

Full Length Research Paper

Using social media to warn potential victims, and encourage youths to denounce crime and violence in Jamaica

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The youth cohort is the group most likely to be involved in criminal activities, being classified as either perpetrator or victim. This intervention explored the use of social media as a mechanism for sensitizing the youth cohort to the negative impact of crime, the value of shunning and denouncing it and the importance of supporting law enforcement efforts. A programmed intervention strategy was utilized to sensitize the youth cohort of the role in crime and foster a stronger relationship between the youth and the justice system. The results of the intervention suggested that youths generally repudiate crime, express mistrust for agents of the state and thought that crime fighting resources were limited. The impact of the cost of crime on the productive capacity of developing countries, such as Jamaica, has a far reaching and deleterious impact on the process of achieving sustainable development. Health, education and justice are pivotal factors influencing the perpetration of crime and violence or the lack thereof. Though novel in this setting, social media may be influential in bridging the gap between crime fighters and youth, and possibly facilitate opportunities for the communication of youthful perspectives on crime. This may serve to communicate the fresh ideas of the youth to the relevant authorities and lead to renewed and effective interventions using youth-led and youth centered reduction and prevention strategies.

Key words: Citizenry, youth, crime, social media, violence, developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of crime and violence has spiraled with devastating effects on the economy of developing states:

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particularly, health, education, production and social well-being. In developing countries, the astronomical costs emanating from violence impacts the most productive sectors of the population and continues to be distressing to the development and economic progress of these countries; many of which rely on the employed productive sectors to fuel development. The potentially most significant contributors to development in these countries are primarily young adults, who are themselves, often frequent victims and or perpetrators of crime. The Caribbean region has been cited as having one of the highest rate of crime and violence in the world (Cohan, 2009). The author refers to World Health Organization statistics (2003) that compares global and regional rates of crime statics. She reports that “while the average world homicide rate is 11 homicides per 100,000 residents, the rate in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region is 36 per 100,000. Crime and violence are now recognized as serious economic and social problems with very high economic and social costs, especially in poor urban areas” (Cohan, 2009, p. 1). Current data also link crime and violence to the economic challenges of this region, attributing regional economic loss due to violence to be approximately 14% of GDP. These financial challenges include, but are not limited to additional cost to health care, productivity, and security, as well as, to the other social burden in the countries of this region. Particularly worrisome, is the fact that youth in the region (typically defined as 15- 24 year-olds) and young men in particular, are disproportionately involved in violence, as both victims and perpetrators.

The data regarding the pattern of crime generally, in developed countries, do not necessarily vary widely compared to developing countries. The significant difference is with regard to violent crime, particularly homicide. In fact, Giles (2003) reported that approximately one third of British men in their mid-forties have been convicted of a crime. The worrying trend of male involvement in violent crime pervades the Caribbean and Jamaica in particular, and requires a dedicated collaborative effort to stem it, especially crimes involving guns and other forms weapons. There is an underlying, highly stratified and complex social and educational system in Jamaica, whereby people tend to become segregated by socioeconomic status, political affiliation, and social class (Lowe et al., 2014). Socio-demographic characteristics have been linked with several incidence of crime, particularly in the youths. According to Lowe et al. (2014), inadequate social networks, poorly supervised adolescents, and the absence of strong community organizations predicted high rates of crime and delinquency.

Jamaica has many unofficial communities that have repeatedly surfaced in the news as being involved in crime and other violent acts. Giles (2003) argues that familial ties and proximity facilitate crime commission

simply because the perpetrators and victims are in a single social sphere. The essay included data suggesting that unrelated people who shared accommodations were 11 times more likely to kill each other, than genetically related kin living within the same circumstances. This may begin to offer an explanation with regard to the contributing factors toward a skewed crime level, in many of Jamaica’s geographically polarized communities, with cramped living conditions. A further examination of the Jamaican context, by Harriott (1996) reports that violent crimes have changed over the last 2 decades. He suggests that the changes are due in part, to the adaptation of the populace to a protracted economic crisis, and the consequent development of a strong underground economic network in which transactions are regulated by violence and the threats thereof.

According to the literature, there are many factors contributing to and mitigating the effects of crime, particularly in the youth cohort. Some suggestions described in the literature to reduce the extent of crime perpetration in this group include:

1. Employing concerted efforts in public health, education, and social services aimed at improving educational outcomes,
2. Skills acquisition, self-esteem building, and reducing teenage pregnancy.

Furthermore, these social outcomes have been positively associated with improved quality of life for young people and reductions in social stress and likelihood of engagement in criminal activity (Middleton, 2013). Research evidence also points to the effects of social reform and economic strictures on the outcome of crime and violence. The present IMF induced austerity and welfare reform policies set the conditions for extreme poverty and for exacerbation of social stress, violence, abuse, and neglect. Collective responses by health and other local authorities to protect individuals and families through welfare support mitigate, but do not go far enough, to prevent adverse crime and social consequences (Middleton, 2013).

In addition to the efforts of the justice and social systems in stemming crime, reporting crime plays a critical and significant role in reducing the perpetration of crime. There are, however, many factors that negatively and severely impact the instances of crime reporting, internationally and locally. According to a recent report by Wisnieski et al. (2013), some of the factors that influence the reporting of crimes include the perception of the community radii by the witness, the severity of the crime and whether respondents actually witnessed or heard of the incidents. The idea of community boundaries is particularly strong in Jamaica, and the fear of reprisal is a poignant factor attributed to low crime reporting. Socio-demographic characteristics are recognized as an issue

that also impacts the level of crime reporting, consequently impeding the effective timely response of the security forces, and actually lends support to crime in some communities.

The incidence of crime, perpetrators, victims and the social and economic impact, continues to be a vexing issue in the Caribbean and Jamaica in particular. It is obvious, that the efforts of the security forces in many instances have been strained and ineffective in combating the scourge. To be effective in combating the war on crime requires the combined effort of the wider community and the authorities, in which there is a significant role for engagement of the youth cohort. In the past various policing strategies have been deployed to repel criminal networks and reduce crime in Jamaica, but these have been largely ineffective. The nature of crime is dynamic, ever changing and requires revolutionary thinking 'out of the box' to cope with present reality. Consequently, some societies have begun instituting unconventional strategies to deal with this scourge; our response is the use of technology in partnership with a youthful population embracing the ever increasing popularity of 'social media' to disseminate crime prevention and sensitization messages.

Orlu-Orlu and Nsereka (2014) cite Kaplan and Haenlein's definition of social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 38). Furthermore, the platforms that are enumerated as characteristic social media spaces include but are not limited to: facebook, twitter, Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, 2go, Badoo, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr and Tumblr. Of these, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most popular (Orlu-Orlu and Nsereka, 2014, p. 38). In Nigeria, Ezenkwu et al. (2013) examined the use of community policing with information and communicating technologies- ICT in reducing and managing the perpetration of crime. The authors reported that Nigerians established police websites which were described as very important for effective policing through the facilitation of interaction between police and the public. The website was also used for crime reporting and information exchange between the police and the community. Though evaluated as ineffective, the authors recommended that in using social spaces, the Police should use an online community policing hub to collect and manage community policing resources, services and contents (Ezenkwu et al., 2013).

In developing countries, similar to Jamaica, with spiraling crime rate and failing crime fighting strategies, innovative solutions are necessary to sensitize populations about crime and ways to rise above it. Usually, the majority of citizens became aware of violence through mass media, word of mouth, or social media (Magaloni et al., 2013). Although citizens who were

victims of crime, were found to become desensitized to governmental messages, innovative platforms continue to be important in raising the awareness of the populace about official strategies to combat crime (Magaloni et al., 2013).

While social media is recognized as a significant tool in communicating swiftly, between different and large numbers of a societal groups, its use as a crime fighting and sensitization tool has not been fully explored. Research studies seem to lack understanding of some human behavior, such as engagement, emotions and social interaction between citizens and police departments on social media (Sachdeva and Kumaraguru, 2015).

According to Waller (2012) in a survey conducted in Jamaica to determine the value of the use of 'smartphones' in social unrest, respondents interviewed regarded the mobile smartphones as an 'effective' and 'efficient' tool for protesting. Moreover, Waller (2012) contends that "this trend suggests a migration of protesters from the traditional brick and mortar use of physical paraphernalia to a virtual space" (p. 7).

According to projections of the World Bank, cited by Cohan (2009), using media to disseminate prevention messages may be a protective factor impacting the decision of youths to become engaged in risky behavior.

This organized social media protest and sensitization campaign, therefore, is consistent with current trends, albeit novel as a crime fighting tool. The National Police Youth Club Council (NPYCC) developed on the theory and engaged social media to better utilize technology in an initiative to sensitize and seek the support of the youth cohort in a program to denounce crime and violence, support safe life styles, and become active participants in an initiative to support law and order.

Therefore the research team proposed a three day programme of social media campaign and discussion forums with strategic situational crime interruption strategies to raise the awareness of the risk of youths, sensitize youths regarding platforms for crime reporting as well as to involve youths in identifying strategies for crime reduction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The situational crime prevention theory and approach posited by Clarke underpins the programme intervention to raise awareness and prevent crime. According to Clarke (1997), "situational prevention comprises opportunity-reducing measures that (1) are directed at highly specific forms of crime, (2) involve the management, design or manipulation of the immediate environment in a systematic and permanent way as possible, (3) make crime more difficult and risky, or less rewarding and excusable as judged by a wide range of offenders." Situational crime prevention strategy is based

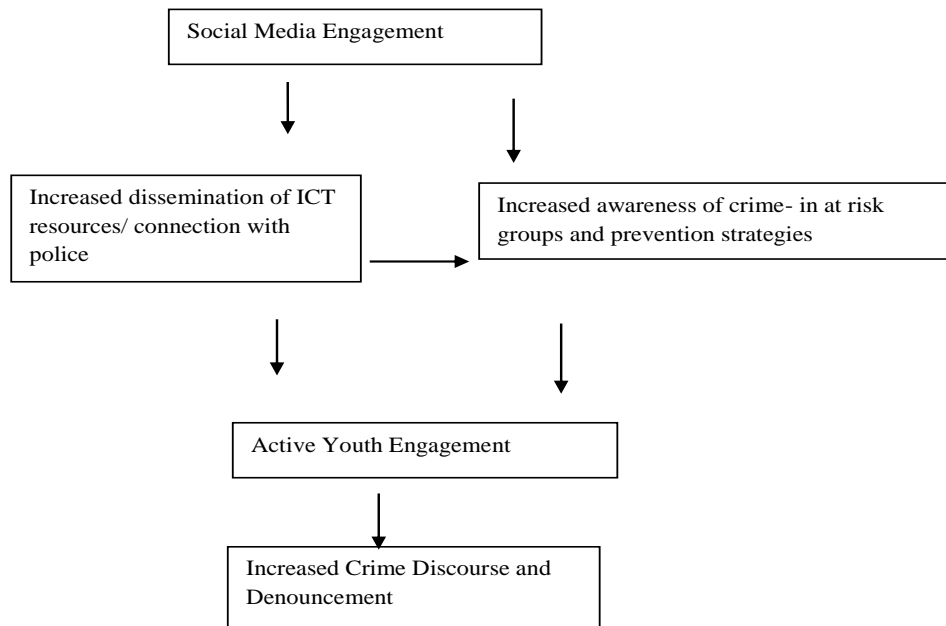


Figure 1. Pictorial views of instituting situational prevention.

upon the principle that crime is repeatedly opportunistic and aims to modify contextual factors to limit the opportunities for offenders to engage in criminal behaviour.

The concept map (Figure 1) provides pictorial views of instituting situational prevention.

The theoretical framework above portrays the influence of social media in effecting changes on the knowledge and awareness of crime related data, and the interconnecting links that social media can facilitate between the police and the youth cohort. The cyclical nature of the concepts supports the flow of information and discourse between all parties and project that as youth engagement increases the way social media is used to denounce and repudiate crime and violence, its impact will become more pervasive.

METHODOLOGY

Recognizing the alarming crime statistics and its damning effect on the development and progress of the economy, the NPYCC planned a four day social media protest. This was aimed at increasing awareness of the acute impact of crime and violence on the Jamaican society, and alternately, seek to utilize a novel approach to engage youth to denounce crime and promote an initiative to reduce the current crime trend.

Accepting a theory of the World Bank, cited by Cohan (2009), using social media to disseminate prevention messages may be a protective factor impacting the decision of youth to become engaged in risky criminal behavior. The NPYCC, in an attempt to reverse the current crime trend, adopted the theory, and developed a social media platform to appeal to youths to decry crime and violence.

The NPYCC operates under the umbrella of the Jamaica Constabulary Force's (JCF) Community Relations Branch and is a registered youth led organization operating in Jamaica since 1954. The organizational structure of the Police Youth Club Movement mirrors that of the Jamaica Constabulary Force, as it operates island wide through Five Area Councils and Nineteen Divisional Councils with membership exceeding three thousand (3,000). The members of the National Police Youth Club Council receive mentoring from officers of the Jamaica Constabulary Force who work primarily out of the Community Relations Branch, but its' executive are elected by their peers through a democratic process. Among the primary function of the National Police Youth Club Cohort is to train and develop young leaders, instill self-esteem in its members and encourage competitive rivalry mainly through debate, sports and culture, as well as, creating an avenue for accommodating and expression of diverse views and facilitating harmonious relationships between the Police and citizens, especially the youth cohort.

Design

The study utilized a programme evaluation style. A dynamic intervention was designed using the format of a social media online engagement and discussion with qualitative and quantitative evaluation targets. Participants were engaged for a single period over four days and were engaged to participate in discussions as well as to share opinions on crime prevention strategies. The team evaluated the reach and the impact of the programme.

Sample

Using Raosoft sample size calculator and a response distribution of 50%, a confidence level of 95% and an error level of 5% a sample of 385 would have been representative. The team hoped to

engage a wider audience and aimed to have 5000 participants.

Sample size

A convenient, non-probability methodology of self-selection was used to enroll participants in the study. Each participant was enrolled after being advised about the purpose and objectives of the interventions.

The main objectives of the social media protest were to:

1. reduce crime over the four day period,
2. raise awareness of the devastating impact of crime on the general population, emphasizing its far reaching and consuming effect on the youth cohort,
3. win the support of the target group for a novel program designed to reduce crime and encourage crime reporting.
4. advocate support for victims of crimes and denounce a culture of lawlessness;
5. increase awareness of the impact of violence on the Jamaican society, particularly on youths;
6. raise awareness amongst youths about the various non-incriminating platforms available to report crime ;
7. garner a minimum of 5000 likes/shares/re-tweets of targeted graphics, images, and media condemning violence and crime.

In keeping with the findings of male involvement in crime, the organizers of the protest attempted to randomly select a sample of 70/30 gender split, and provided targeted activities for males, including the out of school, unemployed and at risk youth who are often themselves, the victims or perpetrators of crime and violence. A convenience sampling strategy was used to enlist the views of five thousand targeted youths, islandwide.

This (4-day) Social Media Protest was implemented by the NPYCC, with oversight and support from the Community Safety and Security Branch Headquarters, as well as, the Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse, both arms of the JCF. The format encouraged participants to replace their profile picture on all their social media pages (whatsapp, instagram, twitter, facebook, etc.) with a black schemed graphic depicting the theme of the NPYC logo against crime and violence.

Data collection

Participants were advised that their anonymity would be maintained and given the opt-out option. Participants were deemed to be a part of the programme if they opted to post, follow or comment in the four day of protest. No identifying detail was used for any participant involved in the study. Posts, retweets, comments were counted and frequencies computed. Comments and posts were analyzed for qualitative assessment of participants' perceptions of crime and violence. Data were collected over the four days of the online protest.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS version 17. Descriptive statistics were computed and reported with measures of central tendencies. Graphs were used to represent findings. Qualitative data were coded and thematic analysis done.

Promotional activities preceding protest

Prior to the launch, the Executive Members of the NPYCC

collaborated with stakeholders and partners in various sectors of civil society, including the media and youth club members, meeting with and soliciting views/opinion/suggestions, as well as, disseminating information about the project to engage broad support of the targeted community.

Operationalizing the initiative

Visits and motivational talks by executives of the NPYCC

In order to seek early buy-in and support for the project, police youth clubs island-wide were visited by members of the executive who communicated to its membership the reason for the planned protest and elicited their support. The expectations and activities surrounding the protest were explained, as well as, sustainability of the program and expected benefits to youth in particular and the nation in general. During these discussions members' full participation was encouraged, their perspective recorded and formed part of the main platform from which the theme evolved.

Using traditional media to raise awareness of social media protest in fighting crime

During the weeks preceding and leading up to the event: print, electronic and television media were engaged to sensitize the nation about the impending protest in an effort to garner support for the program. Several articles were broadcast in print and electronic media highlighting valuable aspects of how social media protest can positively influence the war against crime.

The key information that was disseminated prior to the protest included:

- The aims, objectives and purpose of the protest
- The impetus and background information,
- The partners and collaborators in the protest

In addition executive members appeared on at least two morning programs broadcast on national television. The roles of the executive were to discuss the impact on crime and to explain how the initiative would be implemented. Finally, radio interviews, in which members of the planning committee participated, were conducted to emphasize the impact of crime and violence on society, the need for national condemnation, the role of social media protest in advancing awareness and drumming up support against crime.

Endorsement and support from Artist/ performers/ target youths

In Jamaica, dancehall and reggae artistes command a huge following among the targeted age cohort hence, endorsements and support from members of this genre were sought. Each participating artiste was asked to produce short video clips (30-60 s in length) supporting the protest. These videos were circulated among our target community prior to the event, as a deliberate tactic to stimulate interest, because of their command in the social landscape. Police youth club members, through their individual clubs, were also encouraged to create similar short videos, or other innovative means, to demonstrate support for the event aimed at promoting the protest among their peers.

Institution of the protest and national activities denouncing crime

The social media protest was a series of events/activities that





NATIONAL POLICE YOUTH CLUB SOCIAL MEDIA PROEST					
DAYS	Day 1 - 9/25/2015	Day 2 - 9/26/2015	Day 3 - 9/27/2015	Day 4 - 9/28/2015	
THEMES	SPEAK OUT IT JUST MIGHT HELP YOU OUT Urge late persons to report... speak about ways to report anonymous MOCA and CSOCA facts and data. 	NO ONE IS ABOVE THE LAW Let it be known that every perpetrator can be reported. 	CRIME AFFECTS EVERYONE Speak about the various types of crimes, speak against them, and provide relevant information about criminal activities. 	OCCUPY YOUR TIME SO YOU DO NO CRIME Speak about social interventions... playing sports being involved in community clubs to occupy time. 	
	Launch: Post Launch Graphic; Speak out Video Sofo Antonio	Intro: No one is above the law video		Post to Facebook: Did you know that a man cannot be raped?	Post video from respect Jamaica Post to Facebook: (A) Should the government erect more sporting facilities (B) Should admission to all sporting events – football, basketball and netball, be free to occupy my time
	Post to Facebook: What do you do when you see someone spiking his date's drink? Add CSOCA link and information about anonymity in reporting	Post to Facebook: How do you react to the boss flogging an employee?			
	Post to Facebook: You are standing in a town centre and you see someone stab another person. What do you do, walk away or report it?	Post to Facebook: My tuition is funded by a lotto scammer. Am I a criminal?		Post to Facebook: Is crime fighting just the sole responsibility of the police?	Post to Facebook: Should education be completely free.
	Post to Facebook: Do you get involved in Domestic Violence	Post to Facebook: Should influential persons in society be allowed to get away with crime?		Post to Facebook: For complete safety and security, jungle justice is a must!	Post to Facebook: Should Vocational Training be made compulsory for all high school students?
	Post to Facebook: I know of someone who robbed a shop in my community and I have not reported it. Am I as guilty as the perpetrator?	Post to Facebook: Should police officers be held with other criminals?		Post to Facebook: How is that I am not allowed to drink until 18 but I can legally have consensual sex at 16 years?	Post to Facebook: Do you think social clubs contribute to crime reduction
Post to Facebook: I know of a crime and I fear for my life, how do I report it? Add MOCA link and information about anonymity in reporting	Post to Facebook: I contribute heavily to political campaigns, shouldn't I benefit from government?		Post to Facebook: Why is it for sexual crimes the under aged male is punished?	Post to Facebook: What can young persons do for themselves instead of waiting on the government to provide opportunities?	
#BLACKOUT4PEACE					

Figure 2. Re protest online.

spanned a four day period between September 25 and September 28, 2015. The events/activities included posting, sharing videos, responding to discussion questions, tweeting and retweeting, including discussing topical issues regarding crime and violence within the social media space. The protest utilized a thematic approach incorporating factors that influence the commission and perpetration of crime within the targeted cohort. The themes for the protest days, beginning from first through last, were as follows:

1. "Speak out it just might help you out"
2. "No one is above the law"
3. "Crime affects everyone"
4. "Occupy your time so you do no crime"

Several live discussion forums were held and managed by executive members of the NPYCC to obtain the views of its members. In addition, individuals were invited to write and submit their views regarding perception of crime and violence, factors affecting crime reporting and method of engaging youth in ways to reduce youth crime involvement. Arising from these discussions five

(5) questions were crafted and posted on electronic media, beginning at 7:00 a.m. daily, for twelve hours, for the duration of the protest. These questions were posted at three hour intervals to facilitate rich discussions. All participants were encouraged to be honest, frank, candid and forthright (Figure 2). Participants were also invited to tweet using the hashtag *#blackout4peace* on the days of the protest.

Supporting resources

Within the specified forums and spheres, details of collaborators and supporters were disseminated to participants to assist with educating them about established agencies that handle reports of crimes as well as support institutions for victims of crimes. To illustrate, on day one: discussions were held regarding lottery scamming, data were posted outlining the contact details for Major Organized Crime and Anti-corruption Agency (MOCA). Similarly, when offences about children were discussed, links were provided to Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse

(CISOCA), and The Ministry of Youth and Culture.

Facilitating private support and discourse

In addition to publicly shared social media spaces including facebook, twitter and instagram, participants who had private and challenging issues were encouraged to seek support through whatsapp, direct messaging on facebook and direct text messaging on any of the platforms. Issues aired in these sessions included challenges related to reporting crime and victim support.

National Youth Engagement Activity

A national appeal was made to the targeted population to engage in social and recreational activity over the period, in order to limit the probability of becoming involved in criminal activity whether as perpetrator or victim. In keeping with the proposal for youth engagement, a national fun day and recreational activity was held in the parish of St. Ann, in which more than 100 individuals from the targeted population participated. This program started at 10:a.m. and ended at 12:M.N. with some of the activities including land and water sports, and a beach concert that started in the evening and also ended at mid-night.

FINDINGS

Demography of the participants

Results are presented hereunder. The average age of the participants was 21 years, the minimum age was 16 years, the maximum 36 years. 70% (2928) of the participants were female and 30% (1254) male.

Advocacy for victims of crimes and denouncement of crime and violence

Four (4) social media platforms were used to sensitize youths about methods of crime prevention, condemn violence, and the impact of crime. Additionally, the program allowed for the dissemination of critical material about support agencies involved in the prevention, mitigation and reduction of the effects of crime and violence. Contemporary Youtube videos, relevant to the themes, were used as pictorial representations of violence. A statement denouncing violence was made with each video posted. Victim support was provided through private messaging portals and links to support agencies including personal contact details of resource personnel at MOCA and CISOCA.

Increasing the awareness of the impact of violence

Videography was the medium utilized to display the impact of violence on people, especially the youth cohort. Table 1 shows the number of views and likes that were

Table 1. Support for blackout based on themes.

Themed interviews	Views	Likes
Occupy your time so you do no crime	236	43
Crime Affects Everyone	288	48
No one is above the Law	784	120
Totals	1308	211

Table 2. Responses to Blackout questions.

	Likes	Comments	Shares
Day 1 Questions	43	469	6
Day 2 Questions	19	332	4
Day 3 Questions	25	132	4
Day 4 Questions	30	140	0

generated based on the videos presented within each theme.

Encouraging initiatives for peace

Youth island-wide were encouraged to discuss with their peers perceptions of crime and its impact on nation building and development. Refer to Image 1 regarding questions and posts made each day. The level of participation in these discussions is highlighted in Table 2. A total of nine hundred and seventy three (973) people commented over the four days and 117 likes were generated for the comments and questions over the same period.

Raising the awareness about crime reporting media

Police youth clubs, island-wide, were asked to make suggestions about crime reduction strategies and to describe how they could support crime reporting strategies. Figure 3 provides a representation of the number of youth club members who supported contemporary crime sensitization strategies and graphically denounced crime.

Likes/shares/retweets of media condemning violence and crime

The final objective was to generate 5000 Likes/shares/retweets. The main medium for measuring the number of likes and views was the dissemination of the videos generated by supporters of the initiatives. These videos were created by influential musicians. The total number of

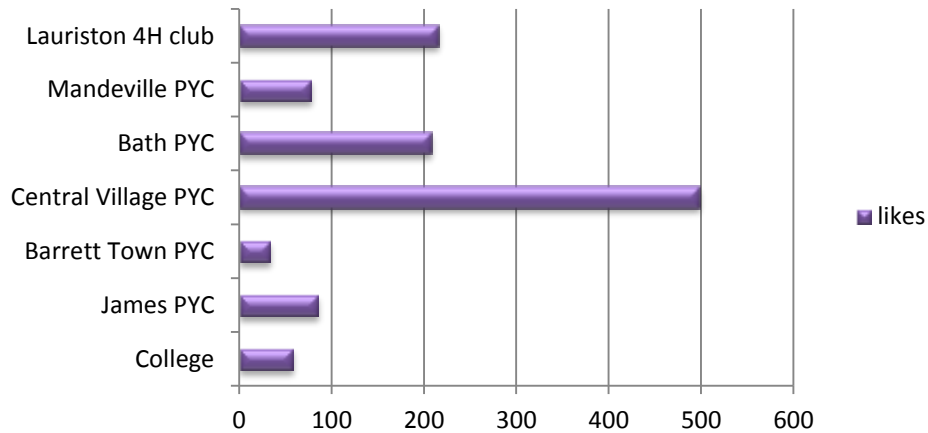


Figure 3. Support for the repudiation of crime.

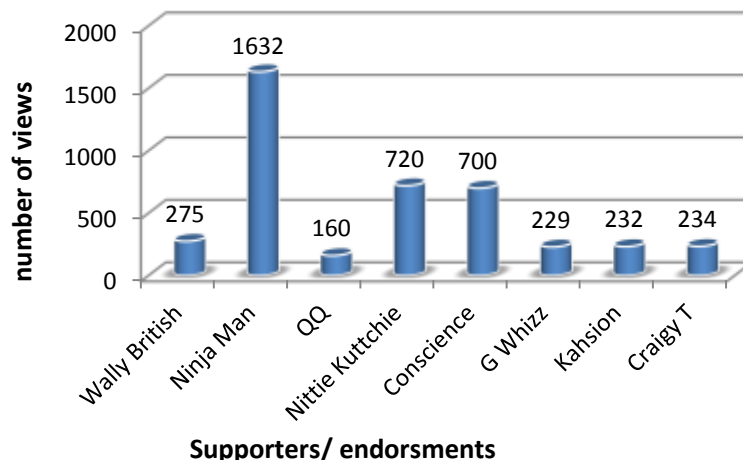


Figure 4. Views of posted media during Blackout.

of views generated was 4182. Figure 4 shows the distribution of views by supporter. This number fell short of our stated goal, but non-the-less the result is significant and provides a basis for further research of the issue under reference.

Participants’ perspectives

In general participants felt that crime was immoral and should be avoided. Participants also embraced the principles of situational prevention and described the positive impact of being engaged in sporting activities and constructive social engagement. Many participants expressed a sense of fear in reporting crime and described that they would only make reports in secrecy because of fear of reprisal.

In response to a question about social clubs deterring criminal engagement HA said:

“Yes it does, sometimes one would not be directly involved in any wrongdoing, it may be a friend that is trying to influence another but the very choice to be a part of something as meaningful as a youth club keeps that person from being influenced”

D J said *“If it is that the citizens will catch and give to that person a fine beating and turn him over to the police, I am cool with that. The killing part is just not a part of it.”* A participant made this report in response to a question about mob lynching as a strategy to prevent crime.

JM responded to a question about citizens’ responsibility in crime fighting. She stated that Police *“are just mere*

humans as us, if we work together we can get the job done, solve crimes faster, have safer communities, creating a stronger bond between police and citizens”.

DISCUSSION

The prevention of crime and violence includes law enforcement strategies. This approach is defined as the enactment and enforcement of criminal laws that seek to deter, incapacitate and rehabilitate (Brisman and South, 2015). Moreover the authors report that the individuals have a civic duty to participate in crime prevention. They cite the “Guidelines for Crime Prevention” which suggests that government institutions and all segments of civil society, including the corporate sector, should play a part in preventing crime (Brisman and South, 2015, p. 132). Though referring to prevention of green/ environmental crime, the authors express the importance of community support in crime prevention. These suggestions by Brisman and South (2015) depict the impetus underpinning the social media protest where community prevention is included with the express aim of transforming the social conditions that affect the perpetration of crime in residential communities by organizing community residents to take preventive actions. Though this position is highlighted by Brisman and South, participants felt concerned for their safety and were reluctant to be involved in crime prevention. Alternatively, some participants support the views of Brisman and South, inasmuch as the identified that police officers were humans and their work would be more successful if supported by the community.

Many crimes are committed because an opportunity is presented that allows for the commission of the crime (Giles, 2003). The ideologies surrounding this social media protest and sensitization, to encourage youth engagement, articulate this principle. This concept related to crime prevention is referred to as situational prevention which is based on the premise that several crimes are contextual and opportunistic (Brisman and South, 2015; Giles, 2003; Lowe et al., 2014). The role of youth engagement in reducing the incidence of this cohort being involved in crime cannot be overstated. Cohan (2009) reports several strategies, that can be employed to increase youth engagement, including supervised and structured after-school programs, youth service programs and mentoring programs. These strategies have been identified as promising in the prevention of youth engagement in risky behavior, including crime and violence. Questions posted on Day five, sought to evaluate the participants views of crime interruption, when asked if social clubs were thought to impact on crime involvement. Participants identified that there was a paucity of social clubs, more needs to be done increase the number of free social and sporting

activities for youths to access. This demonstrates and supports the views of Giles who suggests that the when other activities are present for at risk youths, the likelihood to be engaged in crime is reduced.

Wankel (2009) refers to the assertions of Reinhart that contemporary youths are “digital natives” and report that educators find that this group of individuals are “millennial students” who have been involved with computers from the time they were toddlers. Though social media was explored in classrooms, the virtual competences of the platforms were described as providing an attractive interactive venue, such as a Facebook group, for people to post threaded discussions, material and activities, as well as reply to other postings, creating interactivity. Some discussions might be initiated by an influential person to encourage discourse, others by participants. Furthermore, Wankel (2009) contends that posting comments about topical material in social media spaces might restructure the participants thoughts about the information. This exemplifies the principles of the social media protest as a sensitization tool, to raise awareness and to encourage youth participation ultimately to restructure cultural perceptions of crime involvement. The four days of activities, straddles the principles espoused by both Wankel and Giles. The protest deliberately required, “youths”, likely perpetrators or victims of crime to be engaged in online discussions and it involved the presentation of new data about agencies of support for victims and crime reporting. In the first instance, social engagement served as a means of crime interruption, Lowe, 2014 and in the second case it served to resocialize and inform the youths about valuable crime support embodying the principles of Wankel (2009).

Chiluwa (2012), cites Ghareeb (2000) who suggests that “*there was already an ‘information revolution’ in the Muslim world, initially limited to the elite, which was transforming political discourse in the region*” (p. 218). Contrary to the present widespread popularity of the Internet, there was concern, in Nigeria, that the influence of social media might be limited primarily to the elite due to high access costs. However in Jamaica, the access to smart phones and internet is pervasive and has not stymied the access or ability of youths to engage in social media dialogues. Several youths engaged in the protest and targeted were youths with access to current technology and interfaces that were widely used.

In the Jamaican context though, it is relatively popular that smart phones are the access devices used to enter social media spaces. These devices and platforms have been used to increase pressure on members of the judiciary and the executive to uphold the principle of the rule of law; mobilize and canvass citizens to address violations of the rule of law, as well as to monitor, highlight (make people aware and to sensitize citizens about such violations), and protest these violations

(Waller, 2012).

“Open and widely accessible social media technologies, such as Twitter, are increasingly being used by citizens on a global scale to publish content in reaction to real world events. The rapid uptake of these technologies has resulted in a massive distributed ‘social sensor net’” (Williams and Burnap, 2015' p. 2). In keeping, with the findings of international studies, this protest utilized the most popular social spaces to air the discussions about persons at risk of being victims of crimes. Though, Williams and Burnap, identified that Twitter had high uptake in the youth cohort we found that the protest was minimally supported on that platform, garnering only 500 tweets/retweets. The team however, while not meeting the target, found that social media platforms are apt to having youth involvement, with 4128 youths participating over the four day period.

According to Kashyap (2014) information technology has changed the way people have traditionally communicated. In the past people had restricted outlet and avenues to share and discuss their issues and problems. But the emerging new media technology has provided a new form of communication. In recognition of the trend and the use of the social spaces, this intervention was situated to be in an idyllic position for the greatest penetration of the cohort of interest.

Digital communication technologies like the internet and its various applications and communication tools such as social media web sites including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, provide citizens in crime impacted communities with opportunities to participate in discourse by creating civil engagement and dialogue (Shirazi, 2013, p. 43). These facilities were channeled in this study to increase sensitization and facilitate youth engagement.

Most crimes are largely a result of circumstances that can be changed without making expensive structural and social changes (Zimring, 2011). Using social media as a platform to denounce crime in an organized program is novel to the Jamaican settings, but is valid in many developed settings and recognized in research and scholarship. Many antiquated methodologies do not resonate with the youth cohort that has had a generational shift and experienced changes in the access to technology. The use of popular artistes and the shared spaces were intended to resonate with the target group and generate a platform for vast dissemination as a way of raising awareness, consciousness and accountability.

Current literature list several outcomes that correlate with the extent to which crime is reported. Numerous factors are discussed including age, gender, race, income, marital status, employment, and education (Bennett and Wiegand, 1994). Males and people of lower socioeconomic background are least likely to participate in crime reporting. Increasingly, innovations have been instituted to ensure anonymity with crime

reporting. In Jamaica, a real fear of reprisal exists. This social media campaign provided individuals with anonymous links for crime reporting to propel the crime solving initiatives.

Targeting this population, using the program of intervention was timely, because the crime statistics continue to describe the role and effect of crime in this cohort. Youths are associated with violent and domestic crimes through gang involvement in the streets or through schools. This continues to be a worrying trend that pre-dominates the news. In Latin America, both the perpetrators and victims of violence are mostly young male. In the Caribbean, an estimated 80% of violent crimes are committed by men, the majority of whom are under 35 years, with an increasing number younger than 14 years (Heinemann and Verner, 2006). As the leading perpetrators and victims, interventions targeted at educating, sensitizing and engaging this group is timely and situated in the recommendations of Heinemann and Verner (2006) who suggest that violence prevention is inseparable from equitable development and social action. Interventions should be targeted at the level of the community, and the family, because there is a link between the family structure and crime. High levels of broken families might be related to comparatively high rates of offenders among adult men (Jennissen, 2014).

The National activity on Day 2 of the protest was symbolic of the view that when youths are productively and constructively engaged criminal involvement can be impacted. According to Cook, Gottfredson, and Na (2010) settings that are characterized by having a prevailing norm of engagement in delinquent activities, may culture youths to do so regardless of their own personal dispositions to engage in these behaviors. The national projection was that youth island-wide would participate in positive community activities as a show of support to the program. This negates the potential for opportunistic involvement in crime and delinquency (Cook et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Youth engagement in crime prevention and reduction strategies is highly relevant and poignant. Perpetually, youths are associated with crime and violence to the detriment of economic and social welfare. There is a positive inverse relationship between youth engagement and crime production in the same cohort. There are infrastructural, political and social limitations in supporting youth engagement to achieve sustainable results in youth contribution to the generation of crime. The methods for denouncing crime and sensitization of individuals about crime are broadening, entrusting the millennial with these roles and responsibilities are pivotal in gaining buy-in and ensuring sustainability in information dissemination. Notably the youth- nationally and globally, armed with

social media networks are increasingly re-shaping news agendas and political landscapes.

The gains that can be made in solving and investigating crime are stymied by social ills including the fear of reprisal, the lack of community ties, and the culture of segregation. Demographic factors have been identified as key issues impacting reporting. Nevertheless, efforts can be made to improve anonymity in reporting as well as to simplify the process of reporting to reap benefits that are ingrained in the process. Social media spaces may be used to influence the thoughts regarding crime, engender a culture of reporting, and facilitate youth dialogue and involvement in crime fighting.

Conditions that promote the commission and involvement in crime are multifactorial; they stem from political and economic challenges and create a milieu that is cyclical in its impact on social outcomes. The strategies that are needed to ensure sustainable improvements in the statistics of crime and violence for this cohort require a systematic approach including governmental input, public health, community, law enforcement and security, international partnership and by far the most important factor is individual consensus and investment.

Though novel in this setting, social media may be influential in bridging the gap between crime fighters and youth, and facilitate opportunities for youth perspectives on crime to be aired, thereby appraising the relevant authority on techniques of instituting youth-led and youth centered reduction and prevention strategies.

Limitations

These findings should be reviewed with some caution. First, the sample method was convenience and included self-selection strategies which limit its ability to be representative of other populations. The demographics of all participants were not collected. This limits the scope of generalization. Future research should focus on a single community and employ a longitudinal design to measure the impact on crime perpetration.

Future research

The evidence from this study can be used to guide other intervention projects that target this cohort. The NPYCC is planning to utilize information gathered from this program in a national sensitization project and street march denouncing crime and violence particularly in the target group.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

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