

POLICY BRIEF

Digital Community Policing in Pakistan
Prospects & Pathways

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Executive Summary

Digital Community policing is an emerging concept that integrates core policing community actions with the digital sphere. Police and communities have been sin-qua-non for each other since the advent of modern civilization. The digital sphere offers new opportunities as digital natives or digital citizens, now outnumber digital immigrants. Digital citizens in Pakistan and worldwide started with notions of individuality, liberty, and anonymity. They are now forming new digital communities that, in some ways, are different from conventional communities but, in many ways, address conventional problems and issues.

New digital communities, while maintaining the values of individuality and liberty, are converging for common purposes. These communities are led by new leaders (influencers), and utilize the speed and frequency offered by the digital sphere. Content is the currency of digital exchange, with conventional messages quickly dissipating. Digital communities predominantly comprise of Gen-Z, who embody the spirit of individuality and freedom. In contrast, the boomers hold conventional tools and hard power, constituting only a fraction of the digital constituencies. Digital communities are centered around influence and soft power.

Although new in Pakistan, the concept of digital community policing is practiced at three levels: communication, prevention, and crisis management. The communication domain focuses on awareness creation, information sharing, public relations management, and agenda setting. The prevention aspect addresses the significant challenge of harassment and other crimes against digital platform users, with the shrinking gap between online and offline spaces. Crisis management aims to mitigate the adverse effects of events, such as the spread of fake news or privacy invasions, once they occur. A conventional approach drives the crisis management part in the current digital policing practice.

Effective digital community policing necessitates the use of various community engagement tools. These include the regular development of fresh content, deployment of mobile applications for crime reporting or sharing digital evidence, the creation of online police stations, and the use of hotlines. However, the existing tools are short-term, inadequate, and primarily one-way. A long-term, sustainable, and interactive framework for digital community policing is required.

Based on international best practices, existing gaps, and available opportunities, a five-stage process is proposed to enhance the effectiveness of digital community policing in Pakistan. This process begins with a better understanding of the digital community and relies on a feedback loop mechanism for improvement. The five-step process includes community formation, empowerment, open engagement, digital access, and continuous feedback. The key to the successful transformation of the police is in its better orientation of the digital sphere rather than transplanting existing practices into digital communities. The future of policing is digital, as is the present.

Introduction:

Digital Community Policing (DCP) is an emerging concept in police forces worldwide. It envisages a fusion of three domains—the digital, the community, and the policing. All three domains must be explored distinctly and then together to lay out the prospects for this unique combination of seemingly disparate spheres. The primary focus has to be on Policing. Policing has always been incomplete without the community, and now digital platforms have reshaped communities with enhanced engagement, speed, and impact.

The digital sphere or social media is reshaping communities in multiple ways. A citizen is now more of a digital citizen than a mere physical one. Police worldwide, and more so in our case, is comparatively slow in engaging with digital communities. At best, the Police use the digital sphere only for public relations building and are not able to formulate and engage with digital communities in a holistic and organized manner.

Police is using the digital public sphere for policing under many names. They use terms such as Digital Community Policing (DCP), Online Policing, and E-policing interchangeably. Online policing is an umbrella concept for various operative policing tasks involving Internet-related activities and actions designed to prevent or investigate crimes.¹ Digital community policing should be taken as distinct from the above three terms: a fusion of community policing and digital engagement and a change agent for the new face of policing. The EU's RAN (Radicalization Awareness Network) defines Digital Community as curating an online presence and ensuring police is visible and approachable to their communities.²

1. Community Policing Model of the Police:

Community is as old as the human beings. The distinction between community and society is more theoretical and beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to mention that in the ordinary sense, society is a larger collection of individuals as a parallel to the State. At the same time, the community would be a subset of society. Business persons, lawyers, actors, teachers, farmers, etc., organize themselves in communities. Community can also be geographical or territory-based: village, town, city, etc. Thus, organization and formation are critical features of the community, with others being common objects and interests. These features will also be essential to understand when we will explore the formation of digital communities.

Community policing is, in essence, a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems. With the Police no longer the sole custodian of law and order, the community becomes active ally to enhance the safety and quality of neighborhoods³. Community policing in the case of Pakistan, is predominantly interest group and stakeholder management. Historically, clerics or churches have been first interest groups followed by journalists and lawyers. Traders will be the first in the row of new interest groups, with doctors, teachers, and women forums joining later. It must be noted that politicians having

¹ Mediated Proximity: Community Policing in the Digital Age Kira Vrist Rønn, Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing, Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing, Publication date: 25.08.2023

² Community police and the online Dimension, Conclusions Paper: RAN POL working group meeting – 5 July 2021.

³ US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Community Policing; a framework of action, 1994 pp-5

a share or claim in government power will not be considered a direct interest group but, at the same time, are also a link to the community given their political interests. The digital sphere has produced its own sets of interest groups. The existing interest groups have moved there rather quickly, too. Clerics are the quickest movers, but others, like doctors and lawyers, are not lagging behind.

Community engagement or partnership is the core of community policing, the other being problem-solving.⁴ How the Police engage the communities defines their impact and even their success. Community engagement also takes many forms. Community management is the most common way to keep communities under control. Management, though, undermines establishing and maintaining mutual trust, the central goal of community policing. Communities, being the sub-sets of society, and the Police, being an organ of the State, carry inherent biases and impressions. Successful community partnership means adopting a policing perspective that exceeds the standard law enforcement emphasis. Digital community policing is the extension of conventional practice but acknowledges and adopts speed, content, and modes that have shaped the digital sphere.

2. The digital communities; situation overview:

Digital is the new real. Smartphone is now individual's best friends. People have more friends online than they have in the real world. Relationships, politics, businesses, and entertainment are all drawn from the digital sphere. The digital world shows five notable trends;

- a. People spend more time in the digital world than the physical world.
- b. The digital sphere, especially social media, now defines how people react collectively to any event, crisis, or problem.
- c. Digital sphere is as much, if not greater, the hub of crime and deviance as is the physical sphere.
- d. Crimes, violations, and deviance occurring in the physical world rapidly and more severely translate into the physical world.
- e. Police as an entity or its enforcement capacity is largely absent from the digital sphere.

3. Digital media platforms and the formation of new communities:

Community formation necessitates the need for partnerships. The presence of digital media communities necessitates the need for policing and partnerships. A digital media community is a group of people who come together online to share common interests and experiences. The term can refer to any online group, including forums, chat rooms, and social networking sites⁵. Amongst many approaches to online communities, the most pertinent is social network perspective. The social network approach explores the group or community interactions to determine what kinds of actors and ties make up the network; what exchange of information, social support, socializing, play, or other resources form the basis of the community; and what

⁴ ibid

⁵ Building a community on social media, Forbes, Dec 09 2022 by Monika Ilieva
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/12/09/building-a-community-on-social-media/>

roles and cliques emerge that provide structure to the community⁶ Digital communities can be open and accessible like Facebook pages and closed too like WhatsApp & Telegram.

3.1. Digital Natives: Individuality, anonymity, and liberty:

Digital Community is a specific form of community we are focusing on. The first and obvious question would be locating it. Digital communities or communities might not be that obvious despite the omnipresence of the digital sphere. This elusiveness has more to do with the specific traits of the digital sphere. Digital natives form a digital community. Marc Prensky defined and coined the term digital natives as far back in 2001⁷ as “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet. He also coined the term digital immigrants to describe those who were not born into the digital world but had, at some later point in their lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of technology.⁸

Individuality, anonymity, and liberty are three more prominent traits of digital community members. Digital natives are more individualistic than any individual operating in the physical sphere. Traditional ties like clan and neighborhood do not burden digital citizens or digital natives. Our digital citizen is also not bothered by the limits on behavior set by age, occupation, and income. A security guard will send a ‘friendship request’ to the CEO and would like or comment on his posts and pictures. Individual is sovereign in the digital sphere.

Anonymity is the second hallmark of a digital natives who, as a sovereign individual, is not limited by connections or labels. He or she is also not held back by the identity. They can choose to be anyone or anything. This anonymity is the core of sovereignty and accords immense power to our digital citizens. Anonymity is also more prone to be misused. Behind the shield of user name, handle, and DP (display picture), one can offend, instigate, and even harass others to no limit. Most of the enforcement by the State is to expose anonymity and find known humans behind the use of names and handles.

Liberty is the third feature of the digital sphere. The digital world is the real free world. Even the freest of societies are run by norms, if not laws. You can never say to anyone’s face what you really feel. In the digital sphere, you really can. In the real world, adverse actions have consequences: physical retaliation, social pressure, and legal action. In the digital world, the consequences are few and far. One can get away with almost anything as far as the liberty to say or opine is concerned.

The three trends of individuality, liberty, and anonymity would indicate the absence of any community. How do we go about community policing in the digital sphere if only individuals are free to say whatever they want to and be whatever they want to be? The caveat here is that community formation is inherent to human beings. The starting point of the digital sphere was individual, free, and anonymous, and it still is for new entrants as it was at the start of civilization. However, human behavior eventually moves from individual to collective. The same is happening in the digital sphere. Individuals are forming their tribes on the internet. Beyond a certain point, the followers and friends become a clan. Influencers take their followers along on

⁶ Enabling Community Through Social Media by Anatoliy Gruzd & Caroline Haythornthwaite, J Med Internet Res 2013;15(10):e248) doi:10.2196/jmir.2796

⁷ Marc Prensky Digital Natives Digital Immigrants ©2001 Marc Prensky

⁸ Ibid

new ventures. Social media is now aggregating individual preferences with groups and pages, becoming more and more like communities.

Anonymity also dissipates after some time. The urge to be seen and acknowledged as a real person is hard to resist. Very few digital media users remain anonymous after some time. There are examples of anonymous influencers, but they nonetheless form groups and affect their preferences. The same is true with liberty, which is predicated on anonymity anyway. Once the veil is lifted, the individual is also exposed, necessitating community protection. If the digital citizen does not have community support, he or she is vulnerable to social standing, both professional and personal.

3.2. Emergence of digital communities; Purpose, personality, and speed:

Communities start emerging in the digital sphere once individuality, liberty, and anonymity dilute. Of course, digital communities are still more fluid and malleable than physical spaces, but they are nonetheless tied by a Center of Gravity or COG. As already mentioned, the communities are formed based on interest and constrained by geography. Most basic and original communities are local. People who reside in close vicinity are most naturally aligned in neighborhoods, *Mohalla* or communes. Local and professional interests, when combined, give us doctors, lawyers, traders, and clergymen.

Digital communities extend the limits of local. There is always some center of gravity, but beyond that, the opportunities are limitless. Lawyers from across borders can get together for the purposes that are common to them. Entertainment and arts are the most common purposes and do not depend on the language. The exchange in the digital sphere is defined further by two factors: personality and speed. The digital sphere is more personality-dominated than the real world. No community functions without a leader, but mostly, the leader is the protector of interests. Since social media or the internet is not constrained by space, the COG is one person, idea, or theme that brings people together. The distance or barrier works to the advantage of digital leaders. They are not as exposed as such and can take any persona suiting the medium's and market's needs.

The speed of exchange also marks digital communities. Professional communities make an effort to meet in the real world. The meetings and exchanges involve logistics issues. It's not a problem anymore with the Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, and WhatsApp groups. Community engagement is endless in the digital sphere. Non-stop production of opinions is the biggest challenge for the government agencies like the police. Now, anything anytime can blow out of proportion and become a crisis for them. Riots, mob violence, and even murders have happened when the digital communities exchanged information with police being complacent or simply absent.

3.3. From Messages to Content: the changing face of digital exchange:

Another notable feature of digital communities is the type of exchange they produce in the digital sphere. Commonly called content, these exchanges are not limited by volume anymore. Due to digital media being an attention economy or clickbait culture, the most sensational or entertaining gets the most exchanges or becomes viral –in the language of social media. Those who are good at creating sensations or producing entertainment become the Center of Gravity quickly. Unsurprisingly, we have organizational leaders indulging in exchanges bordering

entertainment often disapproved by conventional leaders. However, the nature of digital communities is that they deal with content, not ideas.

Content is winning against ideas with every passing day. “Content is King” Bill Gates revived the marketing phrase and applied it to the internet way back in 1996⁹ Scholars, academics, artists, and preachers are not producing knowledge, art, and sermons. They are just creating content. Police and police officers are no exception. When they produce content, their outreach multiplies; no one listens when they issue directions and instructions. The pressure is enormous on Police organization. They must maintain their façade of authority and engage with digital natives who have scant respect for authority.

3.4. Soft Power of digital media & the new faces of power:

Digital media has spawned new faces of power. The existing power holders in society, like lawyers, clerics, and journalists, also have to rely on social media to sustain their power. Police must now factor in the digital impact of their policies and decisions. Those who failed to see the trend were exposed and faced consequences. The case of Naqeebullah in Karachi is relevant¹⁰. Had he not been somewhat prominently followed on social media and had his case not been taken on social media, the case could not have been exposed, and the practice would have continued unabated.

Police is also rising to new modes of soft power. Police officers are now routinely seen in the influencer mode, and the police’s videos on TikTok have generated much interest. This is despite the fact that Police initially tried to discourage the trend and barred the staff from using Tik Tok¹¹. Now, they are fully into reels and videos and are attracting mixed reactions. Social media and digital natives seem to have voted in favor of the new influencer police officers, and their response was through engagement.

3.5. The deepening generation gap between the Boomers & Gen Z:

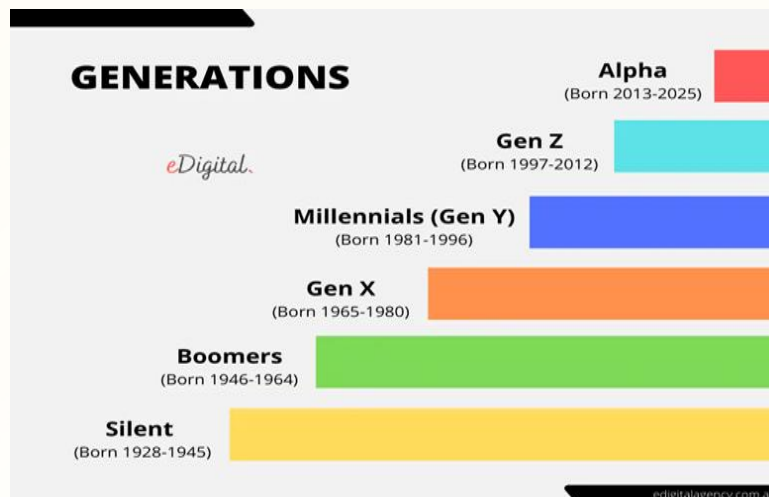
The digital sphere has deepened the already widening generation i.e., “difference in values and attitudes between one generation and another”¹² Due to better aging and the rapid rise in technology, five different generations are now active in the public sphere simultaneously.

⁹ Content is king, essay by Bill Gates 1996, <https://medium.com/@HeathEvans/content-is-king-essay-by-bill-gates-1996-df74552f80d9>

¹⁰ DAWN, January 18, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383540/anger-on-social-media-after-waziristan-man-killed-in-karachi-encounter>

¹¹ The Business Standard, Feb 10 2022. https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/police-in-pakistan-s-punjab-province-barred-from-using-tiktok-122021000235_1.html

¹² Mendez, N. (2008). Generation Gap. In: Loue, S.J., Sajatovic, M. (eds) Encyclopedia of Aging and Public Health. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-33754-8_195



Digital is all about the young people, the Gen Z, who are born as digital natives. On the other hand, the power of the state and government is held by Boomers, who found the internet and digital age at the later end of their lives. Some are *Digital Immigrants*, for they are trying, and others are digital aliens - outsiders who are having difficulty adjusting to the new world. The distinction is not just about the age but the values and habits. Gen Z is more vocal, passionate, and active in digital media. Their work habits are also different and fluid. They do not like queuing up in government offices and have little regard for official authority.

The leverage in the digital age, however, lies with the Gen-Z. Being digital natives, they control two important vectors in today's world: digital economy and politics. Digital has not just made influencers but also created economic opportunities. YouTuber is no longer a sarcastic label but a bona fide occupation. The same is the case with politics. All politics is now on social media, where Gen-Z rules the roost. Boomers, on the other hand, have occupied positions of power in departments like the Police. This widening gap between boomers and Gen-Z can only be filled if policing is taken to the digital sphere instead of them brought to Police.

Gen-Z also has more women in the digital sphere than in the physical world. Women's digital activities are exponentially more than in the physical sphere. Take, for example, a city like Peshawar. No women will engage with police in the public sphere. But one look at the internet and see that women will be substantial in numbers, still not as much and as active as in Lahore, but enough to make a difference. Women are the most growing demographic in the digital sphere. Among Pakistan's social media users, 25.9 percent are female, while 74.1 percent are male¹³. A Gallup survey found that females spend 5 hours using TikTok while males spend 2 hours¹⁴.

4. Police in the Digital Sphere: Three levels:

Police is one organ of the State that has the most stakes in digital communities. We also see that in our case, police have struggled to enforce their writ even in physical space. Patrolling, picketing, and now surveillance cameras through safe and smart cities are some measures

¹³ Digital 2024: Pakistan, by Simon Kemp, dated 28 Feb 2024

¹⁴ Survey by Gallup & Gillani Pakistan: <https://gallup.com.pk/post/33838>

police try to regulate physical space. The same is the case with community engagement, done through the good old methods of giving and taking favors and engaging with interest groups.

How can we enter into digital community policing when the digital communities are fluid, beyond boundaries, and operate with rapid speed? Before going into discussion further. We have to see what Policing is doing presently about engaging digital communities. Police community engagement is at three levels: communication, prevention, and crisis management.

4.1. Police Communication Strategy:

- a. **Information and awareness:** Citizens want and expect to know what the Police is doing or not doing. Thus, police have plenty of routine content about what Police is doing and the things Police should be following. Be it traffic, security, government actions, or emergencies. Police use social media to share information and create awareness. National Highways and Motorways Police is a prominent police organization in this sphere. Most of the content produced by the provincial police organization also falls in the category of information and awareness.
- b. **Public Relations:** Police has been adept at PR before even internet. Policing requires certain goodwill and perception within the public. PROs and friendly journalists have been significant assets. In the digital sphere, police social media handles have been monitored by the public and journalists if not appreciated. Some, like NHMP, provide useful public service as well. The core tendency seems to be prevailing that most engagement is one-way. The practice of one-way communication in the digital sphere is quite common for police forces in even developed countries. British scholar Karen Bullock, for example, found that most police communication on social media in the UK was still one-way – sending information police communication on social media in the UK was still one-way – sending information out to the public instead of engaging in dialogue ¹⁵.
- c. **Agenda Setting:** Agenda setting has been adopted at personal and professional levels in the past. Political agenda-setting is a recent phenomenon but necessitated by the increasingly political role of the police. The same trend has been observed in the US, where police use social media to set their agenda; however, goals relative to community policing are evident in this outreach. Police post and/or tweet about numerous topics related to their public safety functions and community policing goals ¹⁶

4.2. New prevention challenge with shrinking space between online and offline:

Police has failed to keep pace with how many issues in the digital world have led to physical violence From Mashal Khan’s lynching ¹⁷ to sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan, the issue has

¹⁵ The Police Use of Social Media: Transformation or Normalization? By Karen Bullock Social Policy & Society (2018) 17:2, 245–258

¹⁶ Leveraging social media to achieve a community policing agenda, Williams, C.B et al. Government Information Quarterly, 35 (2018) 210-222

¹⁷ Campus Violence and Extremism: The Lynching of Mashal Khan – A Case Study by Syed Hassan Zulfiqar and Marriam Mubashar, 27 Feb 2021 SSRN

stemmed from the digital sphere¹⁸. Not that sectarian conflict or violence is new in our polity, but the digital adds its speed and impact, making the issue a crisis of multiple magnitudes.

Case Studies

Case 1: Two individuals from the same village of District Sialkot work as labourers in Saudi Arabia. One of them says insulting words about the other's family on Facebook. They exchanged harsh words on and offline. After a few weeks, one of them comes back to Pakistan, goes to the other person's house, and kills his brother. Later, he makes a statement before the Police that since the insult was on social media, therefore, he had to protect his honor.

Case 2: A cleric belonging to a particular sect makes a speech behind closed doors and makes some casual statements about the other sect with whom they have no rivalry or conflict. The sermon is recorded and the video is shared online. The members of other sects start protesting and register FIRs against the cleric, resulting in his imprisonment. Now the followers of the imprisoned cleric start registering cases against those who filed initial complaint against their leader. The issue that could have been kept under the covers in normal scheme of things resulted in conflict between two sects with no history.

4.3. Crisis Management - "it's not a crisis unless it not on social media":

Crisis management consumes most of the time, energy, and resources of the Police in Pakistan and around the world. Crisis management and community policing are invariably linked. Police organizations and police leaders that have better and effective community policing apparatus end up having fewer and less harmful crises. The digital sphere has changed the whole framework of crisis management. Now it is not a crisis if it is not on internet. Police can cover the death of inmates in custody, the destruction of property in rioting, or half a dozen deaths in a tribal feud but cannot cover a police officer slapping a citizen and being caught on camera.

Crises in Police fall into two categories: crisis of the police and crisis for the police. Crises of the police is those incidents that involve police as an aggressor, like death in custody, complaint of torture, or failure to trace a case. Crises for police are events involving private persons or parties like sectarian clashes, rioting or family feuds. Both require community or stakeholder engagement for their peaceful resolution. The same concept takes a new angle in digital sphere.

Digital communities are key to crisis management both on and offline. So far, the Police has not used digital community policing in crisis management and has restricted it to digital engagement like statements and video messages. Digital community policing would involve mobilizing the digital communities to mitigate crises. The absence of effective digital community policing gives opportunities to more active groups to capitalize on policing issues. The trend was visible in the aftermath of *Ichhra* incident when the digital supporters of rival political parties stepped in support and against the Police¹⁹ and shows how the absence of effective community policing in the digital sphere led to polarization instead of consensus on the sensitive issue.

¹⁸DAWN, GB Unrest (Editorial), 05 Sept 2023

¹⁹ <https://www.desiblitz.com/content/public-criticises-the-glorious-treatment-of-asp-shehrbano>

5. Digital community engagement tools employed by police:

Police has been developing various tools to engage communities in the digital sphere with varying degrees of success. The notable tools are the following;

- **Social media engagement:** It must be noted that social media engagement is different than community engagement tools. Social media engagement is determined by four activities: following, views, likes, comments, and tags. The last two especially constitute the bulk of engagement and create expectations of responses and replies. Too much of the engagement constitutes a ‘trend’ and hashtags. Every organization craves positive and fears negative trends, which cause a loss of reputation and someone else's job if the trend goes out of hand. Can this social media engagement be called digital community engagement? Perhaps at fundamental level and to the extent of complaints and public relations only.
- **Mobile applications:** Mobile apps are very popular tools for community engagement nowadays. Every organization develops a new app when pushed for a new initiative. Police has organizational apps like Punjab police and NHMP, and there are specific apps for women’s safety and child protection. Women’s safety is quite popular, but interestingly, Punjab Police has launched a safety app at least three times in the last five years, most recently called ‘Never Again.’²⁰ Earlier, the Punjab caretaker government launched a safety app called “Meri Awaz” for women²¹. Even before the current launch, Punjab Police had launched a women safety app on Nov 05, 2023²² and Nov 09 2020²³. The same app had earlier been launched in 2017 too.²⁴ Balochistan Police followed soon and launched their women safety app in April 2022 in collaboration with Punjab Safe City Authority.²⁵ In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the KP Information Technology Board and not the Police department, launched a women safety app²⁶. The child protection app Zainab Alert was launched in October 2020 by the Federal government.²⁷

Are these apps an effective tool of protection and community engagement? The civil society organisation Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) has noted that the Punjab Police Women Safety App has proven popular among users, with over 100K downloads and an impressive rating of 4.9 on the Google Play Store. Three issues remain critical, though: inclusivity, data safety, and functionality.²⁸ The Balochistan app has limited coverage, with just 500 downloads. Overall, apps are challenging too in addressing the core issue

²⁰ The Nation, 08 March 2024, CM Maryam inaugurates women safety App “Never Again”
<https://www.nation.com.pk/08-Mar-2024/cm-maryam-inaugurates-women-safety-app-never-again>

²¹ Dawn March 10, 2023 Safety app for women launched <https://www.dawn.com/news/1741319>

²² <https://punjabpolice.punjab.gov.pk/node/15244>

²³ <https://punjabpolice.gov.pk/node/8931>

²⁴ Panic button, women safety app available for download <https://www.dawn.com/news/1306477>

²⁵ <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/04/18/igp-launches-balochistan-police-women-safety-app-to-ensure-security-of-women/>

²⁶ <https://www.kpitb.gov.pk/content/safe-women-app>

²⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2268438/zainab-alert-app-set-to-go-live-today>

²⁸ Women safety Apps; Are these really effective? April 08, 2023 <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/women-safety-apps-are-those-really-effective/>

of women safety, even in India where the apps trend emerged following the Delhi rape case²⁹

- Virtual/E Police stations: Punjab Police has launched a virtual police station, which has been housed at the Punjab Safe City Authority in Lahore³⁰. Visiting the virtual police station tab leads to a page with three fields – name, phone number and description. On the face of it, this is just another online complaint system. It is also unclear who will be responsible for follow-up because the legal authority to provide relief and redress grievances falls within the Police Station. Despite the challenges, the virtual police station is a step in the right direction and will provide valuable lessons for the future initiatives.
- SMS service (alerts & complaints): Police has also employed low-tech solutions like SMS service. Initially, Lahore Police developed a text service with the universal number 8330³¹. Later on, Inspector General Police Punjab introduced a Punjab-level universal number, 1787³². As per the data available on the Punjab Police website, 70,579 complaints were received by 09 July 2024. The most noticeable data is regarding the nature of complaints, which fall into three categories; non-registration of FIRs, investigation and complaint against Police³³. Earlier, Lahore Police also used SMS alerts to share information about security, crime, etc. with the public. SMS alerts and complaints are an effective and low-cost solution in a country with low internet coverage and app use.

5.1. Case studies: Digital Community Engagement by Police:

NHMP; Information sharing & Awareness:

National Highways and Motorways Police present a good case study of digital engagement by sharing timely awareness. Their social media handles, like Facebook and Twitter, have steadily increased to almost a million followers relying solely on information sharing and awareness. NHMP shows a specific and focused case study and has gained trust with timely and reliable information. At the same time, there is a lot of promise and potential if NHMP changes the content to a more visual nature and involves the citizens in making and sharing content.

Punjab Police; The evolution from Press Release to Tiktoks

Punjab police covered the distance from press releases to Tiktoks (used as euphemism for short entertaining videos) in relatively short time. The trend has attracted mixed responses from police officers and the public. However, based on the traction and digital engagement criteria, the effort seems to be bearing fruit. A deeper and sustainable community is still missing from the picture. However, the technique has flooded the digital sphere with video content and created buzz. How far the digital tools have effectively created and maintained digital communities is yet to be seen.

²⁹ A Handy Guide to Decide How Safe That Safety App Will Really Keep You Nayantara Ranganathan - February 2017 <https://genderingsurveillance.internetdemocracy.in/safety-app/>

³⁰ <https://www.app.com.pk/domestic/cm-inaugurates-virtual-women-police-station-in-psca/>

³¹ Send an SOS: Text 8330 for police help, January 06 2015 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/817377/send-an-sos-text-8330-for-police-help>

³² <https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Feb-2023/igp-makes-1787-complaint-centre-active-for-convenience-of-citizens>

³³ www.punjabpolice.gov.pk IG Police Complaint Center 1787

Despite making efforts, police is not effectively engaged with the digital community because of the following;

- a. Police doesn't recognize the digital communities in the cyber sphere
- b. Police doesn't possess tools to engage with digital communities.
- c. Police still regards social media as a large pond where it has to cast a net, not as a natural habitat.
- d. Most of the police's communication is one-way

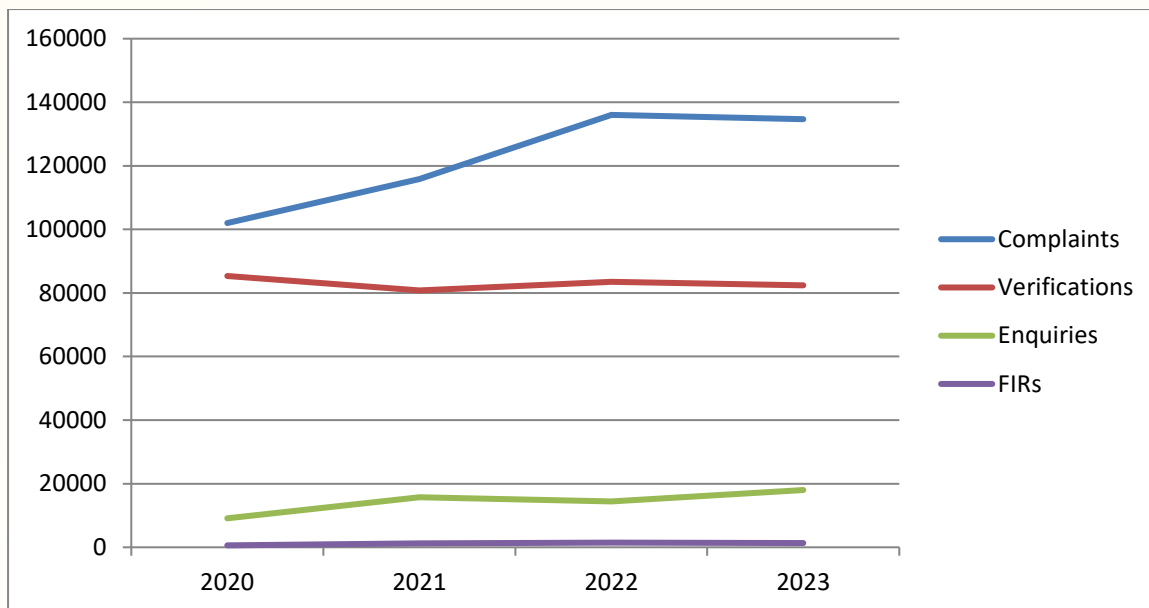
6. Cyber patrolling, analytics & digital crisis management:

The mushroom growth in the digital sphere has given rise to a digital landscape rife with threats ranging from disinformation to cyber terrorism. So far, the threats fall into six categories;

- i. Harassment, exploitation and blackmailing (mostly females)
- ii. Extremism, hate speech, and disinformation leading to violence
- iii. Cheating, frauds & scams in E-commerce
- iv. Illicit financial flows using cryptocurrencies
- v. Copyrights and intellectual property issues
- vi. Fake news and disinformation about the government

The data from the Federal Investigation Agency - the agency tasked to investigate cyber-crimes, shows the exponentially rising figures in cyber-crimes while the capacity to investigate these crimes remains insufficient. The graph below shows complaints rising with limited disposal due to limited capacity. With half a million cyber-crime complaints, it can be safely concluded that cyber-crime is the highest in number as compared to any other crime in Pakistan.

Year	Complaints	Verifications	Enquiries	Case/FIRs
2020	102000	85340	9116	604
2021	115868	80803	15766	1224
2022	136024	83552	14380	1469
2023	134710	82396	18012	1375
2024 (Till April)	29281	28031	4824	324
Total	517,883	360,122	62,098	4,996



7. International Best Practices in Digital Community Policing – Case Studies:

UNITY project EU³⁴; Unity developed ICTs to aid in bringing together the police, communities and other statutory and non-statutory organizations that may otherwise be disparate or operate in information silos. As one component of the UNITY approach, a mobile app was developed to bridge the gap between police, other statutory and non-statutory organizations, and the wider public. This technological intervention sought to enhance participation and engagement between groups across 6 pillar requirements, including 1) addressing local needs, 2) building trust and confidence with communities, 3) enhancing collaboration, 4) preventing crime, 5) improving accountability, and 6) facilitating effective communication.

Local Online Patrols Norway: The Norwegian police upscaled a pilot of an Internet Patrol Unit to an approach where all 12 regional units now have such an Internet Patrol Unit. Three-person patrols are active on different platforms and channels. A study of the newly set-up online patrol units found that *localism* recurs in the interviews as a cornerstone of the Norwegian online police patrols. The combination of Online yet community-based has been reflected in local anchoring, local police tasks, and local ways of working and can be a good practice for Pakistan’s context. Local police officers set up Facebook pages to engage with the community and address even their trivial problems.

CLEAR-path Chicago US; Community residents have access to CLEARpath, a police community website created by the Chicago police to “serve as an information sharing vehicle and help to advance a broad community development agenda”. CLEARpath, which cost over \$10 million and was developed over three years from 2005-08³⁵. Though the study and initiative

³⁴ Benjamin Brewster, Policing the community together: the impact of technology on citizen engagement, Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at www.shura.shu.ac.uk/18465/

³⁵ Examining Technology that Supports Community Policing by Sheena Lewis and Dan A. Lewis, Institute for Policy Research and School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208 USA

were focused on websites and not social media, the CLEAR model has been extended to maps and apps now.³⁶

8. Digital Community Policing; The Way Forward:

Digital Community Policing is a five-stage process that starts from the community and makes a loop back with the feedback

- a. Community formation
- b. Community Empowerment
- c. Open Engagement
- d. Digital Access
- e. Continuous Feedback

8.1. Community formation:

Digital mechanisms can be designed to safeguard, reassure, inform, and empower diverse communities. However, the scoping study of 240 online citizen apps found that Police apps were more likely to seek to reassure, safeguard and inform users, while third-party apps were more likely to seek to empower users³⁷ Here, the second category, the digital sphere, is important: the groups. Facebook and WhatsApp are the most important media for community formation. In group formation police faces three issues including Control, Noise and Speed.

8.2. Community Empowerment

If police is interested in forming digital communities, it has to give or surrender a certain level of control and reconcile with more equal relationships. Police cannot be the sole arbiter as in the case of physical communities. Then there will be lots and lots of noise. Much will be irrelevant, but when it comes to citizens, their issues will be trivial, but they will become partners if paid attention.

8.3. Open Engagement

Digital media is all about openness. Influencers today are producing unfiltered content showcasing the most personal of details. Podcasts are replacing talk shows for being more authentic and open. Gen-Z is all about openness, and the digital media architecture is also designed to provide open, free, and speedy access. The open model envisages opening not just few windows but doors to the public. Digital engagement is based on content, which is the digital currency. Police is not mindful of the content when they have so many opportunities. Police has to share as much as possible, their stories, their adventures, and even their failures. Nothing sells like originality and authenticity in the digital sphere. This entails recording police

³⁶ <https://gis.chicagopolice.org/>

³⁷ Building trust in digital policing: A scoping review of community policing apps Elphick, C; Philpot, R; Zhang, M; et al. Police Practice and Research, available at ORE Open Research Exeter, University of Exeter, 07 December 2020

at work³⁸, allowing people to record the official business, encouraging human side of police officers³⁹ and extending the police functions to community help and support.

The open model is the key to crisis management. Most public sector crises erupt due to the hiding of information either within the organization, from the government, or from the public. Transparency is also the foundation of accountability. Closed organizations operate on the assumption of self-righteousness and immunity to answerability. The assumption is neither good for public trust –which is critical to community engagement, nor for the police working, which is part of the criminal justice system. The next question is how open is too open? The traditional school of thought would argue against being TOO open. Modern school, however, would like to go all out. How and where the bar would be set?

8.4. Digital access:

Police has to acknowledge that many digital citizens don't leave their homes. They shop online, freelancing from their homes, and get paid online, too. They have to be engaged only digitally. Police can use video calls and zoom to have the statements and even do the investigation. There have been some efforts, such as the E-Katcheri by the foreign office. Now is the time to move to Twitter spaces, too.

8.5. Continuous Feedback:

Police has to give feedback continuously and in real time. One common trend is that police use the digital sphere only for reporting, and the public is expected to visit police offices to pursue their issues further. This has to change. Now is the time for digital patrolling base on the feedback loop and reporting.

³⁸ A police officer doing khuli katcheri (public complaints forum) has been quite viral

³⁹ A junior police officer's tik tok with his daughters received universal appreciation

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