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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION OF POLICE OFFICERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to determine which digital communication channels and for what purposes were used by police in rural and suburban parts of Croatia during the COVID-19 pandemic and the obstacles they encountered in doing so. The purpose of the research is a scientific contribution to communication and police sciences, given the lack of such research not only in Croatia but internationally. The practical purpose is the identification of possibilities and limitations of digital communication in policing and aspects of police communication that are important during crises. The semi-structured interview was used in four focus groups of 10 research participants. The results show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the request of citizens, police officers often resorted to communication via social media, even though such a method of police communication was not defined as official at the time and despite other serious obstacles such as insufficient technological infrastructure and lack of access to the Internet. The need to create precise work guidelines was identified to avoid problems and prevent citizens' resistance towards introducing such novelties. This research also points to establishing guidelines and communication protocols between public services to avoid confusion and misinformation.

Keywords: *police, COVID-19 pandemic, digital communication, rural areas, suburban areas*

1. Introduction

Communication through digital channels has become increasingly common in the modern age, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically and dramatically changed the daily life of people all over the globe almost overnight (Kaplan et al., 2020). Considering the fact that a strict lockdown has been introduced at the time when the pandemic was at its peak in Croatia, and that even after the loosening of the measures, for months there was an insistence on minimizing in-person contacts and maintaining social distancing, it is clear that this must have affected communication channels in all spheres of personal and professional life. Many people worked from home instead of at their workplaces, pupils and students attended classes remotely, meetings of representative bodies were held using various suitable digital platforms, state and local administration authorities, i.e. public institutions stopped receiving citizens in-person and also started providing services through intended digital channels.

The police is a public institution that is responsible for the internal security of the state, meaning that the police take care of the safety of people and property, and enable the realization of all human

rights and freedoms within state borders (Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2023). Although the possibility of reporting a suspicious or illegal event to the police through digital channels has long been accepted as a form of police work facilitation with the advantage of keeping police officers in the field (Smith, 2005), during the pandemic it has become a necessity, at least in situations of reporting low-priority level events (Hobbs, 2020). In a report issued by the Police Executive Research Forum (2021) in the USA, based on relevant research, experiences and the impact of the pandemic on police work, it was emphasized that communication during the pandemic was a key component. It was also pointed out that communication and IT systems must be able to adapt in the short term and that the way in which agencies communicate both with each other and with key stakeholders has probably been permanently changed. Additionally, the report noted a significant increase in the use of social media in the execution of police work. However, one of the challenges of this type of communication is the identification of a person being communicated with. In the event that a person is not known, there is a risk that it is not a person they claim to be and that official data is being accessed without authorization, which can constitute a significant problem, especially in terms of police work, since the police collect and process data for the purpose of enforcement of its legal powers and such data may include: identification data, data on criminal activities, data on misconducts, etc. Therefore, according to the results of this research, it is recommended that the first contact in official communication be established in the form in-person visit or via a video call, in order to verify authenticity of a person being communicated with. After that, communication can continue via Email or other digital channels.

Thus, police communication in virtual space shows certain specificity in comparison with other public services and institutions. It is therefore not surprising that studies show that the digitization of the police is not taking place at the pace that would be possible in line with the development of modern communication and information technologies (Waddington, 2019), which could have been a serious problem during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An additional challenge can be the fact that, from the perspective of citizens, there are objective (for example, access to the Internet connection) and subjective (for example, older age, underdeveloped digital competence etc.) restrictions on the use of digital communication channels, which in Croatia is almost typical for rural and suburban areas.

Therefore, the goal of this research is to determine which digital communication channels and for what purposes were used by police officers during the COVID-19 pandemic in the performance of police activities in rural and suburban parts of Croatia and the obstacles they encountered in doing so. The purpose of the research from a scientific aspect is a scientific contribution to communication and police sciences, considering the lack of such research not only in Croatia, but also at the international level. The practical purpose consists in the identification of the possibilities and limitations of digital communication in the performance of police activities, and in the identification of aspects of police communication that are important in crises.

Considering the previously highlighted challenges of digital communication in rural and suburban communities, this research was conducted in Slavonia as a part of Croatia dominated by such areas.

The aim of the research was operationalized through the following research question:

How do police officers evaluate the application of information and communication technology for the exchange of official police information during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The research used a qualitative research approach that was conducted using a focus group in the form of a semi-structured interview.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Paul Watzlawick's theory of communication (Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson, 1967) represents one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for the study of communication. This theory is based on five axioms that explain how people communicate with each other:

1. One cannot not communicate
2. Every communication has both a substantive and relational level
3. Punctuation of the sequence of events
4. communication involves digital and analogic modalities
5. Communication can be symmetrical or complementary.

In addition to providing an important framework for understanding the complexity of communication, the aforementioned theory also helps in identifying misunderstandings and problems in communication. Stating that it is not possible not to communicate, the author explains that any behaviour, whether verbal or non-verbal, is a form of communication. Even if we do not express ourselves verbally, that also constitutes a form of communication. The second axiom explains that in every communication, both a substantive message (what is said) and a related message (how it is said) are transmitted. According to Paul Watzlawick, determining the respective level of communication can be crucial in understanding communication misunderstandings. According to Watzlawick's third axiom, non-verbal and verbal communication have a component comparable to punctuation in written language. Punctuation refers to the way people perceive and interpret the sequence of events in communication. According to this theory, the sequence of events is not objective, but subjective and depends on how individuals interpret their experience. The following axiom explains that communication can be digital, which means that clear signs and symbols are used (content level), or analogue, meaning that nuances and emotional signs are used (relational level). Analogous aspects of communication are often subconscious and can influence the interpretation of the meaning of a message. The fifth axiom clarifies the relationship between the interlocutors, i.e. whether they have equal (symmetric communication) or different information power (complementary communication).

Paul Watzlawick's communication theory has multiple implications and areas of application. In psychotherapy, Communication Theory can help therapists recognize dysfunctional patterns of communication between family members or other groups, which can lead to understanding and breaking those patterns. In management, it can help managers improve their communication skills and understand the effect of their communication on relationships with other employees, as well as on team effectiveness and productivity. In interpersonal relations, this theory can help to improve communication skills and establish better mutual relations, and in public communication, it can help speakers improve their presentation technique, recognize potential problems in communication with the audience, and establish a better connection with the audience.

Paul Watzlawick's communication theory is an important theoretical framework for the study of communication, particularly in the fields of psychology, sociology, and communication sciences, and has been applied to various fields, including police work (Thielgen, Schade and Niegisch, 2022).

3. Methodology

Bearing in mind the categorization of police administrations in Croatia into four categories (Kovco Vukadin, Borovec and Ljubin Golub, 2013), the research was conducted in the areas of the largest and smallest police administrations in Slavonia: the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration, which belongs to the second category of police administrations and the Požega-Slavonia Police Administration,

which belongs to the fourth category of police administrations. In this way, it is possible to observe all local specificities especially related to the degree of urbanization of certain areas, whereby the second category of police administrations largely covers suburban areas, while the fourth category is dominated by rural areas.

A total of four focus groups were held: three in the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration and one in the Požega-Slavonia Police Administration. The focus group in the Požega-Slavonia Police Administration was conducted on December 28, 2022, and the focus groups in the Osijek-Baranja Police Administration were conducted on January 11, 2023. Each focus group lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, i.e. the shortest was an hour and 10 minutes, and the longest was an hour and 30 minutes. All focus groups were conducted during the working hours of research participants, in agreement with their supervisors, so as not to interfere with their performance of work. In addition, all the rules of ethics in scientific research on living individuals were applied, which includes voluntariness, anonymity and informed consent of research participants. Each focus group was moderated by two people. Each focus group had ten participants who are police officers working in the branches of regular and criminal police, given that these branches of the police necessarily have intensive communication with citizens in their daily work, and the nature of their police work often requires in-person contacts.

The research question was operationalized in the closed part of the semi-structured interview using the following two questions:

1. Which channels of digital communication with citizens did you use during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What difficulties did you encounter when using channels of digital communication with citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The obtained data were presented and analysed through these two topics.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. *Digital communication channels between the police and citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people turned to digital communication as the only way to connect with others during that period. Thus, the pandemic encouraged many who had not previously used social media or digital means of communication to adapt and get used to this form of contact with others in record time. That period also caused the intensive adoption of popular messaging platforms such as Messenger, Viber, WhatsApp and other such apps. Given that the pandemic affected all aspects of life, including police work, citizens used these applications to request information from police officers. These platforms proved to be an effective way to quickly and easily connect with police officers, which was especially important at a time when physical contact was limited or not recommended.

“During the pandemic, my Viber and WhatsApp were on fire, people contacted me privately at home, people I haven’t heard from for two years. They contacted me saying they were in self-isolation and wanted me to check something for them etc.“

„Also, during the pandemic there were many inquiries about how long people had to be in isolation. When do I have to apply for my identity card? Can I now... when we introduced checkpoints. It was mostly a bunch of questions about COVID during the pandemic. And then they find you on social media.”

Although such a method of communication with police officers has not been listed as official at that time, citizens, instead of searching for relevant information related to regulations and rules during the pandemic on official websites, very often resorted to communication using the previously mentioned digital channels for exchanging messages.

“It started, as a colleague said, with Viber, WhatsApp at the time of COVID. We were all told what was allowed, and what was not. All of that was written somewhere, but it is difficult for everyone to go and check it. Who reads that information? We read it as police officers. It is easier to ask someone than to find where the explanation is written. Or send a message via Viber or WhatsApp, which again goes back to that human laziness, it is easier to take that shortcut.”

The most common official digital channel through which police officers communicate with citizens is electronic mail, and one of the relevant items is certainly the verification of the identity of a person contacting the police in order to ensure data protection, i.e. so that the data is not disclosed to an unauthorized person.

“You know what, when the pandemic was current, we had an increased number of applications via Email or phone call. In such situations you cannot know one hundred percent whether they are the person they claim to be. That is a little tricky. If only they would come in person for the first time. After that, we can continue the communication via Email or... We had an increased number of official conversations by phone during the pandemic. But I would not recommend such practice to anyone when it comes to the first contact.”

“The official channels we have are mostly Emails. We work via Email, nothing has changed there, direct contact with individuals we normally work with...”

“First of all, you have to know if that is the person they claim to be. That is the starting point. If we refer to the Ordinance on the Confidentiality of Official Information of the Ministry of the Interior, and in there we can see which information we are allowed to disclose and which we are not. Also, to whom, meaning an individual who has a legal interest. Is that actually the person they claim to be? If you have exchanged numbers and you know that it the person, but still you are only allowed to disclose only the data which that individual is allowed to receive.”

Considering that during the discussions with the focus groups it became undoubtedly clear that citizens preferred communication via electronic mail during the pandemic, police officers responded to various types of requests via official Email (such as issuing traffic accident reports, warnings etc.). Contact information for the police administration and police stations is usually available on official websites of a given police administration, but due to the specificity of circumstance during the pandemic, it was necessary to find new ways of publishing contact details of the immediate enforcers.

“So, we put phone numbers, contacts on the front door, i.e. direct contact information of individuals who are in charge of certain policing segments and their Email addresses.”

Although the precautionary measures related to the pandemic have loosened and citizens are once again coming to police premises unhindered, the habit of using digital communication has remained, which allows people to obtain information of interest in an easier way. This is also proven by the fact that communication via Email did not decrease even after the pandemic; rather over time, additional services have become available that enable citizens and the police to have a faster and smoother dialogue.

“Communication has even increased, because now for, say, speeding traffic violations specifically, with each notification of a committed violation, we have to attach a video of the violation for each speed violation, i.e. a photo where the vehicle committing the violation can be seen, and every person who receives a notification of a violation offense receives a code through which they can see the violation on the website of the Ministry of the Interior. They also get, I believe, a notification

about the violation committed via e-Citizen system. I do not know if they can see the video there, but on the website of the Ministry of the Interior they can see the video using a code they received so they do not have to come to us.”

From the point of view of police officers, communication via Email is much simpler and more accepted than direct in-person communication primarily because it is not necessary to react immediately, but one can pause and think about what will be answered.

“Fewer parties. You get an Email, so you do not have to react right away. If someone comes to us in person, you have to answer right away. This way, we read the Email so we can think about what to answer.”

Citizens also very often used the free mobile app “MUP Sigurnost i povjerenje” (in English: Ministry of the Interior – Safety and Trust); reports were received through the aforementioned app on violations of self-isolation or quarantine measures during the pandemic, and the police often, in cooperation with citizens, acted on the basis of these reports. The application is not only related to period of the pandemic, but citizens have been happy to use it for a long time since it allows anonymous reporting of all kinds of events that threaten security. In addition, a large part of the communication of citizens, as well as business entities, takes place on social media, thus information from social media was used as an indication that business hours of catering facilities were being violated, and after checking the information, in some cases, misdemeanour reports were filed.

“... Facebook and similar networks were not used as some kind of evidence, but rather as an indication that business hours of catering facilities were being violated, etc. It served as a sort of evidence for initiating a misdemeanour report.”

Police officers cite mobile devices as a major drawback in interacting with citizens. Namely, since the police generally do not use work mobile phones, police officers sometimes, in order to help the victims of a crime as much as possible and to make the victims feel protected and safe even when the police officer is not in their physical vicinity, give their private mobile phone number to victims. After that, it often happened that that the same citizen or another member of their family contacted them using the same number for a completely different and extremely less alarming situation, even situations not within police jurisdiction. This leads to the conclusion that citizens often do not distinguish between the work of individual organizational units of the police and that most often they just want to get the desired information in the fastest way possible, even if this includes calls to private mobile phone numbers of police officers during working or private hours or attempts to communicate using various social channels and/or media.

“...they all think they can contact you for everything.”

“...but they find you on Facebook, send you a request for a message, they find a way to reach us, Požega is a small town and someone always has your phone number.”

Police officers often use mobile phones, whether work or private ones, for business communication. However, given the fact that it is not prescribed when officials should and should not be available, that there is no universal and consistent way of working, conflicting opinions are often encountered. For example, one supervisor believes that availability on a mobile phone after working hours is a big problem, while some research participants, police officers, believe that not answering the phone after working hours is the solution in this situation.

“Put yourself in their position and give your number to everyone, you would receive call 24 hours a day... especially when someone who has been in a property line dispute for the last 50 years gets a hold of you and you or a contact police officer need to solve that problem. A man would go crazy. Even if we gave out our work number, we could still be on duty 24 hours a day.”

“You don’t answer after working hours. You can receive some kind of notifications, SMS messages that may be important for the service etc. on your work phone.”

“Let’s say that it is used during working hours and then we turn it off so that we do not have to give our personal mobile phone number. From that point of view, it would certainly be easier for us during those eight hours of working time.”

As a result, supervisors in different organizational units of the police have different understanding of duties and responsibilities in that segment, and certain supervisors require their employees to be available outside of working hours. Decisive, unequivocal, clear regulations on mobile phone communication for the purposes of police work are urgently needed to ensure that police officers are not overburdened and to protect their rights and privacy. Broadly speaking, clear rules on communication by work mobile phones in police work could help to maintain a balance between operational needs and employee needs for rest and privacy.

“And what you said at the beginning that a man has a work mobile phone, now we should also call him at 2, 3, 5 in the morning. It makes no sense. Therefore, those work mobile phones are simultaneously good and bad. If a supervisor would allow it, I believe we would be available 0-24.” During the pandemic, it was not necessary to find new ways to communicate with adult citizens only. Namely, a significant part of the work of police officers is prevention work aimed at the younger population, i.e. lectures intended for kindergartens and schools. In order to make up for lectures and introducing children to topics and preventive programs relevant to their age, educational materials (obtained from the Police Directorate) were digitally forwarded to kindergartens and schools, and the teaching staff would forward them to students. Although it is assumed that a larger number of students were educated in this way, police officers do not have complete feedback on whether all the materials really reached the final recipients and how many students actually read and studied the prepared and delivered materials. However, generally speaking, digital delivery of educational materials could be an effective way to implement prevention projects during a pandemic or in situations when police officers are unable to give live lectures.

“We asked them for feedback if they discussed the material with the children. Fifty percent did not respond at all. How can we know whether they discussed the material or not?”

During the interview, research participants stated that they performed tasks related to the implementation of protection and precautions measures, especially during the pandemic, by contacting individuals by phone. They mostly gave out their personal mobile phone number because even contact police officers do not have a work mobile phone. This lack of work mobile phones represents a challenge in the performance of police work, especially in situations where it is necessary to establish quick and effective contact with citizens.

3.2. Obstacles in digital police communication during the COVID-19 pandemic

Certain research participants express concern regarding insufficient information among citizens on the possibilities of digital access to the police and emphasize that access to the Internet represents a significant problem in certain areas. Furthermore, they mention that an often occurrence is that colleagues do not have the possibility to communicate through an encrypted digital channel during interventions (handheld or landline connection), especially in rural and suburban areas where the signal is weaker.

“Not to mention the connections that are not present in some villages or where we have an ordinary connection and you do not have a signal, bad batteries etc. And we are supposedly talking about technology.”

“Yes, but it was extremely bad. We were losing communication all the time. Our software crashed.” Apart from the fact that officials are sometimes hindered in their work by a weak signal, the equipment itself is a much bigger problem. Police officers express dissatisfaction with the IT equipment they use for their work because, in their opinion, this equipment is outdated and limits their work, which

is a major drawback in the daily performance of police work. They believe that eliminating this problem is necessary in order to be able to discuss any improvement of communication through digital channels.

“We have four computers, you can work on one as intended, while on the other three it takes half an hour to open Word, not to mention anything else.”

“But computers as computers. Everything takes a long time to open. They are slow. A single action takes a very long time.”

“Ordinary mail takes an hour to reach you. What can I say, I am sending an Email to my colleague from my computer, I ask the colleague if he received it, he says he did not.”

“Actually, it was well thought out, but technological support failed.”

Given the fact that the police often have to communicate with citizens by telephone, there are often difficulties in establishing telephone communication, since some police officers can only communicate using landlines within the Ministry of the Interior, and in order to make outgoing telephone calls, they have to call through the central office or use services of a secretary. However, it is not clear whether these are technical deficiencies or the decision of a supervisor, or the lack of trust of a supervisor in their subordinates.

“Some offices do not even have an outgoing telephone line. So you have to call the central station to connect you with others.”

“Not some, no departments have it apart from a duty officer, at least at our station.”

The aforementioned limitations in communication create difficulties in the work of police officers. This can cause indignation from citizens who complain about the impossibility of direct communication with the police, but having learned from the negative experience after giving personal contact to individuals, many police officers have given up this communication method.

“For example, I had a case where I was conducting measures, meaning complete measures¹ ... And then, when I started working here, the problem was that there was no outgoing telephone line. And then I have about forty measures, I need to establish contact with someone to talk, I have to do something, I constantly have to go through the central office. So I decided to use my phone. Then the same thing happened, as my colleagues said, people started disturbing me in the evening when I am at home or... one lady even threatened me through messages... because she believed I was constantly disturbing her, that was constantly controlling her. And things like that. So I gave up, I no longer communicate using my phone.”

The limiting factor in the use of digital communication channels is also the level of authority. Namely, most of the operational staff do not have permission to access social media, so the request for authorization should be submitted to the Chief Police Commissioner who will decide on granting access to social media.

“Yes, you must provide a reason why you are requesting access to Facebook. You have to give an explanation. An official request that is sent to the commissioner and the commissioner approves it.”

Although they understand that it is necessary to keep up with the times and that communication through digital channels should be clearly defined and prescribed, police officers are not sure whether these defined conditions will bring only positive aspects or if the system would become overloaded at some point, thus making work in such an environment contradictory.

“Well, look at what my colleague said, that is how we manage and make things easier for ourselves. If that were prescribed, we would have to have it. Now, would that be easier? Would that be easier? It would be easier, would it not? That is the question, we do not know the answer because we do not have it”.

¹ It is not possible to provide full quote in order to maintain confidentiality of the identity of the research participant.

“The infrastructure cannot keep up with it, ours at least, to accomplish what we really want. The most ordinary, who here has a mobile phone, the most ordinary mobile phone is ten times stronger than the computer in the station that you have. Not to mention the Internet speed and things like that.”

Criminal police officers and other branches of police state that during the COVID-19 pandemic their work did not change significantly as they continued to perform police duties and apply police powers, in combination with the application of additional precautions to protect themselves and others from the transmission of the disease.

“As far as our service and general treatment of citizens is concerned, as far as the criminal police is concerned, everything was the same, because we have to receive a report from citizens directly, and conduct an investigation. It does not matter whether we want it or not.”

“Nothing changed for us during the pandemic, we could not investigate an accident remotely, we had to come in the field and talk to people, we just kept a certain distance. Or when we asked drivers for their licence...”

It is obvious, therefore, that it was not possible to move part of police activities to virtual space even during the time when the strictest measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic were in force, which places the police at the same level as the health system and other services whose main task is care for the life and physical integrity of people.

5. Conclusion

It is quite clear that effective and transparent communication with citizens leads to an increase in citizens' trust in institutions (Alessandro et al., 2021), but this research, based on the experience of police communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, showed that quality communication is not only a matter of individual communication skills of employees of these institutions, but requires certain organizational assumptions, especially in crisis and complex situations.

Maintaining privacy and boundaries between work and private life has become increasingly important in today's digital age. Many employees feel uncomfortable giving out their personal mobile phone numbers for work purposes and are afraid that they will be available 24 hours a day, i.e. outside of working hours. This is particularly important in cases where employees are faced with challenging situations that require immediate action, as is often the case in police work. As a possible solution, the idea of using a work phone only during working hours is suggested. In the event of the need for urgent intervention, a call can be taken over by the Police Operations and Communication Centre, which is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This research has shown that this problem is not adequately addressed by regulations providing for the performance of police work and clearly and unequivocally separate rights and obligations during working hours from those in private time. Maintaining privacy and boundaries between work and private life also has a positive impact on productivity and employee satisfaction (Derks and Bakker, 2014). Employees who have clearly defined boundaries between work and private life are often happier and less stressed, which can contribute to better performance in the workplace (Grant, 2013). Vrh obrasca Dno obrasca

Organization of the police in Croatia is hierarchically structured, which means that there are different levels of management, with clearly defined tasks, powers and responsibilities (Kovčo Vukadin, Borovec and Ljubin Golub, 2013). In such a hierarchical structure, police officers usually receive orders from their superiors and are required to follow them strictly. This is an essential part of police culture and is key to the effectiveness of the police organization, and it came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic, since this research showed that police officers did not have the option to choose whether to act in person or remotely. Their work did not experience significant changes as they

continued to perform their police duties and exercise their powers, but with additional precautions to prevent the spread of the disease.

This research also showed that limitations in police communication with citizens by telephone create difficulties in the work of police officers. The aforementioned limitations in communication create problems in establishing direct contact with citizens, i.e. police officers face the indignation of citizens who complain about the impossibility of direct communication with the police. Some police officers have given up this way of communication because of negative experiences after giving personal contact information to individuals. In addition, a limiting factor in the use of digital communication channels is the level of authority. Police officers are not sure if the defined conditions of digital communication will bring only positive aspects or if the system could become overloaded at some point and work in such an environment would become even more difficult. The results of the research show the need to define and prescribe a uniform attitude in all police administrations.

The results of this research showed that police officers generally do not want work mobile phones, which was argued by everyone from the perspective of their workplace. Thus, different types of police indicate different problems, i.e. for criminal police it can be dangerous because of contacts with often extremely violent profiles of people, and for contact police it is a problem because they communicate with an extremely large number of citizens. In fact, they pointed to serious limitations and indicate the need to regulate the practice in the case of obtaining work mobile phones. Therefore, the results of the research clearly indicate the need to create instructions with precise definition of work guidelines in order to avoid potential problems, but also to prevent people's resistance when introducing such novelties.

Considering that most events take place in public places, and that citizens pass through these spaces and a large part of them have mobile phones, information can be easily spread in real time. Live recordings can be broadcast on various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and the information can be further shared and viewed later. The number of people who will see such information depends on the number of followers and viewers on those platforms. While one could argue about ways of preventing the spread of such information, it seems almost impossible due to the ever-increasing availability of technology and the extremely large increase in the number of mobile device users. Viewed from that standpoint, the technological progress of society also causes numerous problems for the police, which is not the case only in Croatia, but foreign research has also reached the same conclusions (Marx, 2007; Deneff et al., 2012), but a difference has been detected between countries regarding the dynamics with which their police manage to face these challenges. Undefined communication coordination of emergency services creates a negative impression in the community. It is necessary to prevent information from being published unchecked and without permission. Considering that information can spread quickly and far through social media, the consequences can be serious. This research points to the need to establish clear guidelines and communication protocols between different services in order to avoid unnecessary chaos and misinformation.

When considering the aforementioned practical implications of this research, it should be taken into account that it was conducted only in one part of Croatia. A kind of limitation is also found in the selected theoretical framework, since the Theory of Communication is based on Western culture, so it may prove insufficiently applicable in other cultures that have a different approach to communication. Bearing in mind the two-way communication as well as the aforementioned limitations of the research, the perspective of future research opens up in the direction of repeating this kind of study in other police administrations in Croatia.

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