was very high. 93.5% used them; either for private purposes (40.3%), work-related purposes (5.5%), or both (47.8%). 50.0% used them at least once a day or more (see Tables 2 and 3). The most frequently used *types of media* were social networks (e.g., Facebook) and microblogs (e.g., twitter). Only for work-related use did video/photo sites play a greater role (see Table 4). We also asked police officers whether they are aware of *social media use in their police force* in general. The majority of officers worked in forces, which used social media (67.3%). Interestingly, 10.2% were not sure whether their force used them or not (see Table 5).

Table 2: Type and frequency of social media usage in the sample

Do you personally use social media?			How often do you use social media?		
	Frequency	Valid Percent		Frequency	Valid Percent
No	19	6.5	Several times a day	83	31.4
Private use only	118	40.3	Once a day	49	18.6
Work-related use only	16	5.5	2-3 times a week	43	16.3
Work and private use	140	47.8	Once a week	40	15.2
			Once a month or less	49	18.6
Total	293		Total	293	
Missing	23		Missing	23	

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of type and usage frequency

		Several times a day	Once a day	2-3 times a week	Once a week	Once a month or less	Total
Private use only	Count	16	21	15	18	29	99
	% within	16.2%	21.2%	15.2%	18.2%	29.3%	100.0%
Work-related use only	Count	4	2	5	3	2	16
	% within	25.0%	12.5%	31.3%	18.8%	12.5%	100.0%
Work-related and private use	Count	62	25	22	15	16	140
	% within	44.3%	17.9%	15.7%	10.7%	11.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	83	49	43	40	49	264
	% within	31.4%	18.6%	16.3%	15.2%	18.6%	100.0%

¹ Data as of September 20th, 2012.

Table 4: Type of media (in %, multiple answers possible)

	Social networks	Micro-blogs	Blogs	Video/ Photo sites	Other
Private use only	44.1	18.6	14.4	11.9	5.1
Work-related use only	93.8	56.3	18.8	43.8	6.3
Work and private use	80.0	50.7	25.0	53.6	13.6

Table 5: Social media usage by police forces

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	198	67.3
No	66	22.4
I don't know	30	10.2
Total	294	
Missing	22	

Note: These numbers are not representative of the percentage of forces using social media, as the sample may contain multiple participants per force.

How high is acceptance and perceived usefulness among officers?

General acceptance and usefulness perception. Acceptance of social media referred to the willingness of individuals to use social media (e.g., “Assuming access to social media in my police force, I intend to use them”). Perceived usefulness was measured with respect to participant’s own police agency (e.g., “Social media improve the performance of my police force”) and their own job (e.g., “Social media improve my performance”).

The *general acceptance* in the sample was positive with a mean value of 5.5 across all users (all scales 1: very low to 7: very high). Usefulness perceptions also were positive with a mean value of 5.1 for police agency and 4.9 for the individual officer (see Figure 2).

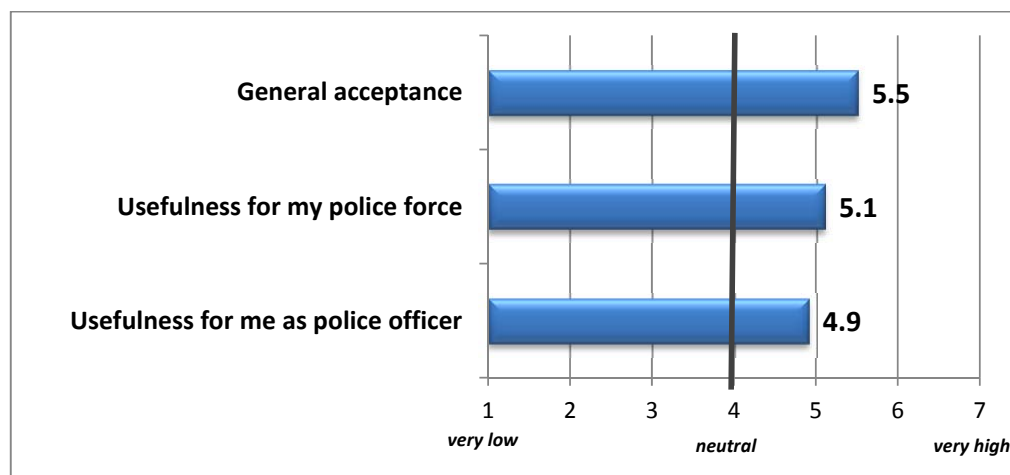


Figure 2: General acceptance and perceived usefulness (across all participants)

Differences in acceptance and usefulness among groups. Primary task, gender, or age group had no significant effect on the degree of acceptance or perceived usefulness. The only significant difference appeared between two of the five comparable *countries*, showing a significantly higher level of overall acceptance by officers in the Netherlands compared to their colleagues in Poland (see Figure 3; $p < .05$).

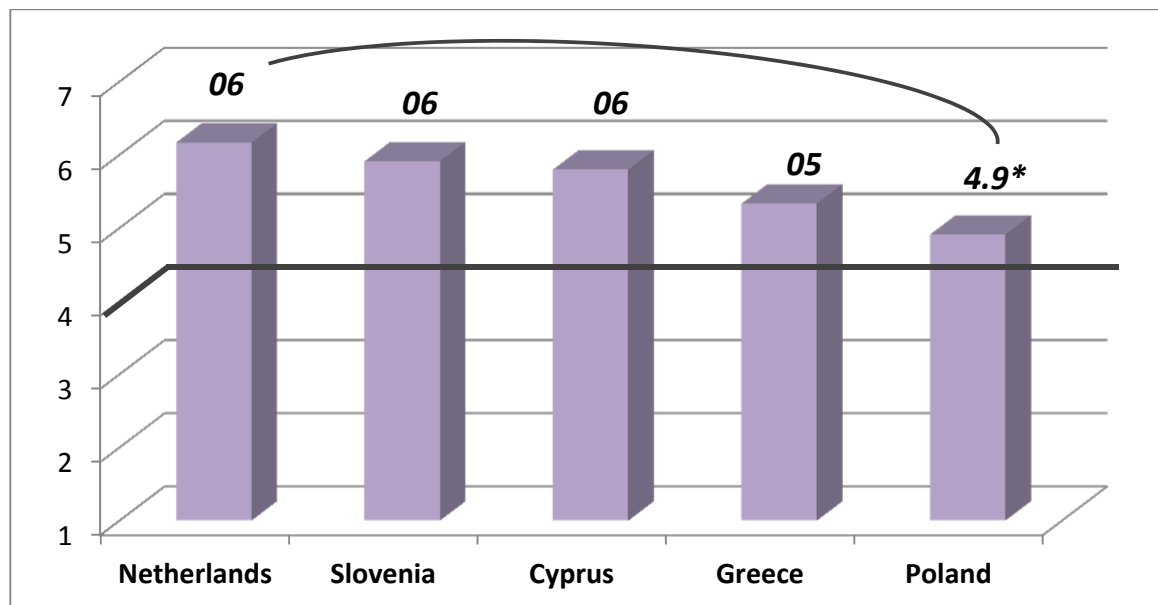


Figure 3: Country comparison on acceptance and perceived usefulness (only countries with sufficient data, * marks significant difference)

What influences users' acceptance?

The *degree of acceptance* depended on three factors: (1) how useful social media were perceived for the own job as police officer, (2) how useful social media were perceived for the own police force, and (3) the perceived fit of social media use with the own task. Of these three factors the usefulness for the own job as police officer appeared as the strongest predictor (see Figure 4).

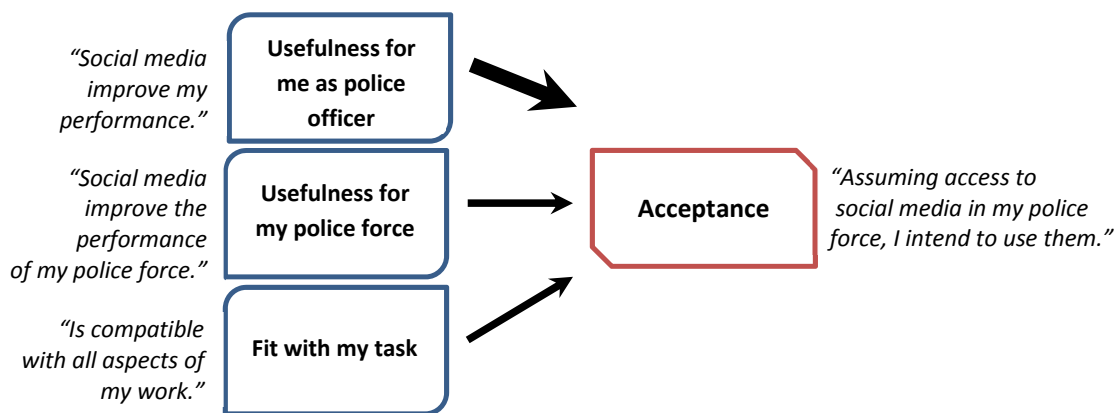


Figure 4: Three factors that impact users' acceptance

Differences in perceived usefulness and task-fit. Usefulness and fit perceptions varied significantly across countries and primary tasks (see Figures 5 and 6). As before with acceptance, attitudes of Dutch officers were significantly more positive than attitudes of Polish officers. In addition Greek officers perceived a significantly lower fit with their task than Dutch officers. Further, officers in community policing judged usefulness considerably more positively than officers in emergency help. In contrast, age and gender had no impact for usefulness and task-fit.

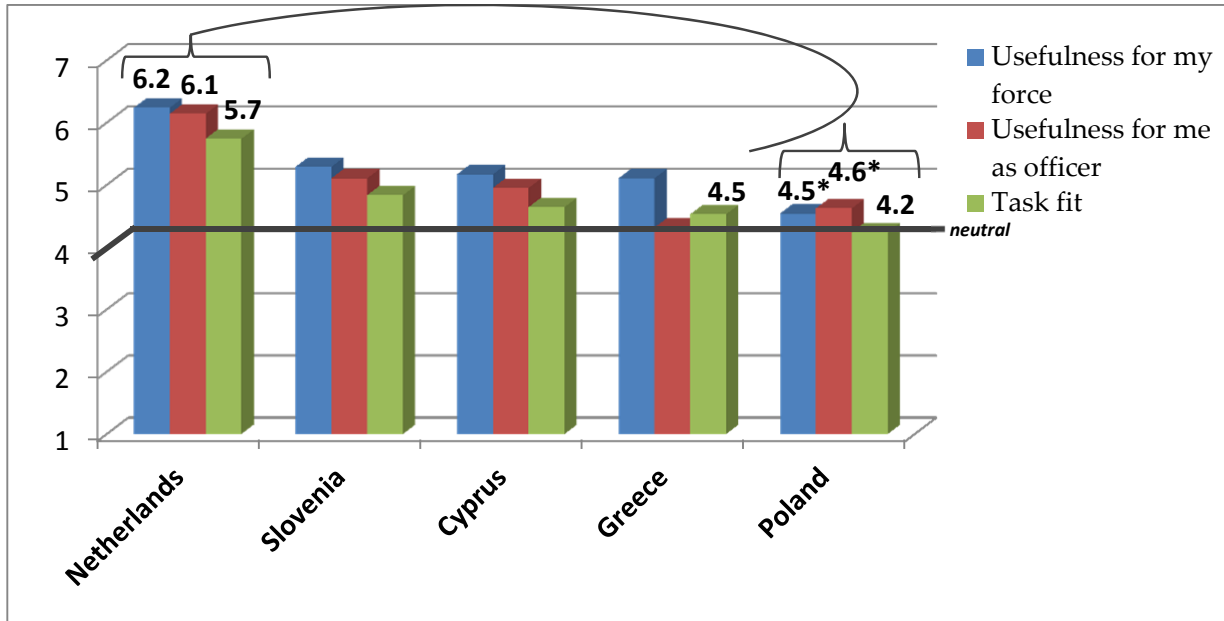


Figure 5: Differences in perceived usefulness among countries (* mark significant differences)

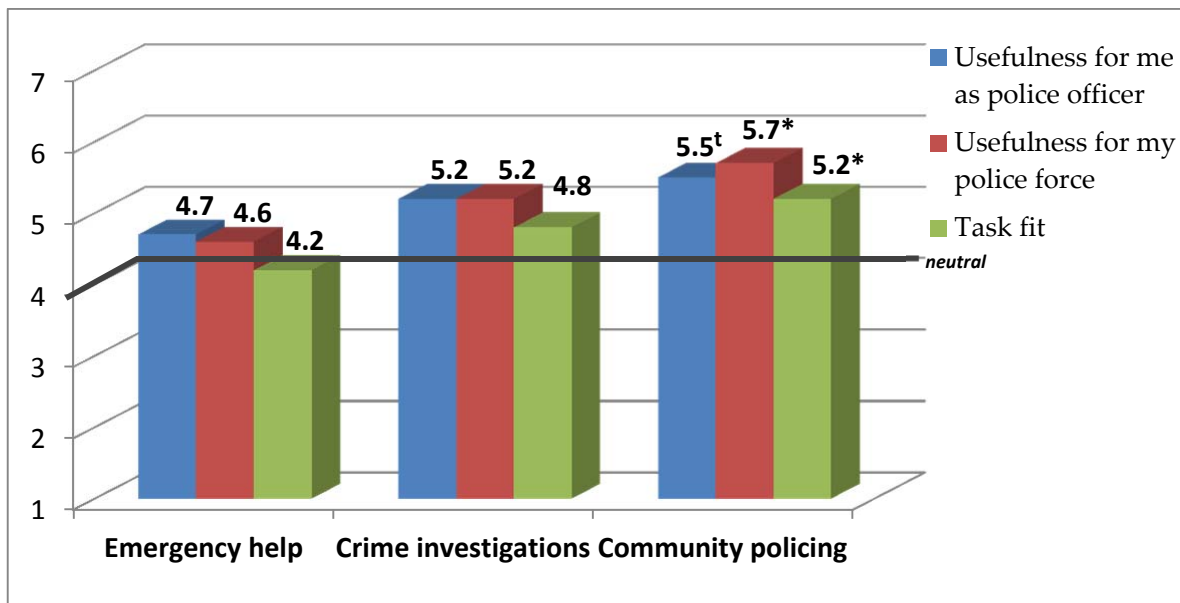


Figure 6: Differences in perceived usefulness among main functions (* marks significant a difference, t marks a marginal difference)

What are accepted purposes for using social media?

Social media can be used for a variety of *purposes*. We asked participants to rate how valuable they considered social media for 11 different purposes (based on the IACP 2011 social media survey; 1: not at all – 7: very much).

Considering *all participants* together, we found that all purposes were considered suitable for social media. Also, we found little variation in their rating (range 5.7-4.5; average: 5.4, standard deviation: 0.36). The majority of purposes were considered highly suitable for social media. The only exceptions were recruitment and in-service training, which were closer to neutral ratings (see Figure 7).

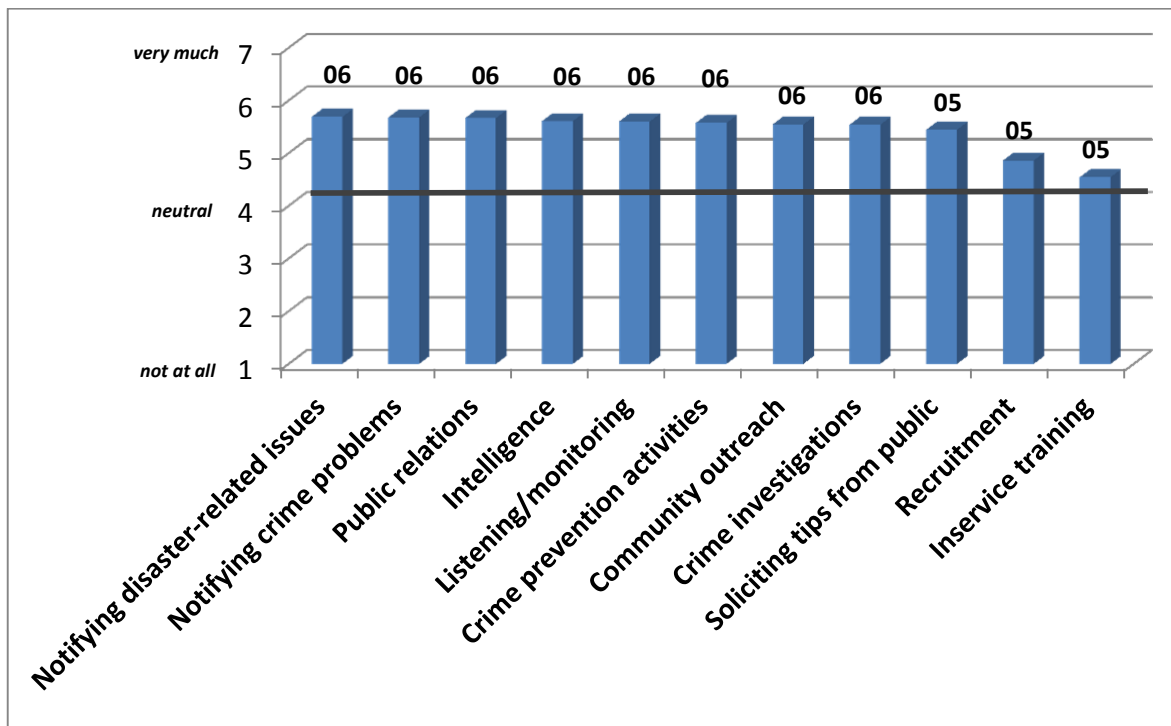


Figure 7: Perceived value of social media for different purposes (across all participants)

Female officers saw a significantly higher value of social media for *community outreach* compared to their male colleagues ($p < .05$) and a marginally higher value for public relations, the notification of crime-related information, notification of disaster-related issues, and crime prevention functions. Age groups had no impact on the ratings. Country as well as primary task significantly impacted which purposes were perceived as valuable (see Figures 8 and 9).

Country differences. We found the most variation in ratings for Greek police officers, which indicates that Greek officers possessed strong opinions about the appropriate usage of social media. Police officers in Poland in contrast rated all purposes on a similarly low level, which reflect the generally lower level of acceptance observed above. Comparing the five countries we found seven functions with significantly different appreciations between three countries or more: (1) crime investigations, (2) intelligence gathering, (3) listening/ monitoring, (4) preventing crime activities, (5) public relations, (6) in-service training, and (7) recruitment (indicated by boxes in Figure 8). In contrast, notification of disaster-related issues and community outreach elicited highly similar reactions in four of the five countries.

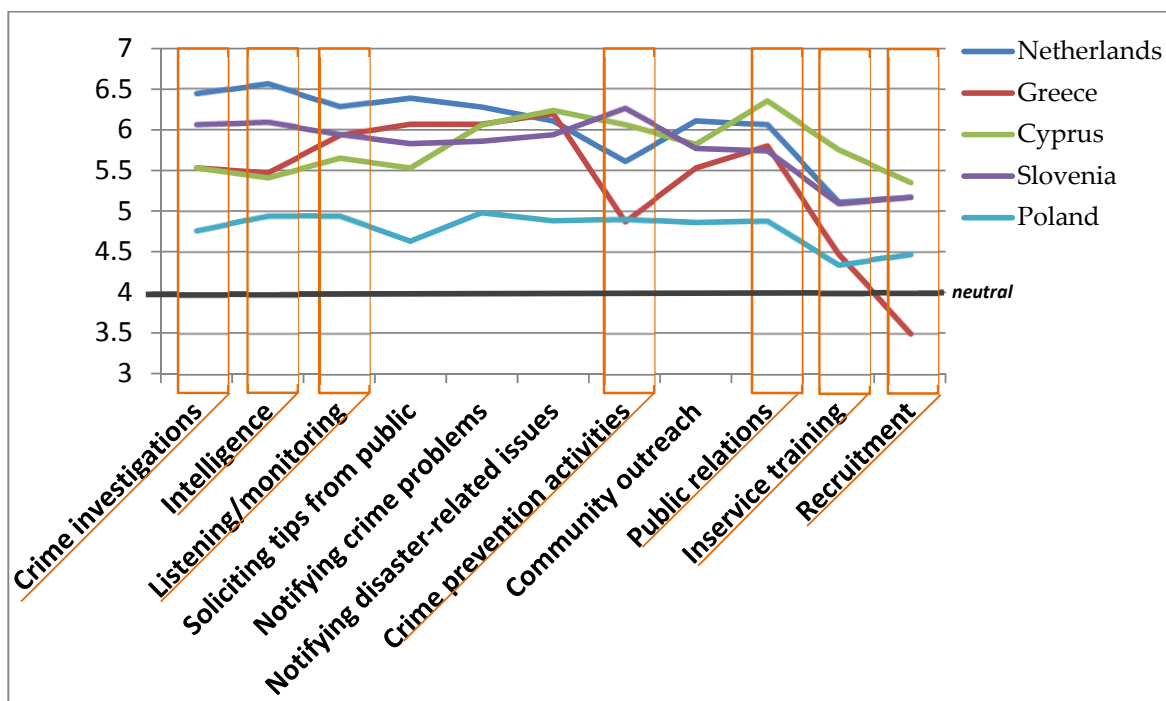


Figure 8: Differences in acceptable purposes among countries (boxes mark significant differences between three countries or more)

Differences among primary functions. In the following we compare officers working in three primary tasks: crime investigations, emergency help, and community policing. The ratings for acceptable purposes reflected the general trend for perceived usefulness and task fit observed above. Officers in community policing rated social media as more valuable than the other two primary services – independent of purpose (see Figure 9). As before, officers in emergency help were the most skeptical of the three groups. Significant were the differences between officers in community policing and the other services, however, only for four functions: (1) listening/monitoring, (2) soliciting tips from the public, (3) notification of disaster-related issues, and (4) community outreach. Still, social media were generally considered valuable for all purposes, although recruitment and in-service training were again rated the least valuable across all three primary tasks.

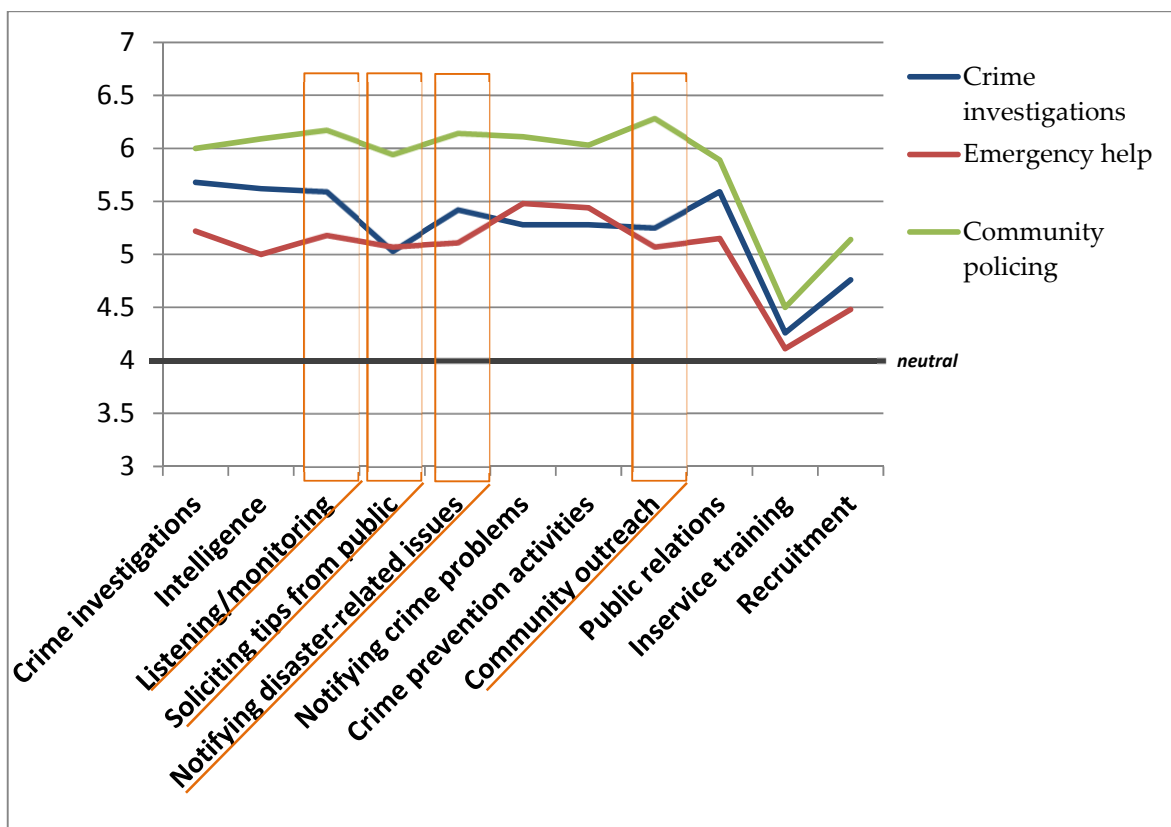


Figure 9: Differences in acceptable purposes among primary functions (boxes mark significant differences between two services)

Conclusions

Our investigation is the first concerted effort to create a comprehensive overview of attitudes towards social media in police officers across Europe.

While the results in this report rely on a small, preliminary sample, they offer a range of interesting observations:

Acceptance of social media amongst police officers was generally high reflecting an overall positive attitude towards social media. Likewise, experience with social media was considerable: 50% of police officers reported use of social media for their work, another 40.3% private use. Only 6.5% did not use social media at all.

Acceptance relied on perceptions of usefulness for the own police force and job, as well as fit with the own task. In contrast to previous studies, gender and age did not impact the degree of acceptance.

Usage in the work context was linked to a higher degree of acceptance and perceived usefulness. This suggests that acceptance may rely on direct experience, i.e., acceptance may come with use. The most resistance to the implementation of social media may thus be expected in user groups with little or no experience.

Clear preferences existed for the type of purposes social media should *not be* used for. However, considerable variation existed among officers from different countries and with different primary tasks, on the most acceptable purposes. This observation suggests that officers in different countries and/or primary tasks perceive disparate benefits from social media use. This may be linked to disparate expectations and motivations on where, how and why to use social media (e.g., in which contexts and in which ways). Such disparate expectations may cause frictions, either amongst individual officers or between officers and their police force wishing to implement social media. To present such frictions, police forces should thus obtain a clear view on possible disparities in expectations prior to implementation and subsequently aim for alignment in purposes, expectations, and usage motivations.

Open Questions

The results raise a number of questions, which will be the focus of subsequent studies; e.g.:

1. Given that task-technology fit is one of the main factors for acceptance, what exactly does 'fit' mean for different countries and areas of police work?
2. How does more or less fit influence usage in general and in the way social media are used?
3. What is 'good' or 'appropriate' use of social media given a specific (national or task) context?
4. What are the consequences of non-fit for individual officers, police forces, cooperation between national police forces?
5. How to assess the 'usefulness' of social media for police given a specific (national or task) context?

Next Steps

- Systematic comparisons of users and non-users on the organizational level (i.e., police forces) and the individual level (i.e., officers)
- In-depth analysis of reasons for differences in acceptance, usage, and perceived usefulness
- Comparative investigation of attitudes in police and the local population

Acknowledgements

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Please note: The study reported in this paper is still ongoing (<http://erim.3uu.de/uc/pbayerl/8558/>). The results may therefore be subject to change depending on later answers. A final report will be published at a later date on the COMPOSITE website (www.composite-project.eu). For further information or questions on this or subsequent studies, please feel free to contact us. Contact details are provided below.

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