Examining Local Law Enforcement Public Relations

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EXAMINING LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Manship School of
Mass Communication

by
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M.S., Syracuse University, 2008
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When I moved to Louisiana four years ago to start the Ph.D. program at the Manship School, I had to leave a great life with wonderful people behind – at least temporarily. The last four years have never been easy, but on the hardest and worst days, I could always count on the support of my long distance love and could feel his warmth thousands of miles away.

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-method dissertation 1) identifies and describes common local law enforcement public relations activities, including reputation management, community relations and engagement, media relations, social media management, and internal communications; 2) addresses perceived similarities and differences associated with local law enforcement public relations relative to peers within the same level of government (e.g., public relations in the parks department of the same municipality); 3) identifies distinctive and reinforces common government public relations environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement; 4) provides insights regarding how local law enforcement are using online tools (e.g., websites and social media) for public relations purposes; and 5) prescribes some best practices for local law enforcement public relations. This research addresses departmental level and “mission or task” gaps in the government public relations literature – particularly the Government Communication Decision Wheel line of research – through interviews with 20 local law enforcement public relations and leadership personnel, representing 16 local law enforcement agencies from across the United States. Furthermore, this research adds a unique contribution to the body of dialogic communication and online relationship building literature through content analyses of website homepages, Twitter profiles, and tweets for local law enforcement agencies representing municipalities with populations of 50,000 people to more than 500,000 people.

Some of the most interesting findings in this research relate to local law enforcement perceptions of how their public relations activities and environmental characteristics are different from other local governmental departments and local governmental agencies. Among the key themes they shared were the demand they face and being “24/7”; the levels of attention paid to,
interest in, and media scrutiny they are exposed to; and the nature and complexity of law enforcement interactions and information.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I began working on this dissertation in 2015, we did not know the name Alton Sterling. Or the name Philando Castile. We had not yet witnessed the slaying of five members of the Dallas, Texas and three members of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana law enforcement communities.

But we knew the stories of Eric Garner in Staten Island. Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio. Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina. Laquan McDonald in Chicago, Illinois. Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland. Their deaths after encounters with law enforcement officials propelled their names into the headlines in the mainstream media, became trending topics on social media, and ignited – or perhaps reignited – an important local and national conversation in the United States about the relationships between members of local law enforcement and the communities they swear to “protect and serve” (Capehart, 2015; Hudson, 2014a).

In December 2014, President Obama created a “Task Force on 21st Century Policing,” designed to “strengthen public trust and foster strong relationships between local law enforcement and the communities that they protect, while also promoting effective crime reduction” (Hudson, 2014b). Furthermore, the White House wrote:

Trust between law enforcement agencies and the people they protect and serve is essential to the stability of our communities, the integrity of our criminal justice system, and the safe and effective delivery of policing services (Hudson, 2014b).

Public opinion polling has consistently shown a racial divide relative to perceptions of – specifically confidence (i.e., trust) in – if/how local law enforcement personnel treat Blacks and Whites equally (Drake, 2015; Marist Poll, 2014; National Institute of Justice, 2015; Pew Research Center U.S. Politics and Policy, 2014a, 2014b; President’s Task Force on 21st Century
A McClatchy-Marist poll from late 2014 found that in terms of gaining the trust of local residents, 43 percent of Americans have a great amount of confidence in local agencies to do so, 31 percent of Americans have a fair amount of confidence, and 12 percent have some degree of confidence (Marist Poll, 2014). The same poll revealed deep divides between White and Black Americans, with 50 percent of Whites and just 22 percent of African Americans indicating “great” confidence in local law enforcement (Marist Poll, 2014). Furthermore, McClatchy-Marist found that relative to protection from violent crime, 45 percent of those surveyed had a great deal of confidence law enforcement in their local community would protect them (Marist Poll, 2014). Again, there were racial disparities, with 49 percent of White Americans, 30 percent of African Americans, and 36 percent of Latinos expressing a great deal of confidence (Marist Poll, 2014).

In May 2015, the President of the National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC) John Verrico, who has more than 30 years of government public relations experience, said that building trust with internal and external publics historically has been an important issue for government communicators. He noted that today building trust is at the forefront of government communicators’ minds and priorities because of the current social and political environment:

When a government official refuses to be transparent, tries to hide information that makes them look bad, or gets caught misrepresenting the facts, it becomes harder to sell anything that comes out of their mouths in the future. When citizens don’t trust that the police are doing the right things in their communities or believe there are biases; well, we’ve seen the result of that in the unrest in Ferguson, and Baltimore, as well as in New York and other cities round the country where police officers are being ambushed or shot (At Last Communications, 2015).

Recognizing these sentiments and after several months of extensive research and outreach, the “President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing” produced a final report in May 2015; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005).
of 2015 with recommendations built around six pillars: building trust and legitimacy, policy and oversight, technology and social media, community policing and crime reduction, training and education, and officer wellness and safety (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015).

The first (building trust and legitimacy) and third (technology and social media) pillars can be examined within a public relations context. Public relations scholars have identified trust as an integral element of organization-public relationships and relationship management. Hon and Grunig (1999) classified trust as one of six important relationship outcomes or indicators for optimally functioning organization-public relationships, and numerous studies, including some focusing on the public sector, have examined trust within the context of organization-public relationships (Hong, 2013; Hong, Park, Lee, & Park, 2012; Kang, 2014; Ki & Hon, 2007; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ledingham, 2003; Yang, 2007; Yang, Kang, & Cha, 2015). Hong (2013) noted that “an individual’s trust in an organization, including the government, is well-known to have considerable influence on the individual’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 348).

Public relations scholars have also identified legitimacy as a critical factor for successful organization-public relationships (Boyd, 2000; Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012; Metzler, 2001; Patel, Xavier, & Broom, 2005) and communication [including dialogue] as important to building and maintaining legitimacy, including in the public sector (Suchman, 1995; Liu et al., 2012; Metzler, 2001; Patel et al., 2005). Metzler (2001) noted that organizational legitimacy cannot be achieved through communication with publics alone; “appropriate” substantive organizational actions are also essential (Metzler, 2001, p. 321). Thus, legitimacy can be defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or
appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” and is “resilient to particular events, yet it is dependent on a history of events” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574).

Researchers have suggested that maximizing access, openness, and transparency efforts aimed at constituents and the media are critical to building trust and legitimacy in the public sector (Fairbanks, Plowman, & Rawlins, 2007; Heise, 1985; Liu et al., 2012). Heise (1985) prescribed five key “tenets” for accessible and transparent public sector communication practices (Heise, 1985, p. 209; Fairbanks et al., 2007). He called for the public sector to 1) provide honest, timely, and complete information, including negative information; 2) communicate with publics – including those usually excluded from the democratic process – through “alternative communication channels” and to not solely rely on mass media; 3) promote opportunities for, enable, and solicit comprehensive constituent feedback on policy issues; 4) incorporate feedback throughout the policymaking, implementation, and evaluation processes, while avoiding political considerations; and 5) make transparent public relations a priority consideration and responsibility of employees throughout government, not just for upper level management (Heise, 1985, p. 209). These practices can be easier said than done in the public sector.

The extant literature reveals that there are opportunities, challenges, and environmental characteristics that influence how government entities communicate with key publics (i.e., citizens/constituents [Hong et al., 2012] and the media [Lee, 2012]), and in turn influence organizations’ abilities to build trust and establish and maintain legitimacy with those publics (Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus, 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Liu & Levenshus, 2010; Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010; Liu et al., 2012). Scholars have argued that government public relations is practically different from other sectors of public relations (Heise, 1985; Liu et al., 2010) and
have suggested that traditional theoretical approaches and models used for private sector public relations research (e.g., Excellence Theory, the Four Models of Public Relations, Contingency Theory) are insufficient for approaching public sector communication because of the unique environmental characteristics found in the public sector (Horsley et al., 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Liu & Levenshus, 2010; Liu et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2012).

Researchers have identified political considerations (Canel & Sanders, 2013; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Horsley & Barker, 2002; Strombäck & Kiousis, 2011), the demands of serving the “public good” (Atkinson, 2014; Lee, 2012; Viteritti, 1997), legal matters (Horsley & Barker, 2002; Kosar, 2012; Piotrowski, 2008; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2008), high degrees of media scrutiny (Cook, 2005; Lee, 2012), a lack of managerial and institutional support for government public relations (Fairbanks et al., 2007), negative public attitudes toward the profession (Heise, 1985), relatively few professional development opportunities, and the system of federalism, as critical factors in the public sector communication environment that influence public relations practices and ultimately organization-public relationships (Horsley, et al., 2010; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Liu & Levenshus, 2010; Liu et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2012). Taking these environmental variables into consideration, scholars created (Liu & Horsley, 2007) and refined (Horsley et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2012) the Government Communication Decision Wheel (GCDW), which serves as a theoretical model for the public sector and accounts for various microenvironments (i.e., intergovernmental, multi-level, external, and intragovernmental), different levels of government (i.e., city, county, state, and federal), communication type (i.e., direct and mediated), and employer type (i.e., elected officials versus non-elected officials).
The GCDW and the aforementioned studies were constructed based on interviews and surveys with many types of public sector communication personnel, but did not focus in-depth on understanding practices and characteristics associated with specific segments of the profession (e.g., law enforcement public relations personnel); therefore, they do not account for challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics that may be specific to departments or segments within levels of government. In other words, while research has established that there are differences in government communication practices and environmental characteristics associated with levels of government, there is a gap relative to differences and environmental characteristics within a segment of government at the departmental level. For example, while the GCDW recognizes differences between the city and county municipal levels, it does not consider potential differences that might be found within city government (i.e., between city departments or between a city department and city government more broadly). Horsley et al. (2010) and Liu et al. (2012) acknowledged such limitations to their research and conceded that fruitful future research could examine “more nuanced differences” (Liu et al., 2012, p. 237).

Meijer and Thaens (2013) noted that “the empirical domain of policing is distinct from the rest of the public sector but makes an interesting domain of study due to variety in citizens’ contacts and the diversity in forms of communication,” yet there is scant research specifically examining law enforcement public relations (p. 343). This study places an emphasis on local law enforcement public relations, as opposed to examining practices at a state or federal level. It is important to better understand government communication practices at a local municipal level for a variety of reasons, including the aforementioned discussions of building trust and legitimacy with the key publics of citizens/constituents and the media. Local governments – and cities in particular – have been historically and are still influential in the development of public
policy (Zavattaro, 2013). Additionally, cities are the “most local layer of government with which people interact” (McCluskey, 2015, p. 10) and various constituencies depend on local governments for critical services like public safety (in the case of law enforcement), among other things (Zavattaro, 2013). In crisis circumstances, local governments and local emergency personnel (e.g., law enforcement) are the “first in” and “last out” and must communicate effectively and competently with the public in order to avoid a “perception that government has failed” (Atkinson, 2014, pp. 1394-1395). Furthermore, “cities generally serve economically, culturally, and demographically diverse constituencies” (McCluskey, 2015, p. 10; Zavattaro, 2013). This dissertation adds to the theoretical body of work associated with the GCDW by addressing some of the more “nuanced differences” (Liu et al., 2012, p. 237) associated with a segment of public relations practice that shares “similar missions or tasks” – local law enforcement public relations (Horsley et al., 2010, p. 288). This research helps to fill existing gaps in theoretical and practical knowledge about government public relations through in-depth interviews with local law enforcement leadership and public relations personnel.

The research detailed herein recognizes the uniqueness associated with practicing public relations and building relationships in a public sector context. While this dissertation seeks to illuminate similar and different challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics specific to local law enforcement, scholars have argued that the digital age has provided government communicators with new potential tools for combating or at least stemming the tide of some of the effects of traditional barriers. Researchers have suggested digital tools (e.g., websites and social media) have the potential to provide means for involving, engaging, and better serving constituents, while offering new pathways for building, maintaining, and/or improving relationships with key publics (e.g., Agostino, 2013; Avery & Graham, 2013; Hong,
Additionally, relative to media publics, these tools are helping to change the rules of gatekeeping and newsmaking in the digital era’s media ecosystem (Henderson & Miller, 2014; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Various online and social media tools have become important components of media relations practices, and journalists are turning to these tools in their daily content and decision-making routines (Henderson & Miller, 2014; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). For example, researchers studied “local television newsroom workers” and found that of television journalists with personal Twitter accounts, 63 percent reported following city government officials on Twitter and 58 percent reported following local law enforcement officials on Twitter (Henderson & Miller, 2014, pp. 9-14). Additionally, 96 percent of respondents who utilized their employer’s station Twitter account said they followed city government officials and 88 percent reported following law enforcement on that Twitter account (Henderson & Miller, 2014, p. 14). These findings are important because the researchers also found support for the idea that journalists are using Twitter as a “supplement to the traditional beat call system” and Twitter-based or Twitter-inspired news stories are making their way into newscasts (Henderson & Miller, 2014, pp. 14-15). I explored qualitatively and quantitatively how local law enforcement are using online tools (i.e., websites and social media) for public relations purposes aimed at the media and constituents.

Scholars have studied how government public relations practitioners use technology (i.e., websites and social media) as public administration and public relations tools to build and maintain relationships through different lenses and to varying degrees online (e.g., Avery & Graham, 2013; Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010; Graham, Avery, & Park, 2015; Heverin & Zach, 2010; Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Mergel, 2012; Mossberger et al.,
and how those tools (i.e., websites and social media) influence publics’ perceptions of organizations and organization-public relationships, including what tools and practices are more effective and how these tools influence publics’ trust and confidence in organizations (e.g., Agostino, 2013; Avery & Graham, 2013; Hong, 2013; Hofmann, Beverungen, Räckers, & Becker, 2013; Jo & Kim, 2003; Johnson & Kaye, 2015; Kent, 2013; Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013; Taylor & Kent, 2004; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014). Though some scholars and practitioners have lauded the public sector for using technology to increase transparency, engagement, and interactivity and to build trust (e.g., Mergel, 2012, 2013), others have been critical and argued the public sector has not fully recognized the interactive potential of various online platforms (e.g., Norris & Reddick, 2012), relying on one-way communication with little two-way symmetrical communication (e.g., Golbeck et al., 2010; Waters & Williams, 2011). For example, Golbeck et al. (2010) and Waters and Williams (2011) conducted content analyses of Twitter use in public sector contexts and indicated that most of the communication was one-way, informational communication. Specific to law enforcement, Heverin and Zach (2010) conducted a study of the Twitter use of large city police departments and found that most city police department Twitter activity was one-way and informational based on their coding approach.

While the aforementioned studies have provided a descriptive understanding of government communication practices online, some of them have done so either overtly or implicitly through the lens of Excellence Theory and the Four Models of Public Relations and largely by equating dialogue or dialogic potential exclusively with replies and direct communication when operationalizing coding schemes. Scholars have argued that such frameworks are inadequate, particularly for understanding public sector communication, because
of their lack of fluidity relative to real-world public relations practice, unaccounted for key environmental attributes, and their emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication as the normative gold standard (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Researchers (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Hether, 2014; Kim, Chun, Kwak, & Nam, 2014; Levenshus, 2010; Park & Reber, 2008; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Shin, Pang & Kim, 2015; Taylor & Kent, 2004) have utilized a dialogic communications framework to investigate the online public relations practices of corporations, healthcare organizations, environmental groups, advocacy groups, nonprofit organizations, political campaigns, and some government entities for building relationships online. This dissertation builds on our understanding of some of the online public relations practices of local law enforcement through interviews with practitioners and an analysis of website homepage and Twitter content using elements of Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic public relations principles and the frameworks of other dialogic public relations researchers. This helps identify the relationship building potential of local law enforcement on these platforms and gives local law enforcement professionals additional insight into how they can best use these tools in a public relations context. The findings ultimately expand the dialogic public relations and online relationship building literature in the insufficiently researched public sector context.

Overall, this study adds to the body of public sector communications work that supports the idea of heterogeneity in government communications practice. It fills a gap in the literature associated with the Government Communication Decision Wheel at the departmental level by examining challenges, opportunities, and environmental factors that influence the public relations practices of one particular type of understudied area (local law enforcement public relations). Additionally, this study – using qualitative and quantitative methods – details how
local law enforcement agencies are using websites and social media for public relations purposes, with dialogic public relations theory serving as a theoretical foundation for the quantitative content analysis of website homepage and Twitter content. The social and political contexts discussed herein make both areas of this research incredibly timely and salient. In addition to theoretically testing the Government Communication Decision Wheel and expanding our theoretical knowledge of online relationship building in the public sector, this dissertation also has practical implications for local law enforcement public relations practitioners. Practitioners will be able to better understand how their practices, challenges, and opportunities relate to their peers, how they relate to other areas of their local municipal government, and how they relate to other levels of government, while learning about theoretically grounded best practices associated with key public relations activities. Furthermore, by assessing some of the types of content provided online by local law enforcement agencies from a dialogic public relations perspective, I was able to illuminate best practices and shortcomings in terms of features and content online that can positively contribute to building relationships with the media and with constituents.

I drew from several areas of literature in order to provide background for the two key areas of inquiry detailed herein and to develop guiding research questions. These areas include scholarly and industry literature associated with government public relations, relationship management and dialogic public relations, and website and social media use in public relations.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Government Public Relations and the Government Communication Decision Wheel

In examining theory, practice, and research from public relations, political communication, and a variety of related fields, Strombäck and Kiousis (2011) have defined political public relations, including government public relations, as:

the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals (p. 8).

This definition differs from traditional definitions of public relations because of its incorporation of the element of politics and due to its recognition that organizations and individuals may inherently have missions or goals that are not completely aligned with each other. For comparative purposes, the commonly used Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) definition of public relations is: “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (Public Relations Society of America, 2015). Similarly, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) defined public relations as “the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p.1).

Scholars have lamented that the important areas of political and government public relations have been historically overlooked and understudied in academia given their societal and democratic importance and that the relatively scant research in these areas has failed to “bridge the gap between public relations, political communication, and political science theory and research” (Strombäck & Kiousis, 2011, p. vii). Though recent research has attempted to buck this trend, researchers have argued that the academy has traditionally neglected to address the unique nature of public sector communication relative to private sector communication, particularly in
public relations theory development and even though other fields (e.g., political science) have recognized the differences more explicitly for decades (Horsley & Barker, 2002; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Liu & Levenshus, 2010).

Excellence Theory championing two-way symmetrical communication and the Four Models of Public Relations (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig, 2001) were the most predominant normative framework and models for public relations research, including public sector communications research, and in defining the field for decades (Taylor & Kent, 2014). The Four Models of Public Relations include press agentry/publicity (one-way), public information (one-way), two-way asymmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication; scholars argue they represent the historical evolution of public relations practices and the types of public relations practice (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig, 2001).

Public relations as press agentry/publicity is characterized by attention-seeking, oftentimes without regard for the truth. In the public information model, recognized as a model often practiced in government and nonprofit associations, practitioners value accuracy, but generally function as “journalist[s]-in-residence” who provide only generally positive information (J. Grunig, 2001, p. 11). Practitioners utilizing the two-way asymmetrical model use research as a means to persuade their publics to act in accordance with organizational aims and desired outcomes. Finally, practitioners using the two-way symmetrical model incorporate research into their public relations programs in order to yield “mutual understanding” between organizations and publics (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22; J. Grunig, 2001). Table 1, derived from Grunig and Hunt (1984), provides additional details about the characteristics associated with and the relationships between the Four Models of Public Relations.
Table 1: Four Models of Public Relations (Derived from J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Press Agentry/ Publicity</th>
<th>Public Information</th>
<th>Two-Way Asymmetric</th>
<th>Two-Way Symmetric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose/Goal</td>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Scientific Persuasion</td>
<td>Mutual Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Communication</td>
<td>One way; complete truth not essential</td>
<td>One way; truth important</td>
<td>Two-way; imbalanced effects</td>
<td>Two-way; balanced effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Model</td>
<td>Source to receiver</td>
<td>Source to receiver</td>
<td>Source to receiver Receiver to source (Feedback)</td>
<td>Group to Group Group to Group (Feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Research</td>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Little; readability, readership</td>
<td>Formative; evaluative of attitudes</td>
<td>Formative; evaluative of understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Commonly Practiced</td>
<td>Sports, theatre, product promotion</td>
<td>Government, nonprofit associations, business</td>
<td>Competitive business; agencies</td>
<td>Regulated business, agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In their construction of Excellence Theory, which prescribed the most effective and ethical ways to practice public relations, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) identified two-way symmetrical public relations as a normative ideal, while arguing that in actuality Excellence in public relations practice included both the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models (Cancel et al., 1997; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig, 2001).

However, some scholars and practitioners have been critical of Excellence Theory and the use of the Four Models of Public Relations to understand public relations in practice because they believe the models do not reflect the reality (i.e., fluidity and complexity) of public relations practitioners’ work (e.g., Cancel et al., 1997). Scholars have developed new theoretical frameworks and models that challenge the assumptions and conventional wisdom of Excellence Theory and the use of the Four Models of Public Relations on the basis of their breadth, rigidity, and inability to sufficiently account for the many complexities and situational environmental
variables public relations practitioners report encountering on the job (Cancel et al., 1997; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Cancel et al. (1997) argued for a Contingency Theory of public relations that recognizes that for public relations practitioners how much advocacy or accommodation are ethical and appropriate “depend” on what variables are in play and what publics are in question. Cancel et al. (1997) identified 87 situational variables that can impact the levels of advocacy and accommodation practiced in public relations. These broadly include threats, industry environment, general political/social environmental/external culture, the external public, the issue in question, corporation characteristics, public relations department characteristics, characteristics of the dominant coalition, internal threats, individual characteristics, and relationship characteristics (Cancel et al., 1997, pp. 60-63).

Public sector communications researchers argued that these variables “focus on private sector considerations rather than the public sector” and lacked parsimony (Liu & Horsley, 2007). Drawing from the literature in public administration, political science, and political communication, Liu and Horsley (2007) identified “unique environmental characteristics” that impact the practice of government public relations and differentiate public sector communication from other areas of public relations, particularly corporate public relations (Liu & Horsley, 2007, p. 377). In reviewing and synthesizing relevant public sector and public administration literature, the researchers identified political considerations, the demands of serving the “public good,” legal matters, high degrees of media scrutiny, a lack of managerial and institutional support for government public relations, negative public attitudes toward the profession, relatively few professional development opportunities, and the system of federalism as critical and

Liu and Levenshus’ (2010) work supported Liu and Horsley’s (2007) assertions to a great extent, particularly in terms of the environmental variables of politics, legal concerns, public trust, and the role of federalism. However, there were some areas in which their findings diverged from Liu and Horsley’s (2007) predictions. For instance, Liu and Levenshus (2010) found that there was indeed a high demand for information from more engaged publics and deduced that it was more difficult to connect with “disinterested and diverse” publics (pp. 9-10). Furthermore, respondents said they did not view media scrutiny as detrimental; instead, they viewed it as an integral part of informing voters within the democratic process and said that the scrutiny helped keep them “on their toes” (Liu & Levenshus, 2010, pp. 9-10). Additionally, regarding relationships with journalists, respondents indicated that they prioritized ongoing and deliberate relationship building, so as to “encourage fair and balanced media coverage” (Liu & Levenshus, 2010, pp. 9-10).

Liu and Levenshus’ (2010) work revealed other environmental considerations for government communicators that had not been addressed: a lack of evaluative practices, varied responsibilities beyond public relations (including performing law enforcement duties), limited financial resources, and differences in the prioritization of internal versus external communication. Their interviews also shed light on possible differences between communicators at different levels of government and between communicators who worked for elected officials versus non-elected or appointed officials (Liu & Levenshus, 2010). They conducted quantitative inquiries exploring these differences associated with employer type and level of government
(Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus 2010; Liu et al., 2012) and quantitatively examined environmental differences between the private and public sectors (Liu et al., 2010).

Liu, Horsley, and Levenshus (2010) found significant differences between the public and private sectors that supported previous work on the Government Communication Decision Wheel. They reported: 1) government communicators were less satisfied with the budgetary support they received than corporate practitioners; 2) politics played more of a role and had more of an impact on public relations practices in the public sector than the private sector; 3) government public relations practitioners felt more pressure than those in the private sector to “meet their primary publics’ information needs”; 4) government communicators reported interacting more frequently with primary publics than their private sector counterparts; 5) government communicators reported interacting more frequently with outside organizations than their private sector counterparts; 6) government public relations practitioners reported more frequent media coverage than corporate practitioners; 7) government communicators reported more negative media coverage than corporate communicators; and 8) government communicators reported that legal considerations impacted their daily work more than their private sector counterparts (Liu et al., 2010, pp. 206-208). Political and legal considerations represented the two most distinct areas of difference and influence between public sector and corporate communications (Liu et al., 2010).

Horsley, Liu, and Levenshus (2010) focused on the environmental variable of level of government and explored similarities and differences associated with the government public relations practices of city, county, state, and federal practitioners. They found differences in some of the daily activities reported by the respondents (e.g., city communicators doing more work on web communications and federal communicators participating in fewer media relations
activities) and found differences associated with six of the environmental characteristics impacting government public relations among the four levels of government: the role of federalism, level of public interaction, politics, support from management, leadership opportunities, and advancement or professional development opportunities (Horsley et al., 2010, p. 284).

In an additional study designed to answer questions that arose out of Liu and Levenshus’ (2010) work, Liu, Levenshus, and Horsley (2012) focused on the variable of employer type (elected official versus non-elected official). Their findings revealed four significant differences in how the public sector environment impacted government communication based on employee type (i.e., elected officials versus non-elected officials). Specifically, the researchers found that government communicators working for elected officials reported that they were more likely to be impacted by legal considerations and more likely to be part of the management structure than government communicators who worked for non-elected officials (Liu et al., 2012). Government communicators who worked for non-elected officials reported being more likely to experience the impact of federalism and to experience more pressure from the public for information (Liu et al., 2012).

While Liu, Horsley, and Levenshus have contributed significantly to the body of government public relations research through their studies associated with the Government Communication Decision Wheel and governmental environmental characteristics detailed herein, some questions still remain. They have studied the public sector versus the private sector, investigated the variables of employer type and level of government within public sector communication, and identified four “microenvironments” (multilevel, intergovernmental, intragovernmental, and external) they have not exhaustively examined the intragovernmental
microenvironment, in which “only a single agency takes action” (Liu & Horsley, 2007) on an even more “micro” or departmental level. Furthermore, their survey and interview research have included a broad spectrum of government communicators between levels of government, but have not identified differences within a level of government (e.g., at the city level, differences between those practicing public relations in the parks department versus those practicing public relations in law enforcement). Horsley et al. (2010) and Liu et al. (2012) acknowledged some of the limitations of their research and indicated that future research could pursue “more nuanced differences” (Liu et al., 2012, p. 237), including explorations of “those working for government organizations with similar missions or tasks” (Horsley et al., 2010, p. 288) and they specifically cited public safety (i.e., law enforcement) as a potential area for inquiry. Meijer and Thaens (2013) argue that “the empirical domain of policing is distinct from the rest of the public sector but makes an interesting domain of study due to variety in citizens’ contacts and the diversity in forms of communication” (p. 343); however, researchers have not treated law enforcement public relations or departments within levels of government as unique in this instance and instead have grouped them into other broader areas of government communication largely based on the level of government.

The distinctiveness of law enforcement and the limitations and omissions of previous research provide the broad context for several research questions. Horsley et al. (2010) found that there were some similarities and differences between the practices and daily activities of government communications professionals at the federal, state, county, and city levels. For example, city practitioners reported doing more work on websites, while federal practitioners reported spending more time on strategic planning and less time on media relations than their peers at other levels of government. The researchers conducted this study prior to the rise of the
use of social media (including in the public sector) and did not investigate similarities and
differences within or relative to levels of government. Additionally, the researchers did not
attempt to explore practices and activities specific to niche segments (e.g., law enforcement) of
government communicators; therefore, I proposed the following research questions about local
law enforcement public relations practices:

RQ1: What are the public relations activities of local law enforcement?
RQ2: How are local law enforcement using websites for public relations purposes?
RQ3: How are local law enforcement using social media for public relations purposes?
RQ4: How do local law enforcement perceive their public relations activities as similar to
and different from other local governmental departments, local governmental agencies, or
municipalities overall?

Furthermore, researchers have identified that variables such as level of government (i.e.,
federal, state, county, city) and employer type (i.e., non-elected officials compared to elected
officials) are linked to unique environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities for
government communicators (Horsley et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2012). For example, federal
communicators revealed that they felt more political pressure and had less support from
leadership than other levels of government, while city government communicators said they felt
more pressure to provide the public with information and communicated with greater frequency
than their peers (Horsley et al., 2010). Government public relations professionals who worked
for elected officials reported that legal considerations played more of a role in their public
relations efforts than those working for non-elected officials, while those working for non-
elected officials reported that they experienced more pressure from the public for information
and felt more of an impact from federalism than their peers (Liu et al., 2012). Given what is
known about the effects of such variables, it is important to understand if other unexplored
variables impact the environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities specific to
niche segments (e.g., local law enforcement) of government communicators; therefore, I proposed the following research questions about local law enforcement public relations:

RQ5: What are the perceived environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement public relations efforts and attempts to build trust and legitimacy?

RQ6: What are the perceived environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement’s online public relations efforts and attempts to build trust and legitimacy?

**Organization-Public Relationships, Dialogue, and Dialogic Public Relations**

**Organization-Public Relationships**

Scholars have emphasized the need to examine public relations efforts relative to organization-public relationships, arguing that relationships and relationship management should be the focal points of public relations research, theory, and practice (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Citing Ledingham (2001) and Ledingham and Bruning (1998), Ledingham (2003) identified 14 axioms associated with organization-public relationships (see Appendix A1) and prescribed in a normative sense that focusing on organization-public relationships and effective relationship management practices could yield positive results for organizations:

Research demonstrates that programs designed to generate mutual understanding and benefit – the desired outcome of management of organization-public relationships – can contribute to attainment of an organization’s social, economic, and political goals when those programs focus on common wants, needs, and expectations of interacting publics (pp. 193-194).

As proponents of examining organization-public relationships, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) named “trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment” as key determinants of the behaviors and attitudes of publics relative to organizations, including loyalty behaviors and perceptions of satisfaction in a corporate context (Bruning & Ledingham, 1998, pp. 198;
In a public sector context, Ledingham (2001) found that personal relationships (trust, investment, interest) and community relationships (openness, support, improvement) were strongly related, while professional relationships (same interests, honesty, devotion of resources) were substantially related to citizens’ dispositions to stay in or leave a community (loyalty) (Ledingham, 2001). Also in a public sector context, Bruning et al.’s (2008) research supported the need for dialogic communication, including public “input, interaction, and participation” (p. 29) as a means to building and maintaining effective organization-public relationships and ensuring that publics attitudinally and behaviorally support the organization.

Hon and Grunig (1999) identified trust as one of six important long-term relationship outcomes or indicators for optimally functioning organization-public relationships, and scholars have examined trust extensively within an organization-public relationship context (Hong, 2013; Kang, 2014; Ki & Hon, 2007; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Ledingham, 2003; Yang, 2007; Yang et al., 2015). Researchers have identified access and openness as two key strategies for maintaining effective relationships with publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Shin et al., 2015). Furthermore, trust includes the dimensions of integrity, dependability, and competence (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

A director of public affairs in a county government described building trust in a public sector context as part of Hon and Grunig’s (1999) research:

‘The main strategy is open communication – by being open, in touch with your various publics, determining what their needs and wants are, how they can best be achieved, and how you can all work together toward common goals…That’s what you build trust on, that’s what you build relationships on, and that’s what you accomplish goals with’ (pp. 11-12).
Dialogue and Dialogic Public Relations

Researchers have argued that dialogic public relations is integral to developing successful, better quality organization-public relationships that can advance the goals of the organization and key publics (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Botan, 1997; Bruning et al., 2008; Huang & Yang, 2015; Kent, 2013; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Shin et al., 2015; Taylor & Kent, 2004, 2014; Yang et al., 2015). Recognizing the scholarly emphasis on organization-public relationships and relationship management and the frequency of the use of terms like dialogue and dialogic in relational public relations research and practice, Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) and Taylor and Kent (2004, 2014) advocated for and offered clarification of these terms. Kent and Taylor (2002) argued that dialogue cannot be considered a process; instead dialogue involves trust and should be viewed as a “product of ongoing communication and relationships” (p. 24). Through dialogue “organizations should engage with stakeholders and publics to make things happen, to help make better decisions, to keep citizens informed, and to strengthen organizations and society” (Taylor & Kent, 2014, pp. 387-388).

Furthermore, Taylor and Kent (2014) made important distinctions between the terms dialogue and dialogic. In addition to being a product, dialogue is an orientation that comes to fruition by utilizing dialogic principles, which are viewed as “procedural steps” to this end (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 390). In other words, dialogic steps or principles are situated temporally before and contribute to dialogue. These scholars identified five critical elements of the orientation of dialogue: mutuality (collaboration, spirit of mutual equality), propinquity (immediacy of presence, temporal flow, engagement), empathy (supportiveness, communal orientation, confirmation), risk (vulnerability, unanticipated consequences, recognition of strange
otherness), and commitment (genuineness, commitment to conversation, commitment to interpretation) (Kent & Taylor, 2002, pp. 24-30; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Notably, engagement is situated within dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Dialogue within the context of relationships requires interest and attraction, interaction, trust and risk, periodic maintenance, and periods of both rewarding and unsatisfactory interaction (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Taylor & Kent, 2004).

Kent and Taylor (1998) identified five dialogic features or principles as guidelines for practicing dialogic public relations and maximizing dialogic potential online in a mediated context, specifically via websites: the dialogic (feedback/interactivity) loop, the usefulness of information (for different publics), the generation of return visits, the intuitiveness/ease of interface, and the rule of conservation of visitors. The dialogic loop provides opportunities for publics to access the organization, while supplying a mechanism or mechanisms through which publics can ask questions and organizations can provide answers. The principle of usefulness of information requires organizations to provide information that is relevant to all publics; however, it also requires organizations to provide segmented information for specific key publics in an easily navigable and accessible manner. Furthermore, this principle requires organizations to provide information that allows publics to “engage an organization in dialogue as an informed partner” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 328). Kent and Taylor (1998) noted that “making information available to publics is the first step involved in developing relationships with them” (p. 328). The generation of return visits principle requires organizations to include features such as updated information, question and answer session opportunities, frequently asked questions sections, and other repeatedly evolving content, so as to make websites appealing enough to warrant users to return regularly. Ideally such features also incorporate interactivity. The fourth principle,
intuitiveness/ease of interface, relates to navigability and convenience; the researchers argue that websites should be “well organized and hierarchical,” providing relevant content “as quickly and efficiently as possible” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 329). Finally, the rule of conservation of visitors alludes to the need for organizations to ensure their websites do not provide opportunities for publics to leave their sites (e.g., through unnecessary hyperlinks not directly associated with the organization) and instead encourage visitors to remain on and return to their sites (Kent & Taylor, 1998). These scholars incorporated the dialogic principles into subsequent studies, including in a public sector Congressional context (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2004; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). Table 2 provides an overview of the conceptual descriptions of each of the five dialogic principles relative to websites (Kent & Taylor, 1998, pp. 326-331).

Table 2: Five Key Principles for Dialogic Public Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Dialogic Loop</strong></td>
<td>Also referred to as a “feedback loop” “Allows publics to query organizations and, more importantly, it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns and problems”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usefulness of Information</strong></td>
<td>Provide information “of general value to all publics” “Audience-specific information should be organized such that it is easy to find by interested publics” Information should allow publics to “engage an organization in dialogue as an informed partner”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation of Return Visits</strong></td>
<td>Utilize features that “make them attractive for repeat visits” Provide up-to-date information, features such as FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) Utilize interactive tools, strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intuitiveness/Ease of Interface</strong></td>
<td>Well-organized, hierarchical Avoid the use of “‘gratuitous’ special effects” Don’t pursue “ambiance” at the expense of valuable content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rule of Conservation of Visitors</strong></td>
<td>Include ‘essential links’ and not extraneous external links Encourage visitors to return to website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Website and Social Media Use in Public Relations

Notably, researchers have detailed important positive effects of online relationship building practices on the quality of organization-public relationships (Hong, 2013; Jo & Kim, 2003; Saffer et al., 2013). For example, in a corporate context, Saffer et al. (2013) found positive significant differences in the relationship outcomes (Hon & Grunig, 1999) of trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment when examining high-interactivity versus low-interactivity companies and their related experimental Twitter stimuli. In a public sector context, Hong (2013) found positive relationships between satisfactory website experiences and levels of trust in government at all levels of government (federal, state, and local), between the level of use of informational services (e.g., ‘looked up what services a government agency provides’ [p.350]) and levels of trust in state and local government, and between the use of government social media tools and levels of trust in state and local government. In an international (Malaysian) public sector context, Warren, Sulaiman, and Jaafar (2014) examined whether Facebook plays a role in “shaping civic engagement initiatives to build trust among people and increase trust in their institutions, particularly the government, police and justice systems” (p. 291). These scholars found that using Facebook had a significant impact on trust toward institutions, including government and police and suggested social media could serve as a means for “closing the public-police disengagement gap” (Warren et al., p. 291).

In addition to recognizing the relationship building and relationship management opportunities associated with websites (Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent et al., 2003; Jo & Kim, 2003; Park & Reber, 2008; Taylor & Kent, 2004; Taylor et al., 2001; Shin et al., 2015), scholars have argued that social media in a mediated online context can be useful for cultivating, building, and maintaining organization-public relationships (Agostino, 2013;
Numerous studies on websites and social media have featured organizations outside of the public sector. For example, Taylor et al. (2001) and Kent et al. (2003) used the dialogic principles framework for websites (Kent & Taylor, 1998) to assess the dialogic features and potential or capacity of general environmental activists and watchdog groups (Kent et al., 2003) and activist organizations generally (Taylor et al., 2001). Taylor et al. (2001) found that while activist organizations were contributing to relationship building online by maximizing the dialogic potential of their websites in terms of the ease of interface, the usefulness of information to volunteer publics, and the conservation of visitors, these organizations were not maximizing their dialogic potential relative to the principles of the dialogic loop, the generation of return visits, and the usefulness of information to media publics. In comparing membership environmental activist organization to watchdog organizations, Kent et al. (2003) found that the membership organizations outperformed watchdog organizations in terms of maximizing dialogic potential. Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) and Bortree and Seltzer (2009) researched the dialogic potential of blogs and Facebook profiles respectively for environmental advocacy groups and individuals. Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) found that blogs included the dialogic public relations principles to a greater extent than websites (particularly conservation of visitors and ease of interface) and were more responsive to outside inquiries. Bortree and Seltzer (2009) noted that similar to findings about website and blog usage of environmental advocacy groups and individuals, such groups were not maximizing opportunities to build relationships online due
to insufficient implementation of some of the dialogic principles, particularly those associated with interactivity (e.g., the dialogic loop).

In a corporate context, Park and Reber (2008) found that major Fortune 500 companies were utilizing many dialogic features and generally maximizing their dialogic capacity on their websites. In addition to examining the features and their absence or presence, these researchers paired the dialogic features with the relationship dimensions of control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, openness, exchange relationships, communal relationships, and intimacy. The researchers noted that there was some room for improvement among these corporate sites relative to the conservation of visitors and the generation of return visits, which they associated with trust, commitment, and exchange relationships (Park & Reber, 2008). Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) examined the Twitter profiles and tweets of Fortune 500 corporations, assessing which dialogic features (with the exception of ease of interface) these companies were using. The researchers found these companies were using features associated with the dialogic loop with the greatest frequency and features associated with usefulness of information with the least frequency, representing a departure from some previous studies that found less employment of the “dialogic cluster” of features (generation of return visits, dialogic loop) and more employment of the “technical and design cluster” of features (usefulness of information, ease of use, conservation of visitors) associated with the dialogic principles (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337; Taylor et al., 2001).

Kang and Norton (2006), Waters and Jamal (2011), and Lovejoy et al. (2012) examined online relationship building in nonprofit settings. Kang and Norton’s (2006) website analysis incorporated elements of the two-way symmetrical communication and the dialogic principles, finding that college university websites were successful in the technical aspects of the dialogic
principles (e.g., intuitiveness/ease of interface); however, they did not fully optimize the principles of usefulness of information or the dialogic loop. Waters and Jamal (2011) utilized the Four Models of Public Relations as a framework to code nonprofit Twitter content. Their findings revealed that the nonprofit organizations included in their study employed one-way communication online on this platform “as a means of sharing information instead of relationship building” (Waters & Jamal, 2011, p. 323). Similarly, Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton (2012) found that nonprofit organizations were employing one-way communication via Twitter, with little interactivity, although these scholars did not use the Four Models of Public Relations within their coding scheme. A more recent study by Kim, Chun, Kwak, and Nam (2014) investigated the use of the dialogic principles by environmental nonprofit organizations across three platforms – organizational websites, Facebook, and Twitter. The researchers found that environmental nonprofits were actually using websites dialogically (including all five principles) to a greater extent than Facebook or Twitter; however, their Facebook presences incorporated more features associated with the dialogic loop than their websites or Twitter accounts (Kim et al., 2014).

Specific to the public sector, public administration and public relations scholars have approached studying government’s online footprint in different ways. For example, Mergel (2012, 2013) crafted a framework that examines transparency, participation, and collaboration, with tactics that are one-way push, two-way pull, or networking respectively. Scholars like Mossberger et al. (2013) found exponential increases in social media use by governments between 2009 and 2011 and through case studies observed that Mergel’s (2012, 2013) push strategies were the most prevalent in practice, though there were some differences in practices between different municipal departments and geographic locations. Oliveira and Welch (2013)
found that, to varying degrees, local government agencies use social media for information dissemination, to solicit and receive feedback related to government service provision, for internal employee collaboration, and to provide a mechanism for participation. The researchers found that several predictors – including specific work characteristics – influenced the types of social media use in government (Oliveira & Welch, 2013). Others (e.g., Davis III, Alves, & Sklansky, 2014; Kavanaugh et al., 2012) have used case studies to examine the role of online government communication before, during, and after crises as a means to identify best practices and shortcomings in public administration practice. Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers (2010) and Waters and Williams (2011) examined the types of communication government public relations practitioners (Congress and various government agencies respectively) were using via Twitter, finding the most evidence of one-way communication for information dissemination and promotion within the context of the Four Models of Public Relations and little evidence for two-way asymmetrical communication or two-way symmetrical communication.

Numerous studies have examined website and/or social media use for public relations and online relationship building purposes using either an Excellence Theory or a dialogic communication framework (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Kang & Norton, 2006; Park & Reber, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Shin et al., 2015; Waters & Jamal, 2011); however, these studies have involved the corporate sector, the nonprofit sector, activists, and advocacy groups. Few studies (e.g., Taylor & Kent, 2004) have used a dialogic public relations framework to assess government-public relationship building potential online; however, given the scholarly criticisms of using Excellence Theory or the Four Models of Public Relations as a framework for doing so, this framework appears more appropriate and applicable for this and future research.
Scholarly and Law Enforcement Industry Data on the Use of Social Media

Specific to law enforcement’s use of social media, law enforcement personnel have reported in industry data that over time social media have become significant and “very valuable” tools for strategic communication activities such as emergency/disaster notifications, information dissemination, and community outreach/public relations (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2014). Since 2010, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Center for Social Media has conducted an annual electronic survey of its members on law enforcement’s use of social media. The IACP Center for Social Media was founded in 2010 “in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, [and the] U.S. Department of Justice” in order to “build the capacity of law enforcement to use social media to prevent and solve crimes, strengthen police-community relations, and enhance services” (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2015). The results of the IACP’s most recent available law enforcement survey (2015) revealed that 76.3 percent of respondents use social media for soliciting tips on crime, 84.3 percent of respondents use social media for notifying the public of crime problems, 79.9 percent of respondents use social media for providing emergency or disaster-related information, 79.2 percent of respondents use social media for crime prevention activities, 83.4 percent of respondents use social media for community outreach/citizen engagement, 82.5 percent of respondents use social media for public relations/reputation management, and 61.9 percent use social media for recruitment purposes (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2015).

Notably, 85.5 percent of respondents indicated social media had helped their agencies solve crimes, while 83.5 percent of respondents reported that they believed social media had
improved police/community relations in their community (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2015). In 2010, the year the survey was first conducted, just 45.3 percent of respondents indicated social media had helped their agencies solve crimes, while just 45 percent of respondents reported that social media improved police/community relations (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2010).

The 2015 survey was conducted in the fall of that year and was sent via email to IACP members across the United States, with 553 law enforcement agencies from 44 states responding (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2015; B. Gorban, personal communication, 2015). Approximately 96.4 percent of those surveyed indicated they used social media within their agency and 86.6 percent (n=479) of respondents represented local municipal police departments. Respondents represented a range of agency sizes, from very small agencies (1-5 full-time sworn personnel) to very large agencies (1,000+ full-time sworn personnel), and also represented a range of populations, from under 2,500 people to more than 500,000 people. Law enforcement personnel identified Facebook (94.2 percent) and Twitter (71.2 percent) as the most commonly utilized social media tools. No other social tools were identified as being used by a majority of respondents, though the survey respondents did indicate using a variety of other tools, such as apps, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn, Flickr, Vimeo, Nixle, and Nextdoor. Respondents indicated that there are a variety of personnel responsible for managing social media accounts day-to-day (selecting all that applied), with 47.0 percent of respondents indicating that a public information officer was responsible, 32.6 percent indicating command staff were responsible, 28.1 percent indicating chief executives were responsible, and 25.9 percent indicating civilian employees were responsible. Less than 20 percent of respondents identified crime prevention officers, community policing officers,
officers, or others as being responsible for social media management and oversight (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2015). These figures are important to consider because those conducting public relations on behalf of law enforcement online may not have a public relations background, training, or skills and may have other job demands associated with public safety that are more of a priority than their public relations-related duties.

While we have this industry self-reported data, there is little empirical evidence to support what practitioners are reporting in terms of their actual practices. Though a majority of respondents reported that social media had helped “improve police/community relations,” their practices have not been examined through a scholarly public relations lens (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2015).

Some public administration scholars have taken a case study approach to examining law enforcement public relations online, particularly for comparative purposes (Meijer & Thaens, 2013) and to assess crisis and emergency management practices (Coleman, 2013; Chavez, Repas, & Stefaniak, 2010; Davis III et al., 2014). For example, Meijer and Thaens (2013) compared the social media use of police departments in Boston, Massachusetts, Toronto, Canada, and Washington, D.C. and found that they employed three different social media strategies (i.e., ‘push,’ ‘networking,’ and ‘push and pull’ strategies in public administration terms [p. 343]). In a crisis management context, the Harvard Kennedy School Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management lauded the Boston Police Department (BPD) for its social media information and engagement efforts during and after the Boston Marathon bombing, arguing the BPD “demonstrated the level of trust and interaction that a department and community can attain online” and effectively using social media to “keep the public informed about the status of the investigation, to calm nerves and request assistance, to correct mistaken information reported by
the press, and to ask for public restraint in tweeting information from police scanners” (Davis et al., 2014, p.1). Given the aforementioned industry data about how law enforcement are using online tools and that they perceive those tools as positively impacting police-community relationships, I posed the following research questions:

RQ7: How do local law enforcement perceive online tools (websites and social media) are impacting local law enforcement-community relationships?
RQ8: How do local law enforcement perceive online tools (websites and social media) are impacting local law enforcement-media relationships?

From a quantitative perspective, Heverin and Zach (2010) conducted a content analysis of law enforcement’s use of Twitter; however, this study did not use a clear theoretical public relations framework. Instead, the researchers did open coding to identify the categories of 10 types of tweets (such as crime/incident information, event information, reply/mention, retweet) (Heverin & Zach, 2010). Additionally, this study was conducted largely before law enforcement industry data (e.g., data from the IACP Center for Social Media) reported more of a widespread use of and success relative to online tools (Heverin & Zach, 2010). These scholars recognized some limitations to their work and called for future research in this area (Heverin & Zach, 2010;). Specifically, Heverin and Zach (2010) only examined Twitter content from police departments in the largest cities – those of more than 300,000 people.

Given that scholars have shown that the public sector presents unique environmental characteristics and challenges to optimal public relations practice, it is important for scholars and practitioners alike to better understand ways to combat any obstacles and maximize new opportunities for building relationships and establishing trust and legitimacy as they arise. As discussed herein, scholars have argued that online tools (e.g., websites and social media) that maximize their dialogic potential can play important roles relative to relationship building, relationship management, and trust, including in a public sector context. Furthermore, industry
data reveal that law enforcement report using online tools for information dissemination, community outreach/citizen engagement, and public relations/reputation management. Over time, law enforcement have reported better outcomes associated with their use of social media, with 45 percent of respondents in the IACP survey indicating that “social media improved police/community relations” in 2010 and 83.5 percent reporting this outcome in 2015 (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2010, 2015).

In order to better understand local law enforcement’s use of websites and Twitter in a scholarly public relations context, I explored online content from law enforcement agencies in cities of 50,000 people or more, examining any content differences between the municipality sizes associated with the local law enforcement agencies. Mossberger et al. (2013), citing research from Moon (2002) and Scott (2006), examined larger cities because they were perceived to be at the “forefront in the adoption of e-government innovations” (Mossberger et al., 2013, p. 351). Additionally, citing Yang and Kathe (2005), Mossberger et al. pursued research that examined differences associated with municipality size because of “some evidence that they [larger municipalities] are most likely to employ strategies for civic engagement” (Mossberger et al., 2013, p. 351). I proposed the following relevant research questions:

- **RQ9a**: What dialogic principles are local law enforcement using in their online website public relations practices?
- **RQ9b**: Do local law enforcement website practices differ by municipality size?
- **RQ10a**: What dialogic principles are local law enforcement using in their Twitter public relations practices?
- **RQ10b**: Do local law enforcement Twitter practices differ by municipality size?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methods Introduction

This mixed-method dissertation incorporates two research methods: in-depth interviews and content analysis. In-depth interviews with local law enforcement leadership and public relations practitioners (from geographically diverse cities with populations of 50,000 or more) were used to investigate the practices and environmental characteristics associated with local law enforcement public relations, including those associated with websites and social media. Quantitative content analysis was used to explore the dialogic public relations principles used by and potential of local law enforcement via websites and Twitter.

In-depth interviews allow researchers to pursue areas of research that have not previously been explored in great detail without the rigidity or standardization associated with surveys, a quantitative research method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Weiss, 1994). Qualitative interviews provide an opportunity for researchers to participate in open-ended conversations and come away from interactions with interview subjects with a more raw, nuanced, and descriptive picture of subjects’ experiences, perceptions, and attitudes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Weiss, 1994).

In this case, I conducted in-depth interviews in a semi-structured way to explore the activities, challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics associated with local law enforcement public relations practices broadly, guided by the context of established theory, but exploring an under-researched and unique segment of government (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). In-depth interviews were also used to explore the challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics associated with local law enforcement public relations practices online and to ascertain local law enforcement’s perceptions of how – if at all – online tools (i.e., websites and social media) help (or hinder) their ability to minimize any challenges they face, build and
maintain relationships with key publics (i.e., constituents and the media), and improve levels of trust and legitimacy between local law enforcement and key publics.

Content analysis is a quantitative method frequently utilized in mass communication research for descriptive and inferential purposes (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). In this case, I used content analysis to complement the in-depth interviews with local law enforcement officials, specifically to assess the dialogic features or principles utilized in and the dialogic potential of some of local law enforcement’s online (i.e., websites and Twitter) public relations efforts.

**Qualitative Interviews of Local Law Enforcement Personnel**

**Rationale**

In-depth interviews are one qualitative research method used to gain insight into the past, understand individuals’ experiences and their perceptions related to those experiences, and collect information about what a researcher cannot observe directly himself or herself (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Weiss, 1994). Weiss (1994) notes that in-depth interviews are used for “developing detailed descriptions,” “describing processes,” “learning how events are interpreted,” and often for “identifying variables and framing hypotheses for quantitative research” (Weiss, 1994, pp. 9-11), while Lindlof & Taylor (1994) note this qualitative approach can be used to “verify, validate, or comment on information obtained from other sources” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 175). This method is often used to gather information associated with occupational research questions (Weiss, 1994). In this case, in-depth interviews were appropriate given that I was examining the occupational activities and practical challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics associated with local law enforcement public relations and, in some ways, I modeled my interviews after those conducted by Liu and Horsley (2007).
**Sampling and Participants**

**Sampling.** I utilized the common qualitative technique of purposive non-probability sampling to recruit interview participants, with the goals of incorporating geographic diversity, municipality size diversity, and agency size diversity into the final sample of participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Liu & Horsley, 2007).

Using 2014 United States Census Bureau data (United States Census Bureau, 2014) on municipalities with populations of more than 50,000 people as a starting point, I attempted to include geographically or regionally diverse (i.e., Northeast, South, Midwest, and West) participants from municipalities between 50,000 and 99,999 people (of 454 total), municipalities between 100,000 and 199,999 people (of 179 total), municipalities between 200,000 and 499,999 people (of 82 total), and municipalities of 500,000 people or more (of 34 total). This created four population increments and the United States Census Bureau recognizes the four aforementioned regions; therefore, in selecting local law enforcement agencies to contact for participation, I identified prospective agencies by considering both of these factors.

I also attempted to contact participants from different states to further ensure geographic diversity. Table 3, adapted from the United States Census Bureau’s website, provides the United States Census Bureau’s breakdown of which states are considered to be part of each geographic region.
Table 3: United States Census Bureau Regions, 2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region (Number of States)</th>
<th>States Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midwest (12)</td>
<td>Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South (16)</td>
<td>Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Derived from http://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf

Law enforcement industry data show that a variety of law enforcement personnel are responsible for law enforcement public relations activities, including administering social media accounts (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2013, 2014, 2015). Such personnel often include public information officers, crime prevention officers, community policing officers, law enforcement chief executives, command staff, civilian employees, officers, and other employees (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2013, 2014, 2015). With this in mind, I recruited participants who identified themselves as overseeing or conducting public relations activities. After identifying prospective agencies based on the aforementioned geographic and municipality size factors, I perused their websites for the email contact information of members of their leadership or command staff (e.g., Chief of Police, Deputy Chief, Deputy Commissioner) and/or anyone who appeared to conduct public relations activities (e.g., Public Information Officer, Assistant Public Information Officer, Director of Public Affairs). In some cases, there were no specific personnel listed and in those cases, I utilized more generic email addresses for my outreach. In all cases, I highlighted my
unique perspective and previous experience in government public relations as a press secretary in city government, including my working relationship with local law enforcement public information officials in that capacity. I did this as one way to establish legitimacy and avoid being denied an interview; Weiss (1994) notes that police personnel are traditionally among the occupational groups that can be difficult to persuade to participate in interviews. Appendix A2 provides an email script that I used for soliciting participation in this study. Though this email solicitation was standardized, I also personalized my outreach to each agency. I sent one email to each agency, often addressing correspondence to multiple personnel, depending on what was readily available on an agency’s website.

Participants. I solicited participation from 48 total local law enforcement agencies. The final interview sample included 20 participants, representing 16 agencies from 16 different states. Four agencies asked to include two participants in the study because of participants’ different areas of knowledge, experience, and expertise in public relations-related activities. For example, one agency in the South included one participant who mainly handled media relations and another participant who primarily handled social media management. The final sample included participants from seven agencies in the South, three agencies in the Midwest, four agencies in the Northeast, and two agencies in the West, as defined in Table 3. Three local law enforcement agencies serve municipalities with populations of 500,000 people or more, four agencies serve municipalities of 200,000-499,999 people, seven agencies serve municipalities of 100,000-199,999 people, and two agencies serve 50,000-99,999 people. All of the local law enforcement agencies, with the exception of one Midwest agency, utilized at least one social media platform (e.g., Facebook or Twitter).
The gender breakdown of the participants was 17 males and three females. This included 15 sworn personnel and five civilian personnel. The sworn personnel included four Lieutenants, three Captains, two Chiefs of Police, two Deputy Chiefs of Police, two Sergeants, one Assistant Chief, and one Senior Police Officer. The sworn personnel sometimes had other specific titles associated with public relations duties. These included titles such as Commander, Public Information Officer, Public Affairs Officer, and Social Media Coordinator. The civilian personnel held titles such as Public Information Officer, Media Producer, Director of Public Affairs, and Director of Communication and Media Relations.

Civilian and sworn personnel had diverse educational and training backgrounds in advance of assuming their current roles. For example, among the sworn participants, one participant had spent time working in local law enforcement in internal affairs, another had spent time working in local law enforcement overseeing criminal investigations, and another had spent time in local law enforcement working in a special victims unit. Among the civilian personnel, some of the participants reported having formal training and experience in public relations outside of law enforcement, while others had professional backgrounds in journalism. The participants also had a range of experience in terms of time working in local law enforcement, with one participant having just two years of experience and another participant having about 35 years of experience. The participants who had a specific public relations role also had a range of experience in terms of their time working in that role, with one participant serving just six months and others having more than 20 years working in a public relations capacity in local law enforcement.

Participants also reported different formal public relations structures. For example, one participant reported that his agency does not have a formal public relations staff member or
specific public relations personnel (e.g., a Public Information Officer); instead, the leadership or command staff and others throughout the ranks assume various public relations responsibilities (e.g., media relations, social media management) in addition to their other daily law enforcement tasks and responsibilities. Others reported being formally responsible for public relations activities and having significant additional responsibilities. For example, one participant said he was responsible for budgetary oversight and other administrative responsibilities, while another participant reported being responsible for overseeing investigations (e.g., homicides, fraud, etc.) in addition to his formal public relations role. Given the diverse municipality sizes and department sizes included in this research, participants also reported having different numbers of personnel formally conducting public relations activities. As discussed, one agency had no formal public relations personnel, while one participant reported that his agency had more than 10 personnel handling public information and public records requests.

**Interviews**

In February and March 2016, I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 local law enforcement leadership and public relations personnel, representing 16 agencies. The interviews were conducted by phone, via Skype, and in person. Prior to conducting these interviews, I received Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval (IRB# E9580) for my application for exemption from institutional oversight for this study, including a waiver of signed consent, with the exception of any in-person interviews. I guaranteed participants that they would only be identified by their job title and geographic area in this research and also assigned each participant a participant number and each agency an agency number; that information is used throughout this research to describe participants. The IRB approval form for this study and the informed consent script utilized for this study can be found in Appendices A3
and A4. All participants received a hard copy (if the interview was conducted in person) and/or an electronic copy of the informed consent script (via email if the interview was conducted by phone or Skype).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, yielding 774 minutes of interview recordings and 360 double-spaced pages of interview transcripts. Agency interviews were between approximately 31 minutes and 71 minutes long. The average interview time for each local law enforcement agency was approximately 48 minutes.

I began the interviews by asking the participants basic questions about their overall history with their departments and their history prior to joining the department. I also asked about the structures of their departments, their tenure working in a public relations capacity, and the number of people working in a public relations capacity at their local law enforcement agency.

In order to gather information associated with RQs 1-8, I used a variety of guiding interview questions in my discussions with the participants, adding follow-up questions as appropriate. The questions tapped into their public relations activities; their perceptions about their public relations activities relative to other local departments, agencies, and municipalities overall; their biggest barriers and opportunities for building trust and legitimacy with the media; their biggest barriers and opportunities for building trust and legitimacy with constituents; the factors that influence their public relations activities; their website and social media practices; barriers and opportunities associated with their online communication platforms; and whether their websites and social media have helped them solve problems and build relationships with the media and constituents. Appendix A5 includes the guiding interview questions utilized in this study.
Analysis

In order to analyze the data collected from the participants in this study, I employed categorization, open coding, and interpretation techniques (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Weiss, 1994). Categories encompass broader, general themes and codes are “links” to those categories that represent more specific participant responses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Weiss, 1994, p. 154). In this research, my categories and codes were developed from existing theory and research and from “topics” that emerged from the participant interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 247).

Using each research question (RQ1-RQ8) as a framework, I examined the hard copies of the transcripts, making notes in the margins and highlighting throughout the transcripts to identify common categories, codes, and rich supporting descriptive quotes. I used Excel spreadsheets to organize my data for each research question by identifying categories and labeling them at the top of column of each sheet, providing spaces for each agency on the side of each sheet in rows, and then filling in relevant information and quotes that applied to each category by agency. I kept color-coded hard copy files of the transcripts with key quotes and/or examples that illustrated the themes, in addition to keeping some handwritten notes during this process to organize and outline key points.

When necessary, I redacted overtly identifying information from participant quotes to report findings and maintain my commitment to participants. I also cut some segments of quotes (indicated by ellipses) that were not relevant to the research questions or themes being discussed or included my side of our exchanges. I also made slight edits to the transcripts to eliminate extraneous words or minor grammatical errors, but without compromising participants’ intended meanings.
Content Analysis

Rationale

Quantitative content analysis includes the “systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption” (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 25). I used this method to evaluate the dialogic public relations principles and features utilized by local law enforcement and the dialogic potential of law enforcement public relations website homepages and social media (i.e., Twitter profiles and tweets), as discussed in RQs 9-10:

- RQ9a: What dialogic principles are local law enforcement using in their online website public relations practices?
- RQ9b: Do local law enforcement website practices differ by municipality size?
- RQ10a: What dialogic principles are local law enforcement using in their Twitter public relations practices?
- RQ10b: Do local law enforcement Twitter practices differ by municipality size?

As Taylor and Kent (2014) noted, it is important to distinguish between dialogic potential and dialogue as some scholars have incorrectly equated the two or viewed dialogue as a process (i.e., two-way communication) supported by social media instead of as an orientation. In other words, dialogic features (e.g., the dialogic loop) can be one component that ultimately helps yield dialogue, but dialogic features are not synonymous with dialogue and should not be treated as such methodologically.

I modeled many of the content analysis measures and procedures after previous dialogic public relations studies that have incorporated elements of or derived elements from Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic principles (see Table 2 in Chapter 2) into their measurement schemes and coding procedures.
Sampling

In order to determine which local law enforcement agencies to examine online for the content analysis portion of this study, I began the sampling process by using the 2014 Census Data (United States Census Bureau, 2014) on 749 municipalities of more than 50,000 people. I randomly selected 10 percent of the municipalities (and indirectly their associated local law enforcement agencies) from each of the four aforementioned population increments (50,000-99,999 people, 100,000-199,999 people, 200,000-499,999 people, and 500,000 or more people) to create a stratified proportionate sample (n=77 [rounding up]) for inclusion in this study.

I used a simple random sampling technique within each strata by employing a random integer set number generator from www.random.org to select the cases included in this analysis (Riffe et al., 2005). I determined the most local law enforcement agency available by Googling the name of the municipality and words like “police,” “sheriff,” and “law enforcement,” researching the agencies present, and selecting the most local agency for study. For example, while some municipalities may have a local municipal police agency (e.g., a city police department) and a local sheriff’s agency (e.g., at the county level that practices law enforcement in multiple municipalities), I chose the most local municipal agency. In cases where there was not a city level law enforcement agency, I used the broader municipal agency.

Table 4 details how I derived the local law enforcement agency sample proportionally from each population increment.
### Table 4: Content Analysis Sampling by Population Increments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Increment</th>
<th>Number of Cities</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>Number of Cities in the Sample*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-499,999</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-199,999</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>749</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The number of the cities in the sample was rounded up in each population increment.

When determining which agencies to include in the assessment of online public relations efforts, I included local law enforcement agencies that had at least one of the platforms (i.e., website, Twitter) available for analysis. All 77 local law enforcement agencies had a website and 62 had a Twitter account based on my research. I kept the agencies without organizational Twitter accounts in the final sample for Twitter profiles (n=77). I coded (0-No/Absent or NA/Not Applicable) for instances in which the platform did not exist for that law enforcement agency when coding the features associated with the Twitter profiles to represent the absence of those features being available for those local law enforcement agencies and their publics.

**Units of Analysis**

**Website Homepages.** While some governmental website studies have examined entire governmental websites (e.g., Mossberger et al., 2013), I narrowed the focus of this analysis to website homepages in an effort to make the coding process more manageable, reliable, and to more clearly define the content that should be included in analysis (see Appendix A6 for the full
coding instructions for this unit of analysis). Previous research supports the approach of using
the website homepage as the unit of analysis as opposed to the entire website. Esrock and
Leichty (2000) discussed the “importance of this initial information gateway” for public relations
(p. 233).

In order to construct the website homepages (n=77) sample, I Googled each local law
enforcement agency and looked for the local law enforcement agency’s website or websites
within the results. Some local law enforcement agencies had multiple websites (e.g., a main
departmental website associated with a municipality and a website for recruitment; a standalone
departmental website and a main departmental website associated with a municipality);
therefore, I coded the website that appeared to have the most information and that appeared to be
for the broadest audience. The website homepages were carefully coded “live” – as opposed to
from screenshots – between March and June 2016, due to the different features and
functionalities of websites and the volume of content which could be overlooked or missed if
coded as a screenshot.

**Twitter Profiles.** In order to collect the Twitter profiles sample, I determined which local
law enforcement agencies had Twitter profiles by looking at the local law enforcement agency’s
website(s) to see which account or accounts were promoted there (if any). I also searched for an
available account or accounts within Twitter, and then determined which account appeared to be
the main organizational account based on characteristics like descriptions provided in the profile,
level of activity, and relative number of followers. This yielded 62 local law enforcement
agencies with Twitter profiles. I collected screenshots of the Twitter profiles in November 2015.
I kept the local law enforcement agencies without an organizational Twitter account in the final
sample for Twitter profiles (n=77) and coded (0-No/Absent or NA/Not Applicable) for instances
in which the platform did not exist for that law enforcement agency when coding the features associated with the Twitter profiles.

**Tweets.** Using the organizational Twitter accounts I identified when sampling Twitter profiles and with the assistance of Crimson Hexagon, I collected all of the tweets from the three month period of August 15, 2015-November 15, 2015 for those accounts. This yielded 12,267 tweets after some duplicates were removed. Then, proportionally by population increment (50,000-99,999 people, 100,000-199,999 people, 200,000-499,999 people, and 500,000 or more people), I randomly sampled 20 percent (n=2,453) of those tweets using a random integer set number generator from www.random.org. I later reduced that sample to a more manageable, yet still robust, 10 percent final sample (n=1,227) by including every other case in this analysis.

**Coding Procedures and Measures**

The coding schemes for each of the three units of analysis reflect the extant literature on the dialogic public relations principles discussed herein, where applicable: usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness/ease of interface, rule of conservation of visitors, and the dialogic loop (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014; Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Taylor & Kent, 2004; Taylor et al., 2001). The coding schemes were also derived from the previous Twitter content analysis work of Heverin and Zach (2010). The codebooks for each unit of analysis (available in Appendices A6-A8) also asked coders to collect basic information about those units of analysis.

In order to understand how I dichotomously coded for the presence (1) or absence (0) of dialogic features (unless otherwise noted) associated with the dialogic principles, it is important to review their related conceptual and operational definitions. While Kent and Taylor’s (1998)
principles are still applicable, some of the principles had to be modified beyond their scope for websites and applied to a social networking context given that I examined website homepages as well as Twitter profiles and tweets.

**Intuitiveness/Ease of Interface (For Website Homepages Only).** The intuitiveness/ease of interface principle relative to website homepages stipulates in simple terms that “users should be able to easily navigate the site” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). Following a similar methodological choice as Rybalko and Seltzer (2010), the measurement of intuitiveness/ease of interface was only examined for the website homepage unit of analysis because the local law enforcement and their municipalities have more autonomy as to what their website interface looks like, includes, and how it functions, while Twitter provides users with relatively uniform interface templates. Dialogic features that reflect the intuitiveness/ease of interface of a website include a site map (coded as site map/index/menu/navigation tool), a search engine (coded search function), and major links to the rest of the website (Kent et al., 2003; Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2004). I also coded for if the website homepage was available in multiple languages, which may make the site easier to navigate for those who are not fluent in English. Appendix A6 provides the full codebook for this unit of analysis and the operationalization of these features.

**Conservation of Visitors (For Website Homepages and Twitter Profiles).** The conservation of visitors principle relative to website homepages reflects that “users should be encouraged to stay on the site” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). Dialogic features that represent the conservation of visitors principles of a website include important information about the organization (coded organizational description/about, organizational history, organizational logo/seal, contact phone number, contact email, and geographic address), a short page loading
time (of less than 4 seconds) (coded page loading time), an indication of the last date and time the site was updated (Kent et al., 2003; Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2004; Taylor et al., 2001); the absence of outside links (coded outside links) (Madichie & Hinson, 2014); and links or buttons to organizational social networking sites (Kim et al., 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

As Shin, Pang, and Kim (2015) note, there are some online principles and features that can best be assessed by looking at the Twitter profile as the unit of analysis as opposed to looking at tweets as the unit of analysis. The principle of the conservation of visitors is one such principle; therefore, this principle was explored at the Twitter profile level in this inquiry relative to social media. Adapting the website definition of this principle to social media, I operationalized the conservation of visitors principle in this context as encouraging users to stay connected to the organization online, including through other organizational social media and websites (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) and providing important general information (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Shin et al., 2015). Among the dialogic features that fit this principle on social media are a recent update (specifically within 24 hours), a link to the organizational website, and link(s) to other organizational social media (Kim et al., 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Additional dialogic features that fit this conservation of visitors principle on social media are an organizational description, organizational history, organizational logo/seal, a contact phone number, a contact email, and an address (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Shin et al., 2015).

Appendices A6 and A7 provide the full codebooks and operational definitions of these features for these units of analysis.

Usefulness of Information (For Website Homepages and Tweets). The usefulness of information principle relative to website homepages specifies that “users should find information
that is specifically tailored to their needs” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). This definition can be applied to the social media context explored here as well. Numerous public relations studies employing the dialogic principles as a framework have broken the usefulness of information principle into two or more categories to account for different publics and to meet the tailoring criterion incorporated into the definition (e.g., Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Taylor & Kent, 2002; Taylor et al., 2001). In these units of analysis of the local law enforcement website homepages and Twitter tweets, the publics are the media and citizens/constituents (Lee, 2012).

Features that fit the usefulness of information principle for media publics (note: some features may be considered useful for both media and citizen/constituent publics) on local law enforcement website homepages include news/press releases and/or media room (coded news or media/press room/section) (Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010); media contact information and information about organizational/agency management (coded information about organizational management) (Kim et al., 2014); data/statistics/fact sheets/reports (coded data) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Kim et al., 2014); crime/incident information; event information (coded event/program information); traffic/alert information (coded traffic/parking information); and prevention information, and other important department information (coded public information/public records, policy/law information, emergency/disaster preparedness safety resources, victim/person/suspect identification, and human interest/community relations) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2013).

Features that fit the usefulness of information principle for citizen/constituent publics (note: some features may be considered useful for both media and citizen/constituent publics) on local law enforcement website homepages include recruitment information (Lieberman et al.,
information about organizational/agency management (coded information about organizational management) (Kim et al., 2014); data/statistics/fact sheets/reports (coded data) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Kim et al., 2014); crime/incident information; event information (coded event/program information); traffic/alert information (coded traffic/parking information); and prevention information, and other important department information (coded public information/public records, policy/law information, emergency/disaster preparedness safety resources, victim/person/suspect identification, and human interest/community relations) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2013).

Features that fit the usefulness of information principle for media publics (note: some features may be considered useful for both media and citizen/constituent publics) via Twitter tweets include data/statistics/fact sheets/reports (coded data) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Kim et al., 2014); crime/incident information; event information (coded event/program information); traffic/alert information (coded traffic/parking information); and prevention information (coded prevention/preparedness information), and other important department information (coded victim/person/suspect identification, human interest/community relations, and other general news/information) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2013).

Features that fit the usefulness of information principle for citizen/constituent publics (note: some features may be considered useful for both media and citizen/constituent publics) via Twitter tweets include recruitment information (Lieberman et al., 2013); data/statistics/fact sheets/reports (coded data) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Kim et al., 2014); crime/incident information; event information (coded event/program information); traffic/alert information (coded traffic/parking information); and prevention information (coded prevention/preparedness information) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Kim et al., 2014).
information), and other important department information (coded victim/person/suspect identification, human interest/community relations, and other general news/information) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2013).

Appendices A6 and A8 provide the full codebooks for these units of analysis and the operationalization of these features.

**Dialogic Loop (For Website Homepages and Tweets).** The dialogic loop principle relative to website homepages indicates websites should be “providing users opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). Dialogic features that align with the dialogic loop principle include survey(s)/voting (coded survey/poll), opportunities to send messages on the site (coded opportunities to send [a] message[s]/conduct business via the website), and regular information through email or social media (coded offers regular information through email/mobile) (Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014; Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2004); calls to take action/initiative (Kim et al., 2014); the solicitation of ideas from the public (coded solicitation of information/help/ideas from the public) and registration/sign-up options (coded registration/sign-up/apply options) (Shin et al., 2015); and other opportunities for users to respond/interact (coded share feature) (Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014).

I built on this definition when examining the dialogic loop principle within the context of social media (i.e., Twitter tweets). In addition to “providing users opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback,” this definition also includes “posing a question…or by engaging in a dialogic opportunity by responding directly to a question or comment posted by another user” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). Relevant dialogic coding features that align with the dialogic loop principle on social media (i.e., Twitter tweets) include survey(s)/voting (coded survey or
poll), (Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014; Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Shin et al., 2015; Taylor & Kent, 2004); calls to take action/initiative (Kim et al., 2014); the solicitation of ideas from the public (coded solicitation of information/help/ideas from the public), open-ended questions or sentences (coded question), and registration/sign-up options (coded registration/sign-up/apply options) (Shin et al., 2015); and other opportunities for users to respond/interact (coded as link(s), hashtags, photos/graphics, and videos) (Kent et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2014; Park, Reber, & Chon, 2016). Specific to Twitter, additional features include replies (denoted by @ symbol and number of replies), retweets, or promoting retweeting (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Park et al., 2016; Shin et al., 2015) and promoting liking. Specific to Twitter, replies, retweets, likes, hashtags, and @ symbols were coded for the total number present and then later recoded in SPSS to (0-Absent/No) and (1-Present/Yes) for the chi-square analyses.

Appendices A6 and A8 provide the full codebooks for these units of analysis and the operationalization of these features.

**Generation of Return Visits (For Website Homepages and Tweets).** The generation of return visits principle relative to website homepages indicates website users should “have an incentive for returning to the site for multiple visits over time” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). Dialogic features that reflect the generation of return visits principle include an explicit invitation to return, a “bookmark now” feature, and information that can be requested via mail or email (coded offers regular information through email/mobile) (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Kent et al., 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2004); an event calendar (coded event calendar/event listing) and FAQ’s/Q & A’s (coded FAQ/Q&A feature) (Kim et al., 2014; Kent et al., 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2004); and safety resources/prevention tips (coded emergency/disaster preparedness safety
In a social media context (i.e., Twitter tweets), the generation of return visits principle can be applied by slightly amending the website definition. The generation of return visits principle relative to social media indicates social media users should “have an incentive for returning to the [organization’s online platforms] for multiple visits over time” (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, pp. 337-338). The dialogic features that were coded as associated with this principle are an explicit invitation to return (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Kent et al., 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2004); links to FAQ’s/Q&As (coded as link(s)) (Kim et al., 2014; Kent et al., 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2004); links for obtaining additional information about the organization/agency (coded as link(s)), links to news and information about the organization/agency (from the organization/agency) (coded as link(s)), and links to news and information about the organization/agency (from the news media) (coded as link(s)) (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010); and safety resources/prevention tips (coded as prevention/preparedness information) (Heverin & Zach, 2010; Lieberman et al., 2013; Madichie & Hinson, 2014).

Appendices A6 and A8 provide the full codebooks for these units of analysis and the operationalization of these features.

**Pretesting and Intercoder Reliability**

Scholars have differences of opinion about which type of reliability coefficients (e.g., Holsti’s, Cohen’s kappa, Scott’s pi, Krippendorff’s alpha) to use when reporting intercoder reliability and what reliability levels are ultimately deemed acceptable (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002). Neuendorf (2002) indicated that based on her review of intercoder reliability scholarship that “reliability coefficients of .90 or greater would be
acceptable to all, .80 or greater would be acceptable in most situations” (p. 143), including those analyses that consider pure percent agreement and those that take chance into consideration.

I pre-tested the codebooks used in this content analysis with small samples outside of the final samples and then later formally assessed reliability levels for the final samples (Neuendorf, 2002). This dissertation includes reporting of overall percent agreement for all variables by unit of analysis, the range of the percent agreements achieved for all variables by unit of analysis, and the range of Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients achieved for all variables by unit of analysis. This was done in order to provide both liberal and conservative estimates of reliability and to ensure transparency about levels of reliability at the individual variable level as opposed to just reporting the overall percent agreement alone (Neuendorf, 2002).

**Website Homepages.** I pretested the website homepages codebook and coding scheme by coding a small sample (n=12) of local law enforcement website homepages that were not in the final sample for analysis. A graduate student coder applied the codebook and coding scheme to the website homepages and we independently coded that sample. I examined any major discrepancies we had in the pretesting phase and improved the instructions in the final codebook and training in order to try to maximize intercoder reliability. A major change that was made between the pretest and the final analysis was that during pretesting the codebook called for coders to examine all content on the website homepages and content within one click away from the website homepages; however, this was changed to focus on content on the website homepages, with the exceptions articulated in the codebook found in Appendix A6.

A paid and trained undergraduate student coder independently coded a randomly selected 15 percent of the final website homepage sample (n=12) that I coded to test for intercoder reliability. I used the online resource “ReCal” at http://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront/.com to
calculate intercoder reliability. Our overall percent agreement for the items included in this analysis was 90.04%. With the exception of one variable (news or media/press room/section, for which we had just 50% agreement), individual variable percent agreements ranged from 66.67% to 100%. In reviewing the discrepancies in the case of the news or media/press room/section variable, I coded for the presence of the variable five times when she coded that it was absent, accounting for the low reliability levels on this feature. With the exception of the news or media/press room/section variable, these percent agreements fall within similar percent agreement ranges to previous website content analysis studies discussed herein, such as Mossberger et al. (2013) (reported 62-93% individual variable percent agreements) and Shin et al. (2015) (reported 87-100% individual variable percent agreements). We had Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients ranging from -.07 (for news or media/press room/section) to 1. Some items coded (e.g., site map) had undefined Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients because there was no variation in how the items were coded in the reliability sample, meaning items were all coded either (1-Yes/Present) or (0-No/Absent). I will discuss the limitations associated with some lower levels of intercoder reliability in Chapter 5.

**Twitter Profiles.** I pretested the Twitter profile codebook and coding scheme by coding a small sample (n=20) of Twitter profiles that were not in the final sample for analysis. A trained graduate student coder applied the codebook and coding scheme to the Twitter profiles in that sample and we independently coded that sample. I examined any discrepancies we had in the pretesting phase and sought to improve the instructions in the final Twitter profile codebook in order to try to maximize intercoder reliability.

A paid and trained undergraduate student coder independently coded a randomly selected 15 percent (n=12) sample of the final Twitter profile sample (n=77) that I coded to test for
intercoder reliability. I used the online resource “ReCal” from http://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront/.com to calculate intercoder reliability. Our overall percent agreement for the items included in this analysis was 99.5%, with individual percent agreements ranging from 91.7 to 100%. We had Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients ranging from .83 to 1. Some items coded (e.g., contact email) had undefined Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients because there was no variation in how the items were coded in the reliability sample, meaning items were all coded either (1-Yes/Present) or (0-No/Absent).

**Tweets.** I pretested the Twitter tweet codebook and coding scheme by coding a small sample (n=50) of tweets that were not in the final sample for analysis. A trained graduate student coder applied the codebook and coding scheme to the tweets in that sample and we independently coded that sample. I examined any discrepancies we had in the pretesting phase and sought to improve the instructions in the final codebook in order to try to maximize intercoder reliability.

A paid and trained undergraduate student coder independently coded a randomly selected approximately 10 percent (n=119) sample of the final Twitter tweet sample (n=1,227) that I coded to test for intercoder reliability. I used the online resource “ReCal” from http://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront/.com to calculate intercoder reliability.

Our overall percent agreement for the items included in this analysis was 95.05%, with individual percent agreements ranging from 85.71% to 100%. We had Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients ranging from .45 to 1, with all but four (of 28) Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients falling above .60 or being undefined. Some items coded (e.g., promoting liking) had undefined Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients because there was no variation in how the items were coded in the reliability sample, meaning items were all coded either (1-Yes/Present) or (0-No/Absent).
will discuss the limitations associated with some lower levels of intercoder reliability in Chapter 5.

Analysis

In order to analyze the data collected in the content analysis portion of this research, I used SPSS Statistical Software to calculate descriptive statistics about any basic information coded and the dialogic features coded for each unit of analysis. I also used SPSS Statistical Software to perform chi-square analyses to assess any significant relationships between the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agencies and the dialogic features coded (Riffe et al., 2005), addressing RQ9b and RQ10b. I performed chi-square analyses for each of the three units of analysis, examining the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency as an independent variable and the dialogic features as dependent variables.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter details the findings derived from in-depth interviews with 20 local law enforcement personnel associated with 16 local law enforcement agencies and from the content analysis of local law enforcement website homepages, Twitter profiles, and Twitter tweets.

Interviews

Chapter 3 outlined the key methodological procedures associated with the in-depth interviews performed and analyzed in this study. In-depth interviews with local law enforcement leadership and public relations practitioners were used to probe RQs 1-8, which focused on several broad areas of interest. First, I inquired about local law enforcement’s public relations activities (including those specific to websites and social media) and local law enforcement personnel’s perceptions of similarities and differences associated with local law enforcement public relations relative to public relations efforts of other local departments, local agencies, or local municipalities overall (RQs 1-4). Second, we discussed the environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement public relations efforts (including online efforts) and attempts to build trust and legitimacy (RQs 5-6). Finally, I asked participants about their perceptions of how online tools (websites and social media) are impacting local law enforcement relationships with the community and the media (RQs 7-8).

Public Relations Activities

RQs 1-3 delved into the public relations activities of local law enforcement agencies. Given their interconnected relationship, which will be detailed herein, these research questions will be discussed together:

RQ1: What are the public relations activities of local law enforcement?
RQ2: How are local law enforcement using websites for public relations purposes?
RQ3: How are local law enforcement using social media for public relations purposes?
In order to understand local law enforcement public relations activities and how local law enforcement are using websites and social media for public relations purposes, I asked about their daily public relations activities toward the beginning of our conversations. I also asked several questions about their website and social media practices specifically (Appendix A5 includes the guiding interview questions utilized in this study). Additionally, participants provided other insights relevant to these research questions during other portions of our interviews.

My analysis revealed five prominent common themes and two more minor common themes associated with local law enforcement’s public relations activities. The five most prominent themes were reputation management, community relations and engagement, media relations, social media management, and internal communications activities. I have identified these themes as more prominent than the other two themes because of the frequency with which they were identified and because of the relatively higher levels of importance participants placed on or emphasized about these activities to their local law enforcement agency overall. The two more minor common themes were website management and public records/freedom of information request management. I have identified these themes as more minor themes because they were identified with relatively less frequency. Since participants identified social media management and website management as common themes associated with their public relations activities, I will address RQs 2 and 3 within this section of interview results. Additionally, there is some overlap between these various areas of activity. For example, local law enforcement are engaging in community relations and engagement activities and media relations activities in person and online via social media and websites, so I will primarily discuss the in-person efforts under community relations and engagement and media relations, while I will discuss the online
efforts related to community relations and engagement and media relations under social media management and website management activities.

**Reputation Management.** Though I intentionally did not explicitly ask interview participants about any of the recent incidents involving law enforcement identified at the beginning of this dissertation (until after a participant introduced and mentioned such topics first), a majority of the interview participants discussed either one or more of these specific incidents or incidents like them, discussed officer-involved shootings, and/or discussed the national attention and sometimes negative sentiment surrounding law enforcement in recent years as a result of high profile cases – including those that have had significant racial components – within our wide-ranging discussions about public relations. During the course of my interviews with local law enforcement leadership and public relations personnel, it became clear that this context weighs on many of their minds and even influences some of their public relations activities.

Some participants expressed that they recognize the negative impact of such high profile incidents and events nationally on public perceptions and the ability to build trust and legitimacy, while acknowledging that such incidents can be damaging to the reputation of the profession broadly even if their local agencies have experienced few or no such cases. Furthermore, participants discussed some of the steps they have taken in their agencies in the aftermath of such high profile cases, including increasing proactive positive promotional and transparency-related public relations efforts as well as bringing in key community leaders (e.g., African American clergy) representing often affected demographic groups for preventative and planning purposes:
This chief has a different mindset when it comes to public relations. And so he is very open and wants the public to know and wants the public to perceive the police department in the civil servant role. Which is what we should be. I mean all police officers are civil servants. And they need to understand that. That we’re here to serve the public, not necessarily just to enforce laws. But you’re here in a service capacity... Officers are monitored and scrutinized a lot more than they were in the past. And for good reason. I mean obviously everything that’s gone on in the country has made a difference, that’s probably one of the reasons this chief felt it was time to start some PR because of all the negative media attention that officers have gotten over the last two-three years. It was time for our department, even though we haven’t had those situations. I think training wise, we’re probably one of the better trained departments in the country, honestly. I’ve been to internal affair schools, and different schools all around the country. And our checks and balance system on [redacted] are so much greater than they are at other departments. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

People have these vicarious experiences. Something can happen in California that people in the state of [redacted], they are affected by it, they don’t say ‘Well, wow, you know I’m glad I live in the state of [redacted] because our police officers out here act differently and they’re trained differently. We’ve had different experiences with our officers here.’ No, it doesn’t work that way. They say ‘Yep, here they go again, the cops’ and it doesn’t matter where you are, it’s the police and we all get grouped together and we all get judged by the same, by the actions of our peers from way across the country. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

It’s no secret there’s a lot of national angst toward law enforcement right now. There’s the perception that kinda all cops are being lumped into this Gestapo-style enforcement belief that – while I’m sure there are cops that are that way, that’s just not the case for the vast majority of us. I think that’s just a, that’s an obstacle. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Public Information Officer in the West

We also have a crisis response team in light of what happened in Baltimore and we bring community leaders and clergy in and we’ve met with them. At least once a quarter, we’ll have lunch and we’ll talk about issues. We’ll say if we ever have a situation like in Ferguson or Baltimore, we need to be united, we need you guys to come in. Or if we have an officer-involved shooting in say a predominantly African American area and there’s a lot of angst toward police, we may bring in some of our black chaplains to come in and help, you know, confirm to the community that ‘look, we understand’ and use them in ways that would help increase community awareness instead of decrease it. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

So, that’s the ugly part about having to deal with the media, everybody wants to make you a Ferguson, everybody wants to make you a racist or a bigot…Well, you know I think, going back to the reference to Ferguson, the media has portrayed law enforcement in such a poor light that it has really hurt the profession and you’ve got to be self-consciously aware of that in everything that you do now and I think a lot of that negative criticism or even within minority communities, I think the media has fed into the negative
stereotype of what law enforcement is and does. We have a very strong transparency policy working with the community and we are an invested community policing organization and one negative news report – it doesn’t even have to be about your city or your department – sets you back 10 years in trying to invest yourself in some of the communities that we deal with. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

When it comes to legitimacy, with all the inquiries, attention, and scrutiny over the past couple of years on law enforcement nationwide, that bleeds over to the local department, [redacted] police department, so that kind of impairs legitimacy too, that they see what’s happening nationally and they’re trying to localize it, so they’re coming in with those preconceived notions…National media definitely affects our legitimacy and the national media coverage of sensational events or events that were sensationalized at their initial reporting have definitely affected our ability, our legitimacy…Things like Ferguson, Eric Garner in New York. Incidents like that where it’s 5-10 incidents a year nationwide and a long shadow is cast upon all law enforcement based upon the actions of a few, whether they’re legal or illegal or justified or unjustified, the initial perception certainly casts a negative view upon us. – Participant 11, Agency 10, Sergeant, Public Information Officer in the Midwest

I think that really the vast majority of citizens and constituents will never have contact with a police officer. Never. You know they won’t be pulled over, they won’t lose their wallet, they just won’t. So, we do have to fight against that, depending on the era or the year or the month, you know there’s definitely a national push with national law enforcement stories. Many of them tragic, some of them illegal. You know just cops and I say cops making mistakes, cops that are unethical in the world or doing illegal things. But when a police officer does something on the West Coast, every police officer wears that. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

Local law enforcement – some discussing it explicitly and others discussing it more implicitly – are directly and indirectly engaging in reputation management practices through their activities associated with community relations and engagement, social media management, media relations, and to a lesser degree, through internal communication and website management.

Participants discussed how their public relations activities are aimed at more than just providing information to the media and constituents. Though they view providing information (e.g., crime updates, prevention tips) as an important and critical service – particularly during major incidents or crises – they are also investing time and personnel in public relations efforts that are designed to educate the media and the public and “humanize” law enforcement officers.
and the profession. Additionally, they are seeking to *build better understanding* and *improve perceptions* about key laws, issues, events, and more that they believe are either genuinely misunderstood due to a lack of information, are inadequately or inaccurately portrayed by or covered by the entertainment and news media, or are often misunderstood or viewed negatively because of the influence of peers who may have shared direct or indirect negative historical experiences with law enforcement personnel. Notably, some participants also pointed to two areas in which local law enforcement also bear responsibility for misunderstandings, a lack of information, and negative perceptions that may exist among key publics. The first is what they characterized as local law enforcement’s historical failure to adequately, openly, and transparently communicate and build relationships with the media and key constituents. The second is the legitimate and highly publicized “bad” actions and events associated with some law enforcement officers.

These comments detail local law enforcement’s need and desire to *educate* the public, *“humanize”* police officers and the profession, and *build better understanding* and *improve perceptions* using a variety of different approaches – from regular daily public contacts to sharing information through apps to storytelling to social media campaigns and more interactive efforts:

A lot of the [Facebook] posts that get the most likes and the most shares, the most comments, are those heart wrenching, heart touching posts, you know when officers do things that you know people say ‘aww…’ But I mean that’s the side of police work that people need to see that they don’t normally get to see. They see the shootouts or they see the wanted suspects and the pursuits and the things like that... – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

We have to work as hard as we can…to expose the general public to the police agency. Buy in. We have to be attentive to the public’s problems. We have to be there for the public and then we have to find every opportunity that we can to present…the law enforcement officers, any actions in law enforcement to become as human as possible. We have to look at ways of letting and showing people that we care. We have to look at
ways and opportunities to educate people as to what we do…We have built into our law enforcement strategy, there is a procedural justice component to it because we want people to know that we’re going to be in your neighborhood and we’re going to be aggressive toward the drug dealers hangin’ on the corner, we’re going to be aggressive toward the gun-toting gang bangers that are shooting up the neighborhoods. And by aggressive I mean going after them for any of their criminal actions and in doing so we’re going to be stopping cars, we’re going to be rolling roadblocks and here’s how you, the general public may be affected by that, by our police actions, and here is what our goal is and that is to restore normalcy to and safety back into your neighborhoods. So that you can live and play comfortably within your own neighborhood. That’s our overall goal, and then to try to show through that process, to try to get buy in from the community. So now it becomes a collective effort with law enforcement in the community and then the community feels that they have a say, they have a say in what happens and they feel that they have a stake. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

I believe my job is just to tell our story. I think that is what my job is. Tell our story so that we can, so that the public can see us for who we really are, that we really are good people trying to do the best job we can with what we have. I think that’s important in the community…I do a lot with the social media just because I think that’s a very unique medium where can have some interaction with the public, where we can get our message unfiltered to a lot of people quickly… I spend time on social media looking for good stories, anything positive that’s going on, or just messages of things we want the public to be aware of. About how to harden themselves against vehicle burglaries or bicycle thefts or different scams to be aware of just so the public can be educated maybe just kind of harden the target a little bit so that citizens in [redacted] aren’t victimized by some of these crimes that are going around or if you’re talking about an arrest or just different things highlighting that… So currently the things we put on Facebook, and I’ve tried not to limit it, is we’re trying to walk that fine line between personable and professional. We want to put forth a very professional image but also have some of that personal interaction with the public that shows we’re people, we’re members of the community, we live here, we’re not an occupying force. And any kind of positive stories, things that may seem run of the mill to us, but citizens might find interesting to read, opportunities that the officers have had to help members of the community, we like to put up. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the West

Being able to put that information on the apps, it shows them a different side of what we – who we are and what we do. So we’re human, we like to have fun. We like to get in the neighborhoods and we play basketball with the kids sometimes when we’re out in the park…We’re able to post that, we have people that are coming out of the community like, ‘Man, you really stop and do that?’…We know that we have a lot of teenagers and youth that are on social media. So they get to see ‘Wow, you know, they’re really police, they’re in their uniforms out here playing basketball in the middle of the street’ or we play football, just whatever we walk up on, we become a part of it. So that’s the opportunity that we have to that put out that information as well as our notifications if we’re for looking for somebody and to put it out to the neighborhood watches, what to be
on the lookout for. – Participant 6, Agency 5, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the South

We launched the campaign called [redacted] here at the [redacted] Police Department. So we’ll have officers hold up signs [on social media]. We’re really trying to humanize us. You know, we have families, we have moms and dads. We have children. So, we’re reaching an audience, I think that’s the biggest thing. But I think that goes along with what our goals are in reaching, or in building trust and legitimacy, because we’re doing that, we’re putting ourselves out there; therefore, we are showing to the community that we are engaged, that we are serious in trying to increase our trust with you guys. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

Barriers [to building trust with constituents] I think sometimes is the media. Because that’s a lot of times, that’s the fastest, easiest, most direct way many people within the area are getting their information and unfortunately their education and to add to that unfortunately a lot of the stuff that the media pushes isn’t really reality or it isn’t put together in a manner that really explains the whole story. So, that’s why we really try hard here to gain our own platforms of getting our information out, so we can make sure that the whole story is received by anybody that wants it and it’s done in a manner that I guess mirrors reality more than something that’s trying to gain viewers or be entertaining I guess. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

You have to let people know you’re human and not just machines and not just, you know you gotta show the human side and that’s why I think it’s important to have different leaders in your department having [online tools] to show that we’re good people, we’re normal people just like everybody else. And I think that’s lost a lot. You know you won’t see me wearing my police hat talking with a military type voice sternly into the camera. I don’t want – that’s not the image we’re trying to put out. Police have been doing that for 100 years. It’s horrible, stop wearing the hat, stop talking like you’re in the military, stop saying nothing, you know, and that’s what I feel is important. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

We have to make sure that all of our officers are doing that public relations work, one person at a time. And I think you change community attitudes one contact at a time. You know, you’re walking into the store to get coffee, say hello to somebody, hold the door. You know wearing mirrored shades 24 hours a day is probably not a good idea. You have to have that that interaction, that connection to make sure that communities and constituents realize that you know police officers are human beings as well, not just the black and white car, and shiny boots, and short haircuts, you know that’s not what we’re about. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

We’re gonna do a tweetalong. So, as we’re going to calls, I’m going to be live tweeting what’s going on from the [redacted] account and I think that that breaks down the wall a little bit about what police work is and what police do. We like to show kind of the human side of police officers, that we’re not just robots, that we’re actually, you know,
we’re moms and dads and brothers and sisters. – Participant 18, Agency 14, Social Media Coordinator in the South

These insights from local law enforcement personnel highlight how they acknowledge that generally law enforcement has contributed to misunderstandings and distrust, a lack of information, and negative perceptions that exist, helping to necessitate current reputation management efforts. They shared reflections on law enforcement’s historical often “closed” relationship with the media, less than optimal levels of transparency, and inadequate proactive educational and promotional efforts:

It’s no secret there’s a lot of national angst toward law enforcement right now. There’s the perception that kinda all cops are being lumped into this Gestapo-style enforcement belief that – while I’m sure there are cops that are that way, that’s just not the case for the vast majority of us. I think that’s just a, that’s an obstacle. But I also believe that’s a bit of a testament to a failure of law enforcement because traditionally we’ve been a very closed – the media would want to come want to and talk to us and it was very much ‘Nah, I’ll talk to you when I’ve got time.’ We wouldn’t be transparent because I don’t believe people become police officers because we have a certain personality and that’s not a stand-in-front-of-the-camera and get a lot of accolades. It’s usually the kind of personality that wants to go, get to work, accomplish a task, and move on to the next task. And I think that hurt us in the past because we were so closed and any time there’s any kind of closed government institution, that’s going to create suspicion and distrust and so we were our own worst enemy for so long, so now we’re seeing the light and realizing we have to be transparent and we have to, we have to talk, we have to share with these guys. Otherwise, people are going to assume in the absence of information, people often assume the worst and so we need to make sure we feed the beast and get the accurate information out there and besides just creating trust, it’s obviously going to help us in other cases too because if we’re looking for suspects, we need to get information out to the public so they’re aware (inaudible) not victimized themselves. And these are messages that we need to get out there to communicate with them. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the West

I see our job is to help educate on the daily activities of what’s going on in our city…It’s that law enforcement in general, we’re probably the – I can’t imagine anybody being much worse than us from a PR perspective in that not many in law enforcement want to be in front of the camera or want to talk about things that we’ve done, want to promote things that we’ve done from a – for lack of a better way of saying it – positive things…[saved] somebody’s life last night, or pulled somebody from a burning car, or jumped in a lake, or even got shot. I don’t want that to be promoted in any way to be something positive, it’s just something I did, and I’ll go back and I’ll do the same thing tomorrow. So, we’re the worst from a PR perspective like that and from a community
perspective, I believe that a lot of the things that you see when people turn the media on now or read and there’s a lot of negative stuff being promoted a lot with law enforcement. I think a lot of that is our fault going back to what I just said before in that most people don’t, have never really wanted to stop and take the time to truly understand what we do and why we do it and we’ve allowed that. We just go out and do it and most people want to feel safe in their community, but they haven’t really taken the time and don’t want to take the time to figure out what it looks like, what it really means to be safe. So and we’ve allowed that and so now there’s a lot of ignorance out there on what we do, why we do it, when we do it and that ignorance has created a lot of the problems that’s out there on TV and in the news right now and I think it’s up to us to look for those opportunities to try to educate people on: Why are we getting these shootings? Why do we tase people? Why do we not do that? I think that the more people become educated on that then the less of these issues or less people can get on social media and say you know whatever, it’s just white cops shooting black kids or whatever that’s being promoted out there. The more people understand why those things happen the less they can get out there and push some propaganda like that. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

If you look at this past year and how police have been viewed by half of our country or a part of our country, I believe that directly relates to our ability to communicate with our public. And our failures. I have taken a completely different stance as to most police departments in the region and including our historical handling of the media and my transparency and ability to be there for the media has made it very easy on me to get away with, you know certain things, and has led to my legitimacy and the media’s very, very good to me…Barriers are historical predisposition of police to not trust the media and that’s not just the PIO level, but I mean the officers. You know most officers are scared to talk to the media. There’s such a bad reputation and deserved in some points and some points not deserved. That officers are afraid to give information out to the media or are afraid to deal with the media… The relationship between media and police has been so bad for so long, the opportunity to succeed in your relationships is so easy right now. All I had to do was answer my phone regularly and talk like a human being and my success level, you know, skyrocketed... And we need to promote ourselves. Like I said, law enforcement has had a pretty bad PR experience over the last 100 years and it’s time changes were made and I know we’re doing it here. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

I think that in general society there’s an unawareness of what law enforcement officers do day to day and a lot of that’s been our fault. You know, we don’t educate the public as much as we should, we don’t let the public know as much as we should about all the positive things that are happening out there and the great stories that officers are involved with, so social media and public relations in general gives you the opportunity to do that. You know, be proud of your folks. You know when the bad thing happens, you publicize that and you work with people and you try to solve these crimes and when the good things happen, put them out there. And you have to revel in the fact that your folks are doing a nice job on behalf of your community and if you don’t do that, then that’s your
own fault, so you really need to utilize the tools that are available. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

**Community Relations and Engagement.** The local law enforcement agencies that participated in this research are extensively involved in community relations and engagement activities, both in person and online. In this section, I will focus on their in-person activities and discuss their online community relations and engagement activities under social media management and website management.

**Begin with every officer and every call.** Some participants, in the spirit of community policing, talked about how public information, public relations, and community engagement are about more than just the personnel technically assigned to perform such duties in a formal capacity. Instead, their view is that community relations and engagement begin with every officer and every call. They reflected on the need for personnel to be accessible, engaging, inclusive, professional, consistent, collaborative, helpful, respectful, and “customer service” oriented:

> I don’t necessarily know if we have a daily public relations activity because of—we concentrate more on accessibility…Rather than putting out information, we make sure we concentrate on giving the public the ability to gain access to us. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

> Every day we have many contacts in the community through every time a police officer contacts a citizen to executive command staff members of the department engaging with the community in meetings and problem solving. And so I consider all of that part of our public relations effort, is you know to create a positive experience and help build a relationship through every contact and every citizen we meet with. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

> When it comes to the community relations, the contact with the department is much more diverse. There are people who work in the role of community policing and do various interactions with the community, but you know every officer who is out on the street is involved in building community relations… And you know and at that point and you know if there’s not a strong connection or if there’s a disconnection between what I might say we’re doing and what people are experiencing, then an issue could and I suspect over time would develop… But the department in which I work has a long history of community policing in one way or another, interaction with the community members individually and collectively through citizens that work in an advisory capacity
or who are involved in their community… good community relations depend on everyone in the department and from a public information standpoint certainly the product that the department is delivering has to match the goals and aspirations of the department.

– Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

I think that first and foremost I mean public relations is – you know we have [redacted] sworn officers… I mean they’re really the ones doing the work every day. You know saying hello to people on the street, being kind, and helping folks. I mean that’s really where your prime area of PR happens every day…I will always come back down on the side of you know, the individual officer and the contact that they have. So we have a regional dispatch center as well, so when somebody calls and we’re dispatching calls for [redacted], that may be the only contact an individual will ever have with somebody in the law enforcement field, the criminal justice realm. So, it’s just you know making sure that we’re all treating people with honor and respect…you have to build that every day and you have to build that every call.  – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

So everybody really, you know the customer service that should be a given with every department and even for us, we have [redacted] of us that are involved in community engagement, but that doesn’t mean the officers that are on the road, that they’re not practicing community policing and you know engaging the community when they can. It’s not this, oh it’s [redacted] officers handling it for the whole department. It should be in the mix for everybody and you know, whether you’re answering a call or dealing with the public, and same things for the other departments, the community, there has to be the public relations within your organization… when we’re talking about community engagement, it’s so broad, because it you know really encompasses so many different things. You know from the mental health courts, we deal with autism training, we deal with hoarding, we deal with quality of life issues, we’re trying to find areas that maybe have lapsed, programs that we used to have and we’re trying to rebuild those, we have outreach with the [redacted religion] community, the various groups we’re working with, we’re working with the [redacted minority organization], so we’re trying to expand our programs and our outreach. – Participant 20, Agency 16, Sergeant, Commander in the Midwest

In addition to the important personal contacts with officers on the beat or on calls on a day to day basis, local law enforcement leadership and personnel reported planning and executing many more formal *community relations and engagement activities, such as events, programs, prevention and volunteer initiatives, and targeted outreach.*

**Events.** Local law enforcement leadership and public relations personnel reported that their agencies are often planning, executing, and participating in different community-centered events,
For example, several agencies hold events at local coffee shops or community centers or have town hall style meetings that allow citizens to speak with officers and command staff and ask questions in person. Other agencies have regular events in which personnel, including the chief of police, walk through different neighborhoods to meet and involve citizens. Many participants described numerous events involving holidays, such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, that allow officers to interact with citizens – with a heavy emphasis on children – in a positive manner and environment. They also described being active in a variety of charitable giving and volunteer events in which officers contribute time and monetary resources to the community. Some participants shared that they have a fairly active presence in the schools in their communities through speaking engagements or events like assemblies or graduations. Some participants also described attending other community events that are not initiated by their law enforcement agency, but instead organized and hosted by important or influential individuals or community groups and organizations.

**Programs.** Local law enforcement leadership and public relations personnel reported that their agencies are often planning, executing, and participating in long-term programs that are more sustained, ongoing educational, informational, preventive, and engagement efforts as opposed to the events discussed above. Some participants shared that they have a fairly regular presence in the schools – from elementary schools to high school schools and even colleges – in their communities through programs that involve reading, mentorship, athletics, or even basic conversations about youth relationships with law enforcement.

A particularly interesting and relevant type of program that many participants have implemented over the years and that some plan to implement or reintroduce again in the future is commonly referred to as a citizen academy or citizens academy. Though the local law
enforcement agencies have implemented the program in different ways (e.g., different specific curricula, exercises, and time spans for participation) and some have targeted specific groups (e.g., clergy, senior citizens, racial and ethnic minority groups) to participate, while others have made these academies available to the general public, the basic principle behind citizen academies is the same: these programs are educational and give people a behind-the-scenes look or an “internal look” at what it is like to be a law enforcement officer, as Participant 20 articulated. The programs do everything from introducing citizens who participate to various laws and law enforcement policies and procedures to providing opportunities for citizens to engage in simulated or real law enforcement activities (e.g., shoot/don’t shoot drills and simunitions, patrol ride-alongs, conducting traffic stops).

Several participants described their approaches to these citizens academies and extensively discussed their perceived value in great detail. For example, one participant discussed the educational opportunity associated with the programs:

I think the more educated that people become on really what we do and really why we do it, not some other person’s kind of subjective opinion on stuff that we do, but if they see it for themselves, I think most people would be ambassadors of our department. So, it’s the opportunity for us to provide – and I say an opportunity – it’s an opportunity for citizens to get a more educated view, become more educated on their police department.

– Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

One participant indicated that his agency had focused on bringing clergy into the fold and said that the programs were a step toward greater transparency and understanding, including for particular “communities that are affected most by crime”:

It’s something this chief more than any other has started reaching out to the communities that are affected most by crime. And with that [redacted program name], he brought in a lot of African American pastors and he put them through a [redacted timeframe] course, and it’s kind of abbreviated academy, where they learned laws…Probable cause, when an officer has enough probable cause to make an arrest. All the laws that officers deal with on a daily basis and then it culminates the last day, it’s basically a shoot, don’t shoot class, and where we give the pastors simunitions and we put them in scenarios [redacted
location] where they’re confronted by an individual who is unarmed and see how they’d handle it. And a lot of times they shot the unarmed individual. They have every right to shoot the unarmed individual. And usually the people we pick are bigger, stronger, than some of these pastors were. To perform that and you know we explain to them and it kind of opens their eyes when they see that and they’re confronted with the same kind of – the same situation that an officer’s confronted with in the field…it helps them realize that yeah, that subject was unarmed but that subject had a hold of my gun and he – or that subject was bigger than me, he could easily knock me out and take my gun from me. I mean those are deadly force encounters. Yeah, the subject may be unarmed, but you feared for your life and it’s either you’re gonna go home or the suspect’s gonna, you know, gonna kill you. That’s helped. I mean there’s like I want to say almost [redacted number] ministers, pastors that went through that, and all of them stated, ‘Wow, this really opened my eyes. It really made me understand that number one, if we have an incident like this in my neighborhood that I’ll be the first person to step up and say hey, wait a minute, before we you know protest, destroy anything, you know, let’s get the whole story. Let’s find out exactly why the officer did what he did and whether he was justified in doing that.’ And I think that that makes a big difference when you do things like that, and you’re proactive and… you open your doors, you open your training, you open up I mean everything to the public. Because you really should be transparent. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

One participant said that his agency opened the citizens academy to different groups and had even extended the invitation for members of the media to participate in citizens academy training, with one member of the media accepting that invitation thus far. He also said he planned to extend the invitation to members of the media in the future. That participant also described his hope that those who complete the citizens academies can become trusted and credible citizen advocates for the department in community conversations because of their community ties and reputations, including when crisis scenarios do emerge:

So we realized in watching our television sets and listening to the news that one of the biggest issues that cause a stir in the community is some type of police involved shooting…And so we wanted to give people an exposure to us and… what a police officer experiences. So, we created this, what we refer to as a citizens academy, where we brought people from the community right into the police department and…we went over the areas of the law: search and seizure, and use of force, and just some other aspects of the law. And then we placed them in practical scenarios where they had to make split second decisions as to what they would do as a police officer…We even used our simunitions … simunitions is where you use real weapons…And they fire real bullets… It hurts, it stings, it will break the skin. It’s similar to a paintball, but it’s with a real weapon and it makes the cracking sound…That a weapon makes when it’s when it’s fired, that
crack or bang…So, now they’re holding a real weapon in their hands, and the bad guys are holding real weapons in their hands. And they know at any moment they have to shoot or they’ll, that they will be shot. And so we put them through those scenarios and they have to make these split-second decisions and then when they come out of it, you see them overreacting…So, that’s one of the things that we’ve done and that we will continue to do that. In fact we have another, we’re bringing some more people in here shortly, we want to do some things like that quarterly because the more people we get through, the more people can understand what we go through as a police officer. So in our absence, when those conversations are taking place in your coffee shops, at your water coolers, and your barber shops and at your cubicles, if we have someone that has gone through that process, they can speak up at that point say ‘Now you know what, I hear what you’re saying and a couple weeks ago I felt the same way, but boy when I went through that training with the police this is what I’ve learned…’ And now that person, that person is different from a police officer. That person is a part of that cultural group or that community and so the trust is already there from the people that they’re speaking to. They don’t have to gain trust, they automatically have it and when those words come out of their mouth, then the people that they’re speaking to will be more inclined to listen to them and now that person has become our advocate in introducing truth into the situation and that chips away at the [negative] perception that we talked about earlier. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

Another participant indicated that his agency focused on several specific groups during previous and for future citizens academies and described some of his agency’s citizens academies as real success stories for advancing community engagement, particularly with some traditionally underrepresented groups that have been historically difficult to positively engage:

Well, the citizens police academy class is where we want to bring in a group of citizens for [redacted number] weeks and a cross-section of citizens and we want to talk about policing. Why we do what we do, what do we do, then we want to get them involved, we want them to be alumni of the citizens police academy. This kinda helps community engagement and recently we’ve adopted the goals of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing and one of those goals is trust and legitimacy and to do that, we are focusing on our outreach through our citizens police academy. We just finished one for the hard of – deaf and hard of hearing. We’re starting another one in two weeks for women only. This summer, I’m doing one for pastors. We’ve already completed one for just the Hispanic population, where we bring in an interpreter. That was such a huge success, we’re doing another one this year. So we’re really trying to reach out to all sections and to make a kind of a point of emphasis, that look the more involved we are with the community, the more they probably gonna be involved and help us, so that’s kind of our target. That’s our goal… However, I think we’ve come a long way… by doing these [citizens academy] classes with different minority groups, with the hard of
hearing, with the Hispanics, because we have an issue with the Hispanics underreporting. I can tell you from our community meetings with them, we have made huge strides in reaching out to them in a positive way and they are on board with it. So, we’re making progress because we’re really trying to put ourselves out there, but there still are some barriers with the Hispanic community and just other certain segments of the population that just don’t trust the police at all. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

**Prevention and volunteer initiatives.** In addition to events and programs, local law enforcement agencies are engaging important publics through crime prevention and volunteer initiatives. Some agencies reported that these activities were specifically assigned to community policing or community engagement personnel and/or were important parts of their community policing philosophy and strategy. While some crime prevention and volunteer initiatives are primarily visible online and will be discussed in the social media management section of these results, local law enforcement personnel also reported that their agencies are directly (those organized by the local law enforcement agency) and indirectly (those the local law enforcement agency supports or substantially participates in, but are not responsible for) involved in important face to face initiatives.

Local law enforcement personnel reported a wide variety of crime prevention activities, such as hosting active shooter trainings, creating safe spaces for Internet transactions, providing seasonal and other prevention tips (e.g., burglary prevention tips for summer vacationers, traffic safety tips, pedestrian safety tips), doing safety walkthroughs with businesses, and assisting with quality of life calls and issues. Additionally, agencies are proactively recruiting volunteers to serve as community ambassadors (e.g., volunteer chaplains) and they are working with volunteers associated with formal community organizations (e.g., Neighborhood Watch Groups, Crime Stoppers).
These participant quotes detail some specific examples of the prevention and volunteer efforts local law enforcement agencies are involved in, including a crisis response team, a diversity group, an athletic league, and a neighborhood-based patrol program, and seasonal or event-centered crime prevention efforts:

We also have a crisis response team in light of what happened in Baltimore and we bring community leaders and clergy in and we’ve met with them. At least once a quarter, we’ll have lunch and we’ll talk about issues. We’ll say if we ever have a situation like in Ferguson or Baltimore, we need to be united, we need you guys to come in. Or if we have an officer-involved shooting in say a predominantly African American area and there’s a lot of angst towards police, we may bring in some of our Black chaplains to come in and help, you know, confirm to the community that look we understand and use them in ways that would help increase community awareness instead of decrease it. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

We have a Chief’s [redacted name of diversity group] which is comprised of representatives of diverse communities within our larger community and we meet monthly with the Chief’s [redacted name of diversity group] members. And we talk about important issues and they help guide and give their recommendations to the police department. We also have strengthened our partnerships with minority groups through outreach and participating in community events and speaking opportunities. We also work a lot with youth through our police activities league, which focuses on at-risk youth and connecting kids and police officers together in meaningful activities and so we do public relations through a number of different avenues…We have had citizens academies in the past and currently what we’re doing, we’re doing a [redacted] academy which is very similar to a citizens academy. When they graduate, they’re actually able to join our, to be part of our citizen volunteer [redacted] program and actually go out on citizen patrols. And they’re trained in safety procedures and using a police radio. And they’re kind of our eyes and ears. We have about a hundred and fifty citizen volunteers in this program that have all gone through the academy. And it’s a highly successful program. And it’s a great way to engage people in the community that are just interested in keeping their neighborhood safe, that want to give back, and they donate tens of thousands of hours a year and it’s an amazing return on investment for the police department. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

We may do a crime prevention program and we may hold off because a lot of it could be annual related crime. In other words, I’ll give you an example, usually toward the end of the school year, into the summer, we’ll hold off and at that time we know there’s gonna be about a week or two push for home burglary prevention or if you’re going on vacation. What steps you should do to protect your house most. So there are some things that we will hold off because it’s a particular time of the year that an initiative would work best. The [redacted event] is in town this month. So today, we just sent out a blast an email blast about burglaries in motor vehicles and how to hide your stuff, lock your car,
especially this time of year when we have tens of thousands of people who are coming into the city and we’re telling those visitors as well. So a lot of it depends on what the current climate is, what your hot crimes that are going on right now that may be on the rise that you might want to get word out on, as a matter of fact, we’re going to be releasing sometime in the next week or two a pedestrian safety campaign because we’ve had an uptick in the numbers of fatality accidents involving pedestrians, whether they’re trying to go across the freeway or not. So we try to zero in on crimes that are getting attention and are getting a lot of talk, but the majority of what we do is we plan out in advance right at the beginning of the year. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

**Targeted outreach.** As detailed relative to the citizens academies, local law enforcement agencies are often engaging in community relations and engagement efforts through specifically targeted outreach. Such outreach is often aimed at the most vulnerable and at-risk populations as well as at those who traditionally have contentious or fractured relationships with local law enforcement. Sometimes this outreach extends to specific demographic and cultural groups (e.g., by race, by age, by religion) or to specific neighborhoods. Other times it extends to specific influential individuals or groups in the community. Additionally, some participants revealed that targeted outreach has spilled over into their social media management practices and I will further detail those efforts in that section of the results.

These participant quotes provide further detailed insights into the wide range and broad types of community and engagement relations activities local law enforcement agencies are participating in, including neighborhood walks, youth mentoring and presentations, charitable involvement, and community conversations:

Building that trust with the public is what we call our [redacted name of activity]. We’re out in the community every [redacted], the chief will pick a different area that he would like to go walk in. Since he’s been here, every district in our city has been covered. We’re actually having officers go out into the neighborhoods no matter what people may consider a good area, the bad area, we’re in all those areas. And we’re walking and we’re gathering a rapport with the community and just letting them know that we’re out here and we’re trying to find out if you have any concerns, if you have any complaints, you know, address the issues right there, when it’s happening so that trust has been built with our department, with the community. They feel more free to stop the officers and talk to
them. We walk in the apartment complexes. If there’s, for instance, if there’s a homicide or if there’s robberies in certain areas, those are the areas that we’re going to walk in. I mean almost immediately after it happened. The next day, we’re out in those areas walking and getting the complaints and concerns from the citizens, you know, so that rapport is built. – Participant 6, Agency 5, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the South

We are very active with our youth in our community, being in our schools, doing mentoring, doing presentations, any opportunity we have to meet with youth or youth groups, we seize those opportunities. As I already mentioned, we have a police activities league which is also known as PAL, P-A-L. That’s an outreach effort. Other opportunities that we’ve had is through working with our minority communities, attending special events, community events, or partnering and so we like to be represented at the Latino Fair, Resource Fair or African American events in our community or community picnics, things like that where we get out to know people as individuals and hopefully help break down those barriers and fear and we’ve been pretty successful in those areas of outreach. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

You wanna talk about food giveaways, turkey giveaways or turkey raising on Thanksgiving, we can talk about that. You wanna talk about hot dinner, turkey dinners to homeless people on Thanksgiving, we do that. You wanna…getting cold, homeless people shelter when it drops down to below zero, yes. Toy drives, [redacted], giving to the children’s hospitals, you name it. We do a [redacted] community conversation. Police Athletic League is non-stop and it’s so much more than shootin’ hoops and it’s important that everything that we do that we put out there now… We have been doing any and all open discussions, in public, with youths, with adults, with anyone about police trust and police and their relationship with their community and building trust. And that involves, you know, difficult discussions around race, and around police officers, and around our city. And we run it though and we do them all the time. Some departments are afraid to do them or reluctant. We do everything we can. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

**Media Relations.** Media relations is a significant and frequent component of local law enforcement’s public relations activities, which is not surprising, particularly given the *levels of attention, interest and media scrutiny* the participants reported throughout our interviews (see RQ4 for further details about *levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny*). The local law enforcement personnel interviewed for this study offered a range of insights about their media relations *activities* and their *relationships* with the media.
**Activities.** Local law enforcement personnel revealed conducting a wide variety of media relations activities. This section of results focuses mostly on the media relations activities that are not related to website management or social media management; those media relations activities will be discussed more extensively in those specific sections of results later in this study.

Common media relations activities include closely monitoring police and crime activity in order to know what should be shared with the media and public and/or to anticipate inquiries that may come from the media and the public; gathering information, answering “bread-and-butter” media questions, and providing information by phone or via email “in a timely manner”; writing and distributing press releases (in some cases creating video news releases or videos) via email, departmental website, and/or social media; arranging or participating in on-camera or in person interviews; arranging and conducting press conferences; and providing information and/or engaging with the media via social media:

We obtain information for the media about the big incidents, we provide police reports to the media about specific incidents, we provide sound bites to the media about the big incidents, we pull crime stats data, information when it (inaudible) for the media, we send out press releases when appropriate, we put up social media posts depending on what’s going on. It could be something positive like opening up a new recreational center for the police athletic league, it could be the latest homicide, it could an officer-involved shooting, it could be some of our officers being promoted, whatever. It’s just a wide array of things that we post on social media. I also, we also answer a great deal of questions not just from the media, but from the public. On the social media side, we engage with the citizens and I coined a phrase, or I claim I coined a phrase called virtual police community relations or virtual community policing because obviously we can’t have a police car on every block engaging with the public but we can certainly engage city-wide virtually through messages, posts, emails, phone calls. So besides that is the conducting a lot of the administrative duties, that’s basically what we do in this office. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

My first tour [in public information/media relations], I did a lot of press releases. This time I don’t. I only do press releases on the really big things now. Now I typically put it on Facebook and Twitter because it seems redundant to do Facebook, Twitter, and a press release because all of the media sources follow us on those. So, I don’t do anywhere near
as many press releases as I used to. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the West

Regularly on a day-to-day basis, I am answering inquiries from our local media and our local newspaper outlets. So that’s a daily – it can be as simple as road closures, traffic accidents, to a homicide. That information is sent out in a timely manner. We try to make it if it’s like a something that’s ‘happening now’ is what we call it, our news media outlets that ‘happening now’ information I need to get to them within 15 to 20 minutes is what we try to answer those questions. So, on a daily basis that consumes most of the day. – Participant 6, Agency 5, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the South

On any given day, as far as our press information news, we are either by way of email or by way of telephone, requests come in from both printed media and TV media about specifics on various incidents that occur within the city of [redacted city]. Now under [redacted state] law, when either in writing or FOIL request, filed under the FOIA, Freedom of Information Act here in [redacted state], if those cases are active, then there are varying degrees of information that we can release. So that’s our primary concern on any particular day is to respond and get those requests for information back to our local affiliates. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

Every morning we brief the media, we make ourselves available to brief them on overnight occurrences and respond to any question whatsoever that they might have. There’s no rules on what they wanna ask, so we do that every morning, give them – knowing that at least TV media, you know a little bit different than print media– but they need video, they need sound bites, so we give them the opportunity to do that on a daily basis and so we start out each day with that, obviously before that, there are several hours spent educating ourselves on everything that occurred overnight and trying to be prepared for anything they might ask. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

Well a lot of what we do here has to do with media relations. A typical day would start with the standard kind of follow-up on people who have been arrested, they’re showing up at the jail overnight and ‘tell me more about this robbery charge or assault charge’ or ‘you know what, there seems to have been a crime that occurred quite a while ago, did you guys have trouble finding him or did it take you awhile to identify him as a suspect?’ or whatever the case may be, all of those sort of typical bread-and-butter media questions. And we have a two person staff here that interacts with the media… I tend to come in a little later in the day and I do media work, I still do a good deal of it but I also and the one on the staff who gets pulled in on the policy level discussions and provides input from a public affairs perspective in that regard…So, there are those meetings. I handle public records requests, the formal requests that are made under the state’s public records law which is [redacted exact state law]…So a typical day would be a combination of some media relations work, I would that say in one way or another that’s probably half of it, either the work that I do directly or work which I’m consulted. The other half of my day is probably spent maybe on average if you average it out probably 15% on public records requests, another 10% on the preparation of news releases concerning cases or
concerning events. And then the general administrative would account for the rest of it. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

Most frequently as PIO, you’re on the phone for the majority of your shift, talking mostly with media representatives, at some points you get some conversations you have with other law enforcement agencies, but those are minimum, and sometimes we get calls from citizens that get patched through to us to talk about you know any information on any particular cases, but the brunt of our work is spent on the phone with media inquiries. Adding to that, what you’re saying you know ‘what’s in a typical day?’, the phone is obviously dominant and then whatever requests that we get in those phone inquiries we send up through the chain of command, that deals with that particular division, in other words if somebody’s asking for information on an investigation, we’ll send an email to that investigator, and up that investigator’s chain of command, and it’s that chief over that command that actually makes a determination if an interview is approved or not with that investigator and a member of the media, so it’s really not up to the PIO or the investigator or officer as to whether or not an interview is going to be approved or information released, per se. But yeah, phone calls, interview requests that are set up, we write anywhere from probably 4-6 news releases a day and that could deal with anything – a homicide, a fatal traffic accident, a crime prevention initiative that we are doing at that time, so it varies. So between being on the phone, writing of releases and setting up interview requests, that’s the brunt of our day. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

I’ll come in and I’ll look back at the day’s events prior to the current day, so I’ll look back at yesterday’s events, or the day before and just look and see if there’s any pattern, see if there’s any alarming activity, you know if there were 4 or 5 different house breaks in a tight cluster of a geographic area, anything like that, I’ll look there. I’ll also look through, I have TweetDeck that I use frequently, as well as SproutSocial, they’re monitoring tools and for the most part, I am staying up to date with what’s being said about us if people use our symbol in their posts, but just seeing what our followers are posting, what people are posting about [redacted location] using the [redacted location] hashtags, all of that, you know and just going through my email. So that’s generally the first hour or so of every day and then if there hasn’t been anything that raises to the level of you know a response in terms of an alert notification or anything like that it’s just working more on like project-based type work, but I’m responsible for all of our social media channels, all of our accounts, the content on those accounts, the content management of our website, media relations. The media has my desk number and my cell phone number on speed dial, so I’m handling all of those and for the most part that keeps me pretty occupied throughout the course of a day. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Participants reported sometimes pitching softer prevention stories or positive stories about their agencies or individual officers to the media as time and circumstances permit, but indicated that providing hard public safety, crime-related, and crisis information and facts are
more of a priority. Additionally, some participants said that when they post positive stories on social media without formally seeking media coverage, the media then picks up those stories and covers them using their traditional platforms, with social media helping to “drive the narrative.” These participants recounted examples of being able to promote positive “above and beyond” or “service oriented” stories by sharing them on social media first or proactively and directly engaging members of the media to encourage coverage and indicated that these types of efforts have been well received:

A lot of times we would call the media in the past and say ‘Look, an officer’s getting an award for this or this officer did that’ and the media really wasn’t interested. They would you know, there have been attempts in the past to get the word out about things that officers do on a daily basis, that are service oriented. Whether it be buying coats for kids at a school that they see, or any number of things that officers do, that they take it upon themselves to do. Going above and beyond. And the word never got out. So we went to social media to try to get the word out. And it’s like I said, it’s actually driven the narrative in regards to the media. It forces them, when you have a post that goes viral and you have national media agencies calling, you know Fox News, or who at CNN calling about ‘Hey, we saw this picture, can you tell us a little about this. We want to do a story on it. We want to interview the officer.’ Things like that, and it kinda forces the local media to go in that direction as well… I mean mainly PR-wise in here, it all starts with social media. It all starts with Facebook. Like I said, in the past we would call say if our K9 division won competitions at regionals or national competitions, we would do a press release and send it out and hope that the media would pick it up and do something with it. And if it was really slow, they would. Now, we do still send out the press release, but we’ll post it on Facebook as well. And when the media – which all the media outlets in here follow our Facebook page now, you know, and it didn’t take long for them to start following it because they have a lot of content to put with their websites, and with their Facebook pages, they have a need for content. And we recognize that, so by them following us and seeing certain things that that we post, they immediately call… We posted some tips on the Facebook page. Well, I mean as soon as I posted it they called within 5 or 10 minutes, wanting to send the reporters out to do safety tips on [redacted] parades. So of course [redacted names] will go down, or I’ll go down, it just depends. And then the radio stations will call. So it does kind of drive the narrative, it helps us drive the narrative for getting the safety tips that we want to get out. I’ll tell you what, the [redacted specific safety initiative]. When we posted that, I mean it had 10,000 likes within an hour. And of course the media called, and it helps us to get the safety tips out to the public. Those are things that the media would never have done anything about, but when they see the public’s hunger for that information, it drives them to do a story on it. So yeah, it’s definitely helped us drive that narrative for public safety and for public
relations. We’ve really, it’s really been successful for us. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

I spend time on social media looking for good stories, anything positive that’s going on, or just messages of things we want the public to be aware of. About how to harden themselves against vehicle burglaries or bicycle thefts or different scams to be aware on just to so the public can be educated maybe just kind of harden the target a little bit so that citizens in [redacted] aren’t victimized by some of these crimes that are going around or if you’re talking about an arrest or just different things highlighting that and it’s not uncommon for the local media or newspaper pick up on what I put on social media and then I’ll spend time doing interviews and speaking to them about that. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the West

What I’ve been able to do is on slow news days, I’ve been able to pitch positive stories. And that’s really been something that the media like and the public like and I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback on that. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

Agencies also reported media relations activities specifically designed to build better relationships with the media, to promote dialogue and improve communication, to resolve conflicts, and to maximize the media’s exposure to what police officers do on a daily basis. Two agencies reported participating in regular meetings – which one described as “feedback session[s]” – with members of the media to discuss any pertinent communication issues or debrief or any specific cases in which the media and the agency may have had disagreements about the release of information. Additionally, some agencies reported offering behind the scenes opportunities for members of the media to learn more about police work, including going on ride-alongs, becoming embeds, or actively participating in programs like that the aforementioned citizens academies:

We actually have conducted media in-service days. Our PIO is actually part of a committee that meets regularly with the media outlets in our area. They’ll discuss issues or critique what activities or incidents may have happened and why we did what we did or released a particular piece of information the way we did. It’s just kind of a feedback session between media representatives and our PIO who represents our agency. Once a year we will do a media in-service and we actually bring them in and discuss kind of past case specific questions and like if we had a police pursuit, we would kinda critique the pursuit and let them ask us particulars about why didn’t we tell them about who the driver
was that crashed or those things which they like to get immediately and many times we’re not in a position to release it immediately, so you know, it’s a good opportunity for exchanging feedback. We don’t always agree, but many times we’ll agree to disagree on a particular topic, but we don’t make it personal, it’s professional, so we have that happen annually. The media correspondents meet quarterly to discuss trends or issues in the business and so, occasionally a few questions will come up there about [redacted state of agency] FOIA laws and what our perspective is or what our interpretation is of that law, so those things are kind worked out or vetted out at a level lower than an agency administrator. Those are good opportunities to have dialogue with each other and I guess the timeliness of the information is something that the printed media is, they want it right now, so sometimes we have to explain to them, you know, look this is an ongoing investigation you know you can’t have it right now, we’re not done with it yet, this is what we know to this point, but we can’t project into what the investigation may reveal in the next you know 24 hours or the next five hours, so we have to work through those particulars at times. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

One of the things that we do is meet on a regular basis with our local newspaper editor and reporters that would be covering police stories. We have a sit down meeting with them at our police headquarters and we talk about how things are going, are they getting the information they need? Is there anything we can do to improve the communication flow and we discuss those issues and work any conflicts out and so I think that helps a lot…We invite them on ride-alongs with our officers, so we take the media out in our police cars and let them experience what it is like to be out in the field and we have very open access to all of our specialty units. They can go out and train with our SWAT team, they can go to training days, they can embed themselves in a detective unit and see how detectives work on patrol. And then I’ve already mentioned, we do meet with them on a regular basis to talk about issues and I think that’s been helpful. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

**Relationships:** Local law enforcement personnel shared details about how they prioritize their relationships with the media, how they characterize their relationships with and views about the media, and discussed a mutual reliance dynamic that exists between local law enforcement personnel and the media.

Participants offered different perspectives about the degree to which they prioritize the media. For example, some participants indicated that they prioritized building their relationships with citizens or constituents over building their relationships with the media. Participant 1 noted that his agency actually changed the name of the office he oversees to reflect that prioritization. He said: “It [the office] was called media relations for years. I like the name public information
because I don’t think that we should, I guess, really be focused on media and catering to reporters as we should be more focused on catering to the public.” Similarly, Participant 10 provided this insight when he was asked about building trust with the media: “With the media? I’ve never thought of it that way. I don’t try to build trust with the media. I try to build it with our community.” Others had a different take. For example, one participant said:

Our relationship with our community is directly mirrored from our relationship with the media. And if you don’t have a good relationship with the media, you’re probably not going to have a good relationship with your community as well. In an impoverished city. You have to be transparent, you have to always be communicating the good, the bad, and everything because if you’re not doing it then, when something bad happens you need to already have that trust established with both the media and your community. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

Furthermore, while some participants described the overall nature of their individual and agency relationships with the media as “open,” “strong,” “good,” or “very good,” others cast their relationships with and overall views of the media in a less positive light. For example, some participants detailed strained relationships with the media and expressed negative views of the media that stem from their perceptions of the effects of the “big business” of media and the media’s emphasis on “drama,” conflict, the sensational, and “stok[ing] the fires”:

It’s my opinion that the media has figured out that strained relationships and public chaos is big business for the news media. When you have incidents like the Fergusons and the Baltimores, and the you know New York City types of incidents, you have millions of people flocking to their television sets and because they want to watch these things play out before their very eyes, and for people who are, who look beyond the moment, we realize that that’s big business. I mean can you imagine if the media knows, if there’s let’s say if there’s civil unrest, right? And it’s going to extend and it’s clear that it’s not gonna end in 24 hours, it’s clear it’s not gonna end overnight. The news media initially goes into a 24 hour coverage. And then you gradually start to see the commercials come in. Well I would imagine they make a lot of money off of that because they are going to be limited to the commercials that they play because it’s an emergency situation, and because of that they have a lot more viewers. So, there’s some money to be made from that. So, when there’s a minor incident that happens – I shouldn’t say a minor incident. When an incident that happens that to blossom into something else, the media doesn’t take an active role in trying to diffuse the situation, in fact what you’ll see is that they will they will in their own ways, in their own subtle ways they will stoke the fires a little
bit... I don’t think that you’re gonna find law enforcement building trust with the media because here’s what that would require. That would require a consistent – that would require consistent, positive interaction... And what I mean is that the law enforcement, we’re a funny group and you’re not going to burn us twice, right? So if we and I just told you my perception of the news media and how they handle things... And that that is my personal perceptions, so based on what I said to you, you have a right to assume that my level of trust of the news media is rather weak. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

I would much rather deal with the community than I have with media outlets... I think after [more than 30] years of this, the media is such a business now that it’s almost like tabloid TV and all of the media correspondents want to get the exclusive or get it out first or get the first interview and unfortunately where we are proximity wise in the state and the size of our agency, it makes us on any given day, probably the best next story generating machine the media has and so they’re constantly fishing and unfortunately bad news sells, good news doesn’t. And so, they’re always looking for that next bit of drama to lay out there and you know, unlike with the community many times, you know you have to be very guarded now about what you say and how you say it because it will start out as a disorder in a public park and if you frame something just slightly in the wrong context, next thing you know, the media’s adding inferences that you’re racist and you’re biased and then you’ve gotta go down that whole trail of trying to explain yourself out of the situation. So, that’s the ugly part about having to deal with the media. Everybody wants to make you a Ferguson, everybody wants to make you a racist or a bigot. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

While participants differed in describing the prioritization of their relationships with the media and in their characterizations of their relationships with and views of the media, most participants provided insights that demonstrated their understanding that they rely on the media to some degree for disseminating information, educating and engaging the public (particularly for solving crimes), and promoting and ensuring public safety. Furthermore, the participants detailed how the media in turn rely on local law enforcement personnel and agencies for access to timely and accurate information. This reflects a dependency dynamic traditionally described as “intertwined” by one scholar (Cook, 2005, p.3). Participants used words like “two-way,” “give and take,” “coworkers,” “love-hate relationship,” and “partner” to describe this relationship dynamic:
It’s just kind of a two-way, give and take that we do with the media. We try to help them get the content that they want, and in return we try to get our message out. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

We may skew your numbers a little bit, Lindsay, because we have such a good relationship with the media. I mean they’re literally here in an hour and fifteen minutes. They’re all going to be down to here. There’s going to be a representative from every single news station and Telemundo and the newspaper and they come down here every morning and we have a stack of reports from the night before so they can get to freely look at through those reports and see what they’re interested in. Very few PIO offices do that, but we do that as an attempt to be transparent. So, they can basically ask for a sound bite on dealing with those cases. And that’s daily. I mean very single day. So because of that engagement, we’re more coworkers... So, the advantages of the fact that if I’ve got a missing kid, I can send out one email and have everybody down here within 45 minutes for a press conference. And I’m talking about the description, I can show them the car, a picture of the car, the suspect vehicle, show them a picture of the kid and an hour and a half later, we found the kid, ended up being safe and sound. And that guy’s in jail. That’s literally happened. So that’s the biggest advantage, so when we have a good relationship like that, you can do those things and you can use the media as a tool. And it’s mutually beneficial. Again, [redacted percent of evening news local law enforcement agency generates] of the news we generate, so guess what, it’s a great little watering hole for them. At the same time, they don’t want to burn us either. I mean we’ve actually had some embarrassing stories which they haven’t run because it was just embarrassing. A couple officers got mad at each other and they had a fist fight at the police station and it was on camera and we were investigating it. They could’ve run that, and they didn’t. They chose not to, where in a lot of cities that would have been on TMZ. I mean that would have been the headliner. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

It’s a love-hate relationship in many ways, we understand. They’ve got a job to do and they’re running a business, but we have a job to do too and many times you know we have to come to that understanding that you know we’re gonna answer your questions, we’re just not gonna answer them right, here right now, and we will acknowledge X, Y, and Z has taken place, but the particulars of that incident, until they’re vetted out and we’ve got factual information to work from, we’re not gonna step out on that branch and misrepresent what has happened. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

One of the ways that we have tried to establish trust with the media is by being open and transparent and readily responsive. We see the media as a very independent, objective partner that – they have their job to do and we have our job to do, but we can work together. And there’s many times when the media’s actually, through their work helped us solve cases or helped us find missing persons, so we see the media as an asset and a resource to us. And I know that the media always wants to make sure that they’re portrayed in any relationship as objective and they’re not beholden to us at all. I appreciate that independence that they have, but we have a very good working relationship with our media. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West
You know the way media is, the way TV markets are struggling to keep up with the social medias of the world now, they’re thirsty and they need the police department to be transparent and cooperate with them and vice versa. We need them as well so it’s quite a, it’s quite a good relationship. The relationship between media and police has been so bad for so long, the opportunity to succeed in your relationships is so easy right now. All I had to do was answer my phone regularly and talk like a human being and my success level, you know, skyrocketed… – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

Well, you know, for us, the sad reality is that, you know crime is a lead in many cases, so we have frequent contact with the media. And I say that in the sense that they are a valuable partner in what we do, but obviously we wish we didn’t have any crime to report… We really do have to look at the media and do as a partner. You know, if I’m trying to get the word out, we know again in 2016, how we solve bank robberies, trying to get video out as fast as humanly possible to the general public, so the community can help us solve crimes. And if you have a confrontational relationship with the media, you can have a hard time doing that. So, we try to be as accommodating as possible, while reinforcing the fact that there are things that we’re not gonna talk about, debates I’m not gonna get involved with, and things like that…editors and reporters have a job to do and they’ve gotta fill a half hour, they’ve gotta do various things as part of their job. So, they’re calling always, always constantly calling looking for an angle, looking for a story, and we try to work with them the best we can but the fact that they have a job to do doesn’t necessarily mean that we’re gonna make it easy for them like ‘Oh, let me give you some backstory scoop on a crime.’ – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

**Social Media Management.** Social media management is a significant public relations activity for most participants and their agencies, with the exception of the one agency that did not utilize social media and the agencies that revealed that they were only in the “infancy” stages – as Participant 13 described – of using social media as part of their public relations efforts. Participants indicated that their agencies utilize social media for a wide range of public relations purposes, including reputation management, media relations, community relations and engagement, and even internal communication to some degree.

In addition to using platforms like Twitter and Facebook – the platforms used most frequently by law enforcement according to the IACP – some participants reported using additional social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Nextdoor, Vine, and
Periscope. Some participants also reported that their agencies have adopted or developed mobile apps that allow their agencies to reach key publics to share information (e.g., emergency alerts, prevention tips) through email and text messaging via smartphones and cell phones and/or allow key publics to share information or feedback (e.g., crime tips, compliments or complaints) with the local law enforcement agency. Some of these tools, such as Nextdoor and mobile apps, have allowed local law enforcement agencies to target their community engagement outreach to specific, segmented audiences. For example, one participant noted that his agency used social media to reach out to specific underrepresented groups and communities when soliciting information about crimes, incidents, or issues impacting those communities. Other participants said that it is useful to target specific neighborhoods with information and alerts through a tool like Nextdoor if there is a cluster of crimes in a neighborhood or neighborhoods that may not be pervasive throughout the entire community.

The local law enforcement personnel who participated in this study generally view social media platforms as informational, educational, and engagement tools that can support the objectives of timeliness, transparency, accessibility, and convenience for users. They also view social media tools as important opportunities to deliver accurate, unfiltered, and immediate information to key audiences and as venues for receiving information and feedback from those audiences. Furthermore, as discussed in the reputation management results section of this study, participants have begun to harness the power of social media as means to humanize local law enforcement officers and the profession, build better understanding, and improve perceptions. Generally, participants viewed social media as more effective and widely used means to communicate with and engage the media and citizens than their departmental websites. I will
discuss these points in further detail in the results section dedicated to RQs 7 and 8 about perceptions of how online tools impact local law enforcement’s relationships with key publics.

These following detailed accounts from local law enforcement personnel provide further descriptive insight into local law enforcement’s social media management activities and their use of social media for a wide range of public relations purposes. The selected quotes included below give a snapshot of the diversity of participant responses overall, while also highlighting the aforementioned common themes. For example, this participant’s extensive discussion of his agency’s use of social media encompasses reputation management, community relations and engagement, media relations, and internal communication:

I guess the reason we I guess delved into social media was to allow – let the public know what officers do on a daily basis. A lot of times we would call the media in the past and say ‘Look, an officer’s getting an award for this or this officer did that’ and the media really wasn’t interested…Whether it be buying coats for kids at a school that they see, or any number of things that officers do… Going above and beyond. And the word never got out. So we went to social media to try to get the word out. And it’s like I said, it’s actually driven the narrative in regards to the media… I think social media has been a huge benefit for the public’s perception of law enforcement, at least for our department in the last year since we’ve started it. It’s been incredible actually… Part of the reasons we started with Twitter, Twitter’s a little bit different than Facebook. I think Facebook is more PR-oriented, whereas Twitter is more, you know, safety for the public. And we do link some of the stories that we post on Facebook on Twitter, but Twitter’s, you’ll notice we don’t post a whole lot except when there’s an emergency situation – road closures – for certain reasons, things like that… With the public, obviously people use social media now more than ever, and so it’s a public safety, more about public safety for Twitter than it is about PR, whereas Facebook is probably more PR oriented…I mean mainly PR-wise in here, it all starts with social media. It all starts with Facebook. Like I said, in the past we would call say if our K9 division won competitions at regionals or national competitions, we would do a press release and send it out and hope that the media would pick it up and do something with it. And if it was really slow, they would. Now, we do still send out the press release, but we’ll post it on Facebook as well…So yeah, it’s definitely helped us drive that narrative for public safety and for public relations. We’ve really, it’s really been successful for us…I get a lot more content now than I probably did when we first started the [Facebook] page. Whereas officers now, especially with [redacted name of recognition program], their family members can see and they comment and they share…and it goes crazy…It’s just nice to do something for those officers that we…normally we can’t do. So yeah, it’s made a big difference. It makes a difference I think in morale as well. When an officer can get recognition from their friends and their
families, and say ‘Hey, I saw that you did that on Facebook. That was really cool or that was nice and you did that.’ – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

These participants placed heavy emphasis on the use of social media for community relations and engagement and reputation management. They also discussed using social media as a media relations tool, including for clarifying or correcting inaccurate information, for providing “good” and “bad” information, and for communicating with the media directly during major incidents or crises:

We put up social media posts depending on what’s going on. It could be something positive like opening up a new recreational center for the police athletic league, it could be the latest homicide, it could be an officer-involved shooting, it could be some of our officers being promoted, whatever, it’s just a wide array of things that we post on social media… On the social media side, we engage with the citizens and I coined a phrase, or I claim I coined a phrase called virtual police community relations or virtual community policing because obviously we can’t have a police car on every block engaging with the public but we can certainly engage city-wide virtually through messages, posts, emails, phone calls… Social media has become our 800 pound gorilla… I nicknamed our social media page or our Facebook page ‘the good, the bad, and the ugly’ because we put it all out there. So the public consistency – they’ve seen that we put everything on there. If an officer gets in trouble, we put it on there. If we fire an officer, we put it on there. If we open up a new rec center, we put it on there… We can showcase a lot of our PR efforts, like town hall meetings and events that we’re involved in and that also builds trust… If you go on the social media page right now, it’s got [redacted] African American officers in celebration of Black History Month. I mean that shows engagement. The fact that we’ve put Merry Christmas on our [social media] wallpaper during Christmastime or Happy Thanksgiving or Happy St. Paddy’s Day, that’s engagement, that’s celebrating culture… So, it’s like we’re not just this robotic, authoritative agency, we’re part of the community and that’s the biggest thing we try to do… We used to send out press releases for every nickel and dime thing that happened… Now we only do it on in-custody deaths, officer-involved shootings, and new programs. That’s it. Everything else, Facebook has replaced the official press release… We let the media do their job and we let them try to be objective, but there’s been a couple of stories that really made us look bad and they really misused the facts and on those cases, we actually put up, we posted a rebuttal and we linked the story to the Facebook post. We basically explained that we believe that the below story is whatever, incomplete or incorrect… And on one of the occasions, they removed, they quickly removed the story off their website and called and apologize for it because we have such a strong following that they don’t want to make it look like they’re incorrect… If it’s that big and it’s that controversial and they screwed up that bad, yes, Facebook, social media now gives us an avenue to say ‘Hey, that’s not right that’s not...
fair, you got it wrong.’ – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

So, we had no social media footprint when I took over a few years back. I was able to get a Facebook page going. It’s updated daily. Twitter has been the biggest avenue for me to be busy without being buried as far as social media. Reaching, the biggest opportunity is the number of people you can reach and quickly and that leads to and if you stay on top of it, you look, we’re doing it every day, and what I put out is not just propaganda. You know, it’s not all just good stuff. I’ll put out that we’re doing a shooting. I’ll put out stuff, arrests and things. It’s not just you know…cops hugging babies. It’s an opportunity to build trust is the main thing that’s there I’d say…Time wise it’s so much easier. I can put out a [tweet on] Twitter rather than a press release and get everything out in my Twitter page pretty quick and sometimes I’ll follow up with a press release later. During a major incident, on Twitter, I can tell the media where to stage… It’s pretty convenient… No one ever had any idea what we did here in [redacted city] as a police department and people are starting to see just how much work we do here in [redacted city] and what we do and it’s been great for the department and the city. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

This participant emphasized using social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Nextdoor for community relations and engagement as well as reputation management purposes:

On these social media sites, [citizens] have an opportunity to ask questions and we’re able to kind of, especially with stuff like Twitter and Nextdoor, we can answer questions. We can kind of help with the transparency that our department strives for. Putting information out quickly, you know the news cycle is what it is, but sometimes people want answers yesterday or people want you know, again, back to that rumor control, and we’re able to reach a lot of people very quickly on our own platforms and get our message out to people and I think people really appreciate that, that we’re talking to them on these different platforms that they’re using… Facebook has our biggest following, so I call that the granddaddy of all of our social media, so we what we use Facebook for is to put out a lot of positive stories that maybe the traditional media would not cover. So we will put out stuff like what we would call [redacted name] which is great stories about officers doing good in the community, whether they’re on a call for service, whether they are you know visiting a school, whether they are, anything like that, we will share that information on Facebook. We also use something like Twitter where we’ll put out monthly things like the Most Wanted, Crime Stoppers will give us the 5 Most Wanted and we’ll put that out on Twitter… We do safety tips, sometimes on Facebook, but usually we’ll use Twitter for that… Recently we put out information about an [redacted] scam that was going around, and we used Nextdoor to put that information out and people really, really appreciated that because they were getting the fake calls from people claiming to be [redacted]… I got a lot of feedback saying you know the fact that y’all validated that this is not true really helped us in our decision not to call them back and not to engage with this person… We’re able to put that information out and it doesn’t have to wait for the news cycle for us to get our message out, so if it’s something like breaking,
for example, if it was something I don’t know, something catastrophic, which we haven’t had, we’re able to put it out on Facebook and get, and because we’re a verified account, we have credibility with the community as far as our social media goes. People are going to look to it and say ‘Ok, this is their official stance on it or this is what’s actually happening and again, back to one of my first points about rumor control, we can kind of control that because we can put our message out and as long as we are giving factual and updated information, I think that that helps to our credibility… Sometimes we ask for the public’s help on stuff too, so they’ll respond back on things, whether it’s something happening that we need to know about and maybe we didn’t know or something like that, they will respond back and we don’t really encourage it too much because we’re not on Facebook and Twitter 24/7. And we do put that on there that it’s not monitored 24/7, so if it’s an emergency, you know use 911, but we do get feedback from citizens about what they want to hear and whether it’s something that they find useful… We’re able to put out a lot of things that go on at the department that people may not know of or people may not realize, but even if it’s just a positive picture, you know it kind of humanizes the department a bit also, you know and also people kind of see the inside of what goes on in the department…. We like to show kind of like the human side of police officers, that we’re not just robots, that we’re actually, you know, we’re moms and dads and brothers and sisters. – Participant 18, Agency 14, Social Media Coordinator in the South

**Internal Communication.** Internal communication is a theme that was discussed by participants in two specific and different ways – communications internal to the department and communications internal to the local law enforcement agency’s associated municipality.

Some examples of communication internal to the department include officer recognition activities through awards, promotional, or retirement ceremonies and events as well as online recognition efforts (e.g., via Facebook) that promote the positive acts and contributions of officers to the department and the community. Another example of communication internal to the department includes improving communication between different segments of the department. An additional example of communication internal to the department includes working and communicating within the departmental hierarchical chain of command about daily tasks.

Some examples of communication internal to the local law enforcement agency’s associated municipality include collaborative and shared work on day-to-day tasks, specific
initiatives, campaigns, or key communications and information messages and ensuring the local law enforcement agency and others within the municipality are on the “same page,” as Participant 14 described below.

These participant quotes provide examples of these two types of internal communication (departmental and municipal) and further details of how local law enforcement agencies are engaging in these activities in practice.

**Departmental internal communication.** Departmental internal communication refers to efforts to communicate within the local law enforcement agency. This includes communication from the leadership to those on the beat and communication from the rank and file up through the chain of command to members of the command staff:

I mean officers have done, everything that’s been posted in the last year on our Facebook page is something that an officer either took it upon themselves to do, it wasn’t directed by the chief or the administration in any way. These are things that officers have done throughout the years that have just never gotten any recognition for it. And I think officers are starting to see that now… So we get, I get a lot more content now than I probably did when we first started the page. Whereas officers now, especially with [redacted], their family members can see and they comment and they share…and it goes crazy. And retirements. I mean there’s things that we’ll post when an officer retires after 30 years, or 32 years or 25 years of service. It’s just nice to do something for those officers that we… normally we can’t do. So, yeah, it’s made a big difference. It makes a difference I think in morale as well when an officer can get recognition from their friends and their families, and say ‘Hey, I saw that you did that on Facebook. That was really cool, or that was nice and you did that.’ – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

I think one of the things you have to guard against and we’re very conscious of it here is to not misrepresent the factual data and we vet that a news, a press release through about six different people before it goes out. So, once it’s crafted by the public information officer here, he does not have the autonomy to hit the send button until at least two or three and sometimes five or six staff level members who are familiar with the circumstances have read through that press release because somewhere along the line the more eyes internally[ly] that we put on it, we will pick up something that we will wanna change or word in a different way, so are very conscious of that. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South
I also am the one on the staff who gets pulled in on the policy level discussions and provides input from a public affairs perspective in that regard. In some ways, I think you also serve as kind of a public ombudsman in those cases and I’m not talking just about with the police department…I think that it’s not uncommon for the public affairs, public information personnel to provide, to be the sort of public ombudsman person and talk about what people are going to want to know about a certain issue or a certain event or incident and to talk about what they have a right to know and then provide the context of if you say it this way, it’s probably clearer than saying it some other way kind of thing…I supervise two people, one I’ve spoken of already and another is an internal communications person. And so we also handle some communication with the department. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

So I manage…communications internally as well for our staff, the chief’s office, I report directly to the chief as part of the command staff and so my role is communications facilitator for the department internally as well…We have a tremendous amount of community support from our, on our Facebook page, which we share out with staff a lot because they, actually a lot of our personnel follow us on Facebook, which is great… it’s a great place for our own folks and their spouses and families to see what’s kind going on in the police department, so that’s how we use Facebook. – Participant 16, Agency 8, Public Information Officer in the West

Whatever requests that we get in those phone inquiries we send up through the chain of command that deals with that particular division. In other words if somebody’s asking for information on an investigation, we’ll send an email to that investigator, and up that investigator’s chain of command, and it’s that chief over that command that actually makes a determination if an interview is approved or not with that investigator and a member of the media, so it’s really not up to the PIO or the investigator or officer as to whether or not an interview is going to be approved or information released, per se. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

I like to get more involved in a lot of the internal communications here, there’s a lot of work. We have silos within the department, there’s investigations, there’s operations, there’s civilian administration, that type of thing, so just trying to you know forge a tighter connection between those different silos. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

**Municipal internal communication.** Municipal internal communication refers to the efforts of the local law enforcement agency to communicate with other departments or leaders associated with the municipality in which the law enforcement agency operates:

Well the city that I work for has a broader public relations team that works at City Hall and they do city wide communications and representing the council, and the mayor, and the city manager’s office. And the police, we do partner with them, but we tend to – our message is more specific to police. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West
We all have to make sure we have a shared message and my role and responsibility is to make sure that I assist them in communicating their needs. Like if there is an issue with the school that involves law enforcement, I communicate with the school and get that out. Just about everything we do affects the mayor’s office, so we try to work with them as well. If there’s any sort of storm, if there’s any sort of weather related thing, we’re talking with DPW, fire department. Could have a traffic impact. So we all try to stay on the same page communications wise with what we do. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

[Redacted] is kind of on its own. You’re kind of on your own when it comes to releasing information, now that doesn’t mean, I mean there are instances throughout a given week that we will CC information that we release to our mayor’s communications office…Just to let them know and then generally that’s done if it’s a big story of the day or big story of that week or something. As soon as we share the information with the media, we will CC them, so there are no surprises… So, they will know if we have an officer relieved of duty for you know criminal conduct or something that went down at a traffic stop or something like that, they will know in that email before it hits the news. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

In the past, there’s almost been like silos in the city, where every department would kind of handle their own thing. And they had you know enough staff to accommodate that, but over the years and due to budget cuts, you know when you’re dealing with less staff and all of a sudden you have to reach out to your counterparts in the different departments, whether it’s the parks, whether it’s our traffic bureau, whether it’s you know courts, etc. And so we really rely on our other departments a lot more than we ever have and I would say that more so for the community engagement unit because by the time something hits our desk, for whatever reason, everyone has had their hand in it, meaning we’ve had a dealing with the trash folks, the parks department, there are different folks, meaning when the citizens they’ve called in have kind of bounced around to different departments. And so when it ends up on our desk, then we have to reach back out to those departments …but we really, we definitely rely on each other, and having where everybody has their expertise. And so really is important and we utilize each other quite a bit. I don’t know necessarily day to day, but definitely a few times a month, there’s outreach within the organization. – Participant 20, Agency 16, Sergeant, Commander in the Midwest

**Website Management.** Local law enforcement personnel generally indicated that website management was a less significant public relations activity than social media management relative to the amount of time and resources dedicated to managing these tools, with the exception of those participants whose agencies did not use social media, did not use social media frequently, or who were in the very early stages of adopting social media as part of
their public relations efforts. Several participants indicated that their agencies lacked total control over their websites because those websites were departmental subsites of the larger municipality’s website, as opposed to standalone websites. In these cases, participants reported at least some oversight or website management being done by personnel outside of the police department. These circumstances left participants feeling somewhat limited in what they could do to shape their website’s look, content, and functionality. Others reported that they had recently upgraded their websites or had plans to upgrade their websites to improve functionality, add more interactive features, and make them a better resource for key publics. Additionally, some participants reported that they spent little time on website management because they did not think it was as useful to spend time managing their websites when they viewed social media as more effective and more widely used means to communicate with and engage key publics like the media and citizens:

Our website sucks. And we’re actually revamping it, as a matter of fact I’m probably going to end up working all day Saturday because I’m uploading all my stuff. Our website is actually being revamped and upgraded. We’re going with a totally different company. This website that’s on our page is actually going to have a little Facebook ticker showing the stuff that we put on Facebook and social media as well. So it’s going to be intertwined with social media, the website, but it’s currently under construction… We’re putting things that the public needs—how to pay your ticket, how to, you know, what public programs do we have, what community outreach programs do we have, what are our policies. Things like that people are most interested in. And the company that we’re hiring to do this, is a company out of [redacted], for us they took a computerized survey so they could determine what more people were clicking on so we decided to make those action keys right on the front of the page… I mean it’s just a poor website right now, it’s very simple, it’s very basic, there’s no bells and whistles on it. Very boring to look at and to read through, so that’s been a barrier. So people discount our website. Even though some people do use it, they actually will just call us or use our Facebook page as a source of information. We’re looking to change that because the new design is 100% better. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

Our website’s lacking… We’re revamping it, again, I could be missing something – even when we revamp it, which I know it’s going to be really good, it just seems that more people, in my opinion, are going to go to Facebook and Twitter. The media use Twitter more but the community, they’re always on Facebook. So I feel like they’re probably not
When I took over our website, it was a shit show. It was run out of city hall, it was an absolute disaster. The chief told me: ‘Fix it.’ I have a secretary, the chief’s secretary helps me with it, she monitors it, and she actually knows how to run the software. I was able to get city hall to give me some control of our website even though it’s the city website technically and we’ve been able to keep it updated daily as far as that goes. We have, our website has a place for FOI stuff, general news stuff, contacts, a place to submit anonymous tips which has been huge. You can see it, it’s not bad, it’s not the greatest, but we’re again confined with what the city allows us because it’s really their website not our own personal one. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

I think your social media tools are more important nowadays than your website, but your website helps you know with hiring and with policies and with helping your constituents do things online rather than go and stand in line at city hall for registration for a car or paying a fine, or FAQs, there’s a lot of opportunities out there, so I think it’s definitely been a positive tool… and I think again the Facebook or your social media world versus the website is just a faster loop. You know you’re putting regular information out, everybody’s doing it. You know websites are certainly important, but they’re passé to a certain extent when you’re trying to actually communicate with people. It's good for FAQs, it's good for applications and things of that nature, but if you're trying to communicate with people, just keep them updated on something, social media is certainly the way to go. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

Despite some perceived overall shortcomings regarding their websites, participants generally indicated that they did view their websites as valuable informational and educational “hubs” serving administrative and customer service public relations purposes, while furthering objectives such as transparency, accessibility, and convenience for users. Participants reported their agencies use their websites for some media relations activities, to promote and inform the public about some community relations and engagement activities, for some reputation management activities, and as a tool for providing some information about or access to public records resources or open data initiatives. Participants generally did not report using their websites for internal communication purposes:

We put information on [the website] about the [redacted] Police Department, so people can go there and kind of learn. We want to put information down out there so that they may be able to answer their own questions through our website. Without picking up the
phone, 24 hours, 7 days a week. They can click on the website...Our annual report is there, and then we said, wait this is great opportunity for us to also get people some additional information and that is ‘Why don’t we put a link to our recruitment section?’ They can fill out a contact sheet, say ‘Yep, I want to work for the police department.’ We put the link for our recruitment on there, and then we said alright people have busy time and busy schedules, they may want to write a complaint or a compliment about a police officer and some of them may want to be anonymous, so we put that there, our complaints and our tips, sorry our complaints and compliments line...And our tips line, sometimes people don't want to pick up the phone and call the police, they want to pick up their smartphone, they want to text the police, so yep our tips line is there...One of the things that I find that’s a little enticing to people that want to come and use our website is that I know people are nosey, right? They want it, they like to get into other people’s business. So we have our warrant, you can go on our website and you can check for people that you know, that have active warrants. No one’s going to know that you’re checking on them...So this is this is enticing to citizens who are nosey, this is enticing to landlords who want to rent, this is enticing to employers who want to hire someone. So when we look at our website we look at various ways to attract people to our website, and then once they get there we will try to help provide opportunities for them to have as much information right there at their fingertips. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

It is much more formal, it is a part of the city’s main website and we have our own area where that’s if you wanna file an application or if you want to become a – attend the citizen’s police academy, you can get those applications off of the main website, if you want to learn about the structure of the police department, you can do that from the main website. It is geared more toward administrative aspects of the department, the chain of command, who the command staff members are, what the philosophy of the police department is, so it is more a representative of the administrative functions and tasks of our agency more so than our Facebook or Twitter...Again I think folks will seek out with kind of the paperwork answers to questions on that particular venue and if it’s easy to navigate and negotiate, it prevents that frustration factor from kind of engaging and in that context I think your website is vital to you. If folks want to talk to a real body, they’re going to call you anyway, but it’s better that they call less aggravated than more aggravated and I think if you’ve got poor website flow or information, it contributes to that aggravation factor. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

Well, we have a department website which is embedded as most police departments within the city’s website and it’s primarily for information sharing. And let’s see, we have all kinds of resources on our website from how to prevent a crime, how to report a crime, department information, career information, and other pretty standard website information with locations of our facilities. We have had and will still have it again a link to crime mapping so citizens can just look anywhere in the City and look at the crimes that occurred within date ranges which they can establish or within a geographical area which the citizen can establish. So, we felt that was helpful so they’d have crime data at their fingertips literally. I already mentioned that online crime reporting is something that we have had and we just switched to a different records management
system, so we’re bringing the crime reporting back up in the next month or so. So, for lower level crimes, people can make, file a report online, they can file citizen complaints or commendations online and things like that. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

So, the city has a main website, of which we have sort of subsites as a city department. So, each department has someone that manages their department website, but we have a webmaster for the city that kind of overall oversees the template because we’re all, all have a very similar look and feel… The website is again a conduit of the city of [redacted], so each department within the city has their own website and ours is obviously promoting – mainly it’s a hub for people to get information, so we don’t push out a lot of information from our website, obviously because it’s sort of a stationary place. So, we do post our media releases on there, so those are kind of the most updated part of our website would be our media release page. The chief does – we stopped using, doing a kind of printed annual report a few years ago as video became much more the go-to place for people to want to watch videos online, he started doing a video annual report updates, which are actually more quarterly and so I manage that program and that is something that’s frequently updated when he has a new video report, we post that on our website. Certainly we do seasonal things on our website, seasonal crime prevention, summer, holidays, various times of the year when you want to encourage people to incorporate more crime prevention and personal safety practices based on seasonal trends, we do those types of updates to our website very frequently. So our website is, while it has some static pages which are kind of crime prevention tips that really never change, we hope people always utilize them, we do keep our website very much updated with current information related to things that are going on in our community that involve our police department. We do, I keep the pictures updated with current personnel, if we have any changes to practices at our precincts that the public, services that the public can access, those are frequently updated. We also have a kind of a how to page for how do you do certain things because obviously we don’t do everything but citizens do call the police department for a lot of services, many of which we do not perform, so we have a pretty robust how to page to keep citizens on track with where they can go, including links to other agencies and other websites that they can go to to get the forms or the information that they need. So it’s sort of a go-to place for a lot of information. – Participant 16, Agency 8, Public Information Officer in the West

I will discuss these points in further detail in the results section dedicated to RQs 7 and 8 about perceptions of how online tools impact local law enforcement’s relationships with key publics.

Some participants reported having more than one agency website. For example, one agency reported having a general website with basic departmental information and a website
specifically for crime and incident information that catered largely to the media. Another agency reported having a general website and a website specifically for recruitment purposes:

We have two websites. One is through the city of [redacted]. It’s a subsidiary of our general city website and is, it’s maintained by us, but it’s set up through the city. And that’s for general information about different divisions of our department, different resources, organizational structure, policies, it’s the general hub of just all the nitty-gritty information that the public could want about us. It’s not a place where we promote ourselves necessarily and it’s not a place where we respond to anything. We also have a second website that we use to get crime information out to the public about shootings, car accidents, we post videos of robbery suspects if there is surveillance video, captures, things like that, so that’s kind of our, I don’t want to call it our negative place, but it’s where we can talk about specific incidents rather than just being an information resource. And that website is [redacted]… it’s a great place for us to, as the sergeant said, to not only put the day-to-day crime stuff because we’ve found while we have our four local television stations and our one newspaper in town, we’ve got bloggers, we’ve got student journalists, everybody wants everything, so everything we put out to the normal media, the traditional media, we also put on that website too. So, along with that, that’s where we put our good news too, good arrests and all that kind of stuff…I do the majority of the stuff on our [redacted] website and if stuff needs to be done on the city website, I have nominal training that I can work my way through it, but if not, I call over to the city IT person and they’ll help me out. – Participants 11 & 12, Agency 10, Sergeant, Public Information Officer and Media Producer in the Midwest

Well, the website is part of an overall city endeavor and it is used basically as a two-fold purpose, largely just as a press bulletin and as an information source. It’s also used if you want to know who to call at the police department, what district do you live in, it’s a source for doing that. We certainly have used the web portal for displaying good news about our employees, for example, if one of our officers has won an award or something like that. We do have a secondary website which plays a very important role, a very important role in our recruiting. There’s a separate recruiting website and in essence it provides, it’s the principal gateway to the department. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

These insights provide further detail about local law enforcement’s website management activities and their use of websites for public relations purposes associated with open data initiatives, including crime mapping:

You go to the [redacted] website, which is linked to the city. That is one issue that I probably have more than any other is the fact that the city [redacted] controls all the city department websites. So any time that I need an update to our website, or anything else I have to go through the city [redacted] IS to get that done… You have to go to the general city [redacted] website and then you go to departments, and then police, it pulls up our
website. All of the press releases are here, open data is here. Now open data when you click on it, it pulls up, you can get the crime maps, crime incidents. They can click on them and it’ll pull up the crimes, let me go back because you can pull up the map. Let’s see, I’m going to pull up the map on and they can zoom in and see particular crimes in their neighborhood. Say if they’re having a rash of thefts, bicycles, things like that, you can pull it up and they’re all color coded, so you can zoom in on all the certain areas… And we get a lot of neighborhood associations that’ll contact us. In the past, we used to have to go and try to get our crime stats individually to pull that information up. And it took a lot of man hours and now we just direct them to the website… – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

Our website, I think is a great tool for us to be able to put a lot of information on it, so that it’s always available for anybody to access it at any time they want whether it’s educationally about our department or different resources we do. We have a ton of information on our website, anywhere from crime mapping, so anybody can look on there and almost real time see what kind of crime has occurred or is occurring in town, where it’s at, exactly what kind of report we took and it goes back several months so a little bit historical there, a lot of critical information about crime in the city and our police chief writes a blog periodically so that kind of gives you a little update on where he’s at with different things so lots of information on our website from a resource (inaudible) and I think that’s very advantageous for us to be able to provide to our community or even anybody outside our community that wants to look at it. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

We have a community that has very high standards, a very well educated community that is financially in a really good standing and they are usually interested in transparency and data so we started our open data initiative just a couple of years ago and have become more and more invested in doing that and providing open data sourced information for people so that they can look at the numbers themselves… So for our website, it’s a fairly static site, and to me it’s just ensuring that we have, if someone goes onto our site, just thinking about the customer experience and giving them the best experience that they can find, that they can find information quickly, easily… We have Google analytics tracked to our site. We utilize that to ensure that the information or the pages that they’re going to are always updated, they have the most relevant information, but there’s not a lot of time invested in our website. The biggest amount of time is ensuring that it works well, it’s responsive, and like I said, the information’s updated one the pages that people go to the most quite simply. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Public Records/Freedom of Information Act Request Management. Some participants revealed that they personally directly oversee public records or Freedom of Information Act request management, while others indicated they have varying levels of participation in the public records management process. For example, some participants reported
consulting with and assisting municipal legal advisors who were primarily responsible for fulfilling requests, while others indicated they play more direct roles in fulfilling public records requests. Some participants indicated that their agencies had numerous personnel – such as an entire unit made up of six or seven staff members – responsible for facilitating public records requests, while other participants indicated that they had minimal personnel – such as one person – primarily dedicated to fulfilling public records or Freedom of Information Act requests:

So you have to be very cognizant of what you release and [redacted] are very good. You know [redacted] been in here for about eight years and [redacted] been in here for about five years, so they know what can be released to the media and what can’t. And if we have any questions, we go right next door, our legal advisor who actually works with the [redacted] attorney’s office is in the office next door, so any time we get, any time we give any kind of public records request or anything, we just send them straight over to her. And if it’s information, then she will gather that information and call the reporter to come and look at it. If they want to pay for it, if it’s a video or something, then they’ll pay for the cost for us to burn it on a disk and get it to them. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

Part of my role in public affairs, as the public information officer, the public affairs officer, but I’m also over the FOIA unit, the Freedom of Information Act. So, I have [redacted number] sergeants that handle all FOIA requests, they do report to me. So, all the FOIA requests from the attorneys and the city and the citizens, they all come to my office concerning police issues….Yes, so that can be problematic – well it’s not necessarily problematic, it’s just that some of the FOIA requests we get are so large and so time-consuming and you know that. It’s like, oh my gosh. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

I handle public records requests, the formal requests that are made under the state’s public records law which is [redacted]. So a typical day would be a combination of some media relations work, I would that say in one way or another that’s probably half of it, either the work that I do directly or work which I’m consulted. The other half of my day is probably spent maybe on average if you average it out probably 15% on public records requests, another 10% on the preparation of news releases concerning cases or concerning events. And then the general administrative would account for the rest of it. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

We’re very fortunate here that we’ve got an open records unit that is separate from us, they’re on our same floor here [redacted]. We also have a number of personnel, probably six or seven personnel, who make up our open records unit, so we’re fortunate in that for the most part any time a media outlet or reporter or anybody wants a document, we will refer them to the open records unit and say hey, here’s an email address that you can send
it to, we’ll help them out with the case number of whatever that incident is that they’re asking about, but we’ll also be up front with them and tell them, ‘Hey, look, it’s an open investigation, so you’re likely, you’re only gonna get page one…’ So, we’ll let the media know what they’re gonna get and what they can expect. I mean say, for example, they ask how many officer involved shootings have you had year to date compared to the last five or 10 years? That’s a request that we would send over to the open records unit. And then it’s open records personnel, it’s their job to get with our legal services people as far as, okay: What can we release? What do we have to redact in this report? What we can’t release period because legally we can’t, so most of that legal stuff comes in on the open records side. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

We have a community that has very high standards, a very well educated community that is financially in a really good standing and they are usually interested in transparency and data so we started our open data initiative just a couple of years ago and have become more and more invested in doing that and providing open data sourced information for people so that they can look at the numbers themselves. But with that comes the expectation that public records are going to be available at all times and we receive a lot of public records [requests], and again in terms of building that trust with your community you know we have to make sure that we commit to supporting those as they come in and more. And they can be major challenges because of the resources and commitment it takes to follow through with that type of request. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Perceptions of Similarities and Differences

Chapter 1 outlined the numerous environmental characteristics that scholars have identified as being unique to or more salient to the governmental public relations sector versus other sectors of public relations, particularly the corporate sector. In order to understand how local law enforcement personnel perceive their public relations activities and environmental characteristics as similar to and different from other local governmental departments and local governmental agencies in their municipality or their overall municipality overall (RQ4), I asked the participants to describe such similarities and differences. I often provided the examples of public relations work for a parks department or public relations work for a mayor’s office as reference points to provide clarity and context for the type of comparison and contrasting I was inquiring about. After conducting several of the initial participant interviews, I noticed some common themes surrounding the level of interest, attention, and media scrutiny, so I also began
to ask subsequent participants about those perceived differences as part of my interview process. Participants also shared relevant information that applied to this research question throughout other portions of my interviews with them.

**Similarities.** The participants were much more quick to identify perceived differences than similarities, though participants noted their efforts associated with the aforementioned collaborative and shared work with other local governmental departments (internally and externally), local governmental agencies, or their municipality overall on day-to-day tasks, specific initiatives, campaigns, or key communications and information messages as one common theme.

**Collaborative and shared work.** Some additional examples that participants provided supporting this perceived similarity associated with the aforementioned collaborative and shared work include the following:

Well, we communicate quite a bit with…the city PIO’s office because we do campaigns together, especially when it relates to public safety or crosswalks, or whatever the issue is. We stay pretty tight with our fire PIO, he calls, he’s new, so he calls and he’ll ask for a lot of advice. Same with the PIO for the [redacted] Sheriff’s Department which happens to be right across the street from us…And then [redacted] Public Schools. We stay pretty tight with their PIO office because there’s always something going on at the schools and our officers provide the security for the campuses so, we stay pretty tight with them. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

We are discussing with them [the city] and our other partners within county governments, [redacted] so between the people that handle PIO type stuff on the different counties, the city, the different departments as well as our federal partners [redacted] who we work probably closer with than any other municipality around as well. Always communicating with them, talking back and forth with them, seeing what's going on, seeing if there's something we need to partner on. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

We report into the city manager’s office – our police commissioner does at least. And the city manager is kind of our – in some cases it would be a mayor – but he has a staff of two communications folks. I work very closely with them on a variety of city based issues or communication opportunities. I’m doing a lot with them as well as our public health department…one of the things we’re seeing a lot of increases on is more mental
health illness related issues, so we’re doing a lot of outreach on that and as a result, we’re working closely with public health. So I have a peer over there that I work with very closely on everything from homeless outreach efforts and educating the public about that to our opioid crisis. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

**Differences.** Several key prominent themes emerged regarding the perceived differences associated with local law enforcement public relations relative to public relations in other local governmental departments, local governmental agencies, or municipalities overall. These include demand and being “24/7;” the level of attention paid to, the level of interest in, and the level of media scrutiny associated with local law enforcement; and the inherent nature and complexity of law enforcement interactions and information.

**Demand and being “24/7.”** Participants shared that they believe there is a greater demand for and expectation of information from them than counterparts practicing public relations in other governmental areas. These perceptions are related to the volume and frequency of inquiries as well as the immediacy of and responsiveness anticipated with such inquiries, particularly from the media.

For example, participants shared these details:

I think we’re kind of unique, Lindsay, in the fact that we in [redacted], my office through [redacted] reports, whatever else, it’s estimated that we generate approximately [redacted percent of evening news local law enforcement agency generates] of the evening news…So, we stay a lot busier, where my counterpart at the Sheriff’s Office, he may do one interview a week. My record for one day is 17 interviews in one day…We stay a lot busier, so because of that, because of the volume and because of the work that we do, we’re pretty much the – how could I put this – the busiest and the most influential public relations office in the state. We’re on the news a lot more than the government’s press secretary, so it’s extremely busy here. It never ends... I can get a phone call at any time of the night. People send us messages at all times. At times, they’re crime tips that they’re pretty important like the location of a homicide suspect and we have to act on those immediately. So me and my staff pretty much are always working to some degree. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

We are probably, I can’t necessarily put a number on it, but we are way busier than other departments that deal with public relations. The police department, it’s just a full time
job. In fact, I have an assistant PIO, then I have a civilian that helps me with social media. Then I have someone that runs citizens police academy classes, so we are a large operation as far as public affairs at the police department. We’re busier than every other city department, hands down. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

Yeah, the media is calling us because they’re listening to the police scanners and they’re following what’s happening at the courts and so we have much more real time media focus on the police department than other departments in the city…I think maybe one other thing is the time sensitive, sensitivity of you have a breaking police story or a SWAT call out or something and that generates a lot of attention really fast and they want information or need information. But then once that issue’s resolved then generally the story kind of ends with that, where probably a city hall issue, on a major city policy may take months, if not longer to work through the work that’s changed or the policy change. So, I think the timing and urgency is one difference… I think that there’s a not to say that when an article is written about a park it’s any less or more important than an article written about the police, but I would say the frequency of contacts with the media, I’m sure police have daily interactions with the media that probably most other city departments do not have and so there is an expectation and a pressure constantly from the media directed at getting good, solid information from the police department. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

When it comes to the demands of not only of what the newsrooms have now and having to get that information out now, it’s made it very, it’s made it a very fast-paced environment to be in police public relations work for that reason…I often tell people that this is the closest profession that you can have, a police PR relations position as a PIO, it’s only second to being in a newsroom. The hectic pace of a newsroom, scanners and all that stuff and ‘I need it now,’ I gotta call up, all these things, we’re basically a heartbeat away from being in a newsroom…And then the call volume, the request volume that we get here reflects that. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

Some participants revealed the “24/7” nature of their roles and shared insights into how that translates into impacts on their everyday lives:

I’ve thought a lot about the difference in my job that I do right now versus what it would have been like let’s say in the mid-90s before 24/7 news, before social media, before everybody had a laptop or a phone. It would have been a lot easier job or a lot less busy, let me put it that way, a lot less busy job then. Because I mean right now, we work around the clock, seven days a week trying to keep up with 24/7 news coverage. Everybody wants to be the first one to break a story, so it doesn’t matter if it’s 2 o’clock in the morning or 2 o’clock in the afternoon, they’re still wanting the information, so it is a whole lot different now versus before all of that was available. It makes us be on our toes more because the information is, has to be timely and there's not any down time anymore. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest
The only thing that I would add to the PIO responsibilities that we talked about before, we said the brunt of it was the phone, the inquiries...the afterhours call outs...each of us is on call about 7-8 nights a month...And that means that you also, you also have to work one weekend per month. So, it is definitely not a 9-5 job. That’s what it says on paper, but on your given on call night, I’ve gotten you know each of us has one night per week that we’re always on call and then we’ll rotate like Monday nights, and then you’ll take one weekend per month where you’re getting maybe 15 or 20 calls on a Saturday or 10 or 15 calls on a Sunday, which we do from our houses, where you know we’re at our houses at that point, but any SWAT call out or any officer involved shooting call out and you’re basically 24/7, no matter if you’re on call or not. ...And I think that’s what makes the job a lot more demanding than what you were talking about before with being a PIO in another department. That’s the big separation from say, parks, or library or you know solid waste, that it is in an after hours, 24/7 capacity and it truly is. I mean we’re averaging about 10-12 call outs per month and those call outs, the majority of those call outs are after hours...Meaning in the middle of the night and throughout citywide. So, that’s probably when you talk about the differences... I think the biggest separation though is that 24/7 on call outs compared to any other agency and that’s one of the big differences. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

I think the real challenge and difficulty and I think a lot of people don’t necessarily understand this or have an appreciation for it because this is a newer role in the city, is that public safety is a 24/7 business... If anything, activity increases on a Friday and Saturday night and weekends period than it does than say on a Tuesday at 3 o’clock. So, yeah, that was one of my biggest adjustments personally, was just getting into the routine of knowing that I have to sleep next to my cell phone every night, I could be woken up at any point in the night, I’ve had conference calls at 1:30 in the morning, I’ve had to put out press releases at 4:30 in the morning so, being really flexible and responsive when an issue arises is by far the biggest challenge, you know, responsibility associated with a role like this whereas my peers, you know the city has a public information officer, not picking on the role or anything, but she has traditional hours, she has 8:30-5 type hours and for the most part unless something significant is happening within the city manager’s office over the weekend or there’s like a major, major city event, you know that’s widely publicized or something like that, you know for the most part, her phone is shut off and her emails, you know, she can wait ’til Monday morning to respond to them. So, I mean the responsive nature of this role is what makes it vastly different than any other position, communication position in the city. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication & Media Relations in the Northeast

**Levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny.** On a related note, participants expressed that they perceive there are greater levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny associated with local law enforcement work than other departments and areas of government, particularly in today’s political environment. Some participants said that while they experienced greater levels of attention, interest, and scrutiny than other departments (e.g., parks department, department of
public works [DPW]), they believed that a mayor’s office or city hall was one area that might experience similar levels of interest, attention, and/or scrutiny relative to the local law enforcement agency. Notably, one participant said that although he believes that generally law enforcement receive higher levels of media scrutiny than others, his agency specifically does not face more media scrutiny because of the relationships he has been able to facilitate with the media through accessibility and transparency.

These insights reflect local law enforcement personnel’s perceptions of the levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny they face:

I think people are more interested in the police department...Now some of the other [redacted] departments, DPW, you know the regular like the council administrator’s office, some of those other departments they’ve I guess delved into social media, but they haven’t had the success that [redacted] has. I think the fire department has even done it, but they still haven’t had the success that we’ve had. I think people are more interested in police work. I mean it’s just they are more interested to see the things that the police department do[es], and it’s easier for me, you know, with content, I have so much more content than they could possibly have. And a lot of it is things that we’ve started to do, with [redacted], and some of the other things that we’ve done, that we we’ve been able to build on that, they just don’t have. You know, when somebody from DPW cuts down a tree or cleans out a ditch, people just aren’t interested, as interested as when we post a press release about a suspect that we’re wanting with pictures attached and want the public to help us identify. Well of course the public, they eat that up, whereas you know some of the other departments, it’s a little bit harder for them to get followers than it has been for us... Well, I’m like well why are you picking us? We handle the majority of the calls for service in [redacted], we handle the majority of the crime in [redacted], and so you know I’ve had reporters tell me well it’s because ‘y’all are low hanging fruit,’ easy to pick, easy to pick on, and easy to get the clicks and the ratings from. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

As opposed to differences, I just think the demand on us is much higher than other areas because I think the public is much more interested in arrests or the flashy cops. Or maybe if there’s a pursuit, or something that it’s in the news – a missing person, anything like that, we tend to get a lot more requests for media coverage interviews than other departments do... It seems like a lot of times I’m wanting not to instead of looking for opportunities to go on camera to tell our story, I’m somewhat chagrined that I’m getting so many opportunities. ’Cause I have a lot of duties and it’s just that I end up having to neglect other duties because the press will not be neglected no matter how hard you would like to or try. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the West
I think we’re probably the number one, the fire department has their own thing, but I think we’re probably in the media a lot more than them just because the level of crimes and stuff that we deal with. You know they put out house fires and all that, and they’ll post that on the news but it’s not as much as dealing with a homicide or some high influential case in the city. We’re going to be in the limelight a lot more I think, versus any other department in the city. – Participant 5, Agency 5, Captain in the South

Where the city office of information can make a general press release, very rarely are those releases followed up by peripheral questions. I guarantee you we are almost always bombarded by five different media affiliates with peripheral questions. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

I think one of the major differences is the police department at least is held a lot more accountable. Maybe the mayor’s office is similar, but compared to the other city departments, we’re always, whenever there’s a question in town, they always come to us first…So, we’re kind of in a very reactive society that we need to you know, know what’s going on, but if there’s a big news story, they’re coming to us first to try to get sound or a statement or something. So, I think that’s one of the major differences is that we’re, the police department is held – I believe – to a higher standard than the rest of the city, with the exception of maybe the mayor’s office. – Participant 12, Agency 10, Media Producer in the Midwest

Well, you know, for us, the sad reality is that, you know crime is a lead in many cases, so we have frequent contact with the media… We wish we didn’t have to be in those situations, but so we have an ongoing working relationship with the media and the CID Lieutenant is receiving calls every day, while city hall may not have that much interaction, they’re certainly busy. The city has a communications director city wide that’s working out of city hall… So we handle it at a different level, you know we’re doing a lot of sidewalk stuff. Something just happened, you know we’re doing interviews to address public safety concerns… You know on the police side, we are far, far busier than anybody else. We’re gonna receive more scrutiny, we’re gonna receive more attention. And at the city level side, I think that the city of [redacted] receives more attention as well for the same reasons. It’s a larger municipality, it is a major player in the state, so, you know the local media outlets are certainly paying attention to what’s happening at city hall more than they would be for, again, that same small town that may be five miles away. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

So, this is just a personal view, but I think the city manager, his biggest critics are the council, the city council. Whereas we do have an entire community that, you know a lot of people in the city don’t even necessarily know the name of the city manager. But they see our officers out and about throughout the course of the city at all times, so yeah, and especially with the national sentiment about policing and police brutality and that kind of theme that’s wavered on for the last year and a half, there’s a lot of attention, pressure, interest in terms of what police are doing and how they’re policing. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast
I would say for the media in today’s day and age that the police department definitely is under scrutiny more than most of our other departments, you know the parks or some other places can have some issue and it may be brought to the attention of the media, but because of everything really going on across the United States with law enforcement, and the use of force, and you know race relations is that we’re really under the microscope more than ever. And so it, where something maybe in the past would have been just a quick brief, something on the newsprint, now it makes you know the local news media, maybe even national attention depending on what level it goes to. So, I definitely would say more, more than ever. – Participant 20, Agency 16, Sergeant, Commander in the Midwest

**Nature and complexity of law enforcement interactions and information.** Participants revealed ways in which their public relations activities were unique by describing the inherent nature and complexity of law enforcement interactions and information that do not necessarily apply to other areas of the public sector.

For example, participants discussed the unique and difficult types of particularly negative interactions and crisis situations law enforcement encounter with the public that can influence perceptions of local law enforcement:

You know every interaction that the public has with a police officer is usually a negative interaction. It’s not like the fire department, you know they show up and they put out your fire or they you know do CPR and save your child or whatever. It’s usually with us, you’re being stopped for a traffic violation, you know you’re about to get written a 117 dollar ticket or whatever the fine may be, and you’re not happy about it. And so that interaction a lot of times, the public gets a negative perception of all police and you may be in a high crime area and you get stopped because you are walking down the street and the officer just got a tip from you know a concerned citizen that you had a gun. And you may not have had a gun, you may not be the person that the citizen saw. But you’re gonna get stopped and you’re gonna get patted down. That’s a negative interaction. Police officers, you know they get called to your house, your house was burglarized, it was broken into, your stuff was stolen. You’re not happy. So, it’s a constant battle about perception that we have in regards to the public. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

And as far as a direct comparison to any other agency within the city, I don’t know if I can necessarily compare ourselves to any other any other agency within the city, because for us what we look to do and we know, we understand the importance of and that is building relationships outside of a crisis situation. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief in the Northeast
Additionally, participants discussed the distinctive and “nuanced” types of crime and public safety information associated with local law enforcement that can influence the release and flow of such information:

Well, on the police side of the media issue, there are nuances and undertones to the release of most any information. And that is framed in such a way that the citizen’s desire to be informed is met without giving away specifics to any particularly incident that may be under criminal investigation. We are very conscious of that. Unfortunately, the city office is not so much conscious of that. Many times, they will make a release about a new park opening, or an addition to the greenway, or a building project that’s underway in downtown and that’s all great. That’s what they’re there to do. They don’t understand many times why we are a little more controlling of the information that we release. They do not anticipate or see the backlash that many times will occur if you don’t word a particular sentence the correct way. Likewise, if you don’t provide enough information to the media and many times to the public, it only encourages or incites more critical rebuttal questions. Many times, if we ever clash, it is because they do not see down the road three questions and prepare for that and we’re very conscious about not putting too much or too little information out and securing the integrity of an ongoing investigation or the particulars about personal information about someone who is involved in a particular issue in the community or with the department. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

I think at times because we are working with open cases in the criminal justice system, there are times when we can’t release all the information because it may jeopardize an investigation, and so we have to be mindful of the amount of information, trying to be as transparent as possible. But there are just times where we cannot release all the details of a case, so it takes a little bit of expertise and knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system on what we can release and what we can’t…– Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

Knowing who to go to with a particular inquiry or request is vital, whereas maybe a parks department or maybe a solid waste or some of the other departments you might think of, you’re generally sending that request or getting with maybe one or two other people who you know is in that thing. Whereas here, we can be dealing with 10 or 15 people on any given day that we have to identify as being the best source of information for a request. So, that’s why it would be extremely hard to have just kind of like a roaming PIO within a city take over or at least be involved with that police department and in that city, only because there are so many moving parts and so many players that are involved on the police side as opposed to your other departments, it would make it very difficult to be able to handle that. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

Environmental Characteristics, Challenges, and Opportunities
In addition to identifying what local law enforcement officials perceive as to what makes their public relations activities and environmental characteristics unique relative to other local governmental departments and local governmental agencies in their municipality or their overall municipality overall (RQ4), I wanted to examine which of the established environmental characteristics identified in the literature most apply to and influence local law enforcement public relations. I also wanted to identify other key perceived challenges and opportunities for building trust and legitimacy.

RQs 5 and 6 relate to the perceived environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement public relations efforts to build trust and legitimacy:

RQ5: What are the perceived environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement public relations efforts and attempts to build trust and legitimacy?

RQ6: What are the perceived environmental characteristics, challenges, and opportunities associated with local law enforcement’s online public relations efforts and attempts to build trust and legitimacy?

In order to examine these research questions, I asked the local law enforcement personnel in this analysis about the factors that influence their public relations activities, some of the specific environmental characteristics identified in the scholarly literature, any barriers or opportunities for building trust and legitimacy with the media and constituents, and any barriers or opportunities associated with their online public relations efforts (e.g., website or social media efforts) (Appendix A5 includes the guiding interview questions utilized in this study).

Participants also shared relevant information that applied to this research question throughout other portions of my interviews with them.

**Environmental Characteristics.** As discussed in the results section of RQ4, local law enforcement personnel identified *demand* and *levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny* as
two key areas of differentiation relative to other local governmental departments and local
governmental agencies in their municipality or their overall municipality overall. These areas
align with the scholarly literature on environmental characteristics (e.g., media scrutiny,
demands associated with the “public good” and for information) associated with government
public relations; however, what is notable is that local law enforcement personnel perceive these
factors as more germane and unique to their work when compared to other local
intragovernmental peers (e.g., parks department, mayor’s office).

In addition to demand and levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny, local law
enforcement personnel identified the following additional established environmental
characteristics as among those that most influence their public relations activities: legal
considerations, political factors, and resource constraints (budgetary, time, and personnel).
Additionally, while some of the extant literature discussed herein points to negative perceptions
of the government public relations profession as a unique environmental factor, this research
indicates that it would be more appropriate to say that negative perceptions of law enforcement –
not specifically law enforcement public relations professionals – are an important environmental
characteristic associated with local law enforcement’s public relations activities. Finally, while
the aforementioned demands associated with serving the “public good” and for information
associated with high levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny are environmental
characteristics that are applicable to local law enforcement public relations, unique
environmental factors that extend beyond those demands and that are unique to local law
enforcement are the demands associated with crime and public safety.

I asked participants about additional previously explored factors from the literature.
These include a lack of institutional or managerial support and a lack of professional
development, training, and networking opportunities. Additionally, though I did not specifically ask participants about the impact and role of federalism, it also did not organically emerge as a key common theme or environmental characteristic associated with their public relations activities throughout the course of my interviews with participants.

Local law enforcement personnel expressed that they generally receive institutional and managerial support for their public relations efforts. They also generally indicated that their agencies provide them and their public relations personnel numerous and diverse internal and external professional development, training, and networking opportunities. In addition to traditional law enforcement training, they reported getting specific communications training such as training tailored to public information officers, media relations, and crisis or disaster communication training. They also reported that personnel receive support to attend local and/or national conferences, attending some conferences specific to law enforcement and others related to communication more generally. Finally, some of the more seasoned and veteran personnel reported that they actually serve the profession by engaging in the training and education of other new or less experienced personnel.

**Legal considerations.** Legal considerations were a common influential factor among the local law enforcement personnel who participated in this research. The role of legal considerations also relates to the nature and complexity of law enforcement crime and public safety information discussed in the results section of RQ4. Participants often discussed legal considerations in the context of transparency and the information that they were able to, not able to, or required to release to the media and the public:

There are things that we have to be cautious about, releasing you know a rape victim’s name, a juvenile’s name, there are certain aspects that we can’t release to the media. There’s also information that sometimes when we’re investigating something that we won’t release because the investigators don’t want us to release that information when
they catch the suspect, they don’t want the fact that this person’s read this in the newspaper or seen it on TV, you know maybe it maybe it’s a description, or witness even. They don’t want the witness to have seen that there was a red car fleeing the scene…it can hurt investigation if you release too much information to the media. So you have to be very cognizant of what you release…And if we have any questions, we go right next door, our legal advisor who actually works with the [redacted] attorney’s office is in the office next door, so any time we get, any time we give any kind of public records request anything, we just send them straight over to her. And if it’s information, then she will gather that information and call the reporter to come and look at it. If they want to pay for it, if it’s a video or something, then they’ll pay for the cost for us to burn it on a disk and get it to them. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

You want to make sure that what you’re attempting to do even though you have the best of intentions, you have to make sure that it’s not going to cause any type of legal problems criminally or civilly. For example, I mentioned to you open investigations. To comment on open investigations, you have to have a strong policy in place to make sure that lines are not crossed, either criminally or civilly. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

I don’t ever give information on what they’ve told us – a suspect in a case. I believe that the individual has a right to a fair trial, I believe in the Constitution, so I’m not going to subvert that right to a fair trial by going on camera and saying, ‘Oh, we interviewed and they confessed to everything.’ I refuse to talk about if they did an interview with us or not, what they said in that interview, because I want that to be in the court process. As far as anything else, obviously then there’s some legal requirements that go beyond that like juvenile information we don’t give out, we never give any information about a sexual crime victim or anything like that, but we actually don’t have a whole lot of stipulations. Before I release anything on any case, I always contact the detective or case officer on the case and tell them ‘This is what I intend on going out, is any of this going to compromise the integrity of your case, make it more difficult for you to close the case or future court?’ – Participant 4, Agency 4, Public Information Officer in the West

I think Freedom of Information requests we receive on a regular basis and you know, in most cases, that is you know folks digging around, sometimes blindly. We spend a lot of time and energy putting together requests for responses that involve thousands of emails and you know it’s important that we’re transparent, so we are, but it’s not easy. And a lot of work goes into those kind of requests. But on the legal side everybody’s just such a better expert in their particular field. So, for us public safety is paramount, but we are also building criminal cases. We look at the credibility of victims, the credibility of situations. The media has said, ‘Well, how come you didn’t put that information out?’ Well because there were some circumstances that you’re unaware of that we don’t just automatically want to put out some big media blast out saying something happened here, everybody should be scared to death because of this because obviously we’re trying to do our jobs, and through that we’re vetting what occurred, we’re vetting facts, so we’ve had some run-ins with that as well. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast
We’re very fortunate here that we’ve got an open records unit that is separate from us, they’re on our same floor here [redacted]. We also have a number of personnel, probably 6 or 7 personnel, who make up our open records unit, so we’re fortunate in that for the most part any time a media outlet or reporter or anybody wants a document, we will refer them to the open records unit and say hey, here’s an email address that you can send it to, we’ll help them out with the case number of whatever that incident is that they’re asking about, but we’ll also be up front with them and tell them, ‘Hey, look, it’s an open investigation, so you’re likely, you’re only gonna get page one…’ So, we’ll let the media know what they’re gonna get and what they can expect. I mean say, for example, they ask how many officer involved shootings have you had year to date compared to the last five or 10 years? That’s a request that we would send over to the open records unit. And then it’s open records personnel, it’s their job to get with our legal services people as far as, okay: What can we release? What do we have to redact in this report? What we can’t release period because legally we can’t, so most of that legal stuff comes in on the open records side. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

My attitude when I started was I wanted to make sure that the media knew that I was always available and that I was always going to be responsive and I was going to give them as much information as I possibly could, so that they could do their jobs as well as they could without crossing the line of providing sensitive information that could potentially disrupt an investigation, so you know I’ve really made attempts to do that… We have a community that has very high standards, a very well educated community that is financially in a really good standing and they are usually interested in transparency and data so we started our open data initiative just a couple of years ago and have become more and more invested in doing that and providing open data sourced information for people so that they can look at the numbers themselves. But with that comes the expectation that public records are going to be available at all times and we receive a lot of public records [requests], and again in terms of building that trust with your community you know we have to make sure that we commit to supporting those as they come in and more. And they can be major challenges because of the resources and commitment it takes to follow through with that type of request... – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Political factors. Some participants said that they did not believe political factors generally influence their agency’s public relations efforts. For example, two participants said that institutional protections help to prevent any negative political maneuvering or influence, with one saying: “Politics really doesn’t play much of a part in a department that’s governed by civil service” and another noting: “The structure that we have set up… it insulates us a little bit from the bad side of politics, from the bad parts of politics.” Another said that his agency was able to
avoid politics because his department’s communications and outreach operation was distinct from operations at “City Hall,” noting: “We’ve not really allowed and been overly influenced by the politics. You know I guess it could be very political, but somehow we’ve avoided that, glad to say.”

Still, most participants revealed that political factors do play a role to some degree, though those factors manifest themselves in different ways – from political or hierarchical leadership (e.g., a mayor, city manager, legislative body, chief’s office), to politics surrounding funding, to broader “political climates, locally, nationally, statewide” and “political environment[s]…of the times.” These quotes from local law enforcement provide additional insights about political factors and their influence:

We stay away from politics. We have an in-house rule that we don’t comment on pending legislation… There’s certain people at the state capitol who say that they don’t like that practice of us seizing the money even though we know that it’s drug money. They would rather us seize it and give it to the state as opposed to using it to buy new police cars, new vests, or whatever else. So that’s a major issue right now. So, when we post things about our drug busts, we haven’t been posting any money pictures because we don’t want to send the message that this is something that is, we don’t want to give them ammunition. Because we don’t want this to go away. I mean we buy a lot of equipment through drug money. And the state senators, they want that money instead. So we really don’t want to dangle the carrot in front of them…So we’ve chosen not to post pictures with money seizures. Does that make sense? So that’s one situation where it does influence – money. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

I can’t separate my office from the office of the mayor because I work for the mayor. And the city’s overall philosophy in terms of how we deal with the general public, that philosophy comes from the office of the mayor. So, whatever I do is reflective of her policies, her directions, or her goals for the city… I serve at the pleasure of the mayor, but I work for the citizens of the [redacted] community and because I serve at the pleasure of the mayor I am appointed by her as her police chief. And so what I do on the broad, the very broad scale, has to be in line with the mayor’s overall vision and goal for the city. So, I would say that my job and my position is absolutely influenced politically. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

People that are higher than the chief, maybe like a city manager or something, that really influences a lot of what we do and what we can say. If there’s things that we want to get out and say and be honest about, and not say that we’re going to hide or he’s going to
hide anything, but it’s just that well, you know he can put a lot of stop to it. So, I would think it would be a more elected official role that would really hinder us a little bit in what we can say and do. – Participant 5, Agency 5, Captain in the South

I like to say that I have a lot of different bosses. I have the community pulling from me, I have the chief’s office, and then I have the media. So, I feel different than most policemen because I report to a lot of different folks… We had a pursuit with a stolen car where…during the pursuit of the stolen car, the car that was stolen that was being pursued by the police struck [redacted number] pedestrians and one of them died. So, I had just went to a conference [redacted name of conference] and I heard presentations from Baltimore and Ferguson and I did a lot of other research from other departments. I’m like [redacted name], City Manager, [redacted name] our City Attorney, ‘I’m telling you we need to release this.’ That’s the goal, we can’t change or edit the video, let’s just go ahead and get this out to the public now, that’s what other agencies are telling people to do, that’s best practices, let’s put this out. So, but they wouldn’t do it. Well, I’m like you just sent me to the school, I’m telling you what other agencies are doing or what they’ve learned from, they say put the information out and they wouldn’t, so I did have some legal considerations where I don’t see eye to eye with the City Attorney’s Office or the City Manager. I see things as more transparent, they see things more like ‘Oh, I don’t know about that.’ They’re more political and you know that from being a PIO for the mayor’s office. Y’all think in more political terms. I think of no, let’s just get this out now and be done with it. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

We’re in the middle of a mayoral election right now, the city of [redacted], so that kind of has been influencing a lot lately. Not to get into too much detail, but it definitely has some influence. – Participant 12, Agency 10, Media Producer in the Midwest

Everybody – there’s a political culture no matter where you’re employed in the world and I don’t think, it does not have, and it does not play an inordinate role. I’ve never known it to plan an inappropriate role…But it’s just reality. You know, you gotta – ‘How’s the mayor gonna feel about this?’ – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

There’s a lot of things I concern myself with when I do give out information and that’s protection of witnesses and victims, keeping victims and witnesses anonymous, protection of the case, make sure that I don’t give away too many details that could affect a jury…make sure again that I stay on message and you know stay within the confines of what the mayor wants put out there…Some barriers are political. Some of the things I would say, I hold back on. I really try not to, but it’s certainly out there. Again, you know, a politician might not want you to say certain things or to report certain things. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

It does more than I would like to think, yeah. You know like I said, we’re managed by the city manager and he’s not politically driven, but you know his boss is the city council and the residents can be. So, there’s definitely a lot of political variables that come into
play. Some of the issues that we do, it’s purely just to appease city council, you know, to be honest. You know and whether they think that’s most appropriate for the community or not, to remove or to strike off a council order or because there was a recommendation of that office, so, yeah, there’s a lot of political drivings behind some of the things that we do, but yeah for us we are unique in our position that our first priority no matter what is the general safety of the public. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

**Resource constraints.** Though some local law enforcement personnel said they believe they have adequate time, personnel, and budgetary resources for their public relations efforts, most participants discussed at least some limitations associated with budgetary, time, and/or personnel resource constraints:

The thing we do the least is actually going out and although I do a lot of public speaking when I’m asked to, I try to limit that as we’re so spread thin here. For example, I have a teacher who wants to come and meet, an English teacher, a writing teacher wants me to come out to this eighth grade class and talk to them about the importance of communication, the written language and things like that but he wants me there all day and I don’t know…I can do an hour if you want to do an assembly or something. I can show up and knock it out in 30-45 minutes, I certainly can’t be there all day. So that’s what we do the least even though we still do it quite frequently. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

With the constituents, it’s just trying to appease them all the time. I find out when I get a lot of phone calls, well ‘Why are you not doing this? We have speeding, we have complaints’ and I’ve said ‘Look, we understand that. We’re going to try to address that when I can, we’re not avoiding you.’ It’s just that we’re busy, we’re short-staffed, we’re undermanned at the police department like a lot of agencies and we can’t do everything all the time… I get so many emails and so many phone calls and even though I have an assistant, I know I’m neglecting things and probably not doing – able to accommodate every citizen like I would. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

I would say if you had asked me that question [about resources] 5 years ago, I would have said yes. If you ask me now, I would say no, I need another person. And the reason for that is the growth principally in two areas: social media and public records requests. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

We no longer have the [redacted program] and the [redacted program] and the community offices due to budget cuts, but our last remaining program is our [redacted] program… In the past, there’s almost been like silos in the city, where every department would kind of handle their own thing. And they had you know enough staff to accommodate that, but over the years and due to budget cuts, you know when you’re
dealing with less staff and all of a sudden you have to reach out to your counterparts in the different departments, whether it’s the parks, whether it’s our traffic bureau, whether it’s you know courts, etc. And so we really rely on our other departments a lot more than we ever have and I would say that more so for the community engagement unit because by the time something hits our desk, for whatever reason, everyone has had their hand in it, meaning we’ve had a dealing with the trash folks, the parks department, there are different folks, meaning when the citizens they’ve called in have kind of bounced around to different departments. And so when it ends up on our desk, then we have to reach back out to those departments …The general public is demanding more of businesses, even city municipalities that you know whether they’re considering that they pay their taxes or whatever, customer service has to be at the top. And when you’re dealing with the tightening of society here where budgets are being cut and it’s less. You know in the past it was somebody would answer the phone and now it’s an automated system, and if you’re not checking your automated system to make sure that it’s functioning properly, you might get people calling in and after about five minutes of getting the runaround, they get disconnected or something. So, everybody really, you know the customer service that should be a given with every department and even for us, we have [redacted] of us that are involved in community engagement, but that doesn’t mean the officers that are on the road, that they’re not practicing community policing and you know engaging the community when they can. It’s not this, oh it’s [redacted] officers handling it for the whole department. It should be in the mix for everybody and you know, whether you’re answering a call or dealing with the public, and same things for the other departments, the community, there has to be the public relations within your organization… We’re really focusing on children’s programs to really have more of a connectivity, trying to start at the elementary and middle schools. And again, we’ve lost that contact, the school contact with losing our [redacted] programs, that’s like three years ago, they’ve pulled out our high school officers that we’ve had in the schools since the ’70s and removed the officers due to funding issues. – Participant 20, Agency 16, Sergeant, Commander in the Midwest

One participant indicated that there had been a significant downsizing of the PIO staff at his agency in 2009, with the number of dedicated PIO personnel being reduced by almost half:

Just think of the technology since 2009 to the present, when it comes to the demands of not only of what the newsrooms have now and having to get that information out now, it’s made it very, it’s made it a very fast-paced environment to be in police public relations work for that reason. I often tell people that this is the closest profession that you can have, a police PR relations position as a PIO, it’s only second to being in a newsroom. The hectic pace of a newsroom, scanners and all that stuff and ‘I need it now,’ I gotta call up, all these things, we’re basically a heartbeat away from being in a newsroom….And then the call volume, the request volume that we get here reflects that…So when you’re talking about the challenges, I think it answers kind of a little bit of one of your first questions you had about the challenges, the challenges of doing that with [redacted number] people. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South
Furthermore, some participants identified resource constraints as one particular environmental factor or challenge that has influenced or influences their online public relations efforts specifically. For example, the one agency included in this study that does not have any departmental social media platforms and another agency that has not yet adopted Twitter cited time and personnel resources as a primary reason for not adopting those tools at this time or a barrier to adopting those tools in the future:

We’re not on Twitter, just Facebook… I realize that there’s a great benefit to utilizing social media because that’s what we’re doing now, I mean that’s how the country is set up. It’s – people use these means to communicate with one another. The barrier would be personnel. If you’re going to, if we decide that for example that we’re going use, set up a Twitter account and Twitter is immediate. Then people when you go on there and people start following you, then they’re looking for information immediately and they’re entitled to it. If you say, ‘Alright, hey I'm going to create this Twitter account and I want you to follow me because I'm going to be putting out information about the [redacted] Police Department, and I think that the information should be immediate and I think there should be an exchange between the users. So, in order to do that, that means that you have to have a human being that’s there, and that’s available to respond and to interact and we, right now, we just don’t have the personnel or resources to do it. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

So, the police department does not particularly [have social media accounts], but the city on their website has Facebook and Twitter accounts. We are in the process of possibly getting a police department feed, but again with – the concern is at least from my aspect that if you have these accounts, is that they should be monitored and have somebody almost full time doing that. And we’re not in the position right now within the police department to maintain that, so we don’t have, meaning the police department does not, but the city has a Facebook and Twitter and is very active in that and then if we need to get information out, we can put it through our communications office. But again that’s my fear is getting some of those accounts, but not being able to maintain those and that would be probably worse than not having it in my opinion. – Participant 20, Agency 16, Sergeant, Commander in the Midwest

Additionally, some agencies that do use social media indicated that they wish they could do more and would do more with those tools if they had additional resources:

We have made modest efforts in both [Facebook and Twitter]. We’re thinking now about how we can have – I don’t know if it’s quite a full time job, but it certainly it would be at least a half-time job, half of a job. I think it’s an area – I think we’re poised to succeed
there, but I think we need to make more utilization out of Facebook and Twitter to really grow our social media presence and the thing about social media if you’re going to do social media, you gotta do it. We have used the limited resources that we have to the best of our ability, but I think that that’s an area with expanded personnel resources we could make more use of that and garner a greater following. My goal would be to make those two, especially Facebook, a direct channel of communication with a wider section and segment of the community… I think the potential is there for us to use social media to go around, to go directly to people. You know we certainly communicate the same things to the traditional media, but I think social media opens the door for us from a public information office standpoint to play a more direct role in communicating with the community and building the relationship with the community. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

We don’t have a full time PIO because if, I mean truth be told if you know all of a sudden I had enough budgetary assets to add another person, I wouldn’t put it in a PIO position. I’d put him working drug cases, or I’d put him out doing community policing, working the street. You know, the world we live in, whether it’s at a university or at a police department, everybody’s doing four jobs, you know, budgetary issues are tough for everybody and everybody’s cut deeply, so having a full time PIO would be great. Somebody that could work on social media and do all those kind of things to expand our footprint, but it just comes down to resources at the end of the day… I think everybody finds themselves constricted, you know from a budgetary standpoint on a regular basis. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

It is important to note that some participants at least partially attributed their overall resource constraints to the fact that they are the only person in their agency formally responsible for most public relations activities (including online activities) and/or they and others in their agencies who are responsible for public relations activities are also responsible for other duties outside of those typically associated with public relations. For example, one participant indicated that he not only serves in a PIO capacity, but he also oversees the detective bureau and all investigative units (e.g., fraud, homicide), while another participant oversees a dispatch center with dozens of employees and has budgetary and records administrative responsibilities in addition to his public relations role:

I have a lot of duties and it’s just that I end up having to neglect other duties because the press will not be neglected no matter how hard you would like to or try… I’d love to have the finances to do like community service videos and things like that on Facebook… I don’t have the funds for that or the chiefs but obviously that’s money and resources that
we just don’t have the ability to do. I would do more than I do right now, but I don’t think it’s a significant setback... When we receive direct messages on Facebook, we respond to them. When people post something on our page and ask questions, we haven’t been responding and that’s not because of a policy, it’s more of a, it’s just a lack of resources and time. The other members of the PIO team are actually patrol officers and detectives with full caseloads and then I have a full load. To be able to effectively interact on social media with this many responses that we’ve gotten on the page is, just it would take so much time. We just don’t have the time to do it, which I regret, because again it’s a unique medium I think that we have the opportunity to be able to connect to the public in a very non-threatening and unfiltered manner and I wish we had more time to respond to page posts. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Public Information Officer in the West

I have a lot of roles here, PIO is one of them, it’s my most time consuming...It’s 24/7...I have no budget. I have no staff. I have nothing, but I get it done...It’s just me... So, we had no social media footprint when I took over a few years back. I was able to get a Facebook page going. It’s updated daily. It’s all I can do to keep it updated, again the secretary does help me with that here and there. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

The sergeant [who manages the agency’s social media], he’s supposed to be supervising people on the street, he’s running community policing programs, he’s putting on countless active shooter trainings – that’s so important out there. He’s one of our primary trainers for that. So, we could do more if somebody had the time to do some more work around social media, but we just don’t have the time and resources to do that. One of the backbones of social media is making sure that your page is active so that you don’t lose people and you attract more people, but yet you have to have the time to do that. So, you know it’s kind of a catch 22 a little bit. We want to expand, but do we have the resources to have somebody dedicate a lot of time to that? So, I think he’s done a nice job and I challenged them probably nine months ago to expand the number of hits and likes and all that fun stuff on Facebook and they’ve done a great job adding thousands of people by being more active, so I think they do a nice job. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

I’m working on trying to improve...the fact that we are such a big department that sometimes by the time a story filters to me or to one of the PIOs, it’s by accident sometimes that we hear about a great story that happened and I’m like ‘Why didn’t you tell me about this, oh my gosh,’ or I’ll see a picture on maybe a friend’s Facebook page, another officer and say ‘Oh my God, this is wonderful, can I use this on our page?’ and so the fact that we do have [redacted number] officers and so many stations and so many shifts, it’s hard to get all of the really good content for the [Facebook] page. We do get a lot, but a lot of times people don’t stop to think, ‘Oh you know what, this would be good to promote the department.’ You know, they don’t think along those lines...I have a Facebook group for that and I sent out an email asking people to join and I have about 20 people that joined and every now and then they’ll post something, like ‘Oh, this happened, and here’s a picture of it’ and so, I’m able to use that. So, I would really like to grow that and get more people in both the classified, which means a sworn officer, and
civilians to help me to have more eyes and ears around the department to get all this good content that I know is happening but that I am unable to get to because I’m just me. – Participant 18, Agency 14, Social Media Coordinator in the South

I’m responsible for all of our social media channels, all of our accounts, the content on those accounts, the content management of our website, media relations. The media has my desk number and my cell phone number on speed dial, so I’m handling all of those and for the most part that keeps me pretty occupied throughout the course of a day… I’ve only been here two years. My predecessor was here for 3.5 years and one of the reasons that he left was burnout reasons, understandably, so I think that’s part of the challenge. You know one of the things I’m personally trying to balance is when there are slower periods – in the winter tends to be slower periods – is that I almost need to use that time to kind of regroup…and prepare myself for the summer months because that’s when we’re going to have higher crime… I’m very analytical or try to be at least and that’s been one area that I’ve been trying to instill within the entire city, not just here with all of our communication efforts, I want to be able to demonstrate to our city manager and our commissioner that the type of work that’s being done out of this office, the impact it’s having within the community. And beyond a survey, I want them to understand you know because of X amount of social media engagements we’ve had, that’s potentially reduced call volume in our 911 dispatch center by X% and I want them to see the overall sentiment of the department is increased by X%. So I want to be able to do that type of work and that’s the type of work that just really falls to the bottom of the barrel you know when a major incident is going down and all your attention and focus has to be centered around that…So that’s the type of good work that would be great… But when you have limited staffing and resources, it can be tough to get to…[Social media] is the last thing I check before I go to bed and the first thing I check when I wake up in the morning, but it can’t all come down to one person long-term, going back to the burnout factor. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Negative perceptions. As discussed extensively in the results section of RQ1, local law enforcement personnel are engaging in diverse reputation management activities to improve negative perceptions or misperceptions about law enforcement officers, the law enforcement profession, laws, issues, and events. The participants in this study attributed negative perceptions and misperceptions to a variety of external causes (e.g., the media, indirect or direct negative historical experiences with law enforcement personnel) detailed herein; however, they also acknowledged law enforcement’s own role in contributing to this dynamic.
**Demands associated with crime and public safety.** As detailed in the results section of RQ4, local law enforcement personnel identified the *nature and complexity of law enforcement interactions and information* as parts of what differentiate local law enforcement public relations from the public relations efforts of other intragovernmental or local government public relations efforts. In a broader sense – which includes those insights – the demands associated with crime and the objective of ensuring public safety are also environmental characteristics that separate local law enforcement public relations from other areas of government public relations.

**Other Challenges and Opportunities.** The public sector environmental factors detailed in the previous section shed important light on what influences the public relations activities of local law enforcement personnel and agencies and what impacts their ability to build relationships. I also asked local law enforcement personnel specifically about additional challenges and opportunities associated with their ability to build trust and legitimacy with the media and with constituents. These challenges and opportunities may not be unique to the public sector, but provide important further context for the relationships between local law enforcement and the media and local law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Local law enforcement personnel revealed three notable *barriers* to building trust and legitimacy with the media. These challenges include the *level of experience of/length of relationship with media personnel; journalistic norms, values, and routines and the business of news;* and law enforcement’s *inability or reluctance to provide information* in some circumstances.

**Level of experience of/length of relationship with media personnel.** Several participants indicated that it was easier to build trust, legitimacy, and better relationships with the media over an extended period of time; however, changes to the media landscape in recent years have led to
fewer and/or newer, less seasoned personnel covering law enforcement and more common or frequent turnover in some cases:

I think the biggest hurdles that we have, there’s a lot of turnover in the media. And once we build a rapport with a reporter they’re gone, they’re gone to a bigger – a bigger network or you know a bigger market. And so, when the new reporters come, they’re always, I guess, they’re always looking for that negative story because negative stories you know – it gets clicks, it gets hits on their website. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

You know this by working with the press in the past – it’s all about relationships, so the reporters that are grounded here that have been here for a long time, they’re not gonna burn us. I mean they’ve literally, they held stories for a couple of days for us because we’re looking to arrest somebody or get a search warrant or whatever. Where the new ones who are kind of jumping city to city looking for the next best gig, those are the ones we take some time to trust them because they don’t mind burning us. We’re a little bit less open with those individuals, so I would say that unfamiliarity of the reporter is the biggest barrier. Now we’ve had reporters that have burned us before and guess what? After that, after they’ve done that to the relationship, we’re going to allow them to continue to have the information they’re entitled to, of course, but that’s all they’re going to get. They’re not going to get anything above and beyond where if I got this awesome new program that we’re using to track sex offenders and I need this publicized and I need a good story, well I’m going to call one of the ones that I trust that I know is going to do a good story, that’s going to take care of us, and who has taken care of us before. That person’s going to get the first phone call, not the one who’s burned us obviously. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

You never know what you’re going to get. You know you can have a change of reporter or a change of a general manager in a station, or of an editor at a newspaper, and here comes a brand new philosophy and they can care less about the previous agreements, previous relationships and they want to just promote their own agenda. And then you’re kind of starting from scratch. Well we, law enforcement has lived through that stuff already. So, we’re gonna make assumptions that there’s going to be somebody there that’s not going to respect whatever gentlemen’s agreement that you may have made. To build trust, to establish trust is an extremely difficult task. It’s an uphill battle. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

With the media, just like anybody else, I mean you have to build a level of trust…And they know we’re not hiding anything, we’ve got nothing to hide. But that helps you know build that trust and those relationships I think and knowing who these folks are. Television reporters, traditionally, rotate through on a regular basis. You know, it’s changing faces on a regular basis. Some of your more print media folks are generally on the beat for years. So you can build a better relationship with some of those folks, but it’s a day to day process, I mean you always have to work on it. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

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Well the biggest barriers are is that there’s a lot of turnaround in the local media these days and a lot of it has to do with budget cuts. And that means that a lot of your more seasoned and long-term journalists and reporters are either moving on because they’re being offered buyouts and their stations are cutting back and I think that the shortening of manpower at the news stations and even the newspaper here in town makes it more difficult as a PIO because those stations still expect to fill those news holes and time and space if they can’t get them filled with their own reporters, they’re gonna be looking to the PIO to provide as much if not all the information that their reporter would have otherwise gotten. And you know, I’ll give you an example, years ago – 10 or 20 years ago – you had each TV station had its own camera man that was shooting overnight news. Now you have one freelance photographer who shoots for everyone and you have you know the newspaper in town doesn’t even really staff the overnight hours from say midnight ’til 6 a.m. So there’s much more reliance than there ever has been on the PIO to supply that information because in some instances the reporters cannot get to a particular scene that may be newsworthy, but they have to clean up and get that thing on the air or in the paper at some point. And that’s up to us to go pull up the information… the majority of the news desk personnel in the city and the managing editors, those are the ones who you are dealing with as a PIO on a daily basis, it’s not really the reporter anymore. It used to be that everyone would have a police beat reporter assigned to their newspaper or TV station. Obviously in the last ten years that is no longer, because like we talked about before about the cutbacks, on the media side, you don’t have that opportunity to build with the beat reporter any longer, but you do have an opportunity to become at least trustworthy with your desk personnel and your managing editors if you need to get a story out and you need people to show up. – Participant 17, Agency 14, Public Information Officer in the South

**Journalistic norms, values, and routines and the business of news.** As briefly discussed in the results section regarding reputation management, some local law enforcement perceive that the end products of the “big business” of news have helped to adversely impact law enforcement’s reputation. Participants indicated that they believe that the business of news and the associated values of clicks and ratings as well as the tendency toward negative or conflict-driven coverage can be detrimental to building trust and legitimacy with the media:

And so, when the new reporters come, they’re always, I guess, they’re always looking for that negative story because negative stories you know – it gets clicks, it gets hits on their website…As far as our relationship with the media, the media likes to skew things in a negative way when it comes to police work…because that’s what gets the ratings. When it’s really not the truth, and that sometimes hurts our rapport with the media… Well, I’m like well why are you picking us? We handle the majority of the calls for service in [redacted], we handle the majority of the crime in [redacted], and so you know I’ve had
reporters tell me well it’s because ‘y’all are low hanging fruit,’ easy to pick, easy to pick on, and easy to get the clicks and the ratings from. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

It’s my opinion that the media has figured out that, that strained relationships and public chaos is big business for the news media. When you have incidents like the Fergusons and the Baltimores, and the you know New York City types of incidents, you have millions of people flocking to their television sets and because they want to watch these things play out before their very eyes, and for people who are, who look beyond the moment, we realize that that’s big business. I mean can you imagine if the media knows, if there’s let’s say if there’s civil unrest, right? And it’s going to extend and it’s clear that it’s not gonna end in 24 hours, it’s clear it’s not gonna end overnight. The news media initially goes into a 24 hour coverage. And then you gradually start to see the commercials come in. Well I would imagine they make a lot of money off of that because they are going to be limited to the commercials that they play because it’s an emergency situation, and because of that they have a lot more viewers. So, so there’s some money to be made from that. So, when there’s a minor incident that happens – I shouldn’t say a minor incident. When an incident that happens that to blossom into something else, the media doesn’t take an active role in trying to diffuse the situation, in fact what you’ll see is that they will they will in their own ways, in their own subtle ways they will stoke the fires a little bit…I don’t think that you’re gonna find law enforcement building trust with the media because here’s what that would require. That would require a consistent – that would require consistent, positive interaction…And what I mean is that the law enforcement, we’re a funny group and you’re not going to burn us twice, right? So if we and I just told you my perception of the news media and how they handle things…And that that is my personal perceptions, so based on what I said to you, you have a right to assume that my level of trust of the news media is rather weak. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

I would much rather deal with the community than I have with media outlets… I think after [more than 30] years of this, the media is such a business now that it’s almost like tabloid TV and all of the media correspondents want to get the exclusive or get it out first or get the first interview and unfortunately where we are proximity wise in the state and the size of our agency, it makes us on any given day, probably the best next story generating machine the media has and so they’re constantly fishing and unfortunately bad news sells, good news doesn’t. And so, they’re always looking for that next bit of drama to lay out there and you know, unlike with the community many times, you know you have to be very guarded now about what you say and how you say it because it will start out as a disorder in a public park and if you frame something just slightly in the wrong context, next thing you know, the media’s adding inferences that you’re racist and you’re biased and then you’ve gotta go down that whole trail of trying to explain yourself out of the situation. So, that’s the ugly part about having to deal with the media. Everybody wants to make you a Ferguson, everybody wants to make you a racist or a bigot. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South
Barriers would be that they often rely on conflict-driven stories with – I would call it two villains. And what I mean by that is we had a story about – let’s say – a sex offender in our city that was violating some rules. He was the obvious villain of the story, but we were also made to be one of the other problems in the big picture because they needed to find two culprits for why this was happening. So, that’s certainly a barrier, they’re not always – I mean local media is not always on board with us to help promote the department, but it survives on the conflict-driven stories. – Participant 11, Agency 10, Sergeant, Public Information Officer in the Midwest

**Inability or reluctance to provide information.** As discussed herein, legal considerations are considerable environmental factors that – at times – influence local law enforcement’s ability to be completely transparent when disseminating information to the media and the public. Local law enforcement personnel recognize that – on a related note – sometimes their inability to or reluctance to provide certain information and appear fully transparent can hinder their ability to build trust and legitimacy with the media:

The barrier of building legitimacy with the media is a probably going to be and I understand is that – look – we, our radio system’s encrypted. They can’t listen to us on their scanner…They’re a little bit like ‘How do we know you’re giving us everything?’ So, I get the media’s legitimacy issue there. We’re not hiding anything, but it’s hard for me to convince them of that because they don’t have access to everything that we have and then there’s just some things – look – when they call I’m like, there’s an ongoing investigation, I’m sorry, I know about it, but I cannot comment on it. The homicide detectives, they’ve recommended that we just don’t speak on that. So, they get frustrated with that some, but I’m doing that to protect the investigation. I’m not doing it to hide things from the public. There’s just some things that we don’t want out. And I get that, because I’ve spent twelve years in violent crimes. We don’t put everything out. We can’t. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

Some barriers are political. Some of the things I would say, I hold back on. I really try not to, but it’s certainly out there. Again, you know, a politician might not want you to say certain things or to report certain things. Some barriers are, you know, you wanna be transparent but you don’t wanna affect – again – our witnesses and victims and you don’t wanna affect the case. You don’t wanna implicate or say anything bad about the police union. You know there’s so many levels in which you have to be careful as to what you say and what you put out there. So many levels. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

With the media, I think you absolutely in this line of work, you have to have a relationship where if you have a big event that you have to be able to put the information out there. Where the barriers are is – and this is probably more for some of the larger
cases – is that the media wants as much information as possible of course to get out to their viewers and the barrier for us is that we’re not always able to accommodate that request. And so, you know where we’d like to put out as much information as possible, and the news folks almost to the point of saying ‘Hey, you’re withholding information or you’re covering something up,’ along those lines. Again, if you have a strong relationship with your local media, and you are – again – as transparent as possible and working, a lot of that will resolve itself. Again, where the problems come in is departments that say ‘No comment, we’re not talking about it’ because the media will find something. – Participant 20, Agency 16, Sergeant, Commander in the Midwest

Local law enforcement personnel also revealed what they perceive as three key broad opportunities to building trust and legitimacy with the media. These opportunities include greater levels of honesty, accessibility, and transparency:

We may skew your numbers a little bit, Lindsay, because we have such a good relationship with the media. I mean they’re literally here in an hour and fifteen minutes. They’re all going to be down to here. There’s going to be a representative from every single news station and Telemundo and the newspaper and they come down here every morning and we have a stack of reports from the night before so they can get to freely look at through those reports and see what they’re interested in. Very few PIO offices do that, but we do that as an attempt to be transparent. So, they can basically ask for a sound bite on dealing with those cases. And that’s daily. I mean very single day. So because of that engagement, we’re more coworkers…We have a policy in this office in that we don’t say ‘no comment.’ That’s just not something we do when they ask us the tough questions, when they come at us with something that’s controversial. We never say ‘no comment.’ We always address the allegation appropriately or we provide whatever information we can. I think that helps. I think posting some of our documents online helps. Helps with our credibility and the thing that helps the most – our relationships. Our relationships. They know, and I’ve told them especially the reporters that have come down here more often than others on a daily basis. They know that I’m never going to lie to them. I’m never ever going bold-faced lie to them. I may tell them, ‘You know what, I have that information but I can’t release that at this time because it’ll hurt the investigation,’ but I’m never going to say no when the answer is yes and you know, that consistency I think has helped build that legitimacy. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

With the media, that we’re responsive to their questions and that we don’t try to—I believe we need to be honest and transparent—we can’t try to put spin on everything. We just need to present the facts as they are because they’re going to see through it. If we try to put a spin on things, they’re going to see through it. And then I think we’re answerable to the public and ultimately the media is delivering that information hopefully without their own spin to the public and we need to – we just need to have the truth and transparent facts out there for the public to be able to judge and decide. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Public Information Officer in the West
In my short time here, because they’re a very active market, I’m very accessible. If you call me, I will answer my phone even at 2 o’clock in the morning. So, I think that’s really helped build trust because the person who was here before—you couldn’t get in touch with him and he wasn’t accessible. And I felt like—look—it’s my goal to be accessible, it’s my goal to not have people call the chief’s office. I’m here to handle the media, I’m going to do that. – Participant 7, Agency 6, Lieutenant, Public Affairs Officer in the South

I don’t necessarily like the word transparent a lot. I think it’s used a little bit too often but there’s nothing that—you know we try to be wide open. It’s like I said, we go down every morning. I say go down—we meet anybody from the media that wants to show up every morning at [time redacted] and it’s whatever question you want, I’m on camera, I’m not hiding anything and you’ll never hear me say ‘no comment.’ That’s a rule I have in my office, so we’ll talk to you about anything that we legally can. There is nothing that is not open to them. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

You know the way media is, the way TV markets are struggling to keep up with the social medias of the world now, they’re thirsty and they need the police department to be transparent and cooperate with them and vice versa. We need them as well so it’s quite a, it’s quite a good relationship. The relationship between media and police has been so bad for so long, the opportunity to succeed in your relationships is so easy right now. All I had to do was answer my phone regularly and talk like a human being and my success level, you know, skyrocketed… – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

My attitude when I started was I wanted to make sure that the media knew that I was always available and that I was always going to be responsive and I was going to give them as much information as I possibly could, so that they could do their jobs as well as they could without crossing the line of providing sensitive information that could potentially disrupt an investigation. So, you know, I’ve really made attempts to do that. And I’ve made attempts to work very, very closely and invest most of my time with our local media. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Local law enforcement personnel revealed several challenges to building trust and legitimacy with constituents. These challenges include the media, negative historical experiences and negative perceptions, and high profile events:

Media. As discussed in the results sections on reputation management, media relations, and challenges for building trust and legitimacy with the media, some participants perceive that law enforcement officers and the law enforcement profession are inadequately or inaccurately
portrayed by or covered by the entertainment and news media, adversely impacting public understanding and perception. For example:

Barriers [to building trust with constituents] I think sometimes is the media. Because that’s a lot of times, that’s the fastest, easiest, most direct way many people within the area are getting their information and unfortunately their education and to add to that unfortunately a lot of the stuff that the media pushes isn’t really reality or it isn’t put together in a manner that really explains the whole story. So, that’s why we really try hard here to gain our own platforms of getting our information out, so we can make sure that the whole story is received by anybody that wants it and it’s done in a manner that I guess mirrors reality more than something that’s trying to gain viewers or be entertaining I guess. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

I think there’s a lack of knowledge or a misunderstanding. I think there’s a misunderstanding based on what people see through mass media, particularly entertainment programming. You know you’ll see law enforcement officers out there involved in an officer-involved shooting in the morning and then they’re in a foot pursuit, they’re back at work in the afternoon in a foot pursuit, and the reality is very much different than that. And everything – there is I think the law enforcement profession is played in a manner that – displayed or portrayed – in a manner that is cops are fast and loose. You know the ones that are most successful are out there bending the rules all the time and the reality is that police officers are held to high standards and they operate under a policy manual that – everybody does them electronically now – but if you printed it out it would probably be somewhere between somewhere around six inches thick probably…It governs practically every aspect of their jobs. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

**Negative historical experiences and negative perceptions.** As discussed in the results sections on differences associated with law enforcement public relations, reputation management, and environmental characteristics, constituents can have actual or perceived negative historical experiences – either directly (personally) or indirectly (through peers, family members, or other associations) – that impact their relationships with law enforcement and yield negative perceptions of law enforcement that can be barriers to building trust and legitimacy. The local law enforcement personnel in this study generally recognize that law enforcement can bear some responsibility for these actual or perceived negative historical experiences and negative perceptions, while other times perhaps there are other factors involved beyond their control (e.g.,
the media). In addition to the insights already shared regarding historical experiences and negative perceptions in other sections of this study, it is important to note that some participants specifically discussed other barriers they face in reaching minority, disadvantaged, and underrepresented populations in particular, including a lack of familiarity or language barriers. For example:

Well, there’s always been, historically there’s been a lot of barriers with minority communities. I mean that’s just been going on since longer than I’ve been [redacted participant’s name]. You know some of those are difficult because there is a little bit of distrust, but we try to overcome those barriers through town hall meetings, through outreach programs, and through social media. – Participant 2, Agency 2, Captain, Public Information Officer in the South

Well, we do have some barriers in certain areas that we go in. Some don’t receive the police because they don’t know us, so it’s – we continue to go back until if it’s just one person that we are able to talk to you that will open up and will speak to us, we’ve made a difference in just one area. We go into the schools, we have…conversations with the youth and go to the elementaries, we go to the high schools… So we’re having real conversations about what’s going on, and how they feel about the police. You know no question is – you know, anything they want to ask. And we do have some kids that say, ‘Hey, I hate the police. I don’t like you.’ And so that’s hard, I mean, how do you address that? And so we’re finding ways to address it. ‘Well, tell us why.’ There has to be a reason why. ‘Well, I just don’t like you.’ Is it because a family member was arrested? Or is it because you know the police did something wrong to you directly? And then we try to break through that. – Participants 5 & 6, Agency 5, Captain & Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the South

Like many, probably most communities, we have underrepresented individuals and communities within our community that may have a fear of the police or a distrust of the police. Maybe if they’ve emigrated from a country where their relationship with the local law enforcement wasn’t good or maybe the law enforcement was oppressive or corrupt and so we work closely with those groups trying to build trust and overcome barriers such as language barriers or fear and mistrust of police in general, so we do very specific outreach to many groups to work on that. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

**High profile incidents and events.** As discussed in the results section on reputation management, local law enforcement are very cognizant of the impact that high profile incidents and events (e.g., officer-involved shootings, use of force cases, in custody deaths, etc.) and
coverage of those events can have on their ability to build trust and legitimacy with constituents. Participants reflected on how the actions – justified or unjustified – of officers elsewhere can impact their local agencies even if their agencies do not experience such incidents or incidents locally.

Participants also shared numerous opportunities for breaking down barriers and building trust and legitimacy with constituents. These opportunities include the various community relations activities (e.g., programs, events, targeted outreach, etc.), social media activities (online opportunities), and website activities (online opportunities) detailed extensively throughout the results sections associated with RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. As revealed herein, local law enforcement personnel view such activities – to different degrees – as informational, educational, engagement, and humanizing opportunities that can support a variety of objectives (e.g., transparency and accessibility) that help to build trust and legitimacy. These sentiments reflect a sampling of participants’ views on the need to seize the aforementioned formal opportunities, while recognizing the need to focus on the more informal everyday contacts of every officer and every call for service:

We have to work as hard as we can...to expose the general public to the police agency. Buy in. We have to be attentive to the public’s problems. We have to be there for the public and then we have to find every opportunity that we can to present...the law enforcement officers, any actions in law enforcement to become as human as possible. We have to look at ways of letting and showing people that we care. We have to look at ways and opportunities to educate people as to what we do. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

Every day we have many contacts in the community through every time a police officer contacts a citizen to executive command staff members of the department engaging with the community in meetings and problem solving. And so I consider all of that part of our public relations effort, is you know to create a positive experience and help build a relationship through every contact and every citizen we meet with. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West
When it comes to the community relations, the contact with the department is much more diverse. There are people who work in the role of community policing and do various interactions with the community, but you know every officer who is out on the street is involved in building community relations… And you know and at that point and you know if there’s not a strong connection or if there’s a disconnection between what I might say we’re doing and what people are experiencing, then an issue could and I suspect over time would develop… But the department in which I work has a long history of community policing in one way or another, interaction with the community members individually and collectively through citizens that work in an advisory capacity or who are involved in their community… good community relations depend on everyone in the department and from a public information standpoint certainly the product that the department is delivering has to match the goals and aspirations of the department.
– Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South

Yeah I think that first and foremost I mean public relations is you know we have [redacted] sworn officers… I mean they’re really the ones doing the work every day. You know saying hello to people on the street, being kind, and helping folks. I mean that’s really where your prime area of PR happens every day…I will always come back down on the side of you know, the individual officer and the contact that they have. So, we have a regional dispatch center as well, so when somebody calls and we’re dispatching calls for [redacted], that may be the only contact an individual will ever have with somebody in the law enforcement field, the criminal justice realm. So, it’s just you know making sure that we’re all treating people with honor and respect…you have to build that every day and you have to build that every call. – Participant 15, Agency 13, Chief of Police in the Northeast

Impact of Online Tools on Relationships

RQs 7 and 8 relate to local law enforcement personnel and their perceptions of how online tools are impacting their relationships with key publics:

RQ7: How do local law enforcement perceive online tools (websites and social media) are impacting local law enforcement-community relationships?
RQ8: How do local law enforcement perceive online tools (websites and social media) are impacting local law enforcement-media relationships?

In order to explore these research questions, I asked participants questions about the opportunities associated with online tools and specifically if their online tools had helped them solve any problems and/or if their online tools had helped them build better relationships (Appendix A5 includes the guiding interview questions utilized in this study). Participants also
shared relevant information applicable to this research question throughout other portions of my interviews with them.

As discussed in the results sections specific to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 regarding reputation management, community relations and engagement, social media management, and website management, the local law enforcement personnel who participated in this study generally view social media platforms as informational, educational, and engagement tools that can support the objectives of timeliness, transparency, accessibility, and convenience for users, including the media and citizens. They also view social media tools as important opportunities to deliver accurate, unfiltered, and immediate information and for receiving information and feedback. Furthermore, as discussed in the reputation management results section of this study, participants have begun to recognize the power of social media as means to humanize local law enforcement officers and the profession, build better understanding, and improve perceptions. Generally, participants view social media as more effective and widely used means to communicate with and engage the media and citizens than their departmental websites, though they do view their websites as beneficial informational and educational “hubs” that are good resources for administrative and customer service functions, while advancing the objectives of transparency, accessibility, and convenience for users, including the media and citizens.

Given these related sentiments, it is not surprising that participants also generally view social media as more effective and as having more of an impact than departmental or agency websites in terms of specifically solving problems and building relationships with constituents and the media. The specific insights below from local law enforcement personnel regarding websites and social media solving problems and building relationships support the broader
themes (e.g., transparency, accessibility) associated with improving relationships already discussed above.

While several participants said they did not believe their websites had helped them solve problems and/or build relationships with constituents and the media, these comments represent a sampling of ways in which local law enforcement perceive websites are helping them solve problems and build relationships:

What the website enables us to – to allow the public to have access to us in various ways that people post their complaints and compliments right there online and then they’ll get an immediate reaction, a response from us if they so choose to…It gives us an opportunity to identify what could be potentially considered patterns of behavior by police officers and address them early on so that we don’t have a pattern of behavior that becomes systemic because people think that we’re ignoring it. So, that’s how and if we stamp out the problem, people will see that we that we’re willing to address a problem. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police, Northeast

We’re able to put that information out and the media picks it up and they run with it, so it’s definitely a good tool when you don’t have to stop and you know send it to different media outlets. You just push it out all at once. – Participant 6, Agency 5, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the South

I think our website has at least helped strengthen our relationship with the media and the community and as mentioned I think it has resulted in some crimes being solved. But probably more than crimes being solved, it’s just another reflection on the department for transparency and for building trust and legitimacy when they can see our media releases, our various YouTube videos we’ve produced, you know there is easy access to information which I think is very helpful. – Participant 9, Agency 8, Assistant Chief in the West

It provides a platform that we can put a lot of information on and it is accessible 24/7 to anybody that wants to look at it. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

I think there’s a basic transparency and accessibility that a website provides and so I think in that way that’s strengthened the relationship. I think we could do things that would further strengthen that by providing more information that people are interested in, things like crime mapping, which we don't have right now and some other things that put people in touch with more robust information would improve it. I think the relationship is stronger because of – it is helpful with putting people in touch with their department and getting in touch with the right office and the right geographic office. – Participant 13, Agency 11, Director of Public Affairs in the South
We have our police blotter there which helps us, every day it lets everyone know who was arrested and what charges the previous day, which helps us with our FOI. It helps us with our transparency. Our ‘submit a tip’ is another avenue for people to report crimes to us and it’s been very well received. – Participant 14, Agency 12, Deputy Chief in the Northeast

One of the things on our site is all the different ways that people can submit anonymous tips, for example, and that is – that’s a key driver. We receive daily tips from the general public of things that they’re seeing, concerns that they may have, you know that goes right through our website, so that in itself is a big success. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Participants were generally much more emphatic and enthusiastic about how social media platforms have helped solve problems and build relationships with constituents and the media:

As far as specific problems that we’ve had, I can’t off the top of my head think of any that’s – you know other than just PR in general, just public relations in general. I mean, I think it it’s helped our image, you know it’s definitely helped our image. As far as specific problems, yeah we get people that’ll inbox us stuff related to specific crimes that they may not have seen had it not been for social media and we’ll forward that on. – Participant 1, Agency 1, Lieutenant, Commander in the South

On social media, we can deliver our message…We control that message, uncensored by outside influences and it’s there, it’s right there for as long as we want it to live on our social media page… so that’s helpful…I think that with the people’s ability to contact us and leave messages for us and ask questions over social media, that’s just another access point that people have to the [redacted name] Department. And some people have become comfortable with that way of communicating and if we are not a part of that movement, then we would be by our absence denying people an opportunity to communicate with us, but we're there. – Participant 3, Agency 3, Chief of Police in the Northeast

I think it’s definitely helped us build a measure of trust with the community that probably wasn’t there before. And also beyond that – and this isn’t specifically the question that you’re asking – but as far as like missing persons or suspects, if we’re looking for suspects or missing persons, I put that on Facebook regularly and we’ve gotten tons of tips via messages that have actually helped us close cases… Especially with Twitter, it’s been a Godsend with where before you had to make phone calls and talk to each reporter or set up a press conference and we had to let everyone know individually through a press release. Now we can just throw it up on Twitter or Facebook and everyone shows up and everyone knows what’s going on. We can get them information at a much quicker and more efficient pace than we used to and I believe that’s obviously gonna create trust with them. – Participant 4, Agency 4, Lieutenant, Public Information Officer in the West
We have had people post about incidents in the community and they are far more willing to interact with us by way of social media than they might be for us to come by the house and knock on the door, so we’ve had great success in feedback and information from the community… Ironically, it helps us far more than it hurts us… We try to capitalize on the things that our officers do daily that do not make the news and all too often we will see citizens comment ‘Oh, great job, [redacted] PD. It’s too bad these types of stories don’t make the 6 o’clock news,’ so I know that our citizenry are going there, they’re looking to see what we are doing, they might not like us as a profession, but it’s hard for them to not like us when they see us engaged in the community, transparent, working with kids, working with the elderly, working with physically challenged children or adults. It’s a tremendous resource to us. – Participant 8, Agency 7, Deputy Chief in the South

I think our use of it has and does [helped build better relationships with constituents and the media]. Social media in general is – can be very scary from the perspective of anybody can put whatever they want on there and none of it has to be the truth…So, from that perspective it can be a little bit difficult and scary…However, our use of it obviously is not done for those reasons. It’s done for the exact opposite of that and that is just to kind of dispel some of that stuff sometimes, promote information sharing and educational information that helps people understand – like I said – why we do things and what we do and help them you know again promote that integrity and build that trust in our community. – Participant 10, Agency 9, Captain, Commander in the Midwest

I think that [social media has helped build relationships] because it is such a daily interaction with people and I do try to post multiple times a week so that we have fresh content and we’re very lucky to have a lot of good content, we’re a very active department with our community, so there’s lots of good content for me to push out there. I do think it has helped us to be maybe better understood…And again, I do utilize Twitter a lot because I know that a lot of media stations as well as individual reporters follow us on Twitter, so that’s a place I know if I tweet something out, they’re likely going to know where to find me if they are following us. So that’s kind of for in an urgent situation, I tend to use that a lot. It seems to be very effective. – Participant 16, Agency 8, Public Information Officer in the West

We’ve had missing persons cases, for example, in which someone’s been missing for 2-3 days and we’ve literally exhausted all of our leads and you know as a last resort it’s like ‘Well, let’s see if we can utilize our social media network, our media contacts, get the word out’ and then literally within an hour, that person was found. So, it’s tremendously powerful, and is a huge tool for us… I think it’s because of the responsiveness, they know there’s more ways than just calling 911 or going to the police station. They can get very specific information or at least even be directed to the right place, so they have – ultimately they’re building a digital relationship with the police department that they never had before. – Participant 19, Agency 15, Director of Communication and Media Relations in the Northeast

Content Analysis
Content analysis was used to explore RQs 9-10, which relate to the dialogic features of local law enforcement website homepages, Twitter profiles, and Twitter tweets:

RQ9a: What dialogic principles are local law enforcement using in their online website public relations practices?
RQ9b: Do local law enforcement website practices differ by municipality size?
RQ10a: What dialogic principles are local law enforcement using in their Twitter public relations practices?
RQ10b: Do local law enforcement Twitter practices differ by municipality size?

**Website Homepages**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the dialogic principles of *intuitiveness/ease of interface*, conservation of visitors, usefulness of information, dialogic loop, and generation of return visits were applied to the website homepages in this analysis.

**Intuitiveness/Ease of Interface.** Of the four intuitiveness/ease of interface features examined, all of the features were present a majority of the time and the features of a site map and major links were present 100% (n=77) of the time (see Table 5). The feature of multiple languages was present the least frequent number of times (n=44), with 57.1% of website homepages having this capability. When examining the website homepages by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were no intuitiveness/ease of interface features that had significant differences in frequency of presence.

---

Table 5: Websites and Intuitiveness/Ease of Interface Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

143
### Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogic Feature</th>
<th>500,000+ 499,999</th>
<th>200,000- 199,999</th>
<th>100,000- 99,999</th>
<th>50,000- 99,999</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>X²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Map</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Function</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>16 (88.9%)</td>
<td>40 (87%)</td>
<td>69 (89.6%)</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Links</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Languages</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>11 (61.1%)</td>
<td>25 (54.3%)</td>
<td>44 (57.1%)</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. df=3
****There is no chi-square statistic because the feature is constant.
No chi-square statistic appeared to be significant at the .05 level.

#### Conservation of Visitors

Of the 10 conservation of visitors features coded for in this analysis, eight were present a majority of the time (see Table 6). Three features – organizational description/about, contact phone, and page loading time – were present 100% (n=77) of the time. It is important to note that the dialogic feature associated with conservation of visitors is actually the absence of outside links; however, for ease and clarity, I coded for the presence of outside links. This means that 100% (n=77) of the website homepage sample included outside links, which is the opposite of this prescribed dialogic feature. The only other feature that was not present a majority of the time was an indication of the last date and time the site was updated, which was present 45.5% (n=35) of the time.

When examining the website homepages by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there was one conservation of visitors feature that had a significant difference in frequency of presence – the indication of the last date and time the site was updated, $X^2 (3, N=77) = 15.86, p < .01$. Local law enforcement agencies associated with the largest municipalities utilized this feature significantly more frequently than local law enforcement agencies associated with smaller municipalities. There was one conservation of
visitors feature that had a nearly significant difference in frequency of presence – links or buttons
to organizational social networking sites, $X^2 (3, N=77) = 7.70, p =.053$.

Table 6: Websites and Conservation of Visitors Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Dialogic Feature</th>
<th>500,000+</th>
<th>200,000-499,999</th>
<th>100,000-199,999</th>
<th>50,000-99,999</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Org. Descript./About</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. History</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (77.8%)</td>
<td>14 (77.8%)</td>
<td>30 (65.2%)</td>
<td>55 (71.4%)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Logo/Seal</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>40 (87%)</td>
<td>70 (90.9%)</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Phone</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Email</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>16 (88.9%)</td>
<td>37 (80.4%)</td>
<td>62 (80.5%)</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Address</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>75 (100%)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page Loading Time</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Links</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>77 (100%)</td>
<td>****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links/Buttons to Org. SNS</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>34 (73.9%)</td>
<td>62 (80.5%)</td>
<td>7.70^</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indication Last Updated</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>13 (72.2%)</td>
<td>13 (28.3%)</td>
<td>35 (45.5%)</td>
<td>15.86**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. $df=3$

****There is no chi-square statistic because the feature is constant.

***p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05, ^p=.053

Usefulness of Information. Of the 16 usefulness of information features coded for the
website homepages unit of analysis, 15 were present a majority of the time (see Table 7). The
most frequently present features were information about organizational management (98.7%,
n=76), event/program information (93.5%, n=72), and public information/records (93.5%, n=72).
The media contact information feature (n=34) was present just 44.2% of the time. When
examining the website homepages by the municipality size associated with the local law
enforcement agency, there were no usefulness of information features that had significant
differences in frequency of presence.

Table 7: Websites and Usefulness of Information Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Dialogic Feature</th>
<th>500,000+</th>
<th>200,000-499,999</th>
<th>100,000-199,999</th>
<th>50,000-99,999</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(X^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News/Press Releases</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (77.8%)</td>
<td>12 (66.7%)</td>
<td>25 (54.3%)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News/Media/Press Room</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>12 (66.7%)</td>
<td>26 (56.5%)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media Contact Information</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>5 (27.8%)</td>
<td>20 (43.5%)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Info About Org. Management</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>16 (88.9%)</td>
<td>36 (78.3%)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crime/Incident Information</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>41 (94.4%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Event/Program Information</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>42 (91.3%)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traffic/Parking Information</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>11 (61.1%)</td>
<td>40 (87%)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>7.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention Information</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (83.3%)</td>
<td>39 (84.8%)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Information</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (83.3%)</td>
<td>44 (95.7%)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information/Records</td>
<td>3 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
<td>13 (100%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy/Law Information</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>41 (89.1%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emergency/Disaster Preparedness</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>40 (87%)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim/Person/Suspect Identification</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (77.8%)</td>
<td>13 (72.2%)</td>
<td>40 (87%)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Int./Comm. Relations</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>17 (100%)</td>
<td>42 (91.3%)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment Information</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>39 (84.8%)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Org. Mission Statement</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>43 (93.5%)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. \(df=3\)
No chi-square statistic appeared to be significant at the .05 level.
**Dialogic Loop.** Of the seven dialogic loop features coded for website homepages in this analysis, five were present a majority of the time (see Table 8). The opportunities to send messages/conduct business (n=76) and calls to take action/initiative (n=76) features were present 98.7% of the time. The share feature (n=31) was present 40.3% of the time, while the survey or poll feature (n=14) was present just 18.2% of the time. When examining the website homepages by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were no dialogic loop features that had significant differences in frequency of presence.

Table 8: Websites and Dialogic Loop Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Survey or Poll</th>
<th>Opps. to Send Messages</th>
<th>Offers Regular Information</th>
<th>Call to Action/Initiative</th>
<th>Solicitation Info/Help/Ideas</th>
<th>Registration/Sign-up/Apply</th>
<th>Share Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-499,999</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-199,999</td>
<td>4 (22.2%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>16 (88.9%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
<td>18 (95.7%)</td>
<td>6 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>8 (17.4%)</td>
<td>46 (100%)</td>
<td>37 (80.4%)</td>
<td>45 (100%)</td>
<td>44 (100%)</td>
<td>42 (91.3%)</td>
<td>20 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14 (18.2%)</td>
<td>76 (98.7%)</td>
<td>62 (80.5%)</td>
<td>76 (98.7%)</td>
<td>75 (97.4%)</td>
<td>72 (93.5%)</td>
<td>31 (40.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. df=3
No chi-square statistic appeared to be significant at the .05 level.

**Generation of Return Visits.** Of the seven generation of return visits features coded for website homepages, four were present a majority of the time (see Table 9). The emergency/disaster preparedness (n=66) and prevention information (n=66) features were present 85.7% of the time. The event calendar/event listing feature (n=28) was present 36.4% of the time, while the explicit invitation to return feature (n=5) and the bookmark now (n=5) feature
were present just 6.5% of the time. When examining the website homepages by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were no generation of return visits features that had significant differences in frequency of presence.

Table 9: Websites and Generation of Return Visits Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Explicit Inv. to Return</th>
<th>Bookmark Now</th>
<th>Offers Regular Information</th>
<th>Event Calendar/Listing</th>
<th>FAQ/Q&amp;A Feature</th>
<th>Emergency/Disaster Preparedness</th>
<th>Prevention Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-499,999</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>6 (66.7%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-199,999</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td>1 (5.6%)</td>
<td>16 (88.9%)</td>
<td>6 (33.3%)</td>
<td>13 (72.2%)</td>
<td>17 (94.4%)</td>
<td>15 (83.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>3 (6.5%)</td>
<td>3 (6.5%)</td>
<td>37 (80.4%)</td>
<td>16 (34.8%)</td>
<td>29 (63.0%)</td>
<td>40 (87%)</td>
<td>15 (83.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. df=3
No chi-square statistic appeared to be significant at the .05 level.

Twitter Profiles

As discussed in Chapter 3, the only dialogic principle applied to Twitter profiles in this analysis was the principle of conservation of visitors, which encourages users to stay connected to the organization online, including through social media and websites (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) and providing important general information (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Shin et al., 2015). The Twitter profiles were associated with verified Twitter accounts 26% of the time (n=20). The Twitter profiles had liked (formerly favorited) between 0 and 5,526 others’ tweets (M=232.77, SD=687.78); had between 0 and 16,700 for the number of total tweets (M=1856.56, SD=3239.52); had between 0 and 2,197 accounts that the Twitter profile account was following.
(M=241.34, SD=418.66); had between 0 and 140,000 followers (M=6865.32, SD=18916.60); and had between 0 and 3,579 photos/videos (M=273.88, SD=576.23).

Of the nine dialogic features analyzed for Twitter profiles, an organizational logo/seal (77.9%, n=60), a link to an organizational website (64.9%, n=50), and a recent update (54.5%, n=42) were present a majority of the time (see Table 10). Notably, some features were present less than 10 percent of the time, including other organizational social media information (7.8%, n=6), organizational history (2.6%, n=2), and contact address (7.8%, n=6). There were no contact emails (0%, n=0) present.

When examining the Twitter profiles by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were three features that had significant differences in frequency of presence. Local law enforcement agencies associated with larger municipalities utilized these features statistically more frequently than agencies associated with the smallest municipalities. These features included a recent update, $X^2 (3, N=77) = 11.18, p < .05$; a link to an organizational website $X^2 (3, N=77) = 9.31, p < .05$; and an organizational logo or seal, $X^2 (3, N=77) = 10.86, p < .05$. 
Table 10: Twitter Profiles and Conservation of Visitors Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Dialogic Feature</th>
<th>500,000+</th>
<th>200,000-499,999</th>
<th>100,000-199,999</th>
<th>50,000-99,999</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>X^2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recent Update</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>8 (88.9%)</td>
<td>11 (61.1%)</td>
<td>19 (41.3%)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to Org.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (66.7%)</td>
<td>25 (54.3%)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (16.7%)</td>
<td>3 (6.5%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Org. Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (54.3%)</td>
<td>15 (29.8%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>3 (16.7%)</td>
<td>10 (21.7%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. History</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (4.3%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. Logo/Seal</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
<td>9 (100%)</td>
<td>17 (89.5%)</td>
<td>30 (60.3%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10.86*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>3 (16.7%)</td>
<td>5 (10.9%)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Address</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. \( df=3 \)

****There is no chi-square statistic because the feature is constant.

***p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05

**Tweets**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the dialogic principles of *usefulness of information, dialogic loop, and generation of return visits* were applied to the Twitter tweets in this analysis. The tweets included in this analysis had a range of 0 to 47 replies (M=.60, SD=2.27); a range of 0 to 544 retweets (M=5.48, SD=20.13); a range of 0 to 470 likes (M=5.30, SD=18.86); a range of 0 to 8 hashtags (M=.75, SD=1.17); and a range of 0 to 6 @ symbols (M=.45, SD=.81). Most of the tweets (55.7%, n=684) were posted in the morning. Most of the tweets (73.1%, n=897) were original tweets, with retweets as the second most common type of tweet (12.8%, n=157) among the local law enforcement agencies studied herein.
When examining the tweets by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were differences in the usage of the different types of tweets, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 37.01, p<.001$, as reflected in Table 11. Local law enforcement agencies associated with the largest municipalities utilized reply tweets more frequently, while law enforcement agencies associated with smaller municipalities utilized original tweets more frequently at statistically significant levels.

Table 11: Types of Local Law Enforcement Tweets by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Type of Tweet</th>
<th>500,000+ 499,999</th>
<th>200,000-199,999</th>
<th>100,000-99,999</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>(65.3%)</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>(70.7%)</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-199,999</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>(70.7%)</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>(87.3%)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-99,999</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>(79.4%)</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>(68.4%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>(76.2%)</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>(67.4%)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>(73.1%)</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>(63.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(13.3%)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(13.6%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-199,999</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(13.6%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(10.1%)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-99,999</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>(9.7%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>(12.8%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>(35.0%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>(12.8%)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>(11.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet with Original Info</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-199,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(1.7%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-99,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(1.7%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1.0%)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(4.3%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(1.9%)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>(3.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(13.3%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(10.1%)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-199,999</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(10.1%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-99,999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(7.0%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(5.0%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>(13.5%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(10.1%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>(7.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(6%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2.5%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-199,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2.5%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2.5%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-99,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1.0%)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(4.9%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(10.4%)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>(4.2%)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(3.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 37.01, p<.001$

Usefulness of Information. Of the nine usefulness of information dialogic features analyzed for tweets, human interest/community relations (53.6%, n=658), event/program information (44.6%, n=547), and crime/incident information (42.1%, n=516) were the most frequently present. Recruitment information (5.7%, n=70) and other general news/information (4.4%, n=54) were the least frequently present.

When examining the tweets by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were seven usefulness of information features that had significant differences in frequency of presence (see Table 12).
Local law enforcement agencies associated with larger municipalities included crime/incident information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 14.80, p < .01 \), and victim/person/suspect identification information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 8.53, p < .05 \), in their tweets more frequently than those agencies associated with the smallest municipalities at statistically significant levels.

Local law enforcement agencies associated with smaller municipalities included traffic/parking information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 15.84, p < .01 \); prevention/preparedness information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 23.80, p < .001 \); recruitment information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 10.46, p < .05 \); human interest/community relations information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 19.70, p < .001 \); and other general news/information, \( X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 8.35, p < .05 \), in their tweets more frequently than those agencies associated with the largest municipalities at statistically significant levels.
Table 12: Tweets and Usefulness of Information Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Crime/Incident Information</th>
<th>Event/Program Information</th>
<th>Traffic/Parking Information</th>
<th>Prevention/Preparedness Information</th>
<th>Victim/Person/Suspect Identification</th>
<th>Recruitment Information</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Human Int./Comm. Relations</th>
<th>Other Gen. News/Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500,000+</td>
<td>135 (45%)</td>
<td>133 (44.3%)</td>
<td>34 (11.3%)</td>
<td>34 (11.3%)</td>
<td>85 (28.3%)</td>
<td>14 (4.7%)</td>
<td>25 (8.3%)</td>
<td>144 (48%)</td>
<td>6 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200,000-499,999</td>
<td>98 (49.5%)</td>
<td>87 (43.9%)</td>
<td>34 (17.2%)</td>
<td>36 (18.2%)</td>
<td>60 (30.3%)</td>
<td>3 (1.5%)</td>
<td>29 (14.6%)</td>
<td>99 (50%)</td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100,000-199,999</td>
<td>82 (46.9%)</td>
<td>66 (37.7%)</td>
<td>41 (23.4%)</td>
<td>41 (23.4%)</td>
<td>53 (30.3%)</td>
<td>12 (6.9%)</td>
<td>14 (8.0%)</td>
<td>80 (45.7%)</td>
<td>11 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000-99,999</td>
<td>201 (36.3%)</td>
<td>261 (47.1%)</td>
<td>117 (21.1%)</td>
<td>138 (24.9%)</td>
<td>123 (22.2%)</td>
<td>41 (7.4%)</td>
<td>63 (11.4%)</td>
<td>335 (60.5%)</td>
<td>31 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>516 (42.1%)</td>
<td>547 (44.6%)</td>
<td>226 (18.4%)</td>
<td>249 (20.3%)</td>
<td>321 (26.2%)</td>
<td>70 (5.7%)</td>
<td>131 (10.7%)</td>
<td>658 (53.6%)</td>
<td>54 (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X^2)</td>
<td>14.80**</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>15.84**</td>
<td>23.80***</td>
<td>8.53*</td>
<td>10.46*</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>19.70***</td>
<td>8.35*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. \(d_f=3\)

****There is no chi-square statistic because the feature is constant.

***p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05

**Dialogic Loop.** Of the 15 dialogic loop features analyzed for tweets, retweets (69.3%, n=850) and likes (67.3%, n=826) were present a majority of the time and were the most common. Links (43.7%, n=536), photos/graphics (42.8%, n=525), and hashtags (41%, n=503) were used with similar frequencies overall. While most tweets (56.3%, n=691) did not have links, this analysis revealed that 22.5% (n=276) of tweets had links to organizational social media and 7.5% (n=92) of tweets had links to organizational websites. There was just one case (.1%) of the survey or poll feature and one case (.1%) of the usage of the promoting liking feature.

When examining the tweets by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, there were nine features that had significant differences in frequency of
presence (see Table 13). These features include replies, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 126.76, p < .001$; retweets, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 81.71, p < .001$; likes, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 72.36, p < .001$; hashtags, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 87.62, p < .001$; @ symbols, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 37.54, p < .001$; photo(s)/graphic(s), $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 8.96, p < .05$; video(s), $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 54.40, p < .001$; solicitation of information/help/ideas, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 34.94, p < .001$; and promoting retweeting $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 8.72, p < .05$.

Local law enforcement agencies associated with the largest municipalities had retweets and tweets with replies, likes, hashtags, @ symbols, photo(s)/graphics, video(s), and solicitations of information/help/ideas more frequently than the agencies associated with the smallest municipalities had tweets with these features at statistically significant levels. Agencies associated with the largest municipalities (1.3%, n=4) and municipalities of 100,000 to 199,999 people (2.3%, n=4) promoted retweeting more frequently than the local law enforcement agencies associated with other municipality sizes.
Table 13: Tweets and Dialogic Loop Dialogic Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Dialogic Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>500,000- 499,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replies</td>
<td>137 (45.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweets</td>
<td>270 (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>260 (86.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtags</td>
<td>165 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@ Symbols</td>
<td>134 (44.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link(s)</td>
<td>130 (43.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo(s)/Graphic(s)</td>
<td>141 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video(s)</td>
<td>40 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey or Poll</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call to Action/To Take Initiative</td>
<td>99 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation of Info/Help/Ideas</td>
<td>57 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>14 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration/Sign-Up/Apply</td>
<td>14 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting</td>
<td>4 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Liking</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. \(df=3\)

****There is no chi-square statistic because the feature is constant.

***p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05

**Generation of Return Visits.** Of the three generation of return visits features analyzed for tweets, a link or links (43.7%, n=536) were the most common and an explicit invitation to return (.6%, n=7) was the least common (see Table 14).
When examining the tweets by the municipality size associated with the local law enforcement agency, two features had significant differences in the frequency of presence. Those features were an explicit invitation to return, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 8.92, p < .05$, and prevention/preparedness information, $X^2 (3, N=1,227) = 23.80, p < .001$. Agencies associated with larger municipalities utilized the explicit invitation to return feature more frequently than agencies associated with smaller municipalities, while agencies associated with smaller municipalities utilized the prevention/preparedness feature more frequently than agencies associated with the largest municipalities at statistically significant levels.

Table 14: Tweets and Generation of Return Visits Principle by Municipality Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Size</th>
<th>Dialogic Feature</th>
<th>500,000+</th>
<th>200,000-499,999</th>
<th>100,000-199,999</th>
<th>50,000-99,999</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Inv. to Return</td>
<td>5 (1.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (0.4%)</td>
<td>7 (0.6%)</td>
<td>8.92*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link(s)</td>
<td>130 (43.3%)</td>
<td>89 (44.9%)</td>
<td>73 (41.7%)</td>
<td>244 (44%)</td>
<td>536 (43.7%)</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention/Preparedness Information</td>
<td>34 (11.3%)</td>
<td>36 (18.2%)</td>
<td>41 (23.4%)</td>
<td>138 (24.9%)</td>
<td>249 (20.3%)</td>
<td>23.80***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each dialogic feature was coded independently. $df=3$

****There is no chi-square statistic because the feature is constant.

***p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Key Findings and Interpretations

While about a year has passed since I began formally developing this research, time has arguably only made this inquiry more meaningful and relevant given how recent incidents involving local law enforcement and the public have shaped the landscape and further amplified the national conversation about the building – and in some cases repairing of – relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they swear to “protect and serve” (Capehart, 2015; Hudson, 2014a). Just this month – August 2016 – the United States Department of Justice released a report detailing constitutional rights violations and racial discrimination associated with the policing practices of the Baltimore Police Department (Eversley, 2016).

Given local law enforcement’s sensitivity to today’s social and political climate, it is not surprising that reputation management was a top theme relative to local law enforcement’s public relations activities. Local law enforcement personnel shared their attempts to humanize law enforcement officers and the profession, build better understanding by educating the media and the public, and improve perceptions. Other key top activity themes included community relations and engagement, media relations, social media management, and internal communications. The participants in this inquiry reported many instances of targeted outreach within their reputation management, community relations and engagement, and social media management work, with these efforts designed to reach and influence key and often underrepresented publics and/or those with historically negative relationships with or perceptions of law enforcement (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities). Website management and public
records/freedom of information request management were more minor, yet still notable, activity themes.

Some of the most interesting and important findings in this research are those associated with RQs 4-6, which centered on local law enforcement perceptions of how their public relations activities and environmental characteristics are similar to and different from other local governmental departments and local governmental agencies in their municipality or their municipality overall and on challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics more broadly. Participants were very quick to identify what they believe sets their work apart. Among the key themes they shared were the demand they face and being “24/7”; the levels of attention paid to, interest in, and media scrutiny they are exposed to; and the nature and complexity of law enforcement interactions and information. Furthermore, while they reported experiencing several of the environmental characteristics associated with government public relations from the extant literature as often having potential impacts on their abilities to build trust and legitimacy, they also revealed what they perceive as some characteristics unique to law enforcement.

Though the local law enforcement personnel interviewed for this study generally viewed their social media tools as more important for and effective at relationship building than their websites and some even disparaged and discredited their websites, the website homepages content analysis revealed that local law enforcement are generally effectively implementing many of the dialogic features associated with relationship building and with the dialogic principles of intuitiveness/ease of interface, conservation of visitors, usefulness of information, dialogic loop, and generation of return visits. Of the 44 dialogic features examined in the website homepages analysis, 36 were present a majority of the time and there were very few significant differences in the presence of these features when examining the results by the municipality size.
associated with the local law enforcement agency. This means that local law enforcement are generally effectively providing their constituent and media publics with opportunities to easily navigate their websites, are encouraging these users to stay on their websites, are providing important and tailored information, are providing question and feedback opportunities, and are providing incentives for these users to return to their websites (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Improvements could be made in providing more media contact information, more survey or poll opportunities, more share features, more explicit invitations to return to their websites, more bookmarking opportunities, and more event calendars/listings.

Notably, one dialogic feature that was absent 100% of the time (note: it was coded as present 100% of the time because it was coded as presence of outside links) on the website homepages was the absence of outside links. The means that 100% of the local law enforcement sample provided links to outside websites other than the website the coder was examining or to organizations not associated with the local law enforcement agency being studied (e.g., a link to the fire department’s website, a link to the general city website, or a social service agency’s website, etc.). While the absence of outside links may be viewed as a best practice in terms of promoting the dialogic principle of the conservation of visitors, an insight from an interview participant revealed why so many local law enforcement agencies may be providing such links. This participant revealed that her agency provides links to other outside entities as a proactive means to give helpful and relevant resources to citizens who may otherwise contact the police department for services beyond the department’s scope of work, responsibility, or expertise. She said:

We also have a kind of a ‘how to’ page for ‘how do you do certain things?’ because obviously we don’t do everything, but citizens do call the police department for a lot of services, many of which we do not perform. So we have a pretty robust ‘how to’ page to keep citizens on track with where they can go, including links to other agencies and other
websites that they can go to to get the forms or the information that they need. So it’s sort of a go-to place for a lot of information. – Participant 16, Agency 8, Public Information Officer in the West

This analysis revealed that there are several areas in which local law enforcement could improve upon their conservation of visitors efforts relative to their Twitter profiles. In other words, there are ways in which local law enforcement could better encourage users to stay connected to their organizations online, including through other organizational social media and websites (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) and providing important general information (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Shin et al., 2015). While they are generally effectively providing important visual identity information by including an organizational logo/seal on their Twitter profiles, local law enforcement personnel could make improvements by providing more organizational descriptions, more information about organizational history, more contact phone numbers, more contact emails, and more contact addresses. Additionally, while they are generally effectively providing links to organizational websites and are posting recent updates, local law enforcement could improve in providing more connections to other organizational social media.

Notably, agencies associated with larger municipalities were statistically significantly more likely to provide recent updates, links to organizational websites, and include an organizational logo or seal via their Twitter profiles. This may – in part – be attributed to the fact that the smaller agencies were less likely to have Twitter profiles and I chose to include those cases within the sample as a methodological consideration, coding (0-No/Absent or NA/Not Applicable) for instances in which the platform did not exist for a law enforcement agency when coding the features associated with the Twitter profiles. Local law enforcement agencies may wish to improve on their conservation of visitors features via their Twitter profiles; however,
they could be limited by the confines of the Twitter platform, which does not provide an extensive area for users to share profile information.

When examining the results associated with the content analysis of local law enforcement tweets, there were several interesting findings. Local law enforcement agencies associated with larger municipalities used reply tweets more frequently, but used original tweets less frequently – at statistically significant levels – than local law enforcement agencies associated with smaller municipalities. Local law enforcement agencies are providing diverse and useful types of information via Twitter to varying degrees, with human interest/community relations, event/program information, and crime/incident information, accounting for the three most frequent usefulness of information dialogic features found in the tweets in this analysis. These results reflect what several local law enforcement personnel shared in their interviews. They are using social media to share the “good,” the “bad,” and the “ugly,” as Participant 2 noted, but the high frequency of the presence of human interest/community relations information also reinforces their expressed desire to humanize law enforcement personnel, showcase a positive image and behind the scenes work associated with law enforcement, and demonstrate different ways they are attempting to build trust and legitimacy.

There were statistically significant differences in the frequency of human interest/community relations information – what might be considered the “good” – and the frequency of crime/incident information – what might be considered the “bad.” Agencies associated with larger municipalities were more likely to provide crime/incident information than those associated with the smallest municipalities, while agencies associated with the smallest municipalities were more likely to provide human interest/community relations information than those associated with the larger municipalities. These findings may be related to the rates or
levels of crime found across different municipality sizes, though further data specific to the 
municipalities and law enforcement agencies included in this study would be required to 
complete such additional statistical analysis. Generally speaking, looking only at FBI violent 
crime and murder statistics, larger cities (which the FBI categorizes as those with populations of 
over 250,000 people) have higher violent crime and murder rates than the smallest cities (which 
the FBI categorizes as those with populations of less than 10,000 people). Larger cities also have 
higher violent crime and murder rates than two groups of moderate sized cities (which the FBI 
categorizes as those with populations of 10,000 to 99,999 people and those with populations of 
100,000 to 250,000 people). For example, larger cities had a violent crime rate of 706.05, while 
the smallest cities had a violent crime rate of 274.11 between 2013 and 2014; larger cities had a 
murder rate of 9.27 and the smallest cities had a murder rate of 2.46 in 2014 (Johnson, 2015).

Local law enforcement have room to improve in their efforts to provide users 
opportunities to ask questions, provide feedback, and interact (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) with the 
law enforcement agency via Twitter. Just two dialogic loop features – retweets and likes – were 
present a majority of the time in this analysis. Less than half of all tweets included links and less 
than half of all tweets included photo(s)/graphics. Similarly, less than half of all tweets included 
hashtags. About one-third of tweets included a call to action/to take initiative. Other dialogic 
features that local law enforcement agencies could employ more frequently include replies, @ 
symbols, videos, survey(s)/poll(s), questions, the promotion of retweeting and liking, 
solicitations of information/help/ideas, and registration/sign-up/apply options.

Notably, there were statistically significant differences in the frequency of most dialogic 
loop features, with agencies associated with larger municipalities being more likely to garner or
employ replies, retweets, likes, hashtags, @ symbols, photos, videos, and solicitations for information/help/ideas than the agencies associated with the smallest municipalities.

Given what interview participants said about their time and personnel limitations, some of the differences between how agencies associated with larger municipalities and those associated with smaller municipalities implement dialogic features may be related to resource constraints. Though social media provide “free” venues for information dissemination to and engagement with the public, these tools do require time and personnel dedication that some agencies cannot fully or exhaustively commit to. Additionally, as previously referenced, Mossberger et al. (2013) – citing research from Moon (2002), Yang and Kathe (2005), and Scott (2006) – examined larger cities because they were perceived to be at the “forefront in the adoption of e-government innovations” and because of “some evidence that they [larger municipalities] are most likely to employ strategies for civic engagement” (Mossberger et al., 2013, p. 351). One qualitative example of how this may have contributed to some of the findings detailed herein can be found when looking specifically at the dialogic feature of videos. As discussed, agencies associated with larger municipalities were statistically more likely to include videos in their tweets. In reviewing some of the specific cases where videos were coded present, there were instances in which larger agencies were using Periscope fairly regularly during the period of examination. Periscope is relatively new compared to other social media like Facebook and Twitter and is a platform that the International Association of Chiefs of Police did not even include as an option for consideration in its most recent (2015) annual social media survey.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This dissertation contributes to our theoretical and practical understanding of the under-researched government public relations sector and, more specifically, local law enforcement
public relations. Furthermore, this dissertation – through reviewing the scholarly literature and identifying how local law enforcement personnel are practicing public relations – provides firm groundwork for describing and prescribing best practices for the four main areas of public relations activities participants revealed as those most frequently undertaken by local law enforcement in dealing with key external publics (i.e., citizens/constituents and the media [Lee, 2012]) – reputation management, community relations and engagement, media relations, and social media management.

Theoretical Implications. While previous government public relations research has highlighted and demonstrated the uniqueness of the public sector relative to other sectors of public relations (i.e., most often the private sector) and differentiated between levels of government (i.e., federal, state, county, and city) in terms of activities, challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics, this dissertation adds to the theoretical body of knowledge surrounding the GCDW by addressing some of the more “nuanced differences” (Liu et. al., 2012, p. 237) associated with the intragovernmental (or departmental) microenvironment and a segment of public relations that shares “similar missions or tasks” (Horsley et al., 2010, p. 288) by investigating local law enforcement public relations, ultimately contributing to our understanding of heterogeneity within government public relations.

Though this research affirmed that previously established environmental characteristics – such as legal considerations, political factors, and resource constraints – impact local law enforcement public relations, interview participants’ perceptions also shed light on some influential factors that may set local law enforcement public relations apart from other areas of government public relations. These differentiating factors include the degree of demand and
levels of attention, interest, and media scrutiny; negative historical experiences and perceptions; and demands associated with crime and public safety.

This research also adds to the litany of dialogic communication and online relationship building literature discussed throughout this study, but makes a unique contribution because it focuses on websites and Twitter, the under-researched governmental sector, and specifically local law enforcement public relations. It also improves upon a previous study of local law enforcement Twitter usage (i.e., Heverin & Zach, 2010) conducted from outside the field of public relations by using an appropriate public relations theoretical framework – beyond Excellence Theory and the Four Models of Public Relations – and by incorporating municipality size diversity into the statistical analysis.

**Practical Implications and Best Practices.** From a practical perspective, this study provides important detailed insights for local law enforcement public relations practitioners and leadership personnel about: key local law enforcement public relations activities; how their peers are using websites and social media for public relations purposes; how their peers perceive local law enforcement public relations as similar to and different from other areas of government public relations; how their peers perceive local law enforcement public relations challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics; and how their peers perceive online tools are impacting relationships with key publics. Additionally, this research provides insights for local law enforcement practitioners and leadership personnel about what practical dialogic features they may want to consider incorporating into their website and social media (specifically Twitter) repertoires in the future.

In reviewing and synthesizing the public relations literature, particularly the work associated with building trust and legitimacy (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2001;
Metzler, 2001; Suchman, 1995) and accessibility, openness, and transparency (e.g., Fairbanks, Plowman, & Rawlins, 2007; Heise, 1985) and as detailed in this study, I combined that scholarly framework and guidance with exemplary findings detailed in Chapter 4 and recommend the following best baseline strategic and tactical practices for the four key areas of local law enforcement public relations activities associated with external publics and identified by the participants in this research.

Broadly, local law enforcement can use basic strategies to build trust and legitimacy and advance accessibility, openness, and transparency goals when attempting to build better and/or strengthen relationships with and improve the perceptions of law enforcement among important external publics, while promoting understanding. These key overarching strategies that can be applied to all four areas of local law enforcement public relations activities discussed below include educating key publics and humanizing law enforcement officers and the profession.

**Reputation management.** Local law enforcement are explicitly and implicitly engaged in reputation management practices; this is partially attributed to today’s social and political climate and the high profile – largely racially charged – recent incidents discussed at the outset of this dissertation. Through community relations and engagement activities, social media management, media relations, internal communications, and even website management, local law enforcement are attempting to not only provide information, but also positively promote the profession and law enforcement officers as discussed exhaustively herein. However, as Metzler (2001) indicated, organizations cannot achieve legitimacy with their publics through their communications-related efforts alone; organizations and their personnel must also take “appropriate” substantive actions (Metzler, 2001, p. 321). As Participant 13 noted, “Good community relations depend on everyone in the department and from a public information
standpoint certainly the product that the department is delivering has to match the goals and aspirations of the department.” In other words, local law enforcement’s reputation management efforts and what they are communicating must reflect and align with what agencies and their personnel are actually doing in practice for those reputation management efforts to be maximally effective and credible.

A recent *Vox* article with the headline “Cops don’t need to hand out ice cream. They need to end racist policing practices” reflects this balancing act. The author details how a local law enforcement agency recently completed a community relations and engagement program in which officers pulled drivers over and gave them ice cream cones instead of traffic tickets, with one of the encounters provided for readers on video. Massie (2016) wrote:

The video is sweet. Literally. And at a moment when tensions between police officers and communities of color are palpable, an officer offering an ice cream cone to a black driver presents a bit of relief. Instead of a clash between communities and law enforcement, often catalyzed by an extrajudicial killing and lack of accountability, the video — and many other feel-good viral videos like it — presents one moment of a cop doing a good deed. Or at least a cop who isn’t doing the wrong thing. But with the laughs and the camaraderie, the video doesn’t adequately account for how dangerous it can be to drive while black. How the woman’s genuine smile may not be simply because she was surprised but instead could also be a sigh of relief that she made it out alive, despite the many examples that show this to be otherwise…Sure, the surprise ice cream traffic stop was a part of building trust with communities. But community mistrust doesn’t come from a lack of summer desserts. It stems from the systemic lack of ways to hold police accountable when they don’t protect and serve, particularly communities of color.

**Community relations and engagement.** Best practices in local law enforcement community relations and engagement – as aptly noted by numerous participants – should not begin and end with the personnel (e.g., Public Information Officers, Directors of Communication) specifically assigned to conduct traditional public relations activities. Instead, these efforts should place an important emphasis on visible, professional, respectful, and “customer service” oriented law enforcement-community contacts on the beat before, during, and after calls for service. Given
that it is crucial for local law enforcement to build relationships “through every contact and every citizen,” this should prompt agencies to focus on qualified, diverse, and representative officer recruitment; rigorous, regular, consistent, and specific community relations and engagement training for all personnel; and as much transparency as is legally permitted relative to law enforcement standards, policies and procedures, and internal and external accountability measures for officers who do not adhere to training protocols, standards, and policies and procedures. Local law enforcement personnel at different levels throughout the chain of command should engage with key external publics in person and online to maximize community relations and engagement efforts.

Some tactical best practices for community relations and engagement include events, programs, prevention and volunteer initiatives, as well as targeted outreach (this could be considered both strategic and tactical). Some specific examples of these tactics include:

- **Events:** Neighborhood coffee shop events (e.g., Coffee with a Cop), Town hall meetings/Community conversations, Neighborhood walkthroughs, Holiday themed events, Charitable and fundraising events (e.g., toy drives), Speaking engagements (e.g., school assemblies, graduations), Attending events with external sponsors (e.g., Latino Fair)

- **Programs:** Citizens academies, Mentorship programs, Athletic programs (e.g., Police Athletic Leagues)

- **Prevention and Volunteer Initiatives:** Hosting active shooter trainings, Creating safe spaces for Internet transactions, Providing seasonal/regular prevention tips, Community ambassador programs (e.g., volunteer chaplains), Working with
neighborhood groups (e.g., Crime Stoppers, Neighborhood Watch), Creating advisory groups (e.g., crisis teams, diversity groups)

- Targeted Outreach: Focus some specific efforts and resources on underrepresented, vulnerable, at-risk populations and those who historically have had poor relationships with law enforcement. These groups may vary by agency and municipality, but participants in this study reported that they can include specific demographic and cultural groups (e.g., by race, age, and religion) or neighborhoods (e.g., high crime, high poverty areas).

**Media relations.** Local law enforcement personnel must understand and respect the “intertwined” nature of the relationship between government public relations practitioners and the media (Cook, 2005, p. 3). Participants in this study characterized these relationships as “give and take” and “two-way.” Practitioners should aim to provide timely, accurate, credible, and complete (i.e., as complete as possible given various constraints) information to members of the media in a fair and equitable manner and through multiple channels (e.g., email, phone, website, and social media), while also capitalizing on positive promotional opportunities for their agencies and officers.

Some tactical best practices for media relations include:

- Providing information to the media in a consistent and transparent way. This means public relations practitioners should provide “good” (e.g., a positive story about an officer “going above and beyond”) and “bad” information (e.g., a negative story involving officer misconduct) both proactively and in response to media inquiries.
• Providing behind the scenes access that illuminates internal practices and realities for law enforcement officers on the job. This can include offering ride-alongs, allowing embeds, or encouraging members of the media to participate in citizens academies.

• Meeting on a semi-regular basis with members of the media. Some participants in this study reported meeting or having in-services with key players at local media outlets to discuss issues, critique the handling of past cases, and exchange feedback. This tactic helps maintain an honest flow of communication and provides a formal venue for both the media and public relations practitioners to openly share concerns, learn from past mistakes or instances of miscommunication, and possibly prevent future problems that could harm the relationship between public relations practitioners and the media.

**Social media management.** As is necessary for consistency and transparency in media relations, local law enforcement public relations practitioners should also aim to share what one participant called, “the good, the bad, and the ugly” via departmental social media accounts.

Some tactical best practices for social media management include:

• Utilizing multiple platforms. Different social media platforms have a range of functionalities and also have a demographic range of audiences and users. By incorporating multiple social media platforms and having specific goals and objectives associated with those platforms, local law enforcement personnel can maximize the potential of each platform by aligning their usage with the strengths of those platforms. For example, some participants reported that Twitter was a great platform for quick, real-time updates and sharing emergency information,
while platforms like Facebook and Instagram may be more conducive to sharing visually-based messages through photos or graphics and/or longer text-based messages. Periscope provides opportunities for livestreaming video, which may be advantageous during important news conferences or events. Furthermore, by using multiple platforms as public relations tools, this will allow agencies to advance their efforts for targeted outreach as discussed in the community relations and engagement sections of this study. For example, a tool like Nextdoor allows law enforcement to target informational messages and create conversations at the neighborhood level.

- **Conducting social media campaigns/events.** Local law enforcement personnel can conduct social media campaigns to humanize the law enforcement profession and law enforcement officers and/or provide a behind the scenes look at what officers do on a daily basis. For example, two types of social media campaigns/events discussed by participants in this study and found within the Twitter content analysis were the #BehindtheBadge campaign and #tweetalong events. A #BehindtheBadge campaign shares some personal information about law enforcement officers (e.g., hobbies), while #tweetalong events take followers on a virtual ride-along or walk-along with law enforcement officers on the beat.

- **Sharing positive photo opportunities.** Sharing positive photo opportunities is another tactical way to implement the strategy of humanizing the law enforcement profession and law enforcement officers. For example, agencies can share photos from formal and informal community relations and engagement activities. While conducting the Twitter content analysis, I came across photos of a police officer
posing and smiling with a child in his Halloween costume, of a police chief and his wife volunteering by sorting donations at a local food bank, and of police officers being recognized for their service to the community. These are just a few examples of the types of positive photos that can be shared.

- Soliciting information/feedback and engaging in online exchanges. As scholars have noted, social media provide unique avenues for give and take between organizations and key publics. Local law enforcement agencies should use social media to not only provide relevant and useful information, but also to solicit information and feedback from social media users. Furthermore, local law enforcement can use social media to pose and answer questions and have online conversations – practicing what one participant referred to as “virtual police community relations or virtual community policing.” Some examples of ways law enforcement can solicit information/feedback include asking social media users to assist with solving crimes (e.g., through identifying suspects or providing tips), to participate in surveys/polls, and to share compliments/complaints. Local law enforcement personnel can also use social media to answer questions about law enforcement policies and procedures, crime prevention, and other areas of law enforcement expertise, while also using social media to refer users to other agencies or individuals who may be able to field inquiries outside of local law enforcement’s purview. Additionally, as some participants in this study explained, local law enforcement can use social media effectively and conversationally to clarify or correct misinformation that may be circulating.
Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this research. These limitations are generally related to methodology and scope.

First, though I attempted to and was able to incorporate a fairly diverse (i.e., geographically and in terms of municipality size) sample of agencies and participants in this inquiry through purposive non-probability sampling techniques, this study included insights from just 16 local law enforcement agencies and 20 total local law enforcement personnel. Due to the qualitative nature of the methodological choices associated with RQs 1-8, the findings discussed herein provide valuable extensive and nuanced descriptive accounts of perceptions from participants, but their perspectives are not considered generalizable (Weiss, 1994; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Shively, 2013). Additionally, as discussed, I contacted 48 total agencies to solicit their participation and 16 agreed to participate. There could be some differences in the perspectives of or biases related to those who responded and agreed to participate versus those did not respond or agree to participate.

Second, though I employed random sampling techniques throughout the construction of my final samples for the content analysis (i.e., website homepages, Twitter profiles, Twitter tweets) portion of this dissertation, there are still some limitations associated with sampling from a broader population of agencies and content. The primary limitation is the introduction of sampling error (Riffe et al., 2005; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Third, though content analysis is an oft-employed research method used for descriptive and inferential purposes in mass communication research, there are some inherent limitations associated with using this method and human coders; these limitations can be manifested in lower levels of intercoder reliability (Neuendorf, 2002; Riffe et al., 2005). While most of the
variables included across the three units of analysis in the content analysis portion of this study met the threshold of exceeding the .80 reliability level (Neuendorf, 2002) discussed in Chapter 3 – at least in terms of percent agreement – it is important to note that several variables coded within the website homepages unit of analysis fell below the aforementioned standards when examining percent agreement and Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients. Additionally, while all variables coded in the Twitter tweets unit of analysis fell above the aforementioned thresholds when examining percent agreement, some variables fell below those standards when examining Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients. Future research could seek to remedy the lower levels of reliability associated with some variables in this analysis.

Fourth, the content analysis portion of this study was limited to website homepages, Twitter profiles, and Twitter tweets. Industry data and the local law enforcement personnel interviewed for this dissertation indicate that local law enforcement are also using other online tools (e.g., Facebook, Nextdoor) for public relations purposes to varying degrees.

Finally, but importantly, while this dissertation (e.g., through the inclusion of survey data reflecting racial disparities in opinions about law enforcement) and participant responses provided herein (e.g., through discussions of targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, negative perceptions, etc.) recognize that there are crucial larger historical, racial, and public policy dynamics involved in shaping the relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they serve, the scope of this examination is meant to be a broad investigation of local law enforcement public relations. As Participant 13 noted, “If there’s not a strong connection or if there’s a disconnection between what I might say we’re doing and what people are experiencing, then an issue could and I suspect over time would develop…” While public policy and public relations should be cohesively linked to maximize the successful outcomes of
both, the qualitative portion of this examination was designed to focus heavily on what local law enforcement public relations practitioners say they are doing, what differentiates their work from other government public relations work, and on the factors they believe influence their efforts, and it was not designed to be an exhaustive analysis of or prescription for the larger aforementioned significant dynamics.

**Conclusion**

While this dissertation substantially contributes to public relations theory and practice as detailed above, this study and its limitations also highlight ideas for future government public relations research and research specific to local law enforcement public relations.

This study sheds light on some online communications practices of local law enforcement through the content analysis of website homepages, Twitter profiles, and tweets, but future dialogic communication and online relationship building work could focus on tools like Facebook, Instagram, and/or Nextdoor, which were discussed by participants in this study and were used respectively by 94.2%, 21.1%, and 20.1% of the law enforcement agencies surveyed by the IACP in 2015 (International Association of Chiefs of Police Center for Social Media, 2015).

While this research revealed that 89.6% of local law enforcement agencies included recruitment information on their websites, that 5.7% of local law enforcement tweets included recruitment information, and that some interview participants reported having standalone websites dedicated to recruitment, these findings only begin to detail local law enforcement personnel recruitment practices. Given that local law enforcement personnel expressed the belief that their public relations activities and reputations can face make or break situations beginning with every officer on every call, it is important to understand how people become law
enforcement officers in the first place, who is targeted for recruitment, how those people are targeted, and more.

Local law enforcement personnel provided detailed accounts of and rationales for their public relations efforts relative to citizen or citizens academies and further investigation of this public relations tool is warranted, particularly in today’s social and political climate. One possible methodological path for exploration would be to participate in one of the academies and conduct ethnographic research in order to share a ‘thick description’ of the experience (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Interview participants also provided extensive accounts regarding their relationships with the media and their perceptions about the media, particularly about how the media impacts law enforcement’s collective reputation. It would be worthwhile to complement these findings by interviewing journalists who cover the criminal justice system about their perceptions of their relationships with local law enforcement public relations and leadership personnel and to see if their characterizations of law enforcement’s accessibility and transparency efforts align with or are different from those self-reported by law enforcement personnel.

Finally, while the interviews discussed herein describe local law enforcement public relations activities, include perceptions about how local law enforcement public relations differs from other areas of government public relations, provide insight into the challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics associated with local law enforcement, and detail how local law enforcement perceive online tools as impacting their relationships with key publics, one of the aforementioned limitations of this portion of this study is the lack of generalizability associated with a narrow qualitative purposive sample of participants. Building from and expanding upon these qualitative insights through a survey of local law enforcement
agencies and personnel would provide an opportunity to gain quantitative and generalizable findings that could reinforce and strengthen the foundational and exploratory qualitative work.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A1: AXIOMS OF ORGANIZATION-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIPS  
(Ledingham, 2003, p. 195)

1. Organization-public relationships are transactional.
2. The relationships are dynamic; they change over time.
3. They are goal oriented.
4. Organization-public relationships have antecedents and consequences and can be analyzed in terms of relationship quality, maintenance strategies, relationship type, and actors in the relationship.
5. These relationships are driven by the perceived needs and wants of interacting organizations and publics.
6. The continuation of organization-public relationships is dependent on the degree to which expectations are met.
7. Those expectations are expressed in interactions between organizations and publics.
8. Such relationships involve communication, but communication is not the sole instrument of relationship building.
9. These relationships are impacted by relational history, the nature of the transaction, the frequency of exchange, and reciprocity.
10. Organization-public relationships can be described by type (personal, professional, community, symbolic, and behavioral) independent of the perceptions of those relationships.
11. The proper focus of the domain of public relations is relationships, not communication.
12. Communication alone cannot sustain long-term relationships in the absence of supportive organizational behavior.
13. Effective management of organization-public relationships supports mutual understanding and benefit.
14. The relationship perspective is applicable throughout the public relations process and with regard to all public relations techniques.
Dear [Insert Prospective Participant(s) Name(s) Here],

I am writing to request an interview with you or the appropriate member(s) of your staff as part of my doctoral dissertation at Louisiana State University. My dissertation examines local law enforcement public relations and efforts to build trust and relationships within today’s social and political climate. Specifically, I am interested in speaking with individuals who conduct public relations activities on behalf of local law enforcement agencies. I am interested in discussing the public relations practices of local law enforcement, the challenges and opportunities these practitioners face, and I am also interested in learning about how local law enforcement are using social media.

I am a doctoral candidate and public relations instructor in Media & Public Affairs at the Manship School of Mass Communication; however, prior to attending LSU, I served as a press secretary for the mayor of Syracuse, NY and had an extensive amount of interaction and collaboration with our police department’s public information officer, police chief, and personnel. I believe this experience gives me a unique perspective from which to conduct this research. In addition to the interview portion of my project, I am conducting a content analysis of websites, Twitter accounts, and Facebook accounts for a sample of local law enforcement agencies from throughout the United States. I am hoping my work will be useful for practitioners and I will share my full dissertation with you and your agency upon completion.

The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and used for academic purposes, but could be published. This study has received approval from LSU’s Institutional Review Board. The names of all interview participants will be kept confidential and participants will only be identified by a job title and a geographic region within my work.

Given that I am based in Baton Rouge and am trying to conduct as many interviews as possible, I would like to conduct our interview by phone, via Skype, or via Google Hangout. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour. I would like to conduct the interview at your convenience within the next 2-3 weeks, if possible.

Please let me know if you or an appropriate member(s) of your staff would like to participate in this study by replying to this email (lmcclu4@lsu.edu) or contact me by phone at 518.441.7135 to discuss this further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lindsay

[Insert Email Signature Here]
APPENDIX A3: IRB APPROVAL FORM

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Lindsay McCluskey
Mass Communication

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 19, 2015

RE: IRB# E9580

TITLE: Examining Local Law Enforcement Public Relations


Review Date: 10/19/2015

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 10/19/2015 Approval Expiration Date: 10/18/2018

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a: 3a

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes for online, etc.; No for in-person.

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING —

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*

2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.

3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.

4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.

5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.

6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.


8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient make sure you use bcc.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
This study is entitled “Examining Local Law Enforcement Public Relations.” The purpose of this research is to better understand the challenges, opportunities, and environmental characteristics associated with local law enforcement public relations and to better understand website and social media use in local law enforcement public relations within today’s social and political context. The researcher will interview confirmed participants [in person, via Skype, by phone, via email], record those interviews, transcribe those interviews, and then use them for academic purposes. The results of this study may be published. The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to the participants and involves no procedures for which having signed consent is normally required. The researcher has guaranteed participants anonymity, agreeing to identify participants only by job title and geographic area (e.g., public information officer in the South). Individuals may choose not to participate or to withdraw from study at any time. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length. This study has been discussed with the participant and all of his or her questions have been answered. The participant may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the principal investigator, Lindsay McCluskey (lmcclu4@lsu.edu or (518) 441-7135). If the participant has questions about the participants’ rights or other concerns, he or she can contact Dennis Landín, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. The participant agrees to participate in the study described above and acknowledges the investigator’s obligation to provide me with this information.
APPENDIX A5: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

1) What are your daily public relations activities? Of these, what are the activities you conduct most frequently? Of these, what are the activities you conduct least frequently? Describe what you might do in a typical day.
2) How are these activities similar to other departments in your municipality? How are these activities different from other departments in your municipality? How are these activities similar to your municipality overall? How are these activities different from your municipality overall?
3) What are the biggest barriers you face in building trust with the media? What are the biggest opportunities in building trust with the media?
4) What are the biggest barriers you face in building trust with constituents? What are the biggest opportunities in building trust with constituents?
5) What are the biggest barriers you face in building legitimacy with the media? What are the biggest opportunities in building legitimacy with the media?
6) What are the biggest barriers you face in building legitimacy with constituents? What are the biggest opportunities in building legitimacy with constituents?
7) What factors influence your public relations activities?
8) Describe your website and social media practices.
9) Have you experienced any barriers specific to online communication practices?
10) What do you see as the biggest opportunity associated with online communication platforms (e.g. websites, Facebook, Twitter)?
11) When did you adopt social media? Specifically Facebook? Twitter?
12) Who manages your website? Who manages your social media accounts?
13) What are your primary purposes for using these tools?
14) Do you think websites have helped you solve any problems you may have previously faced in practicing public relations relative to constituents? Relative to the media?
15) Do you think social media have helped you solve any problems you may have previously faced in practicing public relations relative to constituents? Relative to the media?
16) Do you think websites have helped you build better relationships with constituents? With media? How so? Specific example(s)?
17) Do you think social media have helped you build better relationships with constituents? With media? How so? Specific example(s)?
18) Is there anything else you would like to share about your department’s use of social media?
19) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a leader/public relations practitioner in law enforcement?
APPENDIX A6: CODEBOOK FOR WEBSITE HOMEPAGES

Codebook 5 for Code Sheet 5: Local Law Enforcement’s Website Homepages

This codebook includes instructions for code sheet 5, which will help the researcher identify dialogic characteristics found on local law enforcement website homepages. Specifically, the researcher is looking at the principles of “intuitiveness/ease of interface,” “conservation of visitors,” “usefulness of information,” “dialogic loop,” and “generation of return visits” principles.

Given the amount of information included on and dynamic nature of websites, the coders will code directly from the “live” websites.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Given that websites have different functionalities (some require clicking/some hovering, etc.) to see information, coders will code for anything that is visible on the homepage, by hovering on elements on the homepage, and clicking on the homepage, **but without moving away from the homepage.** There are some exceptions to this. You can click on an “about”/”about us” type of link to code for variables 13, 14, 43 & 44. You can click on a “contact”/“contact us” type of link off of the homepage to answer variables 16-18, 23 and 35. You can also click on a media/communications/press/news type of link off of the homepage to answer variables 23, 33, 34, and 35 about news/press/media information. In order to best be able to code for these items, take a couple of minutes to scan through the website before you start coding in order to see what kinds of content are present and how the website functions.

**Website URL:** This is the URL of the local law enforcement website.

**Coder ID:** Input the Coder ID Number for each website homepage analyzed (Lindsay=1, Other=2) [CID]

1. **Website Page Name:** Type in the name of the local law enforcement agency. (Example: San Francisco) [V1]

2. **Website Page ID Number:** Coders will assign individual and unique ID numbers to each of the website homepages they analyze. [V2]

3. **Date Website Information Coded:** Note the date the website was coded. [V3] (Example: 11/02/2015)

4. **Site Map/Index/Menu/Navigation Tool?** Does the website homepage include a site map/index/menu/navigation tool? This allows users to see what is available on other pages of the website in an organized, hierarchical way. It is often located at the top or bottom of the website homepage. It is often explicitly labeled as a site map. It may also be labeled something like navigation panel, quick menu, menu, or index. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V4]
5. **Search Function?** Does the website homepage include a search function? This is generally found at the top of the website homepage. It is often a box that allows users to search within the website and may be a magnifying glass also or just an open box for searching terms. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V5]**

In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES).

6. **Major Links to Rest of Website?** Does the website homepage provide major links to the rest of the website? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V6]**

In the examples below, the coder would code (1-YES).
7. **Multiple Languages?** Is the website homepage available in multiple languages? This might include something that says “translate this page” or be a Google translate feature at the top or bottom of the site. Be sure to look around carefully for this. It can sometimes be included at the top of the site but not immediately within view. In other words you may have to click on other areas to find it, such as a “tools” sections. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V7]**

   **In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES).**

8. **Page Loading Time?** Is the website homepage loading time less than 4 seconds? If there is an issue, check a few times in case it is just due to Internet connectivity. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V8]**

9. **Outside Links?** Does the website homepage provide links to outside websites (other than the one you are coding) or organizations NOT associated with the local law enforcement agency being studied (e.g., a link to the fire department’s website, a link to the general city website, or a social service agency’s website, etc.). **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V9]**

10. **Links or buttons to organizational social networking sites (SNS)?** Does the website homepage provide links to organizational social networking sites. (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor, Flickr, Nixle, YouTube, etc.). Include embeds. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V10]**

   **NOTE:** Make sure the icons that are available are not links for sharing the website to social media. Make sure they are actually links to social media. Sometimes icons are for sharing and not for accessing the social media sites (see 20b). Also, make sure they are social networking sites specific to the law enforcement/public safety agency and are not related to the general municipality’s social media.
11. **Indication of the last date and/or time the site/information on the site was updated?**

Does the website homepage provide information about the last time information was updated? This can include providing a date and/or time for updates. You may also find this information on press materials that are present on the homepage (without clicking away from the homepage). This may also be embedded on social media updates found on the page (e.g., 2 hours ago on Twitter or Nixle). **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V11]**

12. If you answered (1-YES) for #11, has there been a recent update (within 24 hours from when you are coding the website)? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). Otherwise code (2–NA/Not applicable). [V12]**

13. **Organizational Description/About?** Does the website homepage provide an organizational description/about feature or element (sometimes labeled about us) relevant to the organization? This should not include historical information (see #14 below) but may include descriptive information about the police force, mission, goals, personnel, leadership, management, values, awards, etc. This may be found sometimes in a letter from the chief of police.

**Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V13]**

In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES).
14. **Organizational History?** Does the website homepage provide any organizational history? In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES) because the website provides extensive information about the organization’s history. This could be as simple as detailing when the organization was founded. Some examples could also include historical fallen officers, historical accomplishments. May be found on the organizational seal. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V14]**

In the examples below, the coder would code (1-YES).

15. **Organizational Logo/Seal?** Does the website homepage include an organizational logo/seal that visually represents the law enforcement agency? This can include if a logo or seal is present on a police car or uniform, though many times it will stand alone. This can include logos or seals on social media embeds. Be careful not to mistake a municipal city/county logo for an organizational logo. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V15]**

16. **Contact Phone Number?** Does the website homepage include a contact phone number specific to the law enforcement agency? NOTE: Do not code (1-YES) for this if the only number provided is 911. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V16]**

17. **Contact Email?** Does the website homepage include a contact email address or a way to email the agency specific to the law enforcement agency (can be individual such as the chief or organizational)? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V17]**
18. **Geographic Address?** Does the website homepage include a contact address (physical or mailing street address?) specific to the law enforcement agency? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V18]

19. **Explicit Invitation to Return?** Does the website homepage include an *explicit* invitation for visitors to return to the site? (e.g. Check back later for more information, Visit this website regularly for more information). This may be found in a welcome or a letter from the chief on the homepage, but could also be found elsewhere. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V19]

20a. **Bookmark now?** Does the website homepage include a “bookmark now” feature or an invitation to bookmark the page? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V20a]

In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES).

![Chino Police Department homepage](image1)

20b. **Share feature?** Does the website homepage include a sharing feature, such as one that would allow you to share the website or content from the site via email, via social media, etc.? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V20b]

In the examples below, the coder would code (1-YES).

![Chino Police Department homepage with share options](image2)
21. **Event calendar/event listing?** Does the website homepage include an event calendar/event listing of events specific to the local law enforcement agency? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V21]

22. **FAQ/Q&A feature?** Does the website homepage include an FAQ and/or Q&A feature specific to the law enforcement agency? This may also be listed as something like a “How do I?” or “I want to” or “Frequently Used” feature. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V22]

   **In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES).**

23. **Public Information/Public Records?** Does the website homepage provide information about how to or opportunity to access public information or public records specific to the law enforcement agency? This might fall under “Right to Know,” Records Requests, Records, Public Information, Public Records, Public Affairs, (Freedom of) Information Act, Records Department, Obtain a Record, Obtain a Report, Access to Police Reports, Contact Information for Public Information Officer/Records Officer or Contact Information related to Records. It may also be found in a media relations/communications section. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V23]

24. **Policy/Law information?** Does the website homepage provide important internal and external policy and/or law information/documents or codes (such as those that could be downloaded) related to the local law enforcement organization? This might include things labeled procedures, ordinances, policy, professional standards, accountability, licenses, department manuals, citations, permits, laws, codes, legal notices etc. **NOTE:** Do not include a website privacy policy/legal notice or other website related policy/legal notice here (often found at the bottom of the website). **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V24]

25. **Emergency/disaster preparedness safety resources?** Does the website homepage provide emergency/disaster preparedness safety resources (e.g., for weather-related events such as hurricanes or snow storms; for major public safety incidents such as terrorism; may include information from Department of Homeland Security or similar agencies) specific to the department. This can include an email/emergency alert type of system being available. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V25]
26. **Survey or Poll?** Does the website homepage include an organizational survey or poll that would allow a user to vote on something? (e.g., an issue or idea)? This may be something like a “tell us how we’re doing” button, but should be a survey and not some other type of comment/feedback form. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V26]**

27. **Call to Action/to take Initiative?** Does the website homepage include a call/calls to action for a visitor to make some type of substantive action? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V27]**

This variable measures if the website homepage directly asks publics to take some kind of substantive action, to take initiative, to become involved, etc. There are often active verbs directed at the visitors reading the Website and are declarative. (Examples: “Learn more…,” “Help fight crime…,” “Join us…,” “You are encouraged to arrive early…,” “Check out…,” “Come to…,” “Contact Us…,” “Join…,” “Volunteer…,” “Get involved…”)

In the examples below, the coder would code (1-YES).

28. **Solicitation of Information/Help/Ideas from the Public?** Does the website homepage solicit or provide opportunities for information, help, or ideas from the public? Websites may ask or provide opportunities for visitors to provide information or ideas through the use of questions, but does not have to include a question. May include volunteering opportunities, getting involved, asking for input or feedback, opportunities for sending/providing tips or information, providing recommendations, “Wanted,” help with something specific, reporting information online, areas for compliments/complaints, areas for feedback, etc. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V28]**
29. Registration/Sign-up/Apply Options? Does the website homepage ask or provide the opportunity for the visitor to register, sign up, or apply for something (e.g., an event, an email list, a citizen board, a program, employment, etc.)? May also include things like joining, volunteering, subscribing, etc. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V29]**

30. Opportunities to Send (a) Message(s)/Conduct Business via the Website? Are there opportunities to send messages to the law enforcement agency or conduct business with the agency via the website homepage? (e.g., through a live chat, through a submission form, etc.). May include things like complaint/commendation, report a crime, provide a tip, requesting information, obtaining reports, online forms, making payments, filing police reports or other reports online, e-services, online services, online customer services, etc. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V30]**

31. Offers Regular Information through Email/Mobile? Are there opportunities for visitors/users to receive regular information from the agency via email or mobile? In other words, can users sign up for an email list or receive text or mobile notifications (such as through an app), receive regular updates, etc.? **NOTE:** Code (1-YES) if the law enforcement agency uses Nixle. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V31]**

32. Other? Are there other opportunities for visitors/users to provide feedback to, receive responses from, or interact with the law enforcement agency online or in person? May include citizen/review boards, Citizen Academies, different forums and programs for the public, etc. Briefly describe those opportunities. **(OPEN ENDED QUESTION)** [V32]

33. News/press releases? Are organizational news/press releases available on the agency website homepage? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V33]**
34. **News or media/press room/section?** Beyond press/news releases, is there an organizational news or media/press room or communication section that is tailored to the media and provides other important information for the media about the local law enforcement agency? This could also be a media relations section or a top stories section or something of that nature. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V34]**

In the examples below, the coder would code (1-YES).

35. **Media contact information?** Is there specific information (e.g., phone number, mailing/physical address, email address) for media inquiries/who the media should contact (e.g., public information officer, communications director, public affairs officer, media relations office)? This is sometimes not found in the news sections, but in the general contact areas or on the top/bottom of the site. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V35]**

**Starting here, do not incorporate any of the embedded social media information/posts into your consideration. This content should be organic to the local law enforcement website. **

36. **Crime/Incident information?** Does the website homepage provide (usually negative) crime/incident information, including providing updates about a crime or incident? This can include past crimes/incidents (e.g. Wanted people, Missing people), crime reports and crime mapping, crime blotters, for example, but don’t include crime prevention here. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V36]**

**NOTE:** Traffic/parking information alone is not considered crime/incident information.

37. **Event/Program information?** Does the website provide information about a past, upcoming, or ongoing events/programs that law enforcement are attending, hosting, promoting, or participating in? (e.g., community relations events involving local law enforcement personnel, meetings, news conferences, community programs such as Citizen Academy, Volunteer Programs, Citizen Boards, Neighborhood Watch, Police Athletic League, Programs for Children or other groups, etc.). This can include photos. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V37]**

38. **Traffic/Parking information?** Does the website homepage provide information about traffic issues, road closures, or parking information (e.g., for events, due to accidents)? Can
include traffic reports, ticket information, traffic bureaus/divisions/services/patrols, listings for patrol, red light cameras, etc. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V38]

39. **Prevention information?** Does the website homepage provide specific safety tips or seek to raise preventative awareness (e.g., locking doors, storing valuables)? May include PSAs. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V39]

40. **Victim/Person/Suspect identification?** Does the website homepage include victim, suspect, or missing person information or request help to identify a victim, suspect, or missing person? This can include bodies. This does not have to provide specific information about the victim, suspect, or missing person, but can just mention those words. May include things like Wanted, Cold Cases, BOLOS (Be on the Lookout). **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V40]

41. **Recruitment information?** Does the website homepage include information seeking to recruit people to join the law enforcement agency as a police officer or provide information about what it is like being a recruit/police officer? Include training or items that are listed as jobs/employment here. This doesn’t have to explicitly be labeled recruitment. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V41]

42. **Data?** Does this website provide departmental data? This can include information listed as statistics, mentions of annual or other departmental reports or aggregated data, open data efforts/portals, etc. Can often include crime maps/statistics. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V42]

43. **Information about organizational management?** Is there information about the management of the organization? (e.g., name and/or contact information of the head of the agency such as the police chief, information about the organizational hierarchy of the agency, photo of organizational head, organizational chart, contact information for organizational management). **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V43]

44. **Organizational mission statement?** Does the website homepage include an organizational mission statement? This may explicitly be listed as a mission statement, or it may be found with a letter/welcome from the head of the organization. This may be listed as more of a motto, statement of values, or philosophy. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V44]

45. **Human Interest/Community Relations?** Does the website feature a human interest or community relations/community outreach engagement angle, including displaying law enforcement’s positive work in the community/promoting a positive image for law enforcement in a community context (such as: featuring community policing, humor, nostalgia, “Beyond the Badge” features, community programs available [such as citizen boards, Police Athletic Leagues, Citizens Academy] thanking the community, recognizing/celebrating holidays, fundraisers, scholarship programs, recognizing fallen officers, helping children, the elderly, veterans, animals, etc.). This can include photos. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V45]
46. **Other General News/Information?** Does the website provide other general news/information about the local law enforcement agency that is not reflected in variables 36-45? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V46]**

**NOTE:** Only Code (1-YES) for this variable if there is additional general news/information and if you have coded (0-NO) for all variables 36-45.
APPENDIX A7: CODEBOOK FOR TWITTER PROFILES

Codebook 2 for Code Sheet 2: Local Law Enforcement’s Twitter Profiles

This codebook includes instructions for code sheet 2, which will help the researcher identify dialogic characteristics found on local law enforcement Twitter profiles. Specifically, the researcher is looking at the “conservation of visitors” principle, which includes encouraging users to stay connected to the organization online, including through other organizational social media and websites (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) and providing important general information (Madichie & Hinson, 2014; Shin, Pang & Kim, 2015).

Because Twitter profiles can change at any time, the researcher will collect screenshots of the profiles when sampling and store them electronically in individual file folders for coding purposes. Each file folder will indicate the name of the local law enforcement agency, the Twitter Page ID Number, and the date the screen shots were collected (Example: San Francisco_ID1_11022015). Coders will have to examine each of the screenshots to see if the variables in question are present or absent on the Twitter profile pages included in this research. The unit of analysis for this research is the Twitter profile (note: there may be multiple screen shots of one Twitter profile, but the screenshots in each folder represent one unit of analysis or one Twitter profile).

NOTE: If a Twitter page is not available for the municipal police department to be coded (the folder will be empty), code (0-NO) to indicate the absence of all relevant Yes or No variables. Code 0 for V13. For the Name of the Twitter page, code (NA).

Verified Account? Is the Twitter profile a verified account (denoted by a check mark?) If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0).

Link: Hyperlink to the Twitter page.

Coder ID: Input the Coder ID Number for each Twitter profile analyzed (Lindsay=1, Other=2) [CID]

1. Twitter Page Name: Type in the name of the Twitter page. (example: San Francisco Police) [V1]
2. **Twitter Page ID Number**: Coders will assign ID numbers to the Twitter pages they analyze. (example: 1) [V2]

3. **Date Twitter Page Information Was Collected**: This information will be found in the file name of the individual electronic folder for the Twitter page being analyzed. (example: 11/02/2015) [V3]

4. **Recent Update (within 24 hours)**: Has the Twitter page been updated recently (within 24 hours)? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V4]

The researcher will provide a screenshot of the law enforcement agency’s most recent original or retweeted post in the electronic file folder for each unit of analysis. The coder should judge this variable by looking at when the screenshot were retrieved [V3] and what the most recent post says. So, if the screenshots were pulled 11/2/2015 and the most recent post is from 10/30/2015, the coder would code (0-NO). If the post says yesterday with a time, code it as (1-YES). In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES) because it was within the last 20 hours.

5. **Link to Organizational Website**: Does the Twitter page include a link to the organizational website? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V5]
The coder will look to see if the Twitter page includes a link to the law enforcement organization’s website. In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES), because the page includes a link to the San Francisco Police Department’s website. However, if there was a link to the general San Francisco city government website (http://sfgov.org/) and not a link to the police department website, then the coder would code (0-NO). If you cannot determine if the link is specific to the law enforcement agency or cannot view the entire link for the website for some reason, open up the appropriate Twitter page, click on the link and see if it directs you to the law enforcement organization’s website.

6. Other Organizational Social Media Information: Does the Twitter page include information about how to access the organization’s other social media? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V6]

The coder will look to see if the Twitter page includes information about how to access the organization’s other social media (e.g., Facebook, Pinterest, Google+, Nixle, Nextdoor). This could include a link, a hashtag (#), information about the name of the account, or an infographic button that would make it possible for various publics to access those social media. In the example below, though there is information linking to the SFPD’s social media policy, the coder would code (0-NO) in this case, because there is not additional social media information located anywhere on the Twitter page.
7. **Organizational Description**: Does the Twitter page provide an organizational description? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V7]

This should not include historical information (see #8 below), but may include descriptive information about the police force, mission, goals, personnel, management, values, etc.

8. **Organizational History**: Does the Twitter page provide any organizational history? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V8]

This could be as simple as detailing when the organization was founded.

9. **Organizational Logo/Seal**: Does the Twitter page include an organizational logo/seal that visually represents the law enforcement agency? This can include if a logo or seal is present on a police car or uniform, though many times it will stand alone as the profile picture or be located in the cover photo. If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V9]

In the example below, the coder would code (1-YES) because the Twitter profile includes a logo/seal.
10. **Contact Phone Number:** Does the Twitter page include a contact phone number? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V10]

**NOTE:** Do not code (1-YES) for this if the only number provided is 911.

11. **Contact Email Address:** Does the Twitter page include a contact email address? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V11]

12. **Address:** Does the Twitter page include a contact address (physical or mailing (street address))? If YES, code (1). If NO, code (0). [V12]

13. **Likes (Formerly Favorites):** How many likes has Twitter page done? [V13]

In this example, the coder would code 0.

14. **Twitter Handle:** Type in the Twitter handle. (example: SFPD; Note: Excel won’t recognize @ symbol) [V14]

**NOTE:** Code (NA) if there is no Twitter account.
15. **Number of Tweets**: Type in the number of tweets [V15] (example: 1664 – no commas necessary)

![San Francisco Police Twitter profile](image1)

16. **Number Following**: Type in the number of accounts the organization is following. [V16] (example: 34)

![San Francisco Police Twitter profile](image2)

17. **Number of Followers**: Type in the number of the organization’s followers [V17] (example: 49700 – no commas necessary)

![San Francisco Police Twitter profile](image3)

18. **Number of photos and videos**: Type in the number of the organization’s photos and videos. [V18] (example: 237)

![San Francisco Police Twitter profile](image4)

19. **Year joining Twitter**: Type in the year the organization joined Twitter. (example: 2009)
NOTE: If the date is not explicitly listed, open up the account and scroll to the beginning of its
tweets to see when the account began. (This will happen in rare cases). If there is not a profile for
the agency, code NA.
APPENDIX A8: CODEBOOK FOR TWEETS

Codebook 4 for Code Sheet 4: Local Law Enforcement’s Tweets

This codebook includes instructions for code sheet 4, which will help the researcher identify dialogic characteristics found in local law enforcement tweets. Specifically, the researcher is looking at the principles of “usefulness of information,” “dialogic loop,” and “generation of return visits.”

Coders will have to examine each of the tweets to see if the variables in question are present or absent on the tweets included in this research. The unit of analysis for this research is the individual tweet.

**Tweet URL:** This is the URL of the tweet, as drawn from Crimson Hexagon. Coders will click on this link and then code the tweet accordingly.

**Twitter Handle:** This is the Twitter handle (account) of the local law enforcement agency. **Original tweets** are those that come directly from this Twitter handle and do not include an @reply at the beginning or an .@reply at the beginning of the tweet. **Retweets** are tweets that are from accounts other than the local law enforcement agency’s Twitter handle as listed in the Twitter handle column. In a normal everyday Twitter feed, these tweets would be identified by a “retweeted by” indicator; however, they will be easy to detect because when pulled from Crimson Hexagon they are the full tweets from Twitter handles that are not the local law enforcement agency. So, for example if you are coding for @SFPD’s account and you see a tweet that is from @SFPDCommission or any other account that is not from @SFPD, then that is not an original tweet, but instead it is a retweet. **Reply tweets** are those that include @reply or .@reply at the beginning of the tweet. The “@” symbol is used to identify tweets that are replying to another Twitter handle/account.

**Coder ID:** Input the Coder ID Number for each tweet analyzed (Lindsay=1, Other=2) [CID]

1. **Twitter Page Name:** Type in the name of the local law enforcement agency Twitter page name. 
   (Example: San Francisco) [V1]

2. **Twitter Page ID Number:** Coders will assign ID numbers to the Twitter pages they analyze that align with the Twitter page ID numbers assigned for the Twitter profile page codebook, codebook 2 (1-77). 
   (Twitter Page ID example: 1) [V2]

3. **Reply Count:** Enter the number of replies. [V3]

4. **Tweet ID Number:** Each tweet will be assigned a unique ID number.
   (Tweet ID Number:1) [V4]
5. Type of Tweet: Choose one of the following categories: [V5]

(0) Original tweet: Original tweets are those that come directly from the Twitter handle being analyzed and do not include an @reply at the beginning or an .@reply at the beginning of the tweet. So, for example, if I was coding the @SFPD Twitter handle, I would check to see if the handle was present on the tweet as seen in the image below.

(1) Retweet: Retweets are tweets that are from accounts other than the local law enforcement agency’s Twitter handle as listed in the Twitter handle column. In a normal everyday Twitter feed, these tweets would be identified by a “retweeted by” indicator; however, they will be easy to detect because when pulled from Crimson Hexagon they are the full tweets from Twitter handles that are not the local law enforcement agency. So, for example if you are coding for @SFPD’s account and you see a tweet that is from @SFPDCommission or anything else that is not from @SFPD, that is not an original tweet, but instead it is a retweet. You will also be able to tell if it is a retweet by looking at the tweet text column (the second column of the code sheet).

(2) Retweet with Original Information: Retweets with original information tweets are tweets that have information from the Twitter handle being examined at the top but also include a retweet/quote the tweet of another Twitter handle. An example of this is below.

(3) Reply (@reply/.@reply): Reply tweets are those that include @reply or .@reply at the beginning of the tweet. The “@” symbol is used to identify tweets that are replying to another Twitter handle/account. Below is an example of an @reply tweet.
(4) **Other:** Tweets that do not fall into categories 0-3 above, such as those that may combine two of the above options (e.g., a retweet that also starts with an @reply).

5-1. **IF** you coded (3) (@reply/.@reply) for the type of tweet, is the @reply to an account other than the Twitter handle being examined? In other words, if you are coding the @SFPD account and the @reply is to @SFPD, then you could code (0-NO), but if the @reply is to any other Twitter user, code (1-YES). Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). **Code 2 if NA (not applicable).** [V5-1]

Please use the tweet below as an example/reference for the next several variables [V6-V13]:

![Example Tweet](image_url)

6. **Date of Tweet:** This is the date the tweet was posted. [V6]  
   (Example: In the example above, the coder would code 7/17/2015).

7. **Time of Tweet:** This is the time of day the tweet was posted. [V7]  
   Code (0-AM) and (1-PM). (Example: In the example above, code 9).

9. **Number of Retweets:** Code the number of retweets listed on the tweet. [V9]  
   (Example: In the example above, code 18).
8. Number of Likes: Code the number of likes listed on the tweet. [V8]
(Example: In the example above, code 12).

10a. Number of Hashtags: Code the number of hashtags found in the tweet. Include any hashtags from a retweet. In other words if there is a retweet with original information, count the hashtags in both parts of the tweet. Don’t count hashtags in images/photos. If there are no hashtags, code (0). [V10a] Hashtags are denoted by a “#” sign. In the example above, the hashtag is #SFPD.
(Example: In the example above, code 1).

10b. Number of @ Symbols: Code the number of @ symbols found in the tweet. Include any @ symbols from a retweet. In other words if there is a retweet with original information, count the hashtags in both parts of the tweet. Don’t count @ symbols in images/photos. If there are no @ symbols, code (0). [V10b] In the example above, the coder would code 0.

11. Link(s): Does the tweet include a link or links that can be clicked on and opened? If a URL is present or more than 1 URL is present, then there is a link included in the tweet. Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V11]
(Example: In the example above, code 1).
11-1. Type of Link: IF you answered (1-YES) to 11, code for the type of link (if there is more than one link, code for the first available link). In order to access and click on the link, use the URL in the first column of the spreadsheet provided (highlighted in yellow). Pick the category that best describes the link.

(0) Link to an FAQ or Q &A Page associated with the local law enforcement agency
(1) Link to the/an organizational (law enforcement agency) website associated with the local law enforcement agency (but not a blog) (This may include news and information about the organization/agency from the organization/agency – e.g, press release, statement, speeches, etc.).
(2) Link to a municipal website/municipal social media (e.g., the city or county in which the law enforcement agency operates) (e.g., Facebook, Nixle, YouTube, Nextdoor)
(3) Link to other organizational social media (e.g., Facebook, Nixle, YouTube, Nextdoor)
(4) Link to news/information about the organization/agency (from the news media)
(5) Link to an organizational blog (This may include news and information about the organization/agency from the organization/agency – e.g, press release, statement, speeches, etc.).
(6) Other
(7) NA (Not applicable) (if coded 0 for #11).

12. Photo(s)/Graphic(s): Does the tweet include a photo or photos/graphic or graphics or mention a photo? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V12]
NOTE: If there is a link in the tweet, only include a photo that is present before clicking on the link. In addition to photos of people, places, and things, this can include drawings, maps, images of news releases, etc.
(Example: In the example above, code 1).
13. Video(s): Does the tweet include a video or videos or mention a video? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).
A video can be often deciphered as different from a photo by looking at an image on the tweet and seeing a “play” button in the middle of the image. The play buttons may be different colors, but are typically a forward arrow, as demonstrated in the example below. Also, code (1-YES) if there is a YouTube link or other video link present (e.g., Periscope). [V13]
(Example: In the example above, code 0).

The screenshot below depicts a video, and a coder would code 1.

14. Survey or Poll?: Does the tweet include a survey or poll that would allow a user to vote on something (e.g., an issue or idea)? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V14]

An example of when the coder would code (1-YES):

15. Call to Action/to take Initiative?: Does the tweet include a call to action or a call for a user to take some type of substantive action? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V15]
This variable measures if the tweet directly asks publics to take some kind of substantive action, to take initiative, to become involved, etc. There are often active verbs directed at the users reading the tweets and are declarative. (Examples: “Learn more...,” “Help fight crime...,” “Join us...,” “You are encouraged to arrive early,” “Check out...,” “Come to...,” “Contact us...”)
Some examples that would be coded (1-YES), include:

16. Solicitation of Information/Help/Ideas from the Public?: Does the tweet solicit/ ask for information, help, or ideas from the public/readers of the tweet? These tweets may ask users to provide information or ideas through the use of a question, though it doesn’t necessarily have to be a question. This may include a “Wanted” solicitation. Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V16]

An example that would be coded (1-YES), includes:
17. Question?: Does the tweet pose a question to the reader of the tweet? These will usually include a question mark directed at those reading the tweet. Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V17]

An example that would be coded (1-YES), includes:

![Example Image]

18. Registration/Sign-up/Apply Options? Does the tweet provide an opportunity for or ask/allow the Twitter user to register, sign up, or apply for something (e.g., an event, an email list, a citizen board, a program etc.)? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V18]

19. Promoting retweeting? Does the tweet ask the Twitter user to retweet the tweet? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V19]

20. Promoting liking? Does the tweet ask the Twitter user to like the tweet? Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V20]

21. Explicit invitation to return?: Does the tweet include an explicit invitation/reason to return to the organization's/agency's Twitter account? (e.g., Check back later for more information; Check this Twitter handle/account for updates; More information to come). Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V21]

22. Crime/Incident Information?: Does the tweet include information about a (usually negative) crime/crimes or incident(s), including providing updates about a crime or incident? Include weather-related incidents or information here. Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V22]

NOTE: Unless the tweet includes traffic/parking information and information about a specific crime/incident, code (0-NO). In other words, if the tweet is only about traffic/parking information, code (0-NO), that is not considered a crime/incident by itself.

Example:
23. **Event/Program Information?**: Does the tweet include information about a past or an upcoming event/program (e.g., a public meeting, coffee with a cop, Citizens Academy, sporting event) that law enforcement are attending, hosting, promoting, supporting, or participating in? Include news conferences and meetings here. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V23]

Example:

San Francisco Police @SFPD · Oct 31
We’re hosting our first ever Halloween party at #SFPD HQ, starting 11:30a! Don’t be scared– stop by! goo.gl/3EFLZ!

24. **Traffic/Parking Information?**: Does the tweet include information about traffic-related issues, road closures, or parking information (e.g., for events, due to accidents, due to incidents)? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V24]

Example:

Traffic reminder: Large crowds expected at Music is Art&Edgefest, U r encouraged to arrive early, expect delays & road closures at both:

25. **Prevention/Preparedness Information?**: Does the tweet provide specific safety tips or seek to raise preventative awareness/promote preparedness (e.g., locking doors, storing valuables, Halloween safety, other useful prevention tips, weather/disaster/emergency preparedness)? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V25]

Example:

SFPD/TrafficSafety @SFPDTrafficSafety · Oct 30
Officers will b out tonight and tomorrow night protecting our kids... Please drive carefully.

26. **victim/Person/Suspect Identification?**: Does the tweet include victim, suspect, or missing person information or request help to identify a victim, suspect, or missing person? This can include bodies. This does not have to provide specific information about the victim, suspect, or missing person, but can just mention those words. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V26]
27. Recruitment Information?: Does the tweet include information seeking to recruit people to join the law enforcement agency as a police officer or provide information about what it is like being a recruit/police officer? Include training here. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V27]**

Example:

28. Data?: Does the tweet include data? This will generally include information like specific numbers (e.g., those relevant to the department, those relevant to crimes), statistics, mentions of an annual report or other reports, maps, etc. **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO). [V28]**

Example:
29. **Human Interest/Community Relations?:** Does the tweet feature a human interest or community relations angle? This can include displaying law enforcement’s positive work/promoting a positive image for law enforcement, and efforts related to building trust (such as: positive online interactions, humor, community events/programs, “Behind the Badge” type of posts, awards, promotions, efforts related to building trust in the community, nostalgia (e.g., TBT), thanking the community or the community thanking law enforcement, recognizing/celebrating holidays, fundraisers, scholarship programs, recognizing fallen officers, helping children, the elderly, veterans, animals, etc.). **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V29]

**Examples:**

![Image of tweets examples](image)

30. **Other General News/Information?:** Does the tweet provide other general news/information related to the local law enforcement agency that is not reflected in variables 22-29? **Code (1-YES) or (0-NO).** [V30]
VITA

Lindsay M. McCluskey is from upstate New York and she resides in Syracuse, New York. She received a Bachelor’s Degree in Communication/Journalism and Political Science from St. John Fisher College in 2007 and earned a Master’s Degree in Public Relations from the Newhouse School at Syracuse University in 2008. Prior to joining the Manship School’s Media and Public Affairs Doctoral Program in 2012, she served as press secretary for the Miner for Mayor campaign in 2009 and then served as the press secretary for the City of Syracuse and Mayor Stephanie Miner from 2010-2012. She received the 2016 AEJMC Mass Communication & Society Division’s Student Promising Professor Award. Lindsay joined the faculty at the State University of New York at Oswego as an assistant professor of public relations in August 2016. She anticipates receiving her Ph.D. in December 2016.