Public Perceptions of the Police: The Role of Social Media

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Overview
- Social media has taken off in the last 15 years and alters the way we communicate (Spizman & Miller, 2013).
- American policing has come under fire in past few years due to shootings of unarmed black men (Weitzer, 2015).
- We build off of Intravia et al. (2018) by examining the effects of social and traditional media consumption on attitudes toward police.

Research Questions
1. Does use of social media predict perceptions of police procedural fairness?
2. Does use of social media predict perceptions of police distributive fairness?
3. Does use of social media predict support for police?

Method
Data
- Survey of 18 undergrad classes
- N = 320

Analysis
- Bivariate (t-tests)
- Multivariate (OLS, Logistic)

Variables
Outcomes
- Procedural Justice: 5-item scale (α=.90)
- Distributive Justice: 3-item scale (α=.81)
- Support for police: 1=yes; 0=no

Predictors
- Social Media: 1=yes; 0=no
- Facebook: Days per week
- Twitter: Days per week
- Watch MSM: Days per week
- Watch Local News: Days per week
- Read MSM: Days per week
- Read Local News: Days per week
- Positive Stories: # viewed in past month
- Negative Stories: # viewed in past month
- Crime & Disorder: 4-item scale (α=.81)
- Personal Contact: Last six months (1=yes; 0=no)
- Vicarious Contact: Last six months (1=yes; 0=no)

Results

Conclusions
- The way police are portrayed on individuals’ social media networks has the potential to shape their beliefs about PJ and DJ, net of personal experiences.