An analysis of posts by Kerala Police on their Facebook page

Silpa Mathew*
Research Scholar, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga

Abstract

Wright & Hinson (2009) refers to the noticeable change social media have on communication, particularly on external public relations. Research studies have confirmed the use of social media for public relations by the government machineries too. This study is an analysis of posts in Kerala Police's Facebook page, to understand their usage of the same towards public relations. This quantitative approach towards content analysis subject posts on the Kerala Police's Facebook page in the randomly selected month of September, 2022. A coding sheet developed with reference to previous studies is used to quantify the Facebook posts in to different categories. The study identifies major categories to which their contents fall on and further substantiates significant impact of presentation style and content of the posts on the reactions they receive.

Keywords

Content, Interaction, Facebook page, social media, Kerala police

Introduction

With the world in the midst of social media revolution, it is more than obvious that the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are the popular communication platforms now (Baruah, 2012). As he argues, the evolution of social media as a communication platform have changed how people communicate, what people think about communication and people's basic characteristics in both interpersonal and social communication.

New media communication seems to be different from classical means of communications in several ways. Sing (2004) observes that the immense opportunity new media provide for social interaction sets it apart from classical media. Unlike the traditional media platforms, new media offers its consumers a chance to be the content creators and the consumers at the same time. Trammell (2006) compares new media to the traditional media and acknowledge that the internet platform facilitates more interactive and two-way communication. Gradually, yet at a steady pace, new media emerged as a mainstream media for information sharing and social interaction across the globe (Narasimhamurthy, 2014).

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* **Correspondence:** shilpamathew93@gmail.com

Social media have become the most cost-effective platforms for all leaders and communicators who upload videos, documents, graphics and photos in order to reach out to the world (Klososky, 2012). That is why probably social media is called as the 'vehicle of the day' for connecting people (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012). Social media tools can build relationships through communication like no other element (Klososky's, 2012). Toledano (2017) is also of same opinion and refers interactivity, co-creation of content, subscription – based information service and third party application development as the highlights of social media.

These references to the popularity and acceptance of social media make it worthy to look into the statistics of social media use. According to the Statistica Portal, Facebook was the most popular social networking site across the world with more than 2.45 billion active users in 2019. According to social media based website NapoleonCat there are 31.71 crore Facebook users in India who constitute a sizeable number (23%) of its entire population. A majority of them are men (76.3%). People aged between 25 and 34 years form the largest user group. This commendable growth is believed to be facilitated by tech giants' investments in India towards nation's technological progress, including Google's Wifi at 400 railway stations, besides the rapid internet growth in rural areas (Mary Meeker report, 2019). As per the report, social media sites have got a huge fan base in Kerala also, with Facebook enjoying the first place. There are 48 lakh active users in Kerala with 71 percent being male users and the rest being female users.

It is in this context that the Kerala Police came up with a Facebook page in 2011, which sooner grew up as the No.1 social media page of any government body. Now, the page is leading this new trend with around 1.8 million followers. Understanding and evaluating their Facebook page is desirable in multiple ways, particularly with regard to public relations.

Review of Literature

There are several studies on and about the topic, analyzing various aspects of public relations practice, the use of new media in public relations and studies on how such online interactive platforms are being used by governments worldwide in public relations practice. Wang (2015) gave a synthesis of social media related public relations research, analyzing several studies and papers incorporating social media in public relations. His findings state that the use of social media as a public relations tool has been there ever since its inception and this trend is still increasing. Quantitative methodology, and content analysis, are the most popular method used in conducting research on social

media. But there is a potential lack in theoretical research and methodological application, Wang says.

Accenture (2014) conducted a comparative study of 10 nations to analyze their new media use in governance. Brazil, Germany, India, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, and the USA were the countries examined under the criteria like a) Citizen Service Delivery, b) Citizen Satisfaction and c) Service Maturity. They surveyed the public and found that 81 percent of them consider it as important to have more digital services from the government and 64 percent of the citizens like to interact with the government through social media. Karakiza (2015) refers to such increasing citizens' demand for easier, hassle-free and seamless interaction with the Government, greater transparency and access to information as a cause, leading government agencies to explore new tools like new digital technology and web 2.0 applications that will ease financial pressure and improve the quality of public services.

O'Connor and Walsh (2018) did a study on the role of social media in policing, by reviewing other studies on the topic. They argue that with its accessibility, ease-of-use, networked and participatory characteristics, social media simplifies the state-society relations. It offers new opportunities for surveillance, risk communication, and impression management if to be specific about policing. Disseminating content and messages to earn public support is much easy now, with the arrival of social media. Beyond that, sharing of important events and matters of concern gradually erodes the boundary between the two.

Das and Babu (2021) conducted a study on the use of Facebook by the district collector of Ernakulam. A content analysis of the posts on the page from 1st January to 31st December 2021 shows a healthy relationship between the administration and the public. They further refer to Facebook as an effective tool to foster democracy as it facilitated interaction between the administrators and public through comments likes and shares. The self-representation and impression management are all about the online presence of the user. Similar to other social network sites, Facebook also offers a chance to create a personal profile, a user's personal identity in the cyberspace (Boyd and Hargittai, 2010).

Methodology

The researcher conducted a quantitative content analysis of the posts on Kerala Police's Facebook page for a month of time. September got randomly elected and 60 posts from 1st September to 30th September were analyzed using coding sheet and SPSS. Each post were analyzed and coded based on the nature of

content, language used, mode of presentation, and the level of interaction etc. Message, attachment, title, hash tags and all such elements of the Facebook posts were analyzed towards this coding. Communications in the form of like, comment and share were counted to measure the interaction.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to analyze the posts in Kerala police's Facebook page and to identify its major characteristics.

Data Analysis & Discussion

A total 61 posts from 1st September 2022 to 30th September 2020 was analyzed for its frequency, characteristics and results. The quantitative data collected using the coding sheet was fed to SPSS to get its statistical representation. A simple percentage analysis is done in order to understand the frequency distribution.

Nature of Posts by the Kerala Police Department

The Facebook page of Kerala Police posts an average of two posts a day, making it a count of 61 for the month of September alone. Among the 61 posts, 41 posts, that is 67.2% consists of images. This majority include all types of representation, either as posters or even meme, but all in image format. Only 31.1% Percentage of the posts feature video contents, which are not even the half of the images they have on their page. The page rarely features any hyperlinks, which is only 1.6% for the month of September, 2022.
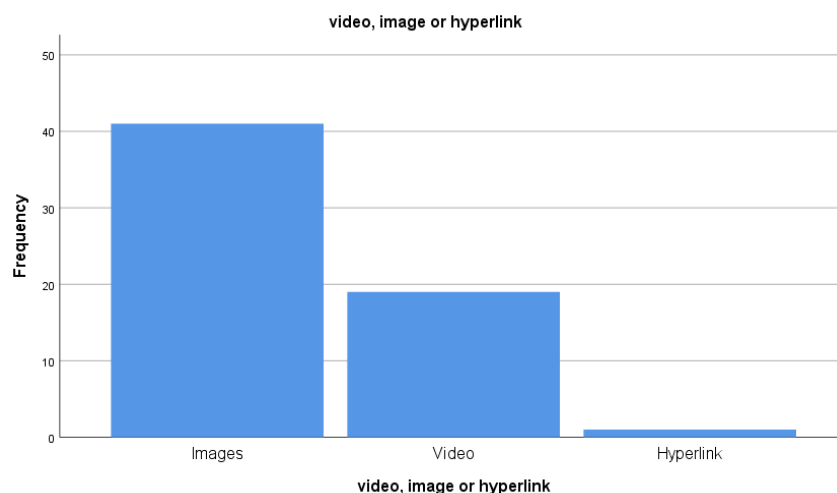
Among the 61 posts, alerts and awareness are identified as the most recurring themes of the posts. Half the posts appeared in the month of September, which is 49.2% of the posts, belongs to these two categories together. There are posts meant to alert the public against online spams and frauds and there are posts aiming to create awareness on such hoax, traffic rules, individual rights, law and order etc. The other 49.8% of the posts belongs to various identified categories which includes department programs, greetings, observations, self support, appreciation and investigation updates. Anyhow, most of the post turned out to be informative in one way or another.
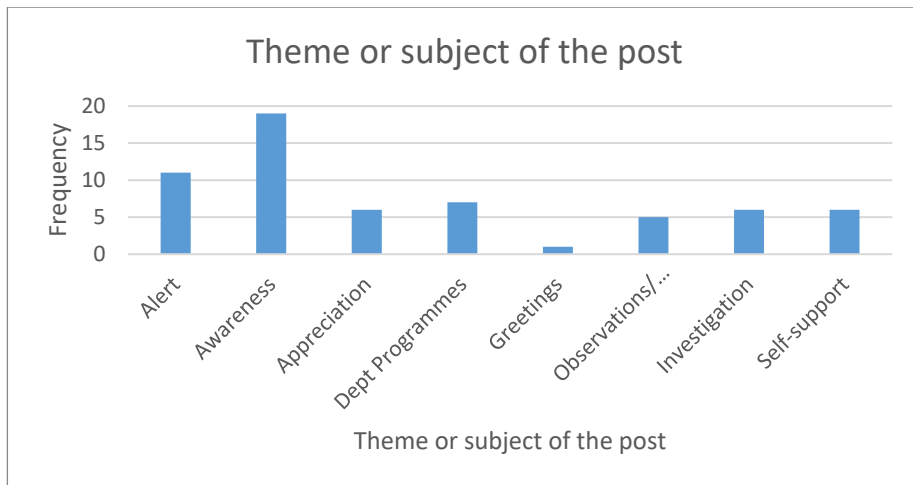
Interaction between the Public and the Police through the Facebook Page

The researcher cross-tabled theme of the post with public's attitude in seeking information from the department. 90.9% of the alert posts and 63.15% of the awareness posts carry questions and queries from the public. But the public seems less interested to seek information regarding department programs, investigation updates and posts on observations, celebrations and self-supporting posts from the police department. But altogether, 52.45% of the posts got some sort of enquiries in its comment section.

		Count		
		Seeking Information	Not seeking information	Total
Theme or subject of the post	Alert	10	1	11
	Awareness	12	7	19
	Appreciation	3	3	6
	Dept Programmes	2	5	7
	Greetings	0	1	1
	Observations/ Celebrations	1	4	5
	Investigation	2	4	6
	Self-support	2	4	6
Total		32	29	61

Theme or subject of the post * Whether they are seeking information or not Crosstabulation

If to measure the interaction between the police department and the public in terms of likes, shares and comments; alert and awareness themed posts got the highest number of interactions. This is followed by posts on investigations and appreciation and interaction is the lowest for department programmes like CoCon and Hackethon.

Both images and videos get equal response from the audience when the format in which the posts were made is crossed with the grand total of the interaction measured, in terms of likes, comments and shares. And the response to a hyperlink they shared is commendably low, with the lowest number of like, share and comment among the entire posts.

	Count							
	Grand total of interactions through like, share and comment							
	0-999	1000-4999	5000-9999	10000-14999	15000-19999	20000-24999	25000 & above	Total
Images	2	14	8	11	1	2	3	41
Video	0	11	2	1	2	2	1	19
Hyperlink	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	2	25	11	12	3	4	4	61

Video, image or hyperlink * Grand total of interactions through like, share and comment Crosstabulation

Findings and Conclusion

Kerala Police's Facebook page and the reactions in it refer to the possibility of police-pubic interaction beyond one way communication. 52.45% of the posts got some sort of enquiries in its comment section, which means people consider Kerala Police's Facebook page as a platform to seek information. These numbers of the comments and its contents also show people interaction and participation in government activities. It elaborates the healthy relationship between the government and the citizens. Thus social media proves to be a good tool of democracy in this information era.

While considering the presentation of the post, public seems to opt for images or videos rather than hypertexts or hash tags, and the police media cell is serving them accordingly. The public casts more reactions on posts carrying some images. Though the public, in varying fraction, react to every post the Kerala Police posts on their Facebook page, they are more lenient towards posts raising alerts and awareness among the citizens.

The police social media cell seems to be easy on applying any particular strategy, but posts having emotional appeal have performed well in gaining popularity. That is evident in the reactions public shower on posts showing some positive social interventions their department or a department person does, apart from the duty of law enforcement they are bestowed with. Another factor they relay on for better reach is the comical representations, memes and trolls, which rather get viewed and shared widely among their followers in Facebook.

98.36% of the posts in the official social media account are created by the Kerala Police's social media cell. They are consistent in using the hash tag #keralapolice and and a few relevant hash tags too, though not always. The social media cell is particularly conscious and careful about using Malayalam – the local language in every post they make. A specialized social media cell working for the maintenance of the page seems to be effective, as no posts they create leave uncounted or neglected by the followers. So, the page is yielding a positive attitude from the public, establishing better public relations practice and a goodwill among the public. Besides, the use of social media for policing keeps it in pace with the rest of the world, making the department data-driven, and intelligence- led and technologically mediated.

Scope & Limitations of the Study

The study gives an understanding about Kerala Police's use of Facebook page for different purposes. And it analyses police- public interaction through the media. But it would yielded a more inclusive and accurate analysis if public's

part were also analyzed. A survey among the public to understand their attitude could have done in this aspect. Also, the page and its performance were analyzed based only on a month's post, which considerably is a short period. A study posts in six moths or a year could have done to get accurate results. Further, Kerala Police's interaction with the public includes other social media platforms too, like Instagram, and accommodating such recently trending social media platforms for the analysis seems to be the need of the hour.

A detailed study encompassing the above concerns too would have made the research an inclusive one, which may even lead to developing a working model for government bodies public relations through social media.

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