Police use of Twitter during a sporting mega-event

Abstract

There exists a range of sporting mega-event security case studies from respective Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, FIFA World Cup, and UEFA European Football Championships. This literature tends to focus on outlining the policing and physical security arrangements at respective Games and the social consequences of these. However, no studies have examined police use of social media at a mega-event. This article addresses this gap by analysing the Twitter activities of social media accounts from police forces and units within Glasgow and London during the Euro 2020 Finals. The article makes an empirical contribution to the mega-events and policing literature by identifying that the police used Twitter in five strategic ways: security spectacle, demonstration of effective partnership working, responsibilisation of citizens, public feedback and reporting, and real-time crowd management. Such findings have important implications for the use of social media by police practitioners at future mega-events and for football policing.

Key words: Police, social media, mega-event, security, Twitter.

Introduction

Mega-events such as the Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, International Association Football Federation (FIFA) World Cup, Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Championships, or G8/20 political summits, are temporary exceptional occasions for a host city, characterised by their economic, cultural, and social significance (Whelan and Molnar, 2018). Unlike other routine cultural or political events, mega events require state governmental intervention in planning and delivery as a prerequisite. The scale and exceptionalism of such

events necessitates complex policing arrangements. These events, because of their global image and media profile are considered prime targets for a range of exceptional threats such as terrorism, as well as more prosaic risks from political protests and demonstrations, football hooliganism, ticket touting, vandalism, and theft (Fussey et al., 2011). A growing number of case studies have been conducted on policing and security at mega-events, as these have focussed on documenting the experiences of specific host cities and their respective security operations at the Olympics in Athens & Beijing (Samatas, 2011), Vancouver (Boyle, 2011) and London (Fussey et al., 2011), the FIFA World Cup in Germany 2006 (Eick, 2011), the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (Aitken, 2020) and the 2014 G20 political summit in Brisbane (Whelan and Molnar, 2018).

Most of this literature has tended to focus on documenting the technical aspects of the policing and security operations such as physical security overlay and security governance arrangements. Other literature focusses on the topic of 'security legacies' including the post-event retention of security technologies and specialist security knowledge (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009; Eick, 2011) as well new police powers and legislations (Fussey et al., 2011; Toohey and Taylor, 2012; Molnar, 2014). Some literature has looked to address the specific policing operations at footballing mega-events; Schreiber and Adang (2010) outline the mixed success of 'low-profile' policing strategies at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, while Toohey and Taylor (2014) have also assessed the proportionality of security and policing in relation to risks at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Mega-events can be viewed as an entrance point in understanding broader trends in policing (Ludvigsen, 2022) due to the way they act as test sites or new forms of security, control, and surveillance technologies (Klauser, 2008), as well as require transnational collaboration between police forces and security players (Klauser, 2013; Boyle, 2011). It has been recognised that new technologies are being developed and used to control people from afar, something

which has been referred to in the literature as "policing at a distance" (Bigo and Guild, 2005; Sausdal, 2019). The limited literature on policing at a distance has been conceptualised mostly in terms of surveillance and information technologies where police come into 'contact' with their subjects without ever meeting in person, for example, through police use of big data and digital evidence (CCTV footage, location trackers, and other computer-mediated information sharing). In the UK, football fans have been subject to intensified surveillance and intelligence gathering activities including clandestine monitoring of fan social media accounts by police football intelligence units (Atkinson et al., 2020; Hamilton-Smith et al., 2019). A criticism of this strategy is that intelligence-led enforcement has often been conducted at the expense of police-fan communication and engagement, with a need for greater emphasis on a dialogue-based approach with football fans (Atkinson, 2021). However, the concept of policing at a distance has not been examined in relation to how the police may use social media to engage in dialogue with spectators and fans and attempt to police specific subjects and wider populations at a distance.

There is growing interest in the use of social media by police officers (Crump, 2011) amidst recognition of the 'affordances' (Bullock et al., 2020) that it may bring to police work. Existing studies on police use of social media (typically Twitter) identify it as providing a new stage on which to perform traditional policing tasks (Bullock, 2018). For example, through supplementing police visibility on the ground with a new digital presence, social media can serve as an important source of police 'image work' allowing the police to demonstrate their capabilities and effectiveness (O'Connor and Zaidi, 2021). Police primarily use Twitter in three ways (Bullock et al., 2020): as a 'push strategy' to disseminate various messages and information to the public such as crime prevention advice or information about events (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2015), as a 'pull strategy' (Meijer and Thaens, 2013) to extract information from the public to help in crime prevention and criminal investigation. Finally,

social media can be used as a 'network strategy' to showcase effective networking by generating connectedness with other policing agencies and the wider public, helping to demonstrate transparency and innovative police work (O'Connor and Zaidi, 2021). It follows that similar benefits could be afforded through police use of social media during a mega-event.

Therefore, two gaps exist within the respective mega-events and police social media literature: first, there are no studies within the mega-event literature that examine police social media use. Second, police social media use is mostly conducted within the context of everyday police work as opposed to the exceptionality of a mega-event. The aim of this article is to address both gaps in the literature by drawing upon the Twitter activities of social media accounts from police forces and units within Glasgow and London before, during, and after the 2020 UEFA Championship in men's football ('Euro 2020'). Whilst Facebook can facilitate dialogue between the police and citizens (Lieberman et al., 2013), Twitter was selected for analysis because it features an array of police accounts across national and local levels in the UK (Ralph, 2020). The data demonstrates that the police used Twitter in five strategic ways: as a form of security spectacle, to demonstrate effective partnership working with other police and non-police agencies, to promote citizen responsibilisation, to facilitate public feedback and reporting, and as a form of real-time crowd-management. It is suggested that using social media in this way can offer practical benefits to the overall policing operation. Such findings have important implications for the strategic use of social media by police practitioners at future mega-events. The article thus makes an empirical contribution to the existing body of literature on police use of Twitter. It also offers a potential practical contribution to policing scholarship and practice by suggesting improvements to policing and security governance arrangements at mega-events more broadly, and football policing more specifically through the inclusion of a template for police Twitter tactics.

Existing literature on mega events and police social media strategies

Mega-events

Mega events such as the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, FIFA World Cup, UEFA European Championships, or G20 political summits, are exceptional events which require equally exceptional policing and security responses (Aitken, 2021b; Whelan and Molnar, 2018; Fussey, 2013; Boyle and Haggerty, 2012). The high-profile nature of mega-events positions them as prime targets for a range of risks and threats ranging from terrorism, political protest, and demonstrations, through to rowdy behaviour, hooliganism and assault, theft, and robbery. As such, security and policing responses are oriented through a convergence of crime control and counter-terrorism measures as part of a 'total security' approach (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009). Features of the total security approach include surveillance and intelligence gathering, physical security, territorialisation, and lockdown around key sites, as well as public order policing, visible and armed patrols, crowd management, access control and accreditation (Fussey et al., 2011), and all of which the police play a central role. Mega-events are also showcase events and the demonstration of successful security competency can yield important legacy benefits such as economic development and investment for the host city and the fostering of a world-class identity. Security at mega-events is subsequently closely related to security performativity as a form of security theatre or 'spectacle' (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009), which is intended to both reassure, deter, and showcase in equal measures. It is commonplace for the overall responsibility for the security operation to be devolved to the state police within respective host cities (Aitken, 2020). In the British context, this involves relevant geographic police forces in England and Wales such as the Metropolitan Police, or single forces such as Police Scotland, as well as specialist police forces such as British Transport Police. The state police act as a central figure within networked governance arrangements alongside other private and voluntary actors and agencies, which can include fire and rescue, ambulance services, transport

police, specialist police agencies and private security agencies as well as shops and businesses (Whelan and Molnar, 2018). The result is a burgeoning security coalition: the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa utilised 40,000 police officers and thousands of private security personnel (Toohey and Taylor, 2014), while the Euro 2016 Championships, held within a state of emergency following recent terror attacks in France, deployed 100,000 police, soldiers and private security (Cleland & Cashmore, 2018 cited in Ludvigsen, 2022). However, these security networks do not always work effectively together and different policing agencies can have differing conceptualisations of security and control (Whelan and Molnar, 2017), or policing priorities (Fussey, 2013). Furthermore, a criticism of security networks at mega-events is that they do not involve ordinary members of the public in discussions of security (Boyle, 2011). Indeed, this is a well-established criticism of security governance networks more broadly (Loader and Walker, 2007; Loader and Walker, 2006) which tend to be characterised through forms of 'paternalism' whereby state and private agencies act on behalf of citizens without ever treating them as "full partners in dialogue" (Loader and Walker, 2007, p. 200). Such arrangements can cause several harmful outcomes relating to the miscommunication of security aims and objectives. For example, policing and security efforts can heighten feelings of insecurity because of being lost in translation. Similarly, the lack of availability of formal channels for the public to report security concerns can foster feelings of disenfranchisement with the police (Aitken, 2020). As such, there is a need for new methods of communication between security actors and the public at mega-events (Aitken, 2020).

A range of case studies have been conducted on mega-event security, most of these focus on the transferability of globalised risks and standardised security responses (Giulianotti & Klauser, 2009), on aspects of physical security and security governance (Aitken, 2020; Whelan and Molnar, 2018), or the concept of security legacies (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009). Much of the literature also tends to focus on exceptionalism of security as opposed to other forms of

public order policing, despite public order disturbances being a regular occurrence at mega-events with crowd disorder and hooliganism being a particular concern at football mega-events (Toohey and Taylor, 2014). Notably, Molnar et al. (2018) have identified the 'failure-inspired learning' that occurred in public order policing between two G20 political summits in Toronto 2010 and Brisbane 2014, while also identifying the tensions that can exist between security actors who have competing perceptions of risk and preferred 'hard' or 'soft' public order responses (Whelan and Molnar, 2017). In relation to football mega-events, and Euro 2020 specifically, Ludvigsen (2022), speaking with security and policing stakeholders in advance of Euro 2020, outlines how they advocate a communication and dialogue-based approach to the policing of football fans during the event.

However, while the above literature has examined policing at mega-events, these all relate to policing in person and on the ground. No studies have examined how police use technologies such as social media as part of the policing and security operations at mega-events. This creates a noteworthy gap within the mega-events literature.

Police social media strategies

It is not within the scope of this section to provide an extensive overview of all research that has been conducted on police use of social media. However, it is important to focus on those studies that have considered how and why the police use social media as this informs much of what we wish to speak to later in connection to police social media practices during Euro 2020 and the overall usefulness of social media during megaevents. Broadly, the police can use social media in three ways. This includes broadcasting information to users, obtaining information from users, and engaging in a dialogue with users (Meijer and Thaens, 2013). According to Crump (2011) Twitter is best placed for one-way communication from the police

to citizens, whereas Liberman et al., (2013) argue that Facebook is more suited to dialogue between the police and citizens. In terms of when and why the police would adopt these strategies, existing research has highlighted the role of social media in both assisting police activity and maintaining people's perceptions of the police and crime. The former centres on how the police use social media to either divulge or to get information from citizens that will in turn aid police work, prevent crime, and keep people safe. Consider the 2011 riots in the UK, and research has shown that police services used social media at the time to both gather information from citizens as well as to deter future rioters (Denef et al., 2013). The latter is about police practices that seek to manage what citizens think about both the police and crime. Along these lines, studies have highlighted police practices linked to using memes (Wood, 2020), humour (Wood and McGovern, 2021), and visual content more broadly in an attempt to augment citizens' support for the police. An example of the police using social media to alleviate people's perceptions of crime can also be seen in relation to the 2011 riots. At the time, Greater Manchester Police used Twitter to reassure citizens that they would be safe and that the police were effectively controlling the riots and dealing with rioters (Denef et al., 2013).

These considerations are an important reminder of the function of police communication via social media today. When considering the key issues in mega-event security as identified above, Twitter could bring practical benefits to security at mega-events by promoting the symbolic elements of security spectacle to a wider audience and enhancing communication channels between security actors and the public. The following sections build on these arguments by examining police practices on social media in the UK before, during, and after the Euro 2020 finals.

Methods

This research focuses on the Twitter posts of social media accounts from named police forces and units within Glasgow and London specifically given their hosting of Games, but also wider national policing organisations such as Police Scotland, British Transport Police, and the National Police Chiefs' Council. Twitter was identified as providing a useful site of enquiry, given it could provide police accounts from different levels, accounting for local and national policing units. The focus on one social media platform allowed the researchers to consider with greater specificity and depth the patterns which emerged from posts provided by police accounts. However, it is worth noting that different social media platforms often contain very different demographics of users (Statista, 2023), and therefore police communication on Twitter may only reach specific audiences.

A scoping exercise was undertaken on Twitter, which initially identified 57 police accounts which met the criteria of being based in London or Glasgow, or had wider national policing remits. This scoping exercise organically grew from the researcher's prior knowledge and snowballed from relevant Twitter lists and retweets of other police accounts, and included a mixture of national, local, operational, and corporate accounts. Manual reviewing of these accounts was undertaken by studying all Tweets[i] (including retweets) made by each individual account between 11th June and 11th July 2021. From the initial fifty-seven, the scope narrowed to focus on the 19 accounts which had provided at least one Twitter post or retweet relating to the Euro 2020 and/or the policing of this event between 11th June and 11th July 2021.

Researchers created individual databases for each of the 19 Twitter accounts to be analysed. Screenshots of the related post(s) were compiled in each individual database, with the numbering of each individual post. The databases varied in size, from the 'MPS Football Unit' with 66 posts, to Glasgow Southwest Police with one post. A combined number of 400 posts from the 19 Twitter accounts were identified for analysis. Of the six Metropolitan Police

Service accounts analysed, a total of 196 tweets were posted, which equated to 49% of all posts within the study. The six British Transport Police accounts across England and Scotland provided 125 tweets (31.25% of all posts analysed), with Other/National accounting for 51 posts across three accounts (12.75% of tweets in the study), and the five Scottish forces providing the fewest tweets with only 28 submissions collectively (7% of the tweets studied). Tweets were thematically analysed manually (Braun and Clarke 2006) in relation to the content (text and imagery) provided. An inductive approach was used whereby initial coding served to highlight the different styles and inferred purposes of Tweets such as 'symbolic displays', 'spectator intended messages', 'public intended messages', 'promotion of information (pushing)', 'asking for information (pulling)'. This led to the identification of five key tactics: security spectacle, demonstration of effective partnership working, citizen responsibilisation, public feedback and reporting, and real-time crowd management. These are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section.

The research focused on utilising police force and organisational official non-individual Twitter accounts rather than personal and professional individual officer accounts for several reasons. Given the focus of the research is on exploring how police services made use of Twitter during the Euros, emphasis is placed on the organisational use of such social media, rather than individual officers' accounts, or through quantification of the data. In addition, there is ethical complexity and contention over identifying and using for research purposes individual officers' accounts, whether these are officially endorsed or not within their organisation, given this requires informed consent from each individual officer, and potential anonymisation. Ethical approval for this study was provided by Northumbria University.

Overview of tactics used by the police on Twitter during Euro 2020

Overall, we found that the police adopted five central tactics on Twitter during the Euro 2020: *security spectacle*, *demonstration of effective partnership working, citizen responsibilisaton*, *public feedback and reporting*, *and real-time crowd management*. These tactics are by no means completely distinct, but instead, provide an overview of the varied uses of Twitter by the police during the Euro 2020. Each tactic broadly connects to the concept of 'policing at a distance' (Bigo and Guild, 2005) where police were using social media to try and control the perceptions and behaviour of spectators and the public from afar. The tactics of security spectacle and demonstration of effective partnership work relate to tweets sent out by the police for public consumption with the view of influencing public perceptions. Instances of security spectacle aim to publicise a message of order and security and promote reassurance. Similarly, demonstrations of effective partnership feed into the overall spectacle by displaying the depth and breadth of the policing operation, at the same time as conveying the idea of the police as being innovative, trustworthy and in control. Tactics of citizen responsibilisation, public feedback and reporting, and real-time crowd management relate to the ways in which the police sent out tweets in an attempt to influence spectator and public behaviour either by encouraging particular conduct in line with broader policing objectives related to public order policing, or by enlisting the public's help in reporting suspicious behaviour or concerns, which is related to counter terror policing. In both cases the use of Twitter could be seen as an attempt to ease and assist police activity on the ground.

Security Spectacle

Twitter was used as a strategy for projecting policing and security iconography and language as a form of 'security spectacle' (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009). It has been recognised that police forces often use twitter as a 'push strategy' (Bullock et al., 2020), which can be tied to aspects

of police 'image work', helping to project images and meanings of police work (Mawby, 2002). Police at Euro 2020 strategically used images and text in tweets to project proactive messages of reassurance and deterrence, as well as reaffirm order and control over the event. The risks associated with a sporting mega-event range from exceptional to the everyday, yet the reality of risks ever materialising is unknown (Boyle and Haggerty, 2009). The security and policing effort thus place an emphasis on a precautionary logic, where visibility is used as a way of demonstrating the appearance of 'total security' amidst such uncertainties. As Boyle and Haggerty (2012) state, *saying* and *showing* security preparedness is a performative strategy used to transform unmanageable dangers into manageable risks. Such instances of performativity are also linked to instrumental objectives as part of deterrence and reassurance strategies, as well as reputation and impression management, "Security […] must be *seen* to be done if confidence in the capabilities of authorities to deliver on the promise of maximum security is to be maintained (Garland 2000)" (Boyle and Haggerty, 2012, p.244-245).

Police services used twitter at Euro 2020 as a form of security spectacle through *saying* and *showing* (Boyle and Haggerty, 2012) aspects of police work. For example, messages within tweets frequently included words such as 'preparedness', 'visibility', 'specialist skills', 'firm and alert', and that 'officers are on hand and ready to step in should they need to'. Other tweets focussed more specifically on reassurance stating the word 'reassure' within the overall message. Tweets were also used to showcase policing operations such as '#ProjectServator'. Images were also selectively used in tweets to *s*how the strength and depth of the security apparatus. For example, many tweets displayed images of specialist dog and horse units, whilst others showed police patrols in stadiums and around key venues such as transport hubs and fan zones (as seen in Figure 1).

Twitter may have facilitated security spectacle by widening the audience base of such performativity by affording it greater visibility. For example, by providing a digital presence

which reaffirmed or documented policing and security on the ground, social media provides a new stage on which to perform (Bullock, 2018) security spectacle with the aim of changing the perceptions of the public from afar.

[*Figure 1 Here*]

Figure 1: Twitter post by British Transport Police London which is both *saying* and *showing* the policing operation as a form of security spectacle.

Demonstration of effective partnership working

Police services made use of Twitter in making the social media audience aware of the relations, connections, and partnerships they had with internal policing and external organisations during the European Championships. As O'Connor and Zaidi (2021) note, such identification and promotion of community collaborations between the police and other agencies works as portraying the sense of being effective community partners, enhancing the image of policing. The London 2012 Olympics G4S fiasco in which the company were organisationally ill-prepared for the staffing and training requirements for such a mega-event (Fussey, 2013), provided subsequent challenges for the Metropolitan Police Services reputation as an effective partnership worker. Given the Metropolitan Police Services role in collaborating on security for the 2012 event (Booth and Hopkins 2012), it is evident that police services would desire enhancements to public perceptions and legitimacy through demonstrating such effective collaborations at future mega-events.

Twitter provides a domain in which the police can control the projection of this image work, and not be dependent upon traditional forms of media (Lieberman et al., 2013) in conveying the work of partnerships. Yet this may present as a sanitized account of the reality of partnership working (Mawby, 2002). Such promotions of collaborative success were apparent

within this study (as seen in Figure 2), with the forces keen to demonstrate the breadth of external agencies the police service were engaged and working with (O'Connor, 2017). This sense of projecting togetherness between the police and external partners reflects the notion of strength in the collective of securitisation (Ludvigsen, 2022). Utilising external partners may be beneficial particularly for the Metropolitan Police Service, given their reported lower public confidence scores (MOPAC, 2022) than external emergency service partners such as the London Ambulance Service (London Assembly, 2018), and the Fire Service (HMICRFS, 2020). Not only may such posts strengthen police legitimacy but may also convey greater perceptions of policing from within such external organisations.

[*Figure 2 here*]

Figure 2. Twitter post by Metropolitan Police Events that demonstrates the partnership working being undertaken to secure the safety of people in London on the day of the European Championships Final.

The Police Twitter accounts also reflected partnership working and the demonstration of their associations by retweeting content published by other police units, particularly in relation to intra-policing operations. Demonstrations of association with external partners such as, Refuge, Action Fraud, Trading Standards, Wembley Stadium, Transport for London, and numerous train operators were also prevalent. Content included transport updates, joint operations around counterfeit memorabilia, warnings of ticket scams, event information and warnings about violence. This reflected significant efforts to 'push information' (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2015) that indicated the scope of partnership work being undertaken by the police. Such attempts may help change public perceptions of the police from afar. Police demonstrations of associations and effective partnership working on Twitter can provide a counter-narrative to any negative press that may exist on the ground or in other media

channels during the event. It can also present an image of police partnership working as successful irrespective of the various tensions (logistical, organisational, operational) that often exist between different policing and security actors and agencies within networks (Whelan and Molnar, 2017).

Responsibilisation of citizens

Police Twitter accounts sought to get citizens both inside and outside of the stadium to take responsibility for their actions and in particular their own safety. This closely aligns with the work of David Garland (1996) and others (see for example Hinds and Grabosky, 2010) about the use of responsibilisation strategies in a criminal justice setting. These studies suggest that responsibility for addressing crime, harm, and victimisation is increasingly being passed from the police and state more broadly to citizens in an attempt to create a 'responsibilised citizenry' (Hinds and Grabosky, 2010, p.110). Crowd disorder, alcohol-affected fans and hooliganism are long-standing issues at football matches (Toohey and Taylor, 2014) and present a significant threat to public order. Police attempts to get citizens to take responsibility during the Euro 2020 can be seen in a tweet shared by City of London Police (Figure 3). In this post, fans are told that it is 'your responsibility to know your limits and enjoy alcohol responsibly' and that 'there is no excuse for violence'. Such a message intends to serve as a warning to fans with the aim of controlling or regulating fan behaviour on the ground from afar, for example by getting them to limit alcohol consumption or to desist from engaging in rowdy behaviour or acts of hooliganism which could lead to violence.

[*Figure 3 here*]

Figure 3. Twitter post by City of London Police reminding football fans that it is their responsibility to know their limits and enjoy alcohol responsibly.

Police Twitter accounts attempted to get citizens to take responsibility for their actions and safety in other ways, for example, by only travelling to the match if they had an official ticket, keeping belongings secure and away from potential thieves, and ticket fraud. Beyond crime control, citizens were also asked by the police on Twitter to adhere to Government Covid-19 guidance and this again revealed the unique context surrounding the event and the role that the police at times played on social media during the pandemic in sharing public health messaging (Ralph et al., 2022).

Public feedback and reporting

Twitter was used by police during Euro 2020 to encourage public feedback and reporting in a variety of ways. Police frequently use social media as a 'pull strategy' (Meijer & Thaens, 2013) to extract information from the public which can be useful in enhancing their effectiveness. At Euro 2020 police used pull strategies to facilitate public feedback and reporting on range of security risks. In relation to counterterrorism policing, tweets were made stating that 'security is a team effort' and '#CommunitiesDefeatTerrorism'. Tweets were often accompanied with messages urging the public to 'stay vigilant and report any suspicious activity or behaviour to stewards, security staff or the police'. Unlike regular police pull strategies on social media, which aim to facilitate digital public engagement through replies and messages online, Twitter was used to as an attempt to transcend the digital environment and promote public feedback and reporting of suspicious behaviour on the ground to the police, security, or stewards from afar (Figure 4). Other tweets by British Transport Police provided a dedicated text number and hashtag #textBTP for the public to text in their 'concerns' or 'if you need us'.

[*Figure 4 here*]

Figure 4. Twitter post by Counter Terrorism Policing UK urging the public to stay alert and report suspicious behaviour to a steward, security, or the police.

Mega-event security networks are often state-led and hierarchical (Boyle, 2011), with limited opportunities for the public to become engaged in the security effort. It has been identified that community members and the wider public are a 'missing node' (Johnston and Shearing, 2003) within mega-event security networks (Aitken, 2020). A lack of involvement or opportunity for the public to communicate their concerns with security authorities can have harmful outcomes which can heighten worry and insecurity, as well as damage the perceived legitimacy of the police or other security actors (Loader and Walker, 2007; Aitken, 2020; Aitken, 2021a). While the links between police social media use and citizen participation remain ongoing (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2015), the use of Twitter by Police at Euro 2020 can be viewed as one way in which some 'recognition' (Loader and Walker, 2007) is given to local communities and the public in security governance at mega-events. The inclusion of community members and the public into security governance arrangements can also have practical utility, enhancing the overall security operation 'by utilising the mentalities, technologies and resources of the community, the efficacy of security to deal with potential threats and enhance the safety of the public [can] also be improved." (Aitken, 2020, p.365).

Real-time crowd management

Twitter was also used by the police during the Euros to manage the actions and behaviours of fans during incidents. Different than responsibilisation tactics that sought to push responsibility onto citizens, these practices instead centred on responding to emerging and ongoing incidents. This follows a key advantage of social media that has been reported more broadly in the existing literature, which is that it enables the police to share messages and updates

immediately and in real-time with their audience (Crump, 2011). Rather than working with the traditional media who will ultimately decide what content and information is shared, the police instead have the power to do this via social media platforms (O'Connor, 2017). As Figure 5 illustrates, Metropolitan Police Service Westminster used Twitter to divulge information about an unfolding incident in Leicester Square, London, that at the time was comprised of Scottish fans. The post illustrates that the police are present in the area, and an attempt is also made to thwart others from entering the area. Other examples of police using Twitter in real-time and as part of crowd management during the Euro 2020 highlighted geographical areas that were either busy or crowded with fans and that should be avoided, as well as ongoing safety and crime concerns and police action in combatting this. One such post was made by the Metropolitan Police Events account in the immediate aftermath of the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy. Following online racism of an English player, the account communicates that they were 'aware' of such comments and that 'it will be investigated'.

[*Figure 5 here*]

Figure 5. Twitter post by Metropolitan Police Service Westminster about police operations in Leicester Square, London that was at the time occupied by travelling Scottish fans.

There has been some research on emergent public order policing strategies utilising a communications-based approach where social media may be used to engage football fans (Atkinson, 2021). Police use of Twitter as a real-time crowd management tactic may relate to the way that security stakeholders at Euro 2020 had advocated for a policing approach that emphasised communication and dialogue (Ludvigsen, 2022). On one hand, publishing the location of incidents will heighten people's awareness and may lead to others joining. On the other, utilising Twitter in real-time to forewarn fans and the public from afar of unfolding incidents on the ground may benefit the policing and security operation by changing the

routines and behaviours of some fans who may have been travelling to congregate at certain locations, for example, Leicester Square. Furthermore, there is some evidence which suggests that police transparency and communication in public order policing can enhance police legitimacy and in turn reduce levels of disorder and conflict (Stott et al., 2012). Once again, this demonstrates the intended function of police Tweets was to transcend the digital environment and have real impacts on the ground through policing from afar.

Conclusion

This research has provided the first study into police use of social media during a sporting mega-event. It fills an important gap in existing mega-event security literature by providing an event-specific overview of police use of social media during the Euro 2020 Finals. It also contributes to the existing scholarship on policing and social media by considering the use of Twitter by Police Scotland and Metropolitan Police units as part of the overall policing and security operation for a mega-event. The research has identified that police units used social media in five strategic ways: as a form of security spectacle, to demonstrate effective partnership working with other police and non-police agencies, to promote citizen responsibilisation, to facilitate public feedback and reporting, and as a form of real-time crowd management. The article proposes that each of the identified five tactics can potentially have tangible benefits to the policing and security operation at a mega-event through the way that Twitter facilitates 'policing at a distance' (Bigo and Guild, 2005) whereby it can be used to influence spectator and public perceptions and behaviours on the ground from afar. Subsequently, the research offers a potential practical contribution to policing and security governance arrangements at mega-events and football policing by placing emphasis on the role of Twitter as a policing tool.

For example, Twitter as a new stage on which to demonstrate security spectacle or effective partnership working allows for a widening of the audience base of these aspects of policing, potentially changing the perceptions of those who may not even be in physical proximity to the event. While any deterrent effect could reach those with malign intent who may be travelling to the event, a key aspect of security spectacle is also to demonstrate security and policing competency to the world, Twitter allows such messages to be projected both locally and globally. Mega-event security networks are also frequently fraught with tensions and competing interests (Whelan and Molnar, 2018). Security failures such as the 2012 Olympics G4S scandal can be damaging to both the private security industry and the police. By projecting image management on the new stage of social media, the police can enhance their reputation as successful collaborators and innovators, enhancing their legitimacy, irrespective of the reality of tensions that exist between different policing and security actors and agencies on the ground. Twitter may also serve important functions in shaping behaviours of fans and the public at mega-events. For example, Twitter posts prompting fan responsibilisation around a range of public order risky behaviours such as alcohol consumption, hooliganism, violence, and theft means that, if taken on board and enacted, can reduce conflict, disorder, and crime on the ground. Similarly, using Twitter to facilitate public feedback and reporting can enhance the effectiveness of the police to respond to a range of exceptional and everyday threats, while the very act of engaging the public and community members around key venues can further instil a sense of legitimacy through the 'recognition' (Loader and Walker, 2007) that it affords. Lastly, Twitter posts, as a form of real-time crowd management within a dialogue-based approach may be able to direct fans and spectators to or away from sites of conflict or danger, helping to avoid an escalation of crowd disorder, hooliganism flashpoints, or even minimise casualties in the event of terror incidents.

The potential value that Twitter affords policing practitioners during a mega-event is likely to be significant within an era of renewed policing austerity, budget cuts, and amidst a potential global economic recession. Even mega-events which utilize millions of pounds in policing and security budgets are not exempt from such influences. Being able to do 'more with less' has become a growing consideration for the police (Bell, 2015) and it may be that policing at a distance via social media could provide several cost-effective benefits. For example, police Twitter use has been traditionally characterized by a lack of strategic direction (Bullock, 2017), and so by providing a strategic template for police Twitter use at mega-events and football policing, the research within this article can act as a 'motor' for change (Innes, 2010) by allowing better use of police time and resources spent on Twitter during such events. Similarly, social media affords the police greater visibility by extending the communication of messages from the physical to virtual realm, this could help amplify messages of reassurance and deterrence to intended audiences even if there are shortages of police personnel and physical security infrastructures. Likewise, sending responsibilizing messages to fans and citizens may promote self-policing behaviours which limits the need for police enforcement. Real-time communication of messages with fans also enlists citizens as an additional node in security governance which could reduce the dependency on more established actors and agencies. While the overall enhanced visibility and communication with citizens and fans afforded through Twitter can help to build trust and increase the legitimacy of the police, something which has been shown to promote compliance and reduce conflict and disorder (Stott *et al*., 2012). Taken together, the above points demonstrate that policing at a distance via Twitter could have the potential to allow the police to do more policing with less resources. This article proposes five Twitter tactics that police practitioners could utilise during mega-events and other forms of public order policing. However, further research should be conducted to fully

measure the impact of these tactics, and namely if and how police communication on Twitter alters the behaviour of their audience.

Naturally, some limitations exist within the present study. Firstly, the research only used Police Scotland and Metropolitan Police related Twitter posts, and it therefore did not consider police use of Twitter in other host country locations. Second, the research did not investigate the extent of public engagement with respective Twitter posts. And while this was not the aim of the article, as of November 2022, the Metropolitan Police Twitter account had 1.3 million followers, while Police Scotland's account had 318,000. It can be inferred that the potential outreach of police social media use is still significant. The Euro 2020 Finals were also not free of controversy. There was unprecedented crowd disorder in the build-up to the Championship Final held at Wembley Stadium in London on 11th July 2021, where 2,000 ticketless fans breached security to force their way into the stadium. 89 arrests were made including 53 at Wembley. Baroness Casey's report identified that police, stewarding and the Government may have underestimated the exceptionality of the event (Houghton, 2021). However, we argue that such security failures only strengthen our case for greater police use of social media, particularly when considering the potential real-time crowd management and fan responsibilisation benefits identified.

This article serves as a starting point for future research into police use of social media during mega-events. Future research could explore the levels of public engagement and interaction with police Twitter profiles. Furthermore, interviews could be conducted with police practitioners involved in the policing operation and specific officers tasked with updating Twitter profiles to examine the intended uses and benefits.

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Figures:

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