

**‘POLICING IN GREAT BRITAIN HAS ALWAYS BEEN  
AS MUCH A MATTER OF IMAGE AS MUCH AS OF  
SUBSTANCE’  
THE CHANGING NATURE OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF  
THE POLICE AND THE EFFECT ON PUBLIC  
PERCEPTIONS: FROM MASS MEDIA TO SOCIAL MEDIA**

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Abstract

The effect of the media and what they can do cannot be ignored as it plays such a crucial part in daily life. This is highlighted by the recent Leveson inquiry which considered whether the press needed regulating. This thesis considers the effect of one of the fastest growing types of media, social media. In the UK alone, social network site Twitter registered around ten million users in 2012 (Guardian, 2012). A large percentage of the UK now has access to these social networking sites. This study explores the changing nature of media representations of the British police and the implications that social media may have on perceptions of the police. This will be achieved by examining the literature surrounding media representations of policing, followed by a discussion of five qualitative, primary research interviews with journalism students, which examine the use of social media, engagement with police related content and influence of social media on opinions of the police. This thesis covers areas of media effects research that this author believes have not yet been addressed and so aims to fill a gap in the literature. Significantly, this research hopes to develop knowledge on, and allow the reader to understand the impact of the changing nature of media representations of the police on how the police are perceived. The findings suggest that social media enables users to be more involved in the democratic processes of government organisations, but what also happens is that people may be exposed to more damaging footage of the police, take in smaller amounts of information and still be greatly influenced by mass media organisations, who are the main context setters of news. Public opinion may be no better informed than before. Representations become more complicated, and so views of the police become more extreme and varied, which in turn may create more tension over opinions on the police.

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### Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation aims to explore the changing nature of media representations of the British police and the implications on how this affects people's perceptions of the police. Robert Reiner once said, 'Policing in Great Britain has always been as much a matter of image as much as of substance' (Reiner, 1994 cited in Mason, 2003: 1), meaning that the way they are represented is as important as what they do. The importance of these representations on perceptions of the police will be explored, from newspaper and television through to social media. The secondary research will focus on the changing nature of these representations, whilst the primary research focuses on how social media may impact on how people perceive the police.

The ways in which people perceive the police can be broad, the Home Office include measures such as police effectiveness in dealing with crime, respect for the public and reliability (Home Office, 2010). Successive examinations of the British Crime Survey reveal that the public are unfamiliar with various aspects of the criminal justice system and rely on the media for their information (Chapman et al, 2002). From this we can assume that the media are crucial for some, and probably the singular influence for others on their perceptions of policing. It is clearly important that people have a good understanding of these elements of policing and that their views are fair and well informed. There is a considerable amount of research into what media representations of the police exist, however, there has been little research on the extent to which media representations inform public opinions about the police (Jewkes, 2011). Moreover, through extensive reading, it appears there is extremely little research into the influence of social media on perceptions of policing. Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking, (Oxforddictionaries.com, 2013). It is important to appreciate that social media is a significant change in the distribution of media and everyday communication. Major social media websites include those such as Facebook and Twitter, which will be central in some of the discussions in the thesis, with the former currently registering around thirty five million users in the UK (Socialbakers.com, 2013). The thesis will be concerned with how social media effects the media environment, whether representations within social media have a different impact to those seen in newspaper and television and if this will help people have fair and informed perceptions of the police. The study reflects the author's interests as a criminologist and as a news consumer.

The thesis is organised systematically, so that the reader can follow the transformation in media representations of the police. Firstly, is an examination of existing literature around media representations of the police and social media. This helps provide context and justification for the final discussion, and also inform the reader about the importance of media representations of the police on public perceptions. This is broken down into two chapters; the first is concerned with how the police are and were represented in newspaper and television and why these representations are important to public perceptions. This will focus on the debate over whether the police are represented positively or negatively, and by using some influential examples, the reader will understand why these representations of the police are important to public perceptions, and in turn how this can impact on police practice and policy. The second chapter is concerned with the role of social media in the media environment, whether or not it is distinctly different from traditional forms of media, and also look at the importance of citizen journalism and new technologies in affecting what becomes news.

Following this is the methodology chapter, which outlines the research methods that were used throughout the course of the study. It also aims to consider the advantages and disadvantages related with the chosen methods.

This chapter will look at what sample was used and how it was gathered. It will also consider what problems the writer encountered and what they may have wanted to do differently.

A findings chapter will be included, which encompasses a summary of the main findings from the primary research, which focuses on how journalism students have interacted with police related content on social media and how this may have impacted on their views of the police. This will be done by describing what has been found and applying relevant quotes to each finding. Journalism students were chosen for practical reasons. As there is very little existing research, primary data collection needed to be used, journalism students would be familiar with the vocabulary around the topic, and would undoubtedly come into contact with various types of media, they may also have some enthusiasm for the topic. This will be followed by an in depth discussion of how social media may impact on how people perceive the police. This will be influenced by the primary research findings, and evaluate how differently people may perceive the police because of social media. Various theories and concepts will be brought into the discussion, including hyper-reality, the demystification of police work, the influence of mass media organisations and the synopticon principle. The reader will learn more of these in the discussion chapter.

The conclusion will pull together the findings and discussion of the literature and primary data. It will consider how the nature of representations of the police in media has changed, and whether social media could impact on how the police are represented and perceived, whilst also considering the role that newspaper and television still have. It is argued that this study addresses certain gaps in knowledge, and encourages further research in the area. The reader should be able to understand how media representations of policing have changed and the potential impact social media may have on perceptions of the police.

## Chapter 2: The Police in Mass Media: From Institutional Racism to Dixon of Dock Green

In order to understand how media representations of the police have changed, there needs to be recognition of how the police were and are represented in newspapers and television, especially the latter, which could still be considered the dominant form of media (Croteau et al, 2012). Understanding why these representations are important in shaping perceptions, and how people's perceptions can have impacts on police practice and policy must also be understood. The literature in this area reveals a conflicting view, the mass media's portrayal of policing comprises of both positive and negative representations, both of which can have significant impact on perceptions of the police. We will briefly consider the argument either side, before looking at various influential examples in factual and fictional media and what impact they may have had on public perceptions.

Firstly, we ought to acknowledge that the police view public perceptions very seriously. The Metropolitan Police Service for example, value public perceptions highly. Their website states that they view public image and confidence as very important. They also carry out local surveys to measure confidence and attitudes towards policing (Metropolitan Police, 2012). Like any government body, they serve the public so aim to satisfy the public and gain their confidence. The media need the police to provide them with quick, reliable sources of crime information, and the police have an interest in maintaining a positive public image (Dowler, 2002). However, what this fails to consider is the growing number of negative representations of the police in mass media, and why this is the case.

Despite the view by police that they are repeat victims of mass media malice, the broad thrust of news coverage of crime and policing does appear ultimately to be supportive of the police as an institution and to depict them as successful and dynamic crime fighters (Leishmann & Mason, 2003). They cite here an existence of police officer negativity towards the media, but maintain that on the whole, mainstream media reflect the police positively. However, the former commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Ian Blair, believed otherwise. He spoke out on several occasions about the reporting of crime and policing issues by the media (Reiner, 2008). Sir Ian believed the media had negative effects on the way the public perceived these issues. Media images of policing could be considered mainly positive in the UK, and may partly be down to police forces having well resourced communications offices, which ensure that their image and messages are positively represented to key stakeholders, such as the media (Greer and McLaughlin, 2010). There is clearly debate amongst academics, police officers and other high standing people on how the police are represented within mass media. In factual and fictional media, there are an array of examples of which could support either argument, meaning that the

portrayals of policing are diverse. Various representations of policing have existed within factual and fictional media which linger within the rhetoric of policing debates (Jewkes, 2011). Firstly, there will be an observation of fictional representations of policing.

The modern crime drama often sees the main protagonist eat, sleep and drink their work. They put their job first, sometimes at a substantial cost to themselves (Heath and Gilbert, 1996). *The Sweeney* was an edgy drama that fits the typology of the rule bending cop, but only in cases where it was needed in order to secure justice (Mawby, 2003). Since *The Sweeney*, rule breaking has been inherently linked with crime solving (Heath and Gilbert, 1996). Some people may believe rule bound bureaucracy to be holding the police back (Mawby, 2003). The author believes this could lead people to have false expectations of the police, expecting them to go to any lengths to apprehend the criminal, but can't because they're held back by politically correct rules. Crime drama's such as *Heartbeat* and *A Touch of Frost* were particularly popular in the 1990's with peak viewing figures often reaching around eighteen million people (Mawby, 2003). You only need to look at the weekly viewing figures on the main British television channels to realise how popular crime drama's still are. The week beginning the fourth of February 2013 saw crime drama *Silent Witness* in the top ten most viewed on BBC1 (Barb, 2013), and the week beginning February eleventh saw detective thriller *Lewis* in the top ten most watched on ITV (Barb, 2013). Another feature of these crime dramas is that almost all crimes are solved and criminals apprehended (Dowler, 2002). We know that in reality, this is not the truth. While criminologists are aware of the low clear up rate of offenses by the police, media depictions of policing can lead the public into thinking that it is much greater than it actually is, whilst also boosting the police's ability in crime detection (Leishmann & Mason, 2003; Dowler, 2002). There are a low percentage of crimes where the police gather enough evidence to justify criminal proceedings, however the public are often projected with police successes across all types of media and this can mislead them. This projects an image that police are more effective than official statistics demonstrate (Dowler, 2002). This could be seen to impact on perception measures used by the Home Office. The police themselves can also worry about the positive image of policing, as it can lead the public to expect too much from them (Reiner, 2008).

One of the early British television programmes with a police officer as the central character, was *Dixon of Dock Green*, which created a symbolic representation of the British bobby, that still remains a reference point today (Mawby, 2003). Despite not being on television screens for around 40 years, *Dixon* continues to overshadow debates about public attitudes towards the police (Jewkes, 2011). Politicians or police chiefs under pressure regularly call for the return of the likes of *Dixon* (Reiner, 2008), showing just how influential television can be. However, television dramas do not always show a positive reflection of the police, *Life on Mars* highlighted problems with policing in the 1970's, with corrupt, brutal, authoritarian officers, and referenced scandals such as that of the 'Birmingham 6' (Jewkes, 2011).

Dramas are not the only type of television programme that represent the police. Television images of policing are conveyed through a range of programmes, including those based on detectives, uniformed officers and elite teams, and include, investigative documentaries and docu-dramas, the latter of which can blur the distinction between fictional and factual programming (Mawby, 2003). Docu-dramas are shot in the style of a documentary to appear realistic, but are a type of fictional entertainment. *The Cops*, was a powerful and disturbing docu-drama of policing in Britain during the 1990's. Police were not only challenged by members of the public, but by colleagues, management and in their personal lives. The Police were shown engaging in deviant behaviour, including fitting people up and drug use (Mawby, 2003). *The Cops* shows how television is used as a vehicle for playing out the condition of society (Mawby, 2003). The police are shown coming into contact with many different sections of society, shows like *The Cops* may impact on the views of people from certain sections of society, or impact on the ways in which people think they should be policed.

Factual television programmes should give us a more honest view of policing and policing issues. Originally from the US, in the UK there has been a surge in reality policing shows (Mason, 2003). These can provide a visual alternative to news accounts of crime incidents. However, the participating force has regulation over the final edits of these shows, therefore any misconduct or negative portrayals can be omitted (Surette, 2007). The lack of emphasis in the media on unspectacular, unrecorded, unsolved crimes can be seen to let the police off the

hook for under performance in such areas (Leishmann & Mason, 2002). The emphasis on success solving more serious crimes can help bolster perceptions of police skill and efficiency (Leishmann and Mason, 2003).

The final type of television programme discussed is the documentary. This is also something that has emerged in more recent years. *The Secret Policeman* was an extremely controversial drama that was screened in 2003 amid heaps of publicity. This programme shows undercover reporter Mark Daly reveal racism amongst police recruits in Manchester (BBC, 2008). *The Secret Policeman*, can highlight unacceptable policing practices and add to the pressure to implement change and reform (Mawby, 2003). Policing programmes in general, can inform debates about the nature and future of policing and so can influence policy and procedure (Mawby, 2003). When media representations of policing can instigate change and begin to impact on police policy and practice, one really begin to understand the true importance of them. This is one programme amongst an increasing amount which have revealed or discussed scandals within public organisations, however, most writers still suggest that the broad thrust of factual media depict the police positively. The police are evidently represented through a number of different types of programme, some of which they cooperate with and influence and other which are beyond their control (Mawby, 2003).

Robert Reiner posits that the news media, those mediums in which news is delivered, including television news channels, radio, newspapers and magazines, also portray the police positively, as heroic, professional crime fighters (Reiner, 2008). This is evident in some of the language used in news reports. The recurring use of warlike metaphors, words such as war, battle and invasion, in connection with issues such as drugs, public disorder and immigration, bestow a kind of heroic status on the police organisation (Leishmann & Mason, 2003). This could possibly reinforce the macho image of the police, whilst impact negatively on people's views of women in the police. Rudyard Kipling once said 'words are the most powerful drug used by mankind' (Kipling, 1928). In other terms, language with such powerful connotations, have the ability to alter people's perceptions of reality. One of the biggest cases in British policing in the previous twenty years is that of the death of Stephen Lawrence, and its resulting inquiry. This led to the Macpherson report, which branded the police institutionally racist (Guardian, 2003). As you can imagine, almost all newspapers and news stations ran this story. Foster et al (2005) carried out research to see how police officers believed this media coverage had impacted on perceptions of them. Media coverage almost certainly had an important role in shaping officers' understanding of, and opinions towards the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Some officers thought it helped to distort the meaning of 'institutional racism,' sometimes saying the phrase without defining it (Foster et al, 2005). As a powerful term, with a deeply embedded social stigma, those hearing the word racism may have difficulty disassociating it from the actions of individual officers. A result of this is that it was likely to have contributed to confusion between the notion of systemic discrimination, and the notion of individual racism. Officers reported being called murderer and a racist, by black people, but also by middle class white people. (Foster et al, 2005). This is a powerful example of how the way media report something can give context and shape people's views. Some people clearly took their information from watching and reading news and this shaped their views, in this instance believing many officers within the force were individually racist. This is very important, an entire organisation could be seen as being racist, a very strong term, because media coverage failed to properly define the term institutional racism.

The focus in the news media tends to be on the police pursuit of justice. It also focuses on the police as an organisation, and very rarely on an individual officer unless they themselves become criminal (Surette, 2011). However, a news organisations agenda must be considered. During the 1984 miners' strike, the police were dubbed 'Maggie's boys' (Jewkes, 2011). Left wing press would no doubt associate the police with the conservative government in this instance, many would see the police in a negative light. There are other instances where the news media have shown the police negatively, such as the treatment of Sir Ian Blair. From his appointment as commissioner in February 2005 Sir Ian was subjected to persistent attack from right wing press, in particular for his efforts to reform the police, characterised by Melanie Phillips, as turning the force from the thin blue line, into utterly pc police (Reiner, 2008).

We can see that there is a synthesis of positive and negative representations of the police in newspaper and in television. Different characterisations of the police and police officers exist within news media and television

entertainment. Television dramas tend to show the police to be heroic and rule bending, documentaries reveal scandals and newspapers have a broad range of representations, which often echo their individual agendas. It would seem that although media messages do not affect all of the people all of the time, some of the messages affect some people, some of the time (Heath & Gilbert, 1996). As long as this is the case, it is important to understand their influence. Media images of policing are significant for a number of reasons, they demonstrate and challenge the accountability of the police, they are a source of information on policing and help people to understand why they're being policed. They also fulfil a symbolic role, providing a commentary on policing and on society, offering interpretations of the police in society (Reiner, 2000), proving that their image could be as significant as what they do. A major difficulty can be when the real police do not act like their media portraits, the unrealistic public expectations can generate real world public dissatisfaction with law enforcement (Surette, 2011). After considering what representations of the police have existed within news media and television programmes and how they have impacted on perceptions of the police in this chapter, the reader now needs to develop an understanding of social media and the rise of citizen journalism, which have changed the way mass media operate, whilst also offering the public new ways in which they can see the police.

#### New media environments: Social media and citizen journalism

This chapter will consider the role of social media in the media environment, as well as introduce the concept of citizen journalism, which is an important characteristic of the changing media environment. It will consider the new forms of communication that are becoming ever more dominant in daily life, which will help to set the context for the primary research and discussion chapter.

Firstly, it is important to get an idea of what social media actually is. Around the early 2000's a new form of technology began to emerge, in which individual users were the main content generators and also the main participators, which involves; watching or reading something, then liking, sharing, commenting, or following said things, with a theme of connectivity between users throughout (van Dijck, 2013). This connectivity would surely allow individuals to have more input again into the democratic process. However, less than ten years on, Van Dijck believes social media has turned into an area dominated by only several major players (Van Dijck, 2013). It is clear who these major players are in the UK, Facebook is clearly number one, with Twitter growing all the time. Less than ten years on, the user generated networks are now dominated by content generated from major organisations, who can more easily gain exposure through their own accounts, paid promotions and the ability to have their data shared, or trend for example. Users can see their news feed, a selection of important or interesting information (Paek et al, 2010), now flooded with content from large organisations as much as users they have chosen to friend or follow. Van Dijck argues that social media is now merely a transformation of mass media, not an alternative to it (Van Dijck, 2013). Van Dijck's argument will be very important in the final discussion, as we aim to discover how different this change in technology has on how people view the police, whether individuals are having a great impact, or whether mass media organisations still have an iron grip on what people should be influenced by.

It is worth looking at the concept of citizen journalism and how much of an impact this has had on the ways in which people see the police. Citizen journalism refers to a range of practices whereby ordinary users engage in journalistic practices, including blogging, photo and video capturing and sharing, or posting commentary on current events (Goode, 2009). The term can also be used more broadly to include other activities such as, linking, re-posting, or commenting on news materials posted by other users or news organisations, without necessarily being the creators of the content (Goode, 2009). It is clear the contemporary reporting of policing issues takes place within a drastically transformed information communications environment (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011). However, even the most recent criminological research has paid little attention to important changes in news gathering practices brought about by the emergence of a global, interactive 24/7 news environment (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011). Central to this argument is the rise of the citizen journalist, as a key component of the way in which news is gathered, and also the way in which it is shared and consumed (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011). The growth in the number of news gatherers, and the way in which they can share their news, can disrupt the traditional news media orientation towards the police perspective (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011). In this sense, an array of images of the police can be seen through ordinary people, not just selected by mass media organisations, changing the way the police and other public organisations are viewed. Subsequently, there is the increased possibility of highly damaging images and representations of state organisations such as the police, appearing and circulating in news media (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011).

The G20 demonstrations are an interesting example of the impact of citizen journalism, but also demonstrate the work of Van Dijck (2013). It shows how citizen journalism can influence what is news, but also how citizen gathered news can be put into context by mass media institutions, who ultimately control what people talk about. Originally the event was reported in a way which showed the police as the thin blue line, coming up against violent protesters, however this was before the death of Ian Tomlinson. Immediately after the incident, the press situated the death in the existing context, dying amid protestor violence, news coverage showing images of protesters throwing objects at the police, trying to help a dying man. Less than week later, camera phone footage emerged of an officer pushing Mr Tomlinson to the ground, The Guardian, who had the footage, shared it with other major institutions, including, the BBC and Sky. The footage was also uploaded to YouTube. Rapidly, the context of protestor violence turned to police violence (Greer and McLaughlin, 2010). Citizen journalism changed what had become news, however it was media institutions that radically transformed how the policing of G20 was interpreted and understood. It demonstrates the disruptiveness of citizen journalism, but shows nonetheless, that mass media were the context setters and main influence on people's views of the situation. The media pressure that resulted from the death, and their focus on other incidents of heavy police tactics, led to an inquiry of police public order tactics, again demonstrating how important media portrayals of the police can be.

New technology clearly offers new opportunities for citizen journalism, a video can be captured on a mobile phone, shared via Twitter, then spread rapidly through shares, links and an ability to trend. Citizen journalism has clearly had an impact on the way news is gathered and social media on the way news is consumed. However, it would appear mass media organisations are still the main context setters of news. After considering how the police can be represented in social media and the impact of citizen journalism, the discussion chapter will consider how far the results reflect this, and whether perceptions of the police will be affected by social media or not. However, firstly, we must look at the methods we have used so far, and more significantly, how the primary research was conducted and the motivations behind it.

### Methodology

In order to explore the changing nature of media representations of the police and how these changes may affect perceptions, a mixture of primary and secondary research methods were used. This section of the dissertation will consider why these types of data collection were used, the advantages and disadvantages, and also the problems encountered. It will also consider the sampling method used and the reasons behind it.

Quantitative and qualitative traditions of research need to be considered when carrying out research, as both have potential benefits. Firstly, each has different epistemological considerations, a consideration which concerns what is acceptable knowledge within a discipline. One main issue is whether the social world can be measured in the same way as the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012). Quantitative and qualitative research methods both have different epistemological standpoints with regard to social research. Quantitative research looks to understand the connection between theory and research, so it usually relies on the natural scientific approach, also known as positivism (Bryman, 2012). In contrast, the qualitative tradition is concerned with the relationship between theory and research. This adopts the stance that researching the social world is different from the natural sciences, so this requires a different technique, one that reflects the individuality of humans. This can also be referred to as interpretivism (Bryman, 2012). It is clear that there are significant differences between using quantitative or qualitative methods of research. This thesis will mainly consist of qualitative data collection. This is because this thesis is interested with the ideas that people have in regard to the police and the role of the media in society, which would be extremely difficult to discuss using statistical data.

There are various types of qualitative research for the social scientist to use. Because this dissertation is exploring the views of Nottingham Trent University students, primary research had to be used. Primary research involves collecting data on events, objects, or people that is measurable, observable, and replicable. The eventual goal in undertaking primary research is to learn something new about a subject while eliminating our own biases in the process (Driscoll, 2011). This research involves collecting data on people's views, around a subject with very little prior research. There is a fair amount of research regarding representations of the police,

but very little specifically to social media and other new types of media. This is likely due to the fact it is a relatively new topic, with social media only appearing in the last decade, and primary research is useful when you want to learn about something that does not have a wealth of published information (Driscoll, 2011).

The primary research used in this study was in the form of face to face, semi structured interviews. The semi structured interview could be described as being important, because it allows that the researcher to get a greater idea of the interviewees perspectives (Bryman, 2012). This is especially relevant in this piece of research, as there are little expectations of what results are going to be obtained, participants answers may also cover several questions, leaving them unnecessary or irrelevant. Still asking the questions would waste your time and it may also appear that you aren't listening to the participants answers (Barbour, 2008). As an interviewer with little experience, this could be helpful, as it gives the user slightly more freedom with what questions they can ask.

Preliminary questions were asked, such as age and gender, which could help identify any patterns in the results. This could also help to put the participant at ease and be used as a transition into the interview itself (Hannabuss, 1996). It may also help to ease the interviewer if they have little experience, as interviewing can be a daunting experience (Bryman, 2012). Face to face interviews have distinct benefits. Firstly, body language can be used as extra information on top of verbal answers (Opdenakker, 2006). This may help when emphasising someone's point and how they felt about an issue. The interviewer and interviewee can directly react on what the other says or does. An advantage of this communication is that the answer the interviewee gives is more spontaneous, there is no extended reflection (Opdenakker, 2006). This is when follow up questions are asked, interviews may take a different direction each time. The interviewer has a lot of possibilities to create a good interview atmosphere (Opdenakker, 2006). This could allow the respondent to relax and provide more lengthy and honest answers. However, this could also turn out to be a disadvantage. If the interviewer is not able to create a good atmosphere or rapport with the participant, then there may be an opposite effect, the interviewee may be reluctant to give detailed and honest information. Another disadvantage of face to face interviewing is the existence of social desirability bias. The interviewee may provide the interviewer with answers they think they want to hear, in order to not embarrass themselves or to project a favourable image (Fisher, 1993). This was possibly evident in this research as one respondent asked 'am I giving the right answers?', in which the author replied 'there are no correct answers' in order to gain honest answers. This bias can be reduced by indirect questioning (Fisher, 1993), however, this would not have been suitable for this study as it was important to understand the individuals social media habits and their views on social media influence.

This was achieved by firstly asking questions how students interacted with social media, and more specifically with police related content. This was done to gauge how important social media was in daily life and discover what kind of information regarding the police people were likely to come across. This was also to see if people preferred video footage to reading, as it is extremely quick and easy to watch videos in this era, there are also distinct differences between watching and reading. Following this, the author asked participants how important the source of something was when influencing opinions. As social media offers opportunities to see policing beyond mass media, this was clearly an area that needed to be explored. Finally, participants were asked questions around whether social media had helped enlightened them to new information about the police or if it had helped change their opinion of the police. This question would more easily help identify the impact of social media on perceptions of the police.

The recording of the interview is also important. The interviews carried out were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewee. This method allows the user to record the interview word for word, so not missing information (Opdenakker, 2006), although, this method of recording also has limitations. Tape recording brings with it the danger of not taking any notes during the interview. This is important for the interviewer, because even if the interview is tape recorded, it ensures that all the questions have been answered and also prevents loss of all data in case of malfunctioning of the tape recorder, or in case of basic mistakes such as not turning the recording instrument on (Opdenakker, 2006). During the research, the author did not take any notes so ran the risk of losing data in this way, however, thankfully all the interviews were recorded safely using two separate instruments. Another disadvantage of this method was the time consuming nature of writing up the transcripts and also arranging a time and place that was convenient for both the interviewer and interviewee.



It was also very important that secondary data collection was used for this project. Secondary information consists of data and other forms of information collected by others and archived in some form (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). It is needed because it is central to understand how the nature of media representations of the police has changed, whilst setting context for the primary research and providing theories and concepts for the final discussion. Secondary research has the advantage of being very inexpensive, you also have the benefit of the years of experience of other people and organisations (Dale et al, 1988). This allows the user to generate a lot of data around the subject, being specifically advantageous to a lone researcher. Finally, secondary data allows the user to make new interpretations of existing data (Dale et al, 1988). Just because the data has been collected and written about, that does not mean it cannot be further analysed or differently interpreted.

The secondary research was a vital element of this study and consisted of a literary review and analysis, which were used before the primary research and also afterwards in order to support and discuss the findings. This involved two chapters which give some background on media representations of the police and the emergence and importance of social media and citizen journalism. An element of this is reviewing existing literature, which can be useful in determining what is already known about the topic, as well as recognising the flaws in others research (Bryman, 2012). It was also used to apply theory and support to the discussion of the primary research findings. This means that the majority of the research was secondary in nature. This has limitations though, as sets of data can be hard to understand, it can be complex and a good quality of data cannot be guaranteed (Bryman, 2012). However, it can be high quality and students can take advantage of this.

Finally, it is important to understand how the sample was gained, and the importance of having a good sample. Journalism students were chosen to be studied for practical reasons. Their expertise in media would mean they would be familiar with the vocabulary used and would also be likely to have some level of enthusiasm for the topic. Once identified, participants needed to be approached, this can generate problems, people are busy and may be suspicious and you may need to access gatekeepers first, there may be difficulties in communication (Hannabuss, 1996). This was true for this study, as a journalism lecturer was contacted, to forward e-mails to their students. Thankfully, the lecturer was cooperative and it was easy to contact participants once they had shown initial interest. As it was a volunteer sample, this meant that participants showed some interest in the topic, so would have views on the issues raised and would provide more detailed answers. As this was a purposive sample, a sample chosen with a purpose in mind, opposed to a random sample (Socialresearchmethods.net, 2006), the sample could be identified and reached as quickly as possible. However, certain subgroups in the sample may be more accessible as so be overweighed in the study (Socialresearchmethods.net, 2006). This was true for this study, as every participant that volunteered was a second year student. Five participants were gathered and each provided with a participant information form. This can inform them and assure them of confidentiality, however, there is a risk of giving too much away and so affecting results later in the study (Hannabuss, 1996). It could have been useful to interview more participants, but this may have taken too much time, and may have required some incentive. Nevertheless, the author felt they had been able to reach theoretical saturation after five interviews, as several patterns were noticed.

It is important to note some other difficulties that were faced when carrying out this thesis, and what was learned from them. The first problem, was in deciding on exactly what to study. The idea kept on changing and developing, right up to the carrying out of primary research. However, it has been crucial in developing a well-rounded idea. This was also made difficult as the author was trying to carry out research on a topic with very little prior information. This meant that the thesis could not just focus on new types of media. However, this allowed the thesis to show the transition to social media from other types of media, and discover the importance of representations of the police. Deciding on final interview questions was also difficult. Many questions were developed, then changed or scrapped, but this process was important in developing the best questions possible and refining the chosen research instrument. If the chance arose to do the study again, it would be helpful to try and interview more journalism students, and have a greater variation of first to final years. A larger and more diverse sample would allow the study to be more representative of the journalism student population.

The reader should now fully understand the motivation behind the research methods used and the advantages and disadvantages. This will be important when reading the final chapters, which are considered with the primary research findings. The following chapter will identify the main findings of the primary research.

### Findings

This section highlights the findings from the primary research, these were identified by the author as relevant to the overall question, through a process of coding.

#### **Social media is an integral part of daily life**

This was identified first from the research. The straightforward question of how often social media was used was asked and produced interesting responses. All five participants used social media every day, one participant equating their use to 'probably a couple of hours a day' and another 'two or three times a day.' This shows that the use of social media is a daily pattern and suggests that it has a significant role in daily life. The research also showed that participants, who were journalism students, spent much more time on social media than any type of news source.

#### **Source is very important when influencing views. People are not just passive consumers of news stories they judiciously receive. They accept some things but reject others**

This was possibly one of the most interesting findings from the primary research. This reflects the power, and seeming trust in news organisations. All participants revealed that their perceptions of the police would only be affected by news materials distributed by mass media institutions, one saying 'it was probably the main thing' and another noting that unless it has come from something that would be considered reliable, then it would not be fair to make a judgement. Finally, one respondent went as far as to say they would not question something had it come from a reliable news source. News institutions were clearly considered a reliable source amongst participants.

#### **News reading often starts on social media**

This was a very interesting finding, as it epitomises the changing media environment. Even as journalism students, who're interested in other types of media, for most participants, they're initial news reading began with looking at social media. One participant described how social media is 'mainly where they start they're news reading now', with a lot of news stories becoming talking points through social media, like lightening quick word of mouth. Another participant echoed this, by explaining how throughout the day they predominantly use social networks to find out about news, and often search news stories after reading about them on social networks. This exemplifies the immediacy and speed that news breaks out through social media.

#### **Social media can enlighten and inform people about the police**

This finding suggests that a 24 hour news media environment raises the accountability of the police, whilst at the same time, allows the police to be in more contact with the public and raise their profile. Respondents said that social media attention made them instantly aware of certain cases of police malpractice, but on the other hand, police forces own social media accounts also helped show a more human and humorous side, with one interviewee saying they had seen funny and sarcastic comments posted from police forces personal accounts. Another participant noted how social media had made them more aware of what the police are doing.

#### **Preference of visual image over the written word**

Four out of five participants, when asked, preferred to watch a video of the police than read an article. They explained how video imagery is more entertaining and also allows the watcher to take in snippets of information, rather than read the entire information included in a news article. This may have implications for the level of detail people take from news stories and also mean that people are more likely to see things that are video worthy, such as the death of Ian Tomlinson, which was mentioned by the majority of participants. One participant explained that they would be very likely to watch a video of the police on social media 'especially if

it was something that was going to be bad about the police.’ This suggests a voyeuristic nature exists within some people, a desire to see the police acting against their job description. This is supported by the fact that nearly all participants named the death of Ian Tomlinson as something that they were enlightened to through social media. Social media may highlight negative cases of police representation.

The primary research told the author a lot about the way in which people can interact with police related content on social media, and how it differs from other dominant types of media. This presented the author with questions related to what implications this could have on the perceptions of the police and how they’re seen to the public. This will be the focus of the discussion chapter.

### Discussion

After considering what the research interviews tell us about journalism students interaction with social media and police related content, what follows is a discussion of what these findings may tell us about how social media may affect how people perceive the police. It will also be considered how the nature of these representations has changed and what theories and concepts underpin this.

The reader can now think back to chapter one, from *Dixon of Dock Green* to programmes like *Lewis*, it is clear that the nature of representations of policing have changed. Now think back to chapter two, and the important role of social media in the media environment. It must be now considered how and if social media has a part to play in the changing nature of media representations of policing. The way the police are represented has clearly changed and the changes have undoubtedly had impacts on real life perceptions of policing. What is known, is that the development in media has clearly made the police more visible (Mawby, 1999), but this does not mean it has made them more transparent. Being transparent means the police have an openness to share with people what they do and why (Mawby, 1999). Social media, both as a source of news and a forum of discussion, has the potential to enlighten many people with a range of different views and images of the police, which could clearly affect perceptions. However, the results from the study indicate that people are not just passive consumers of news, they will not simply be affected by a piece of news they read or a video they view. The respondents in this study identified media organisations as a medium that had the power to influence their views, albeit different organisations for different people. An individual appears to have very little power and influence next to a well established news organisation. In chapter two, an argument was presented, which maintained that increasingly, mass media and large organisations dictate the way people view news that is being discussed on social media, transforming it from user generated content, to almost another form of mass media (Van Dijck, 2013). This would mean that many policing incidents and issues which are discussed on social media, are likely to be given meaning and context by a news organisation. What this means is that when people share or discuss a story on social media, their interpretation of it is likely to be that of a news organisation. We know that these interpretations are not without bias and agenda’s, organisations own inferential structures can affect the way things are presented, meaning that news can be put into several contexts (Lang and Lang, 1955). The fact that participants referred to the G20 riots in the context of police violence would support this, as this was an example of how the media are able to change the context of a situation.

Before simply accepting that social media is a direct transformation of other mass media, there are many other things one can consider when looking at these research findings. If inclined to agree with Van Dijck’s (2013) theory, it can be assumed that mass media institutions have great influence over the way social media users perceive policing. In essence, this would mean that very little has changed, as we have established that mass media is key to many people’s views on policing (Chapman et al, 2002). However, it will be argued that the way in which people perceive the police can be affected in several distinct ways because of social media and associated technology.

It has been acknowledged for several years now, that the internet has become an essential part of people’s lives (Lenhart et al, 2010). The rise in social media is a product of this. Social media use is particularly high amongst young people (Lenhart et al, 2010). The evidence that has been collected in this study would appear to echo this,

as all respondents indicated that they used social media very often. The growth of young students has clearly coincided with the growth of the internet and social media, however, the use of social media is by no means inclusive of young people, with almost every major business, businessman, politician or political party on social media. Another major feature in this environment is the use of mobile technologies such as mobile phones. There has been a shift in the use of internet on desktop computers to mobile phones (Lenhart et al, 2010). This will surely only become more common. Almost every mobile phone now has an internet connection, so more people literally have an internet connection at the tip of their fingers. As the research suggests, people are more likely to use the internet, and so social networks, if they have quicker and more available use of it.

This central role in daily life has implications on the way people consume news and so could impact on how the police viewed. Social media has undoubtedly changed the way people communicate and come together. Michel Foucault's very influential work talks of the panopticon society, one in which the masses are controlled, via surveillance, by the police and other major institutions, in other words, the few watch the many (Foucault, 1995). However, in conjunction with the rise in surveillance, has been at an even greater rate, the rise in mass media, and particularly television. Came with it was the ability to bring millions of people together at one time, and watch the few (Mathieson, 1997). Mathieson believes that we live in a society that is increasingly synopticon as much as panopticon (Mathieson, 1997). Mathieson was not really able to consider the impact of the internet, and certainly not that of social media. This author believes that social media possibly adds a new layer to the synopticon principle. Participants in the research mentioned on several occasions, how they reacted to things they had seen whilst browsing their social media news feeds. Information about the police is not confined to television and newspaper, by simply browsing through their phone, someone may be exposed to information about the police. The sharing of information in this way, allows up to millions of people to read or watch things within minutes. This may also suggest that more people come into contact with news stories, as they are inadvertently exposed to it just by being on social media. This is the nature of the 24 hour news environment, the many are now always closely watching the few, as much as they're being watched themselves. The accountability of the police is raised greatly, meaning their image is fragile, one bad move from the police can be seized on and shared between massive numbers of people within minutes. This could possibly turn groups of people against the police, several participants in the study stated that their perceptions of the police could be affected by bad video footage in particular. In a highly mediated society, more damaging images of the police are likely to be seen (Mawby, 1999), we have already seen an increase of negative images in newspaper and television. The effect could be similar to that of mean world syndrome. Research into the effect of mass media found a case of mean world syndrome in many people, which states that the violent content of mass media leads people to believe the world is much more dangerous than it actually is (Gerbner et al, 2002). This could be applied to images of policing, whereby an increasing number of damaging images may lead more people to have a negative views of the police, they see crime rates spiralling and the damaging images lead people to believe the crime is at the hands of an ineffective and mistake prone criminal justice system (Hough and Roberts, 1998 cited in Jewkes, 2004).

The popular view amongst participants of this study was that social media and other new technologies made them more aware of police activities, not only things they had done wrong, but also positive things that the police had done. Examining the responses reveals that there may be two main reasons for this, the first, police forces using their own social media accounts and the second, social media as a 24 hour news platform. The description from one respondent saying they had seen humorous messages posted on police accounts, shows how the police can show a more human side through social media contact. This has been shown as a feature of police reality shows (Surette, 2011), but the police would appear to be not losing touch with changes in media. The fact that police forces have set up their own Twitter and Facebook accounts shows this, and appears to be reaping its benefits in terms of public image. A brief look at police Twitter accounts, suggests that they report mainly positive things about their organisation. Nottinghamshire police for example, telling people about the success of their Clare's law pilot scheme (Nottinghamshire police, 2013). Now although much more research would have to be done, it could be safe for the author to assume that with complete control over their social media accounts, that police forces are going to project positive images of themselves. Social media has been identified as a great way for the police to reach out to young people and also gives the police an official voice that can be trusted (BBC, 2012). Participants also reported being more aware of what the police were doing and why, this could be seen as the police being more transparent.

This transparency may be partly down to social media being a 24 news platform. Participants referred to being alerted quickly about news because of social media, most participants said they had read news stories that they may of otherwise not seen, because they had been thrust in front of their eyes. One participant said this had helped them 'know more about what they're (the police) involved in.' In chapter one it was noted how in contemporary media, we see a greater range of representations of the police, including more negative representations. Robert Reiner attempted to theorise this increase in negative representations. More and more negative images of the police would coexist with positive ones as part of a demystification of law and order (Reiner, 2000). This transparency has been captured by the film *Skyfall*. Head of MI6 Mallory, declares 'We Can't keep working in the shadows, there are no more shadows' (Mendes, 2012), showing that this demystification may not just be happening to the police but other government agencies. As the police are in the public eye, their work is under more scrutiny than ever, people can discuss their every action because they are gradually gaining a better understanding of how the police work, and the police are required to account for their actions. Reiner he did not have the ability to take social media into account. The writer identifies that the effect of social media may be a continuation of processes that have been years in the making. This is supported by participants such as the one quoted above, who expressed knowing more about the police due to social media. However, this continuation is not without its flaws.

Evidently, social media can alert people to news and issues that they may never have seen or thought about before. The author believes this could be a positive thing, as it could allow people to be informed, and in turn have a better input into the democratic processes of government organisations. However, as we have already discussed, news organisations have great influence over what is news on social media, people may know more about the police, but it may not necessarily be any better informed than in the past. People are still susceptible to reading about news that may likely be in a context affected by biases and agenda's. There is also a problem with the fact that news may be transformed when it spreads around social media, which will be discussed next. This apparent demystification also highlights the synopticon principle again, with more people wanting to know what the police are doing and why. With more people holding the police to account, and a vaster array of representations of policing, this author may reason that debates over policing issues may be more extreme and varied, with proponents and critics of police having more, and more powerful evidence to back up their arguments. This could mean that there may be more conflict over perceptions of policing, some thinking police work is declining, and others arguing that police work is fine. People may be susceptible to these kind of views if they are not taught to think critically, which can enable people to think more broadly, and understand why things may happen (Facione, 1992). Education and awareness in thinking critically could help people have more informed views of the police and so be less affected by biases and agendas.

Participants in this study identified social media as a starting point for them discovering news. One participant stated that 'probably about half' of all their news reading started with social media. This could impact on how the police are actually represented, as reading something through social media is not the same as reading a newspaper or watching a news channel. Now although the way an issue is perceived may depend on mass media context, there may be an effect that social media has on what information people actually consume. The primary research would suggest more people inadvertently come into contact with news through browsing their social media news feeds. This type of news consumption may mean that many people are only seeing small sound bites of information, which could have been condensed and edited on their journey around social media. This could distort the true nature of something, in what could be referred to as a proverbial Chinese whisper type effect (Simmons et al, 2011). The research carried out by Simmons et al (2011) found how initial quotes from American politicians had been reduced and changed over time, how snippets of their words had been shared between thousands of people, without any prior thoughts or explanation. The way people perceive the police could be severely affected in this way. Imagine a politician cutting spending in a certain area, this does not necessarily mean this area is less well off, the issue is usually much more complex, but the direct quote or snippet of information saying they're cutting spending could damage their image. In the same way, a senior police officer could have a quote severely reduced to give a certain effect. Again, this is why a demystification of the police is not necessarily a well informed one, we can see how different perceptions of policing could come into conflict. With the ability to think critically, people would understand issues are more complex.

This could all be part of what Ray Surette has identified as a blurring of fictional and factual representations of the police in contemporary society (Surette, 2011). He refers to content looping, the multiple use of Images or

videos of police incidents, for example, that could be used in news reports, documentaries, or Hollywood movies (Surette, 2011). The effect of this is that people's view of reality becomes distorted, they cannot differentiate between what has actually happened and what is fiction. Words could be looped in the same way, real life quotes or powerful fictional quotes can be spread online. This is not a contemporary idea though, similar ideas have been written about by famous writers such as Noam Chomsky and Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard conceived the theory of hyper reality. This he called a reality without an original origin. Hyper reality is an inability to distinguish between reality and an imitation of reality, what is real and what is not can be blended together until there is no clear distinction between the two (Baudrillard, 1994). This happens in newspaper and television, when people are continually exposed to certain images of the police, they may become inclined to believe those images.

Social media could be seen to add to this hyper reality. Social media is a communication tool and a forum of thoughts and opinions. The participants in this study mentioned first reading about the death of Ian Tomlinson through social media, the Chinese whisper effect may kick in. Lines such as that mentioned by one participant saying 'police officer kills man' may be coupled together with compilation videos of police violence, which may even contain powerful fictional images that have blurred into reality. These images and snippets of information could add to the hyper realness of policing declining which was mentioned previously, again creating conflict amongst perceptions. In a world of image manipulation and hacking, living in a hyper-reality is more possible, creating complexities in the representations of policing.

Images such as the death of Ian Tomlinson are more common because of technology and the research suggests that they are viewed by many people due to social media. This could be indicative of the consumer society that we live in. The participants in this study overwhelmingly preferred visual imagery on social media over reading. Respondents confessed that they were much more likely to watch videos if other people were watching and discussing them. This could be symptomatic of Baudrillard's theory of consumerism. The ideas of commodity fetishism and reification are big parts of Baudrillard's work on the consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998) and they could be relevant here. They both could be looked at here in a way which doesn't necessarily deal with just the physical object. The latter specifically refers to making something abstract, real. We now have the ability to view more things than ever, an example of this is video footage of a police incident, instead of just reading a news article, the actual event can be made real through the eyes of a video camera, and in a consumer society people would surely prefer this. We could also view it in the sense that, in the same way as people desire objects, people desire to see these videos because others have, they don't want to be left out. This could be compared to wanting a new type of clothing or gadget because others have it. The research clearly reflects this as participants were much more inclined to watch something if they knew a lot of other people had. This can have significant implications for the police. When you take into account that more people may watch videos that depict the police negatively due to social networking, along with the increased amount of negative images in newspaper and television, more people may have undesirable views of the police. Mass media organisations have great impact on the context of news, but they may have to change what news is, due to the powerful images which may emerge due to citizen journalism, meaning that they report the negative images as much as the positive ones. The police may struggle to keep the faith of traditional police supporters, because more people are aware of miscarriages of justice or cases of malpractice that come to light in this highly mediated world. Again, this highly mediated world adds to this hyper reality, as the fact that more damaging images of policing exist is more likely down to the technology available and the more transparent nature of policing, rather than the fact that the police are worse than they have been in the past. Education would again highlight this to people. But, it must not be forgotten that many positive images of policing still exist, which means that there will still be many avid supporters of the police. With even more coexisting negative and positive images of policing, conflicting perceptions may be highly likely.

### Conclusion

The nature of representations of policing has clearly changed, as highlighted by several principles talked about in the discussion chapter. We now live in a highly synopticon society (Mathieson, 1997) where the police and other major organisations are under great scrutiny, and due to this we see a greater array of images of the police, and a greater variation. It appears to have been a gradual process, beginning with television and carrying on into

social media. Impacts on perceptions of policing in general appear to be part of a continuation of processes that have been occurring as the world has gradually become more highly mediated.

A demystification of policing is clearly occurring (Reiner, 2000), which can be positive as it allows people to be more knowledgeable of the workings of government organisations. However, unless people are educated into rational and critical thinking, people's perceptions of policing are still going to be affected by the biased messages of mass media organisations with agendas, which still ultimately set the context of news, even that on social media (Van Dijck, 2013). However, mass media organisations do not have control over what is news, due to the impact of citizen journalism (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011) and the ability of social media to bring news to more and more people. This more highly mediated world, and the powers of connection which lie in social media, mean that more people will undoubtedly view damaging images of policing alongside positive ones. What this may create is more conflicting perceptions of policing, with proponents and critics of the British police having a greater wealth of and more powerful evidence to back up their arguments. This can also create a reality which is hyper real (Badrillard, 1994), the large array of images, alongside image manipulation, blurring of fact and fiction, hacking and other such circumstances, mean that some people cannot actually distinguish between what is real and what is not, their views are distorted. Social media's role in a consumer society mean that these range of images will be brought to people's attention, creating more complex perceptions of policing. Social media offers opportunities for more people to come into contact with news and representations of policing. However, this news and array of representations are open to manipulation and still greatly affected by the messages of news organisations. This may mean that people's views are not well informed and that people's perceptions of policing are still distorted, possibly more than ever for some, and it is education that can help correct this. For this author, image can be as important as substance.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information/Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to consider participating in this research project. Before deciding whether to grant me an interview, we feel it is important that you understand the reason why the research is being conducted, and what your participation will involve. We would be grateful if you would take the time to read the following information carefully. Please do not hesitate to contact me if any of the information is unclear or you wish to discuss your participation in this project.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

This study is primarily concerned with gaining an understanding of the influence of social media in shaping perceptions of the police. I will be conducting 4-8 semi-structured, one on one, face to face interviews. The study has been designed in order to gain an understanding of how influential social media can be in shaping your views on the police, their attitudes, working practice and performance.

**Who is running the study?**

The project is being conducted by myself, Daniel Shepherdson, supervised by Matt Long of the Criminology Division at Nottingham Trent University. The research is being conducted as part of the Criminology BA (hons) dissertation module.

**Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been selected for interviewing as I am interested to hear the thoughts of journalism students, who will be the people entering into the media industry. I believe it is important to understand the influence of the media as they're such a central part of our society.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can also withdraw from the study at any point either by contacting one of the researchers before the interview, asking to terminate the interview, or withdrawing your data after the interview has taken place and before 03/05/13. If you do decide to take part, we ask that you read and fully understand the information on this sheet and sign and complete it. If you decide not to take part in the research, you will not be asked to give any explanation for your withdrawal.

**What do I need to do?**

We would like you to take part in an interview lasting approximately 20 minutes, on the university grounds. Interviews will be taking place throughout January and I will contact you to arrange a date and time that is convenient for you. The interview will be carried out by myself and will follow a semi-structured format. As part of the interview, I ask for your permission to record the interview with a digital voice recorder and mobile phone to ensure the data you provide is accurately documented.

**What questions will be asked in the interview?**

A full copy of the questions that are going to be asked in the interview will be provided in advance and you will have the chance to read through them. Any questions that you would not feel comfortable answering will be omitted from the interview. If you are unsure about any of the questions, you may contact the myself to discuss them further before the interview. In addition to this, if you feel uncomfortable whilst in the interview you may refuse to answer, or give no comment to any of the questions, and the researcher will continue on to the following question.

**What will happen to the information I provide in my interview?**

The recording of your interview will be transcribed and analysed. This information will then be incorporated into the findings and conclusions of the research. All transcripts will be kept on a private laptop. The laptop and transcripts will be kept in a locked drawer. At the end of the study the data will be destroyed in a secure manner.

**How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?**

All transcripts will be fully anonymous and will be kept in a secure location at all times. Myself and my supervisor will have access to these documents and recordings of interviews. Hard copies of data will be kept in a locked drawer and electronic copies will be stored on a private computer in line with the British Criminological Society's code of ethics. You will not be named or otherwise identified in any publication arising from this research. The research team will exercise all possible care to ensure that you cannot be identified in the write-up of findings.

**What are the possible risks/disadvantages of taking part?**

The main cost to you will be the time taken with the interview.

**What are the possible benefits/advantages?**

We hope that you will find the interview interesting, and will take satisfaction from helping to develop my understanding of social media influence. We also hope that you will find the results interesting. The results of the study will be available to you as a report when the research is completed. You may also wish to include your participation on your CV.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

I will write up the results in a report and hope to have them published as academic articles or in academic publications.

**How can I find out more about this project and its results?**

For more information about my project please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor. We will send you a full copy of the interview questions before the interview and an electronic copy of the report once the research is completed if you wish.

**Has the study been reviewed by anyone?**

The research has been subject to ethical approval by the University's Research Ethics Committee. It has been designed with reference to the British Criminological Society's code of ethics.

**Who is responsible for the study?**

My supervisor Matt Long will be responsible for the conduct of this research.

**Contacts and further information**

Please feel free to contact any member of the project team on the following email address or phone numbers:

Daniel Shepherdson

Matt Long

daniel.shepherdson2010@my.ntu.ac.uk

matthew.long@ntu.ac.uk

If you wish to withdraw your data from the study, contact myself or Matt Long before the 1st March

Sign here.....

**Appendix 2: Interview Questions**

1. How often would you say you used social networking sites per week?
2. How much of your news reading would you say came from social networking sites, and how does this compare to other forms of media?
3. How likely would you be to read an article about the police through social networking sites and how does that compare to other forms of media?
4. How likely would you be to watch a video regarding the police through social networking sites and how does this compare to other news media?
5. How important would the source be when reading an article or watching a video about the police through a social networking site? Would you prefer a trusted source or not mind?
6. How important is the source when influencing your views of the police?
7. Have you ever developed an opinion, or changed your opinion on the police based on something you saw on a social networking site, if so, why?
8. Have you seen a new side to, or changed your opinion of the police since the introduction of social media?
9. At this point in your life, how much of an influence do you think social media has on your views and opinions of the police and how does this compare to other forms of media?