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How Social Media Platforms Shape the Public Perceptions of the Policing Strategies in Nairobi City County

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Abstract

Social media platforms is a powerful influence in shaping the public opinion and demanding for accountability from the policing agencies. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook have increasingly influenced how the policing strategies are developed and implemented. Understanding this impact can be essential as the public expects transparency in policing. This study analyzed how social media platforms shape the public perceptions of the policing strategies. Public Sphere and the Agenda-Setting theories, were used to demonstrate the connection amongst the social media platforms and the policing strategies. The study utilized a cross sectionally survey design, was carried out in Nairobi city county with the target population of law enforcement officers, journalists and media practitioners and general social media users. A multistage sampling technique was employed starting with the clustering of the target population into four homogenous groups. Purposively sampled and stratified random sampling were used to get to the particular respondents. Online questionnaire (Google forms) and interview guides were used to collect data. Qualitative data was analyzed

thematically. While the numerical data was examined using summary statistics such as proportions, averages and the means, as well as visual representations like the pie charts. The study found five key ways the social media impacts the public perception of policing: conduit for direct sharing of police actions, an amplifying tactic of negative incidents involving the police, being platforms for whistleblowing of police malpractices, management techniques of the police public relations, facilitating means of debates and dialogues about police policies. The study concluded that, the social media platforms are serving as a powerful tool for transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. They have also introduced challenges related to misinformation, public trust and the need for institutional responsiveness. The study recommends that, the Nairobi Police Service can consider to adopting verifiable digital engagement systems of policing. Such would require mandating body-worn cameras and establishing a formal protocol for the rapid release of authenticated digital evidence following viral incidents.

Keywords: Digital Surveillance, Internet Restrictions, Live-Streaming, Policing Strategies, Protesters, Real-Time Communication, Social Media, Social Media Platforms, Viral Hashtags

1. Introduction

Policing strategies refer to the planned approaches, techniques and policies that law enforcement agencies adopt to maintain public order, prevent crime by various methods like detention for questioning and protect citizens' rights and property. According to Verma and Varma (2021) ^[32] policing strategies include a wide range of activities such as community policing, problem-oriented policing, intelligence-led policing, hot-spot policing and the use of technology in crime prevention. These policing strategies are continuously evolving making sure that the law enforcement adapts to social, technological and political changes.

Modern policing strategies are increasingly guided by the principles of accountability, transparency and public trust. As Cram (2023) ^[6] notes that, the legitimacy of law enforcement is closely tied to the perceived fairness and effectiveness of its policing strategies, including how the police engage with the public and respond to the citizen's concerns. In practice this means that, the policing strategies must balance crime suppression with respect for human rights, often under intense public scrutiny. The connection between the policing strategies and the social media platforms arises from the growing influence of the digital

platforms in shaping public expectations, accountability demands and the institutional responses. Social media platforms offer the citizens with powerful tools to document, disseminate and to amplify information about the policing strategies both the good and the bad. According to Martin *et al.*, (2023) ^[17] social media functions as both a tool for the citizen oversight and a channel for the government-citizen interaction, meaning that the public sentiments expressed online increasingly shapes how the law enforcement agencies develop their policing strategies.

Social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping the public opinion and often drives institutional changes. According to Pitts (2022) ^[23] the law enforcement agencies are increasingly pressured to respond to concerns raised online by revising policing strategies, improving transparency, adopting community-friendly approaches and also enhancing officers training. Social media platforms therefore involve the use of various platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp to promote and organize any social or political causes (Zhuravskaya *et al.*, 2020) ^[36]. It is mostly marked by a rapid information sharing, real-time mobilization and the ability to bypass traditional media. In Kenya, it has become a vital tool for the citizens to expose police brutality, corruption and also human rights violations.

In essence, social media platforms can be the amplification of the marginalized voices, shaping the public discourses and thereby trying to influence the decision-makers. As Pitts (2022) ^[23] argues, the strength of social media platforms has laid in its capacity to put up networks for togetherness, creating alternative narratives and thereby pressurizing the authorities into action. In the context of the policing strategies, social media platforms are envisaged to push the law policing agencies to implement transformations, to improve on communication with the public and to demonstrate a greater transparency. It can therefore contribute to a crucial role in breaking the silence around misconducts, thereby enabling the ordinary citizens to maximumly participate in the co-production of their security and safety.

In the United States of America (USA), social media platforms have increasingly shaped the law policing strategies over the recent years. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok have become the key tools for documenting police actions, organizing protests and also demanding for institutional accountability. The movements such as the #BlackLivesMatter, which arose in response to the police violence against African Americans, demonstrated how the social media can quickly mobilize the public outrage, influence national discourse and push for reforms in the policing strategies. According to Chang, Richardson and Ferrara (2022) ^[4] this form of platforms have redefined the civil rights advocacy by amplifying the marginalized voices, attracting media attention and compelling institutional responses. In turn, many U.S.A police departments have adapted by forming social media units to monitor public discourse, engage with citizens and manage reputational risks. However, this shift has also raised concerns about surveillance and freedom of expression, as the security agencies monitors activists online. Overall, the U.S.A experience shows how social media platforms has fundamentally changed the dynamic between the citizens and the policing strategies, making the public opinion a critical force in shaping policing strategies

and reforms (Chang, Richardson & Ferrara, 2022) ^[4]. In the USA the social media platforms has been shown to influence policing strategies and accountability, but how the particular platforms that shape the public perceptions of the policing strategies and how they promote the police accountability and transparency was not explained. Such was some of the gaps that were pursued in this current research.

In France, the social media platforms have significantly influenced the public debates and the policing strategies, particularly during the Yellow Vests protests starting in 2018 (Reungoat, Jouhanneau & Buton, 2020) ^[25]. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were used to organize protests, share live updates and to document any police actions, including excessive force. According to Adam-Troian *et al.* (2021) ^[1] social media enabled for decentralized coordination, amplified grievances related to economic inequality and bypassed the traditional media, allowing activists to create very compelling visual narratives that challenged the government's portrayal of the protests. In response, the French law enforcement adapted its policing strategies s by monitoring social media to anticipate protests, track the key influencers and to gather real-time intelligence. They also enhanced their media strategies, releasing body-camera footage and also using the official accounts to present their own version of events. However, tensions remained high, with accusations of the police violence fueling online outrage and calls for accountability (Adam-Troian *et al.*, 2021) ^[1]. This dynamic shows how the social media has reshaped policing strategies in France and forcing the law enforcement to balance the public order with their reputation management in an interconnected digital world. In France, social media platforms managed to significantly influence public debates and policing strategies, particularly during the Yellow Vests protests, but the particular public debates and balancing of the public order are what this study endeavored to show.

In Sudan, social media platforms played a crucial role in driving political change and challenging the repressive policing, especially during the 2018–2019 protests that led to the removal of President Omar al-Bashir. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were used to coordinate demonstrations, expose human rights abuses and also share real-time updates. According to Daffalla *et al.* (2021) ^[7] the young activists bypassed the state-controlled media to build a unified national movement that cut across social divisions. Despite internet shutdowns, they used VPNs and offline networks to sustain communication, demonstrating the strength and adaptability of Sudan's social media platforms. In response to social media platforms, the Sudanese security agencies intensified their policing strategies through internet shutdowns, targeted arrests of online activists and on cyber-surveillance. They also violently suppressed those protests organized via social media, leading to human rights violations and global criticism (Daffalla *et al.*, 2021) ^[7]. This situation reveals the dual role of social media platforms in empowering the citizens to seek accountability while also triggering harsher and more technologically advanced state policing strategies, ultimately transforming the nature of protest and the policing strategies in Sudan. While social media platforms has been shown to shape political change and provoke adaptive policing responses in countries like Sudan, limited research has existed on how such platforms specifically influences policing strategies within various

unique socio-political and technological context.

The global use of social media in protests from the Sudan to the U.S.A and France, shows its power in challenging the policing strategies. In Kenya, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp have become key tools for reporting police brutality, corruption and abuse. Hashtags such as #StopPoliceBrutalityKE and #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers have raised the public awareness, mobilized support and pressured state authorities to act. Social media now serves as both a watchdog and a mobilization tool, enabling fast information sharing and holding state actors to account (Owino & Karani, 2022) [22]. In turn, the Kenyan law enforcement has adjusted its policing strategies by engaging with the public on social media, enhancing transparency and responding to digital evidence in disciplinary cases (Dwyer, 2019) [9]. Still, issues like surveillance, cyber harassment and online regulation efforts have revealed ongoing tensions between the reform and the control, as the social media continues to reshape policing in Kenya. Despite growing recognition of how the social media platforms have influenced the policing strategies in Kenya through public engagement, digital accountability and protest mobilization, there was limited research on how it specifically shapes policing strategies in Nairobi City County.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following were the two suitable theories to guide the study on social media Platforms and the policing strategies in Nairobi City County, Kenya: Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1962) [11] and Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) [18]. Together, these theories have offered a comprehensive framework for understanding how social media platforms have shaped the law enforcement strategies by both creating spaces for the public participation and also influencing what issues are elevated to the centre of the public and the policymakers' attention.

2.1 Public Sphere Theory (Jürgen Habermas, 1962)

The Public Sphere Theory by Jürgen Habermas offered a valuable framework for understanding the social media platforms' influence on the policing strategies in Nairobi City County. Habermas conceptualized social media platforms as the digital spaces where the citizens freely engage in the public discourse and democratic participation. In this ideal public sphere, discussions occur without interference from the state authorities or any commercial interests, fostering collective opinion formation and the potential to shape societal policies. In the context of Nairobi, social media acts as this public sphere, allowing the activists and the citizens to mobilize, deliberate and to challenge the policing practices, thus influencing the public policies aimed at reforming the policing strategies.

Moreover, the theory illuminated how the social media facilitates inclusive and deliberative debates among the diverse groups in Nairobi City County. These digital platforms have enabled the citizens to share their lived experiences, concerns and demands regarding the law enforcement practices, which would increase transparency and accountability in policing. Social media Platforms thus has empowered the ordinary people to influence the policing discourse and potentially drive policy reforms by fostering active civic engagement and public participation in matters of security and justice.

However, the Public Sphere Theory was limited in the digital age, particularly given that the social media platforms are privately owned, driven by commercial interests and subject to content moderation and surveillance. These realities restricted the openness and inclusiveness envisioned by Habermas, fragmenting discourse and limiting participation. The theory also fell short of explaining how the specific topics gain prominence nor how the power dynamics shape issue prominence on these platforms. These weaknesses necessitated incorporating Agenda-Setting Theory to better understand how the social media Platforms strategically shapes the public and the official focus on policing issues in Nairobi City County.

2.2 Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)

The Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) [18] addressed the limitations of the Public Sphere Theory by explaining the process through which social media platforms influenced the public and policymaker attention toward various specific policing issues. Unlike the Public Sphere Theory, which focused on the ideal of open, democratic discourse, the Agenda-Setting Theory revealed how the social media platforms actively shaped the public agenda by amplifying certain topics while sidelining others. This strategic framing was especially relevant in Nairobi City County, where the activists use the social media tools like hashtags, live streams and the viral campaigns to highlight their specific policing concerns and to mobilize public support, thus directing the focus of the security agencies and the policymakers.

By integrating Agenda-Setting Theory into the study, the researcher gained insight into how the social media platforms translated from the public discourse into tangible shifts in policing priorities and strategies. The theory helped explain how the activists' communication efforts do not merely create dialogue but effectively set the agenda by determining which policing issues become prominent in the public debates and the official responses. This was crucial for understanding the mechanisms of influence in a digital context characterized by rapid information dissemination, competing narratives and algorithmic prioritization of content.

Therefore, the Agenda-Setting Theory complemented the Public Sphere Theory by bridging the gap between the democratic potential of the social media as a public sphere and the pragmatic reality of the agenda formation and media influence. Together, they provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing how the social media platforms in Nairobi City County shapes not only the public perceptions but also the policing strategies that respond to the evolving digital-age protest dynamics.

3. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Nairobi City County. It was an ideal area for study for the research on social media platforms on the policing strategies due to several key factors. As Kenya's capital and largest urban center, Nairobi has been a focal point for political platforms, demonstrations and civil unrest, often fueled by the social media mobilization. The county hosts a high concentration of the internet users at 52.4%, making social media platforms widely accessible for the protest coordination, information dissemination and the real-time engagement (StatsKenya, 2025) [30]. Additionally, according to Wa Teresia (2025) [33],

the law enforcement agencies in Nairobi have implemented advanced digital surveillance and policing strategies, creating a dynamic environment for studying the interaction between the protesters and the security forces. The city's diverse population, including the activists, journalists, the law enforcement and the policymakers, provided a rich pool of respondents for data collection. Furthermore, Nairobi has witnessed significant protests in the recent years, making it a relevant case study for examining how the social media has influenced modern resistance movements and the corresponding countermeasures by the policing agencies.

The target population for this research comprised the adult population of Nairobi City County, estimated at over 3.5 million individuals aged 18 years and above from a total county population of approximately 4.9 million (KIPPRRA, 2024) ^[14]. This included the law enforcement officers responsible for monitoring and responding to protests through digital surveillance and policing strategies, journalists and media practitioners for their role in reporting and analyzing social media-driven platforms and the general adult social media users who engage with protest-related content and shape online discourse. This diverse adult population ensured a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between social media platforms and policing strategies in the county.

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling approach, which is a combination of purposive and stratified random sampling, so as to ensure a diverse and representative selection of the respondents. Purposive Sampling was used to select the key informants such as the law enforcement officers and the journalists. These individuals were chosen based on their expertise and their direct involvement in the social media regulation, digital surveillance and the protest management. Approximately 1,198 journalists were accredited in Nairobi County, representing 64% of Kenya's 1,868 national/media practitioner journalists in the Media Council of Kenya's 2024/2025 register from a total of 5,985 accredited nationwide (Media Council of Kenya, 2025) ^[19]. And there were an approximate 9,530 police officers in Nairobi County (Shitsama, Kiongera & Otuya 2023) ^[29].

Stratified Random Sampling was applied to the social media users, protesters and the activists. The population was stratified based on the factor of frequency of participation in the protests, so as to ensure a balanced representation across the different levels of participation. Cochran's (1977) ^[5] formula (Appendix IV) for sample size calculation was used for sample size determination as shown in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sampling and Sample Size

Target Population	Approximate Size	Sample Size
Protesters and Activists and General Social Media Users	3,500,000	384
Journalists and Media Practitioners	1,198	294
Law Enforcement Officers	9,530	369

This study employed a mixed methods approach, with questionnaires collecting quantitative data, whereas one-on-one interviews gathered qualitative data.

Online Questionnaire (Google Forms) (Appendix II):

It was utilized as an online questionnaire designed and administered through Google Forms as a primary data

collection tool. This method was chosen due to its efficiency, accessibility and the ability to reach a diverse range of the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of structured and semi-structured questions tailored to gather the relevant insights from some law enforcement officers, some Journalists and Media Practitioners and general social media users in Nairobi City County. Google Forms allowed for real-time data collection, automated responses and ease of distribution through the digital platforms such as WhatsApp. This ensured that the respondents could conveniently participate at their own time, leading to a higher response rate. The tool also supports anonymity and confidentiality, encouraging participants to provide honest and accurate responses without fear of reprisal (Sari *et al.*, 2020) ^[28]. Additionally, responses were automatically compiled into a secure database, facilitating seamless analysis and interpretation.

Interview Guide (Appendix III): One-on-one interviews were conducted with: some senior law enforcement officers, some senior Journalists and the Media Practitioners. The interview guide was useful because they provided the researcher with the ability to collect more detailed and thorough data as it had more precision and flexibility as compared to the questionnaires (Dawson, 2019) ^[8]. In addition, the researcher was able to explore topics in a general way and addressed new issues that arose during the discussion with the participants.

The pilot study procedure involved a random sample of 105 individuals: 38 Law Enforcement Officers, 30 Journalists and 37 Media Practitioners and the General Social Media Users in Kisumu County. Kothari (2017) ^[15] recommends that the sample size of a pilot is expected to be equal to 10% of the sample population in the study. It was not included in the main study population but it shared similar characteristics with the target group. The outcomes of the pilot study assisted the researcher in identifying potential weaknesses in the research instruments, assessed the clarity and relevance of questionnaire items and tested the feasibility of data collection procedures (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002) ^[31]. For example, the Google Forms were pre-tested to assess its clarity, relevance and the ease of response. Additionally, the findings enabled necessary adjustments to enhance the accuracy and the effectiveness of the study before the full-scale data collection began.

Online Questionnaire (Google Forms): The data collection process using Google Forms followed a structured approach to ensure efficiency and reliability. First, the researcher designed the questionnaire on Google Forms, incorporating both closed-ended and open-ended questions aligned with the study objectives. Once finalized, the questionnaire link was distributed through WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram social media platforms where the researcher has accounts to reach the target respondents of the general social media users. The researcher also shared it with several law enforcement officers who posted on the groups for other officers to access. The participants were made aware of the study's objectives, privacy safeguards and their voluntary participation. To maximize response rates, follow-up

messages were sent periodically as reminders. Responses were collected in real time and allowed the researcher to monitor participation and address any technical issues. The collected data was then securely stored and later analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

Interviews were recorded: One-on-one interviews were arranged via phone calls and through in-person visits to schedule appointments with the respondents. During the sessions, the researcher took notes while simultaneously capturing the conversation using audio recordings. Since there was a chance that some details might be overlooked during the discussion, the audio recordings provided an opportunity for revisiting and thoroughly reviewing the interview contents. To record, the researcher set two mobile phones on the table between them and the participant and activated the recording feature. Careful consideration was paid to confirm the audio worthiness was clear and reliable. The researcher conducted a sound check inside the interview room shortly before the session began to confirm the recording quality.

Quantitative data that was collected from the field regarding social media platforms and the policing strategies in Nairobi city county, Kenya, was coded and inserted into the Microsoft Excel for analysis. The descriptive statistics was employed to summarize the patterns in how social media platforms shape the public perceptions of the policing strategies, the role of social media platforms in promoting the police accountability and transparency and the influence of social media platforms on the formulation of the policing strategies. Measures of central tendency such as the average (used to calculate mean response scores), the median (to determine the middle point in perception scales) and the mode (to identify the most frequently selected responses) were used to assess the trends in the social media platforms influence.

Frequency counts were generated to understand how often the specific responses and any incidents mentioned occurred. Percentages and proportions helped to compare social media platforms and the policing strategies by showing how the response rates varied across the study population. To aid interpretation, Excel's charting tools was used to create bar charts, pie charts and the line graphs, which visually illustrated the connection between the social media platforms and the outcomes of the policing strategies. This visualization made it easier to interpret how social media platforms impacted the implementation of the policing strategies in Nairobi city county, Kenya.

Qualitative data to gathered through the key informant interviews with some senior law enforcement officers, senior Journalists and the Media Practitioners was analyzed thematically. Responses were first written out and then carefully reviewed to identify any recurring ideas and patterns related to social media platforms efforts. Using a coding framework, major themes were identified and grouped. These themes were analyzed to explore the views on the social media platforms and to highlight the success or failure of the policing strategies. Insights derived from the qualitative data was triangulated with the quantitative findings to enhance the credibility of the results. Representative quotes were extracted and presented to support the key arguments, giving voice to the experiences of those directly involved in or affected by social media

platforms to that was meant to impact on policing strategies in Nairobi city county.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher dispersed 384 Online Questionnaires for the Protesters and Activists and General Social Media Users. The researcher dispersed 264 online questionnaires for the journalists and media practitioners, and had scheduled 30 interview guides altogether being 294. The researcher dispersed 332 online questionnaires for the law enforcement officers, and had scheduled 37 interview guides altogether being 369. Figure 1 shows the response rates from the different groups of the participants regarding the connection between the social media platforms and policing strategies in Nairobi city county, Kenya.

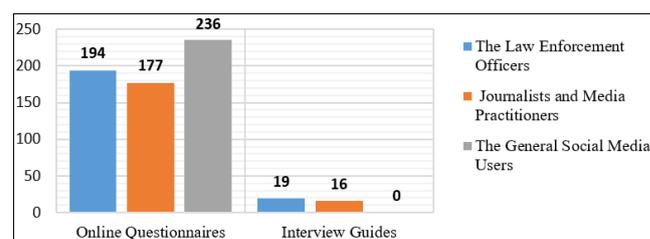


Fig 1: Respondents' Response Rates

The General Social Media Users had a total of 236 responses, which constituted 61.5% of that cluster total sample population that was 384. This met the recommended adequacy range of 33% to 66% of the response rate against the sample size as suggested by Hagaman and Wutich (2017) [12]. The Journalists and Media Practitioners had a total of 177 Online Questionnaires responses and 16 scheduled interview guides that were successful to a total of 193 equating to a 73.1% response rate out of the sample of 294. This exceeded the recommended adequacy range of 33% to 66% of the response rate against the sample size as suggested by Hagaman and Wutich (2017) [12]. Also, the online survey response rate of 53.3% met the 10% to 30% criteria by Wu, Zhao and Fils-Aimé (2022) [34].

The law enforcement officers had a total of 194 Online Questionnaires responses and 19 scheduled interview guides that were successful to a total of 213 equating to a 64.2% response rate out of the sample of 369. This exceeded the recommended adequacy range of 33% to 66% of the response rate against the sample size as suggested by Hagaman and Wutich (2017) [12]. Also, the online survey response rate of 53.3% met the 10% to 30% criteria by Wu, Zhao and Fils-Aimé (2022) [34]. Overall, the study achieved robust response rates across all stakeholder groups—ranging from 61.5% to 73.1%—exceeding established benchmarks for qualitative and mixed-methods research, thereby ensuring data adequacy, representativeness, and methodological rigor for analyzing social media platforms' impact on policing strategies in Nairobi City County.

The research also sought to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. Understanding these characteristics was essential because they are recognized to affect the respondents' opinions and perspectives (Robertson & Watts, 2016) [26]. Therefore, the socio-demographic factors examined comprised of gender, age, and the level of education.

4.1 Respondents' Gender

Participants were asked to indicate their gender by placing a mark next to the relevant option provided (male or female). The responses are presented below (figure 2).

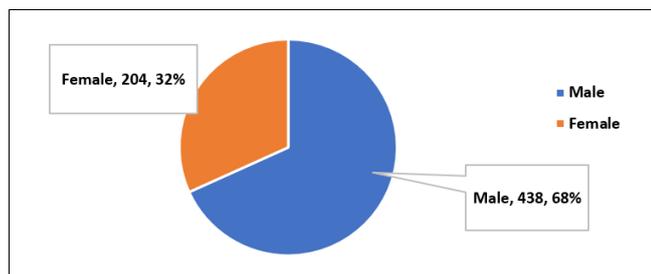


Fig 2: Responses by Gender

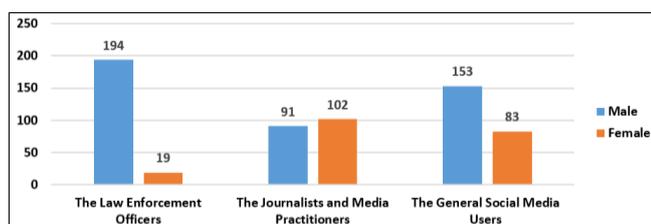


Fig 3: Respondents' Gender in Each Cluster

Fig 2 shows the gender distribution of the respondents, with 204 (31.8%) females and 438 (68.2%) males indicating that, the majority of the participants available for the study were male.

Fig 3 indicates the distribution among the various clusters, showing that all the law enforcement officers as, 194 male (91.1%) and 19 female (8.9%) and the journalists and media practitioners (91 male, 102 female) reflects the existing gender demographics within these specific professions in Kenya. Historically, certain fields like policing have been male-dominated, while others, like journalism, are still experiencing a shift towards a greater gender balance (Mutungi & Mavole, 2024) [21]. Therefore, the study's results are not unusual but rather they mirror the broader sociological and professional reality of the Kenyan workforce. These observed gender ratios align with the global and the local statistics that often show a gradual, but not yet complete, feminization of professions that were traditionally male-dominated.

The General Social Media Users were 153 male (64.8%) and 83 female (35.2%). The significant disparity among the general social media users can be explained by the digital gender divide. This is a well-documented phenomenon where men often have a greater access to and higher rates of participation in, digital spaces than women, particularly in developing countries (Piva Asaloko, Mondjeli, & Tsopmo, 2025) [24]. Factors such as access to technology, digital literacy and the cultural norms can contribute to this gap, leading to an overrepresentation of males in online-focused studies. This trend is further compounded by the socio-economic factors, where the women may be less likely to own personal smartphones or have reliable internet access, thus limiting their capacity for the online engagement.

4.2 Respondents' Age

The participants were requested to specify their ages by choosing from the given options. For those who took part in interviews, their age was recorded as part of the introductory

questions. The data was recorded as shown in the Figure 4 below.

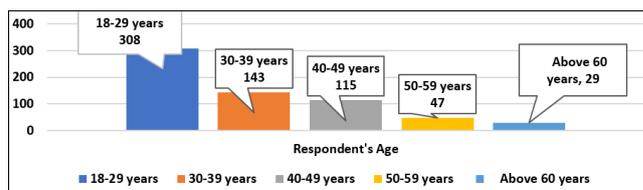


Fig 4: Age for the Respondents

According to the findings, the 18-29 years age group was the largest, comprising 308 respondents (48%). The second largest group was the 30-39 years category, with 143 respondents (22.3%). The 40-49 years group accounted for 115 respondents (17.9%). The second last smallest group were the 50-59 years at 47 respondents (7.3%). The smallest segment of the sample was the above 60 age group, with 29 respondents (4.5%).

The distribution of respondents by age group in this study offered important insights regarding the demographic makeup and the potential factors influencing the participation in the research. The predominance of the 18-29 years age group, making up almost half of the sample (48%), suggested that the younger adults were more accessible and more willing to engage in the study. This could be due to their greater familiarity with the research participation, higher availability and the study's appeal to issues relevant to their age cohort. As Murray and T (2024) [20] in the study had also revealed a positive attitude towards greater familiarity with the research participation, with a strong willingness to take part in a research.

The substantial representation of the 30-39 years group (22.3%) indicated that, the early middle-aged adults also formed an important part of the study population. This age bracket typically encompasses individuals who are engaged in their careers and family building, which could have influenced their perspectives and experiences relevant to the study's focus.

As age increases, the proportion of participants decreases progressively, with the 40-49 years group at 17.9%, followed by the 50-59 years group at 7.3%. This decline reflected a reduced accessibility, time constraints or even lesser interest among the older adults to participate in the research. Alternatively, it could also have been an indicative of the study's recruitment methods or topics not being as relevant or appealing to these age groups.

The smallest group was respondents above 60 years (4.5%), which could be attributed to factors such as limited mobility, lower exposure to research initiatives, or even potential health limitations affecting their participation. Furthermore, older adults may have different communication preferences that were not fully addressed during their recruitment.

Overall, the downward trend in respondent numbers with increasing age emphasized the need to consider age-specific engagement strategies in the research design. As Hübel, Stan and Tasente (2023) [13] stated, all ages significantly influence participants' perspectives on various aspects of their lives, including quality of life, future expectations, and attitudes towards societal and economic structures. Understanding this demographic distribution is critical for interpreting the study's findings, identifying potential biases and possibly enhancing the representativeness of the future

research samples. These discussions can help to frame the findings within the broader social and methodological contexts, ensuring a better understanding of the population under study.

4.3 General Users Respondents' Frequency of Participation in Protests

The respondents were instructed to specify their frequency of participation in protests by inserting a mark where the applicable selection was given. For the ones who were interviewed, their frequency of participation in protests was captured as a question during the introduction. The data is captured in below (figure 5).

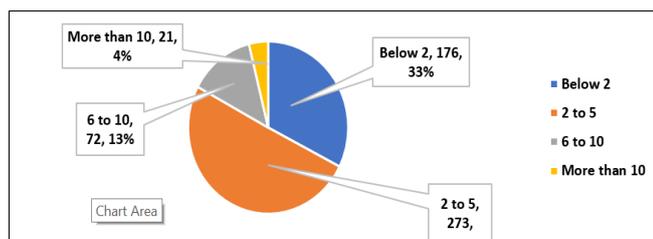


Fig 5: Respondents' Frequency of participation in protests

With regard from the findings to the frequency of participation in protests, most of the participants attended 2 to 5 protests, and this was represented by $n = 273$ (50%). This was followed by those who participated in below 2 protests, represented by $n = 176$ (33%). In the third position was the group who participated in 6 to 10 protests, represented by $n = 72$ (13%). Lastly, were those who participated in more than 10 protests were represented by $n = 21$ (4%).

The findings on the frequency of protest participation revealed a distinctive pattern of engagement, with a majority of the respondents falling into the moderately active category. This distribution provided insights into the dynamics of social movement participation. The most prominent finding is the concentration of participants in the 2 to 5 protest range, representing the largest group at 50% of the total sample. This suggests that the majority of individuals who engage in public dissent are not one-time participants but are also not highly frequent activists. This moderate level of engagement can be conceptualized as "episodic platforms" or "sustained episodic participation," where individuals are motivated to join multiple, high-profile events related to a particular cause without dedicating themselves to a constant, high-frequency protest lifestyle. As according to Gonzalez, Hoffmann and Mercea (2024) [10] this pattern is often supported by the formation of some weak social ties and shared grievances, which are strong enough to encourage a repeat of participation but do not necessarily require the deep personal commitment of a core activist.

Furthermore, the data indicated a significant portion of the sample (33%) participated in below 2 protests. This group likely represents the broad base of a movement, composed of individuals who may be new to protesting, were mobilized by a single, highly salient event, or maybe lacked the resources or motivation for a continued involvement. Building on the foundation of resource mobilization, the Political Process Theory emphasizes the role of a political opportunity structure like the presence of favorable political

circumstances in encouraging and shaping protest. The large group of participants who attended "Below 2" protests (33%) may represent individuals who were motivated by a specific political window of opportunity or a particular, highly salient event. This is also where the concept of "framing" becomes critical. The movement's leadership must successfully "frame" the issue in a way that resonates with a broad audience, making the act of protesting seem both necessary and morally correct. The ability to create a compelling frame can draw in new, less-committed participants who feel compelled to show up for a specific event, even if they do not continue their participation afterwards.

The sheer number of the group that participated in 6 to 10 protests, represented by 13%, underscored the importance of a wide "selection of beliefs" that can attract and sustain a diverse range of participants. While less frequent, their presence is crucial for demonstrating the broad public support and legitimacy of a protest movement.

Finally, the small but committed group of the individuals who participated in more than 10 protests (4%) represented the core activists. These participants were likely often driven by strong ideological beliefs and a deep-seated sense of injustice. They are the "protest specialists" who are fundamental to the long-term sustainability and organization of the movements. Their high level of participation can be explained by a convergence of strong grievances, robust social networks within activist circles and a personal identity deeply intertwined with the causes. According to the Resource Mobilization Theory, a success of social movements depends on the availability of resources, such as money, organizational capacity and critically human labor. The findings that a small number of the participants attended "More than 10" protests (4%) is a classic illustration of this theory. These individuals can be viewed as the "professional activists" or the core organizers of the movement.

These finding highlighted the hierarchical nature of the protest movements, where a small, dedicated core of activists can mobilize and sustain a much larger, moderately engaged base. These distinct levels of participation collectively have contributed to the overall strength and visibility of the movements, each playing a critical role in their life cycle and impact.

4.4 Objective for the Study

After presenting and examining the demographic characteristics of the participants, this section concentrated on the presentation and analysis of the primary research objective. It is worth recalling that the study was examining how Social Media Platforms Shape the Public Perceptions of the Policing Strategies in Nairobi City County. This section provides the analyzed and interpreted data concerning the objective. The presentation of findings was based on the data collected from the field as shared by the participants in relation to this subject.

The participants were asked to mention ways how the social media platforms shape the public perceptions of the policing strategies, make comments on the mentioned ways how the social media platforms shape the public perceptions of the policing strategies and on the scale given to rate the mentioned ways of how social media platforms shape public perceptions of the policing strategies in Nairobi City County. The findings are displayed below (Table 2):

Table 2: The Ways How the Social Media Platforms Shapes the Public Perceptions of the Policing Strategies in Nairobi City County.

The Ways by which the Social Media Platforms Shapes the Public Perceptions of the Policing Strategies in Nairobi City County	Number of Participants Mentioned	Percentage (%)
Conduit for Direct Sharing of Police Actions	610	95
An Amplifying Tactic of Negative Incidents involving the Police	517	80.6
Being Platforms for Whistleblowing of police malpractices	408	63.6
Management techniques of the Police Public Relations	152	23.7
Facilitating means of Debates and Dialogues About Police Policies	315	49.1

As indicated in the findings above in table 2, the most significant way the social media shapes the public perception is by acting as a direct conduit for sharing the police actions, represented by n=610 (95%). This was followed by the perception that the social media is an amplification tactic of the negative incidents involving the Police, represented by n=517 (80.6%). At the third position was the perception that the social media platforms are a means of whistleblowing, represented by n=408 (63.56%). This was followed by the perception that they are a facilitating means of debates and dialogues about the police policies, represented by n=315 (49.1%), and lastly, they perceived that the social media is used as a management technique of the police public relations, represented by n=152 (23.7%). These findings are discussed in the subheadings below.

a. The Conduit for Direct Sharing of Police Actions

The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed how the citizens in Nairobi City County perceive the policing strategies, moving away from the traditional, top-down communication to the more dynamic and unfiltered information flow. The most significant way this is achieved is through the conduit for the direct sharing of police actions, where platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram enable the residents to bypass the formal reporting channels and instantly upload videos and photos of the police operations. This real-time, on-the-ground contents, provide raw and immediate perspective on the police conduct, whether positive or negative and directly shape the public opinion by creating a widely accessible visual record of the law enforcement activities. A Journalist interviewed explained...

“In my journalistic experience, social media has tipped up how we cover policing. It has turned every citizen into a potential reporter, providing a raw, unfiltered view of the police actions that can go viral instantly. This real-time access holds the police accountable like never before, but it also means that a single, decontextualized incident can be amplified, shaping the public perception in a way that is often oversimplified or negative”

As the journalist respondent has properly summarized, the advent of the smartphones has effectively turned every citizen into a potential reporter, bypassing the traditional

media's role as a gatekeeper of information. This direct, real-time access to the raw content for both the positive and the negative, has created a public record that was immediate, unfiltered and deeply influential. The findings demonstrated that this new dynamic was a powerful force in shaping the public perception, as it offered a level of transparency that was previously unattainable. For example, the cases where a citizen on a bus recorded police officers accompanying a VIP using the wrong side of the road, intimidating and threatening other road users. After uploading the video to Twitter, the clip instantly went viral, bypassing the formal channels and becoming a public scandal that day and the whole of the week.

This newfound transparency also came with a heightened sense of the real-time accountability for the police. The verbatim from the respondent underscored how a single viral video of a police officer's misconduct could instantly circulate across platforms, destroying the credibility and forcing a rapid, often public, response from the authorities. This is a significant departure from the past, where such incidents would have gone unnoticed or been contained within the official channels. The findings showed that this direct pressure from the public has become a powerful mechanism for holding the police to a higher standard of conduct, thereby creating a more responsive and less opaque system. There was also an instance, when a video of a police officer using excessive force during an arrest during a normal traffic stop went viral. The National Police Service had to issue a public statement on its official social media pages within hours, announcing the officer's interdiction and the launch of an internal investigation.

However, the findings also highlighted the inherent risks of this democratized information flow. The respondent noted that, while the social media provides accountability, it often lacks the crucial context that a journalist would typically provide. As results from Broda and Strömbäck (2024) [2] study showed that, the social media is frequently driven by misinformation, disinformation, and fake news to hype up the public. A short video clip, for example, could be amplified by systems and shared thousands of times without a full understanding of the circumstances, leading to a decontextualized narrative. This could result in a simplified or unfairly negative perception of the police force, where a single isolated incident was generalized to represent the entire institution. Another officer had narrated on a video of a police officer forcefully pulling a woman's arm during an arrest that had gone viral, sparking widespread outrage and accusations of brutality. However, the full unedited footage later revealed that, the woman was resisting arrest and attempting to flee a robbery scene, a critical piece of information that was lost in the initial public fury. A key critique here is that the rapid, the emotional nature of social media virality often creates a ‘justice before facts’ dynamic, where the initial, highly emotive video clip shapes the dominant public narrative irrevocably. This necessitates the police developing a robust and proactive digital communication strategy to rapidly inject verified context, rather than relying solely on reactive and defensive statements made hours later, which often struggle to catch up with the initial speed of misinformation.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that social media's role in shaping public perception of policing was a complex and often a contradictory phenomenon. While it served as a powerful tool for transparency and accountability, it

simultaneously created a volatile environment where decontextualized information could rapidly spread. The respondent's insights highlighted that, this new information environment, though beneficial for the public oversight, requires a more critical approach to how the public consumes and interprets content related to the law enforcement activities in Nairobi.

b. An Amplifying Tactic of the Negative Incidents involving the Police

This section delved into the second most significant way the social media shapes the public perceptions of policing in Nairobi: the amplification tactic of the negative incidents involving the police. While the direct sharing of information provides a window into the police activities, this second finding highlighted how the platforms' algorithms and user engagement tactics sometimes magnify these events, creating a sense of their severity. A single instance of a police misconduct, such as a heated traffic stop or a controversial arrest, can be repeatedly shared and re-shared, gaining an immense traction and dominating the online discourses. In the words of a Law Enforcement Officer respondent...

"The social media has completely changed the game for us and honestly, it is mostly for the worse. One small mistake by an officer, either an angry word, a harsh action in a split-second decision, gets filmed and becomes the only story people get to see. These videos are often taken completely out of context and the media systems push them to go viral. People see a 30-second clip and immediately assume the worst. It does not matter what led up to the incident as the public's perception is shaped by that one moment, and it creates this constant negative narrative that we are all a bunch of thugs. It makes our job so much harder and erodes the public trust we work so hard to build."

The findings of this study suggested that, the social media platforms are perceived by law enforcement officers as a double-edged sword, particularly concerning the amplification of the negative incidents. As a respondent from the police service articulated, "One small mistake by an officer gets filmed and becomes the only story people see." This perspective highlighted a key finding that, the police officers feel that their actions are subjected to a constant, decontextualized scrutiny that is often unfair. The pervasive presence of smartphones means that every interaction has the potential to become a viral video, where the full context of a situation such as a suspect resisting arrest or even an officer following established protocol is often lost. This leads to a sense of professional vulnerability and a feeling that a single, isolated incident can unjustly define the entire policing institution in the public eye.

The perception that the negative incidents are disproportionately amplified was found to have a tangible impact on the morale and the operational confidence of the police officers. The verbatim from the respondent underscored the belief that these viral clips lead to an immediate, widespread loss of the public trust. This speedy cycle of filming, sharing and the public condemnation was reported to create an environment of constant pressure, where the officers felt they were always one misstep away from a public relations crisis. On the ground, the officers on

patrol in a high-crime area might have been hesitant to use necessary force to subdue a suspect, knowing that a bystander could be recording and the clip could be misinterpreted online, leading to internal investigations and the public backlash. This dynamic was observed to create a chilling effect on the proactive policing, as the officers weighed the risk of a viral video against the need to enforce the law. However, a critical assessment of the police framing this as "decontextualized scrutiny" is that, the public attention is overwhelmingly drawn to incidents that indicate a failure of accountability or procedure, suggesting the issue is not misinterpretation, but a deeply rooted trust deficit. Therefore, the long-term solution lies not in controlling the narrative, but in implementing systemic transparency such as the mandatory use of official body-worn cameras to provide the verifiable "full context" the police claim is missing to proactively restore credibility.

Furthermore, the study's findings indicated that, this amplification of the negative events also hampered the police service's ability to communicate its own positive narratives and successes. While the social media is a powerful tool for the community engagement and information dissemination, the overwhelming focus on the misconduct and corruption in online discourse has often overshadowed any positive stories. As according to the study by Chalke and Mishra (2023) ^[3] it indicated that, the spread of misinformation on the social media is by feature content and different emotions with consequent different changes. For example, a team of officers who successfully executed a complex rescue operation, saving a young man who had been abducted, might have seen their story receive minimal engagement, while a simultaneous video of a traffic officer being rude to a driver received tens of thousands of views and comments. This imbalance creates a skewed public record, where the perception of policing is shaped almost exclusively by its failures rather than its successes.

The data revealed that, this continuous cycle of negative amplification reinforces a deep-seated distrust between the police and the public. As the respondent stated, it "erodes the public trust we work so hard to build." The cumulative effect of decontextualized, viral clips creates a feedback loop where the public mistrust leads to more filming of the police, which in turn leads to more opportunities for negative amplification. This was found to be a significant challenge for the Nairobi City County police service, as it hinders their efforts to implement community-oriented policing strategies and build collaborative relationships with citizens. This is a critical issue when viewed through the lens of Public Sphere Theory, as the theory posits that a functioning public sphere requires rational-critical discourse, yet the online environment is dominated by emotionally charged content that undermines mutual understanding. Ultimately, this leads to a fragmented public sphere where rational debate about policing is sidelined by a constant stream of mistrust-fueled content. In practice, the community policing initiatives, such as open forums in informal settlements or public safety awareness campaigns, are poorly attended or met with skepticism because a recent viral video of a police officer's misconduct had dominated the local conversation, making it difficult for citizens to see the police as partners rather than adversaries. However, a counter-critique from the Public Sphere perspective is warranted as the police service's focus on its "positive narratives" is itself a strategic form of information control.

The real challenge is not merely amplifying successes, but accepting that the public is using social media to define police accountability on their terms. Therefore, success must be redefined not as media management, but as implementing tangible and structural reforms that render the filming of misconduct a rare event, thereby organically shifting the public conversation.

c. Being Platforms for Whistleblowing of Police Malpractices

This section explored the role of social media as a platform for whistleblowing, which was identified as the third most significant way these channels influence the public perceptions of policing in Nairobi city county. While the traditional avenues for reporting police misconduct often faced public skepticism due to a lack of trust in the internal systems, the social media provides a direct, accessible and often anonymous alternative. The citizens can bypass the formal complaint processes and publicly expose instances of corruption, brutality and impunity. This ability has profoundly reshaped the power dynamics between the police and the community, creating a new form of citizen-led oversight that directly impacts public perception. A verbatim from a journalist interviewed was that...

"The social media has completely changed our role as journalists. It is no longer just about us breaking the story but it is about what the public is already reporting. For whistleblowing, it is a game-changer because citizens can bypass the formal, often intimidating, police complaints system and directly expose misconduct to a massive audience. As a result, we are now often in a reactive role, following up on the viral videos and the public outcry. It is a powerful tool for accountability, but it also means that the narrative is no longer solely in our hands as it belongs to the public."

The findings of this study revealed that, the social media's function as a platform for whistleblowing has fundamentally altered the information landscape for both the public and the law enforcement. As a journalist respondent noted, the role of traditional media has shifted from being the primary gatekeeper of information to a more reactive position, following up on stories that have already gone viral online. This highlighted a critical finding that, the social media has empowered the citizens to act as the first responders in reporting malpractices. The ability for the individuals to share evidence of corruption or brutality directly to a wide audience bypasses the traditional, often bureaucratic, channels of complaint, which were frequently perceived as ineffective and biased in favor of the police. This new dynamic has created an environment where misconduct is not only exposed but is also thrust into the public consciousness with unprecedented speed.

The study found that, this direct-to-public form of whistleblowing created a new and significant source of pressure on the police service to act. Unlike a private complaint lodged with the internal affairs department, a viral video of the police malpractice carries immediate reputational risk and demands a rapid public response. The verbatim from the journalist respondent emphasized the "relative safety" of the whistleblower, as they can often share content anonymously or from a distance, without the

fear of direct reprisal that might come from a formal complaint. As was explained that, a matatu driver who had been asked for a bribe by a traffic officer had secretly recorded the interaction on their phone. By posting the video to a popular Facebook group for drivers, the post immediately generated public outrage, forcing the police command to issue a statement on the incident and announce an investigation. This rapid, public exposure acted as a powerful platform of whistleblowing. However, a critical critique of this "relative safety" is warranted while, anonymity online reduces the risk of direct, immediate reprisal, the police service's delayed and reactive responses to the viral content often fail to address the systemic issue of reprisal. This signals to potential whistleblowers that the institution is only responsive to public pressure, not to the act of truth-telling itself, potentially discouraging formal and detailed evidence submission which can be crucial for successful prosecution and reform.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that, this whistleblowing dynamic has created a collaborative relationship between the citizens and the journalists, with the social media serving as a bridge between them. The journalists have been found to be increasingly using the social media as a primary source for story leads, corroborating citizen-generated content to build more comprehensive and impactful reports. As Yerlikaya (2020) ^[35] indicated, social media, which was initially thought to be speculative has been found to extensively being a source of breaking news factual news. The verbatim quote, "we are now often in a reactive role, following up on viral videos," captures this shift. The public's initial act of whistleblowing provided the raw material that the journalists then used to conduct more in-depth investigations, verify facts and the provide the crucial context that might have been missing from the original clip. For instance, the researcher was shown a video posted on Twitter showing a police officer assaulting a street vendor which was noticed by a journalist, who then used it as a starting point to interview the vendor, talk to witnesses and to file a formal story, thereby giving the incident a wider audience and an official record. This symbiotic relationship between the citizen-whistleblowers and the traditional media amplified the impact of the initial report, ensuring it was not just a fleeting viral moment but a documented case of misconduct.

The data also revealed that, this role of the social media as a whistleblowing platform has profoundly shaped the public perception by reinforcing a narrative of the police unaccountability and the necessity of the citizen-led oversight. The constant exposure to footage of malpractices, whether of a traffic officer taking a bribe or an officer using excessive force, has fostered a collective sense of vigilance among the public. This vigilance, in turn, was found to encourage more individuals to document and share incidents, creating a continuous feedback loop of the citizen-driven accountability. This dynamic is a prime example of Agenda-Setting Theory in action, as the frequent exposure to these specific negative events does not just inform the public but also tells them what to think about, elevating the police misconduct to a central issue in the public discourse. By consistently highlighting these incidents, the social media platforms set the public agenda, making issues of the police corruption and brutality seem more prevalent and important, thus shaping a broader perception of the systemic problems rather than some isolated events. A final critique

using Agenda-Setting Theory is that while social media sets the agenda for what the public thinks about like police misconduct, the police service's failure to leverage this platform for genuine and interactive engagement means they lose the opportunity to influence how the public thinks about the path to reform, ultimately ceding the entire discourse space to a narrative of systemic failure.

d. Management techniques of the Police Public Relations

This section presents an analysis of how the social media platforms are utilized as a deliberate management technique for the police public relations, a method identified as the second-to-last mentioned by the respondents. Unlike the citizen-driven content that often exposes misconduct, this approach represents a proactive effort by the police service to shape its own public image. By using the official social media accounts, the police in Nairobi City County can directly disseminate success stories, highlight community engagement initiatives and then share public safety announcements. This strategy aims to counter prevailing negative narratives, build public trust and foster a more positive and approachable perception of law enforcement, thereby directly influencing how citizens view policing strategies. A Law Enforcement Officer, interviewed had this to say...

"The social media is a double-edged sword for us. On one hand, we see how a single video of a minor incident can go viral and tarnish our image overnight, no matter what good we do. It creates a very negative perception and it can be frustrating. But on the other hand, we know we have to be on those platforms. We use our official pages to put our side of the story out there, to show the public what we are really about. We post photos of our officers helping in the community, giving safety tips or celebrating successes. It is a way for us to control the narrative and build trust, but it is a constant battle against the negative content that gets way more traction."

The findings of this study revealed that, the law enforcement in Nairobi City County perceived social media as a crucial, though challenging, a tool for public relations management. The verbatim from a law enforcement officer highlighted a key tension that is, the frustration of having positive efforts being overshadowed by negative, viral content. This perspective underscored a finding that the police service felt compelled to be present on the social media not just to engage, but to actively counter a prevailing narrative of misconduct. The official accounts are thus being used as a strategic tool to disseminate information and to shape a more favorable public image, in an attempt to balance the public record, which was perceived as being dominated by the citizen-generated content of mostly malpractices.

The study found that, these management techniques were deliberately employed to humanize the police force and to showcase its community-oriented side. The verbatim from the respondent, who mentioned posting "photos of our officers helping in the community," captures this finding. The goal of this strategy is to move beyond the traditional, formal image of the police and to present the officers as approachable, relatable members of the community. This approach was a direct response to the public's perception,

which has been negatively influenced by the amplification of incidents of brutality and corruption. According to Levon and Yavetz (2020) ^[16] the police are hoping that, by showing a different side of their work, they could rebuild trust and create a more positive and collaborative relationship with the public. I one of the police stations in a busy residential area, they have used its Facebook page to post photos of its officers helping schoolchildren cross the road and of a police team participating in a local clean-up event. These posts served as a deliberate public relations tactic to project an image of a caring, helpful police force, contrasting with the often-negative portrayals seen elsewhere on the social media. A critique of this "humanizing" tactic is that its effectiveness is inherently limited because it addresses the symptom like the poor image, rather than the cause such as systemic misconduct. The public is unlikely to forgive a bribe-taking or a brutal officer simply because they saw a photo of another officer helping a child cross the road. True trust and perception change requires a visible, verifiable institutional reforms and not merely strategic combination of positive and negative content.

Furthermore, the data indicated that the police service used the social media to proactively provide their own narrative of events, particularly in cases where a viral video had sparked public outcry. The respondent's statement, "We use our official pages to put our side of the story out there," speaks to this finding. This technique involved releasing official statements, clarifications, or video footage to provide context that might have been missing from a short, viral clip. The police service was found to have utilized this technique to assert control over the narrative and prevent public opinion from being solely shaped by the decontextualized content. For example, there was an instance a video of a heated exchange between an officer and a civilian when the presidential motorcade was about to pass which went viral. The police service's Twitter account would later release a statement explaining that the civilian was being uncooperative during a lawful stop and that the police officer's actions were in line with established protocol when covering a presidential commuting. This swift, public response was intended to mitigate any damage to the police service's reputation and to present a more balanced view of the incident.

In conclusion, while the police public relations management techniques on social media were found to be a proactive attempt to shape perception, they were also perceived by the law enforcement as a constant and challenging "battle". The findings suggested that despite these efforts, the police still felt that, the negative content garnered "way more traction" and attention. This struggle is a direct manifestation of Agenda-Setting Theory, as the police's attempts to set a positive public relations agenda are frequently undermined by the public's pre-existing focus on the negative incidents. The more traction and attention that the negative content receives, the more it elevates issues of misconduct and distrust to the forefront of the public's mind, overshadowing the police's efforts to highlight their successes. The study concluded that this ongoing struggle to manage the public perception on the social media was a significant factor influencing how the police service developed and implemented its policing strategies in Nairobi. This final manifestation of the Agenda-Setting Theory reveals a failure of the police's strategic goal as their reactive P.R. tactics are

continually losing the agenda-setting contest to the powerful and emotionally resonant citizen-whistleblower content, demonstrating that institutional legitimacy cannot be successfully messaged into existence when underlying accountability gaps persist.

e. Facilitating means of Debates and Dialogues About Police Policies

This section presents the findings on social media platforms as a facilitating means for debates and dialogues about the police policies, which was identified as the least mentioned way these platforms shape public perception in Nairobi City County. Unlike the immediate, emotional responses generated by the viral incidents, this function highlights a more deliberate and informal role for the social media. These platforms provide a digital public square where the citizens, civil society organizations and even the politicians can openly discuss, critique and also propose changes to existing police strategies, such as the patrol methods, community engagement programs or any accountability mechanisms. A general social media user interviewed had this to say...

“Before social media, we had no real say in the police policies. You would see a problem on the streets, but your only option was to hope a person of influence like a politician would get to know. Now, we have a public forum right on our phones. We can get together in groups, share ideas and tag the Inspector General or our local MP directly. It has given us a voice to debate things like the patrol routes and how to handle crime in our estates. We can propose solutions and hold our leaders accountable in real time. It feels like we are finally part of the conversation, not just the people who have to live with the consequences.”

A law enforcement officer mentioned that:

“The public thinks they can debate our policies online, but they do not understand the complexities of the work. You get people with zero training in policing or security who think they know how to run a force because they saw a few things on a video. It is often just a lot of emotional, uninformed opinions masquerading as policy debate. While we do pay attention to what is being said, it creates a lot of pressure to change things based on popular opinion rather than on sound tactical and professional judgment. We are trying to do a job that requires specific skills and having it debated by a million of different people on Twitter just makes our work more difficult.”

The findings of this study revealed that, the social media's role in facilitating debates and dialogues about police policies, but while the least mentioned, represented an emerging and complex dimension of the public-police relations. The verbatim from the general social media user highlighted the transformative power of these platforms as a means of the public discourse, noting that they provided a voice to the citizens who previously felt unheard. This finding indicated that, the social media had become a new and accessible space for grassroots advocacy, where the ordinary citizens could collectively organize and engage in

discussions that directly influenced policy. As Saaida (2023) [27] had pointed out in her study, the benefits of social media are like the amplification voices and enabling direct communication between politicians and citizens, thereby ensuring a healthy and inclusive political discourse. However, the verbatim from the law enforcement officer exposed the friction inherent in this process, where the officers perceived these public debates as uninformed and lacking in professional understanding, creating a disconnect between the public demands and the operational realities. The study found that, these digital dialogues often united around specific, highly publicized incidents, which served as a catalyst for broader policy discussions. The verbatim from the social media user that, "we can debate things like patrol routes or how to handle crime in our estates," summed up this finding. The citizens were observed to use the social media groups and hashtags to discuss the perceived shortcomings in the police strategy, such as slow response times and the over-policing of certain areas. This collective online deliberation then translated into public pressure, which the police service had to acknowledge. As had been witnessed by a respondent that, after a string of muggings in a residential neighborhood, it was posted on a community WhatsApp group, thereby the residents used the platform to organize and debate possible solutions, such as requesting increased police patrols and the installation of CCTV cameras, before officially presenting their ideas to the local police chief. This demonstrated a shift from passive observation to active, although informal, policy consultation.

Furthermore, the data indicated that, the civil society organizations and the human rights groups were leveraging social media as a primary tool to drive the public debates and push for policy reform. These organizations were found to be skilled at framing specific incidents within the context of systemic issues, thereby turning a local conversation into a national debate. The verbatim from the social media user who mentioned tagging "the Inspector General or our local MP" was a testament to this, as it showed how the social media facilitated the direct communication with the policymakers. In a practical scenario witnessed by some respondents, following a public uproar over a police shooting, an advocacy group used its Twitter account to launch a campaign, utilizing infographics and live discussions to educate the public on the police use-of-force policies and call for a review of existing protocols. This process served to both inform the public and to apply a direct pressure on the police service and the government officials to engage with the demands for change.

The findings also revealed a significant sense of frustration from the law enforcement regarding these public debates. The verbatim from the officer, who described the online discourse as "uninformed opinions masquerading as policy debate," reflected a perception that the public lacked a fundamental understanding of the operational complexities and resource limitations. This was found to be a major challenge in bridging the gap between the public demands and what the police service deemed to be a feasible and effective strategy. For example, in online forums, the citizens have demanded a complete halt to nighttime police operations in certain areas due to some security concerns, a demand that, from an operational standpoint, was considered impractical and even dangerous by the police command. This friction underscored the study's finding that, while the

social media had democratized the conversation around policing, it has not necessarily created a consensus or a shared understanding of the challenges faced by both the public and the law enforcement. But critically, the police perception of the public as "uninformed" reflects an institutional failure in communication, but not a flaw in the democratic process. The police service has a responsibility to proactively utilize social media not just for public relations but for educational transparency, sharing information about their operational realities, resource constraints and legal protocols to facilitate a more informed public debate, thereby fulfilling the ideal of a rational Public Sphere.

In conclusion, while the social media's role in facilitating the policy debates was not the most dominant finding, its emergence was found to be a significant development in the public-police dynamic. It has transformed the citizens from passive recipients of policing strategies into active participants in a public dialogue, providing a platform for advocacy and collective action. However, the study concluded that, this new form of engagement was still characterized by a notable disconnect, where the public's online demands were often perceived by the law enforcement as being divorced from the professional realities of policing. This is a critical issue when viewed through the lens of the Public Sphere Theory, as the theory posits that a functioning public sphere requires rational-critical discourse, yet this online dialogue is often marked by a fundamental lack of shared understanding between the public and the law enforcement. This disconnect ultimately hinders the public sphere's ability to facilitate meaningful influence on policy. This indicated that, while the social media had opened a new avenue for dialogue, bridging the gap between the public expectations and the police perceptions of their work remained a considerable challenge.

5. Conclusion

Based the findings of the study, it can be concluded that, the social media platforms have fundamentally transformed the landscape of the public perceptions regarding policing strategies in Nairobi City County, serving as a powerful tool for transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. While these platforms have democratized information sharing and amplified both positive and the negative narratives, they have also introduced challenges related to misinformation, public trust and the need for institutional responsiveness. The findings underscore that genuine police legitimacy in the digital age requires more than strategic communication but it demands systemic reforms, proactive transparency and meaningful dialogue with the public. Ultimately, the evolving role of the social media in shaping policing perceptions highlights the necessity for a balanced approach that leverages its potential for accountability while addressing its limitations to foster sustainable trust and collaborative governance in Nairobi.

6. Recommendation

Based the findings of the study, the study recommended that, the Nairobi Police Service can consider to adopting verifiable digital engagement systems of policing. Such would require mandating body-worn cameras and establishing a formal protocol for the rapid release of authenticated digital evidence following viral incidents. This

would be necessary to reclaim narrative control from any decontextualized content and build a sustainable trust through their evidence-based accountability and structured public dialogue.

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