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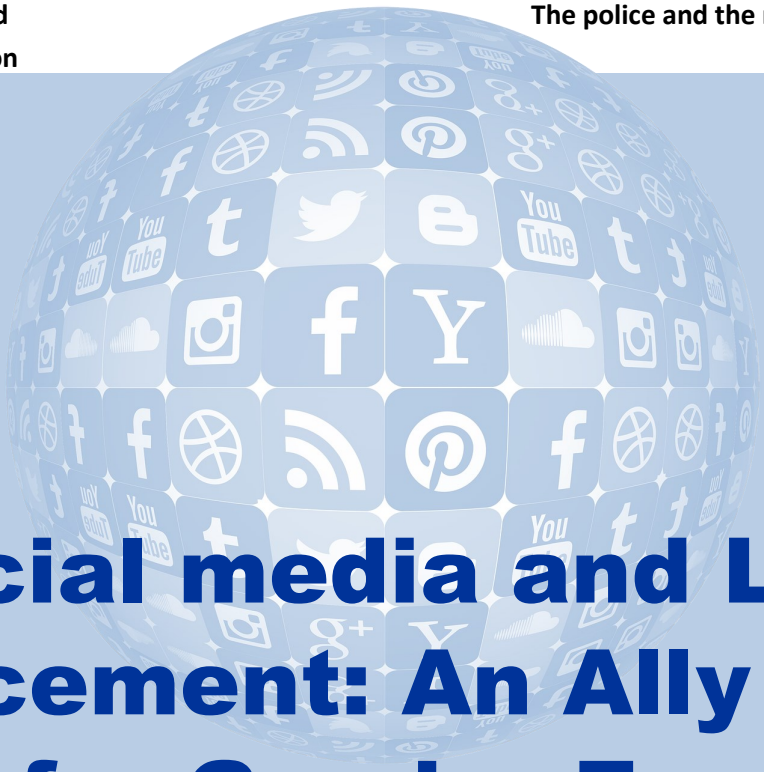
The police and the respect for human rights in BiH



Social media and Law Enforcement: An Ally in the Fight for Gender Equality?

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Introduction

Social media have become an almost indispensable part of most people's daily lives. Individuals use them for a variety of purposes, from entertainment, information, communication with friends and family to business and professional advancement. For business purposes, social media are increasingly used by businesses entities as the main means to present their products and services to millions of people. The benefits of social media are also recognized by various international and governmental organizations around the world to provide relevant information to a specific target audience and the general public on time. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the best example is the efforts of health organizations to timely and accurately inform the world public about virus prevention and protection measures, but, at the same time, to resist the torrent of misinformation that makes pandemic control difficult.

According to data of the website Datareportal, in July 2021, there were 4.48 billion users of social media worldwide, which is approximately 57% of the world's population. Furthermore, according to the same data, a typical user spends on average about two and a half hours a day using social media [1]. Although the digital scene consists of many social media platforms, the platform Facebook holds the leading position, with more than 2.85 billion active users monthly, according to data from July this year [2].

57% of the world population is using social media

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), there were 1.8 million users of social media in January 2021, which is an increase of 100,000 users compared to the year before. Therefore, the number of social media users in BiH is approximately 55% of its total population[1]. The most popular social media platform is Facebook, which had 1.5 million users [3].

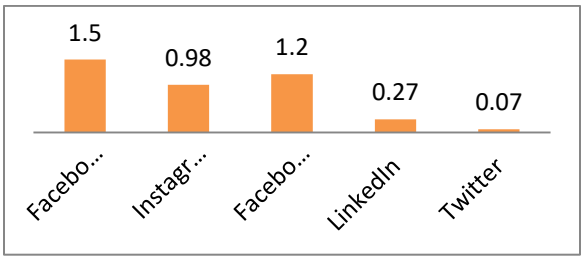

Chart 1 - Numbers of users of different social media platforms in BiH[2]

[1] According to Datareportal, there were 3.27 million people in BiH in January 2021, of which 51% were women.

[2] The figures presented indicate the potential audience that advertisers can reach through ads on these social networks. Data were taken from Datareportal from the Digital Global report for January 2021.

There are 1.8 million social media users in BiH

Social media and the police

Analysis of the literature indicates that the use of social media can be useful for police agencies for several reasons. They enable police agencies to better connect with the communities and citizens they serve and, thus, improve interpersonal relationships. Thus, police agencies can quickly share important information with citizens, especially when it comes to crises (natural disasters, traffic accidents, other incidents, etc.) or security advice, but also receive information from citizens about local, security issues they face. Therefore, social media have the potential to improve community policing.

Also, social media provide police agencies with the opportunity to better manage their reputation. Publishing facts to combat harmful rumors or assessing community opinions on agency policies and practices are just some examples. In addition, police agencies use social media as one of the tools in operational work (for example, investigating various forms of crime or supporting the finding of suspects).

Although there are many benefits, social media can also have negative consequences. Since official posts can be seen by a large number of people in a short time and can be shared at high speed, it is very important to determine what content may be publicly posted on official social media accounts. It is also important to take into account what employees publish on personal accounts because there are cases that employees, during working hours or in official uniforms, published inappropriate content that negatively affected the reputation of the agencies themselves and the community's trust in them.

Social media can improve relations between police agencies and citizens.

To avoid side effects, police agencies should primarily establish a policy for the use of social media. This policy should establish clear rules on who within the agency is authorized to manage social media accounts, through which devices and applications, which are appropriate and inappropriate content, as well as the rules of conduct of authorized persons during the presentation of the agency on official social media

accounts, especially in terms of interaction with citizens, etc. In any case, the policy should prohibit commenting on ongoing prosecutions, sharing confidential information, and statements of suspects' guilt or innocence [4] [5] [6].

The findings of a 2015 survey conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and involving 553 police agencies from the United States showed that 94% of police agencies use Facebook, 71% Twitter, and 40% YouTube [7].

Situation in BiH

Findings of the previously mentioned survey have served as reference values to determine the extent to which 16 police agencies in BiH use social media.[3] Also, the research took into account the social media Instagram, as it is very popular among the local population, especially women (51% of users are women). The research showed that only five police agencies in BiH use social media (31%). These are the Border Police of BiH (BP BiH), the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republika Srpska (MoI RS), the Ministry of Interior of Zenica-Doboj Canton (MoI ZDK), and the Ministry of Interior of Sarajevo Canton (MoI SC). On average, police agencies use two social media platforms. SIPA and the MoI SC use the highest number of social media platforms.

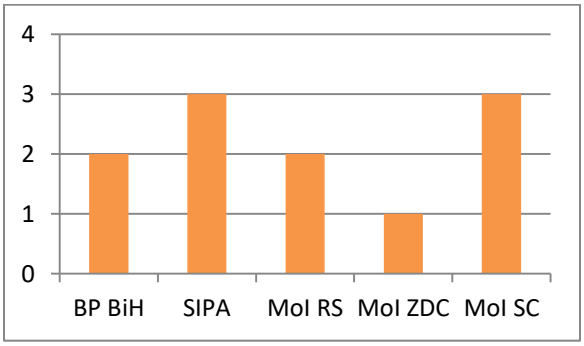

Chart 2 - Numbers of social media platforms used by police agencies in BiH

All mentioned police agencies use the social media platform *YouTube*, while other social media platforms are used by two police agencies.

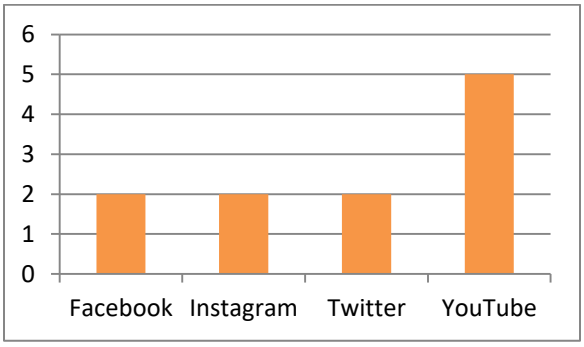

Chart 3 - Use of individual social media by 5 police agencies

[3] The research was focused on the analysis of police agencies' official websites, that is, searching for direct links on the front pages for social media accounts that may be used. The justification of the approach is that in this way it was attempted to determine the official accounts of social media used by each agency, i.e. to avoid potential false accounts. This approach also has a limitation, as there is a possibility that certain official accounts of agencies have been overlooked and which are not presented on the official websites.

Social media and employment

Considering that social media in BiH are used by the majority of its population, there is no doubt that they can be used to advertise jobs that require new employees to attract as many (qualified) candidates. At the same time, since the majority of the population in BiH are women, social media can be a useful tool for attracting female candidates, especially if a certain organization is facing the problem of gender inequality. Such is the case with the police sector in BiH, where women are represented by 20% of the total structure of employees in 16 agencies, and only 9% of them are in the status of police officers. On the other hand, according to the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality in BiH, gender equality is when one of the genders is represented by at least 40% in public sector institutions. Also, the findings of the research, conducted within the project "Police and respect for human rights in BiH", showed that there is a downward trend in the number of registered women candidates for public competitions for the admission of new police officers in the rank of a policewoman. Since these are vacancies for the rank where a larger number of new staff is generally accepted, the observed trend could have a long-term negative impact on the numerical representation of women in the status of the police officer. Social media unquestionably have the potential to stop such a trend, but at the same time to popularize the police call in the younger part of the population, especially among girls.

However, the findings of the same research showed that no domestic police agency has so far used social media to advertise public vacancies for new police officers.

Conclusion and recommendations

Social media have changed our way of living. They have also changed the way different organizations operate, while the current trends justifiably leave room for a rhetorical question: will we be able to function without social media in the future?

For police agencies, social media have many benefits, especially in terms of improving relationships and connections with the communities and citizens they serve. However, social media also hide numerous dangers for the police, and their use is necessarily conditioned by the existence of a

clear and precise policy that will regulate the ways and conditions of their use.

Police agencies in BiH do not sufficiently exploit social media. Only five agencies use them. On average, they have accounts on two social media platforms.

All five police agencies use the YouTube platform, while Facebook is used only by two agencies. This indicates that the BiH police are not accustomed to following digital trends, because the Facebook platform is used by almost half of the population.

Also, as they face serious under-representation of women in their ranks, especially in the status of police officers, social media are a serious ally to police agencies in BiH in solving this problem by announcing future public competitions for new police officers and popularizing the police call.

Recommendations

1. Analyze the real needs of the scope of use of social media, but take into account that there should be at least one official account on one of the social media platforms, considering the trends among the population.

2. Develop a policy for the use of social media that will cover all important aspects.

3. On the official website, place links for accounts on social media platforms as clearly as possible. This will make it easier for citizens to connect with official orders of police agencies on social media.

3.1. As part of the management of orders on social media take all necessary steps so that citizens can know unequivocally that this is an official account of the police agency. Also, take possible steps to remove suspicious or possibly fake police agency accounts on social media or at least to alert users to it.

4. According to the possibilities, use social media as one of the channels for popularizing the police call.

5. Public competitions for the admission of new police officers should be published and advertised on social media.

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