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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LIVESTOCK THEFT: A CASE STUDY**Willem J. Clack¹**

ABSTRACT

The development of social media in South Africa and the use of social media in general by the criminal justice system will firstly be discussed and then the focus will move to the role of the social media in solving livestock theft crime. Formal social networks are explored and analysed within the context of a social networks analysis. The purpose of the article is to determine if social media networks in collaboration with more formal social networks contribute to the apprehension of the offenders as well as involving other related information that could lead to reduction in livestock theft. This entails an exploration of the various formal and informal social networks and their successes and failures in the solving of livestock theft crimes. The forming of the social media group for one specific crime is unique in the world and could seriously contribute to the changes in social policies within the criminal justice system. Case studies from the social media group on Facebook are used to illustrate how social media was used to identify possible livestock theft suspects and the interrelationships between the various role-players. This would include the community at large who contributed to the apprehension of offenders, locating of stolen livestock and the identification and tracking of owners. The case studies are compared in order to identify possible common denominators that influence the relationships and trust between the public and the roleplayers in the criminal justice system, the relationships between organised agriculture and the criminal justice system and lessons to be learnt from these experiences.

Keywords: *Livestock theft, social networks, Facebook, social media, offenders, crime investigation*

INTRODUCTION

Social media refers to a group of online internet tools and applications that build on ideological and technological foundations and allow for social interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61 Meijer & Thaens, 2013: 344) Amongst the ideological and technological foundations, there are a variety of different social media such as Facebook, Wikis, blogs and Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Social networking websites are just one of many different mediums of social media (Rahman, Dewangga & Sjöholm, 2013: 5). This article will focus specifically on Facebook which has been in existence since 2004 and since its development has attracted considerable interest, revolutionised the way societal networks operate and augmented the Social Network Theory (Knibbs, 2013, Rahman et al 2013: 5).

The approach to use social media in crime prevention, creates a comprehension of informal nodes¹ with an interest in the same social problem or social ill. More informal nodes incorporate Facebook and other social media in solving crimes or determining crime patterns. In countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, police forces have harnessed the social media as a means for citizens to talk to the police and report crimes. The purpose is to share tips and crime deterrent information to reduce crime, to enhance citizens' input in police investigations, to strengthen the public image of police departments, to control crowds, to tackle crisis situations, to obtain better input in policy-making processes and to attract new police officers (Meijer & Thaens, 2013:

¹. Senior Lecturer. Department of Corrections Management, School of Criminal Justice, College of Law, University of South Africa. Email: wclack@unisa.ac.za.

Author is also an agriculturalist; Chairperson of the Gauteng Red Meat Producers Organisation; Chairperson of the Gauteng Stock Theft Prevention Forum; appointed by the Minister of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries to the Agricultural Produce Agents Council. Some of the views expressed are based on experience gained within organised agriculture in Gauteng and South Africa.

343, Nalla & Newman, 2013: 250, Mergel, 2010: 7, Rahman, Dewangga & Sjöholm, 2013: 3). Globally policing continues to change and attempt to improve relationships that build on mutual respect and trust (Davis & Taylor, 2013: 2). In South Africa, the South Africa Police Service (SAPS) and detectives have not yet recognised the potential of the social media in solving crimes (Knibbs, 2013; Nalla & Newman, 2013: 250). Thus, in the developed world, unlike in South Africa, social networks have been incorporated into community policing, and the internet is acknowledged as having the potential to transform the police-citizen interface (Nalla & Newman, 2013: 250).

The approach and attitude of using social media has changed to an extent in South Africa and this article focusses on the connections, relations and the patterns of connectivity between the various roleplayers within organised agriculture, the red meat value chain and social media to solve livestock theft cases. In South Africa, two distinct social networks with specific connections, relations and patterns are in operation. Firstly, a formal social network exists that comprise the various roleplayers within organised agriculture and the red meat value chain. Secondly an informal social network is in operation involving the some nodes of the formal network to an extent, but mainly makes use of social media to address livestock theft incidents and the solving of these crimes.

The development of the formal and informal networks and how the networks complement one another in combating livestock theft is discussed. The focus then moves to specific livestock cases where both networks are used extensively to indicate how these livestock theft case were solved. The case studies are then analysed to explain the value of the different networks in solving at first the specific crime and then crimes in general.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

The research question is:

- can informal social media networks in collaboration with more formal social networks contribute to the apprehension of the offenders and provide other possible information that could lead to reduction in livestock theft.

The objectives to address the research question are therefore to:

- describe the development and formation of formal social networks and informal social media;
- illustrate the development of the relationships between the formal and informal networks;
- describe the development of different case studies as it developed until the offenders are apprehended or the owners identified and
- illustrate involvement of the criminal justice system, agricultural community and victims of the crimes within the social media.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory approach is was adopted to address the research question, as the article-deals with a unique topic – livestock theft – which is under-researched and needs to be attendant to more as it has a direct impact on the food security in South Africa (De Vos, Delpont, Fouche & Strydom, 2011: 95). In the exploratory phase of the article, the development of the formal and informal social networks and social media within the prevention of livestock theft will be discussed. The formal social networks is in operation for an extended period of time, but nowhere have the functions ever been recorded for academic purposes. Detailed information will be provided based on a literature review of the Constitution of the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum, personal involvement of the author in the NSTPF and the spontaneous

developed of the informal social networks within the social media. The detailed discussion forms the foundation of the research and case studies used during this study to address the research question and objectives.

Regarding the informal social media dealt with in the article, cases studies will be used although case studies are also exploratory in nature and the study focuses on a phenomenon never before been researched in South Africa, and may lay the basis for further research on the topic (Rule & Vaughn, 2011: 8). Generally, case study research is divided between an extensive or intensive approach (Swanborn, 2010: 1). This article follows an intensive approach as only a few case studies are selected to explore the role that the social media plays in the apprehension of offenders and the identification of animals and owners in livestock theft. Swanborn (2010: 2) indicates that in an intensive approach, data collection involves many sources of information such as spokespersons, documents, behavioural observations, interviewing the people involved in the cases, etc. Based on the fact that a case study approach is followed and so many factors and developments influenced the article, no limits were placed on the collection of data, although the main focus is the analysis of social media. Social network analysis and social media analysis provide-for these unique methods of data collection in addition to more established research methods (Scott & Carrington, 2011: 11). Using social network analysis and social media research, provided a cognitive structure for a much clearer understanding of relationships between the various nodes and ties involved in livestock theft and the prevention of livestock theft (Wortley & Mazerolle, 2013: 78).

The nodal point of the article is not the offender but the criminal justices system, the community, the victims of the crime and their involvement via different social networks and media in preventing livestock theft. The more formal social networks such as the criminal justice system and stock theft prevention forums and their involvement in the social networks and social media. The role of the community is accessed via their involvement in social media and contributions made to apprehend the offenders. The victims in the cases involved in this study were mostly interviewed by telephone. Although telephone interviews are a less appealing form of interviewing than in-person interviewing, because of the limitation on personal observations, it was more cost effective based on the distance between where the victims reside (Novick, 2008). The telephone interviews were directed less for the emotional aspects of the crime but more at obtaining information about the crime scene to ascertain details common to the thefts.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE PREVENTION OF LIVESTOCK THEFT

Solving and reducing the number of crimes of livestock theft globally, is paramount at present based on economic trends and capital incentives in order to maintain sustainability, profitability and food security and the emotional effect it has on the agricultural community (Barclay & Donnermeyer, 2011: 3). Notwithstanding the claim of importance, livestock theft research is a neglected crime in South Africa's agricultural areas. During the 1990s livestock theft reached an unprecedented peak owing to the incorporation of the statistics of the erstwhile 'black homelands' into the official statistics of the new South Africa (South African Police Service, 2000: 4, Schönteich & Louw, 1999). In response to rampant livestock theft, the agricultural community in 1995 established the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum (NSTPF), comprising roleplayers within the red meat value chain, criminal justice system and related NGOs. The overall purpose of the NSTF within organised agriculture is to be a representative structure in the battle against livestock theft and to prevent livestock theft specifically, by ensuring compliance with legislation and the apprehension of those within the red meat value chain who do not comply with legislation (Anon, 2011: 1).

The NSTPF as a formal social network meets twice per year. The various role-players in the NSTF operate in accordance with schedule 4 of the Constitution, and their activities are considered to be provincial matters. Abiding by the Constitution in an attempt to battle livestock theft within provinces, the provinces also have a Provincial Stock Theft Prevention Forum (PSTPF) functioning according the same rules as the NSTPF (Swanepoel, 2013: 55, Republic of South Africa, 1996). All nine PSTFs are represented on the NSTF. The NSTPF and PSTPF are regarded as the more formal social networking nodes in the prevention of livestock theft in South Africa. The establishment of the various livestock theft prevention forums can be regarded as the creation of a formal social network connecting role-players with interrelated social nodes (Marin & Wellman, 2011: 11).

During April 2013 the Gauteng Stock Theft Prevention Forum (GPSTPF), as part of the formal social network, discussed the viability of creating a social network group on Facebook, for livestock theft reporting and establishing an informal database of livestock theft statistics in South Africa. The idea arose due to the discussion of a variety of problems in solving livestock theft cases e.g. the spatial areas in which the crimes are committed, the involvement of organised crime syndicates in the crime, the fact that ‘*potslagting*’ (killing/butchering for the pot) decreased to an extent and the availability of technology such as cell phones, the internet and other advanced modes of communication. After exploring different avenues of responsibility the GPSTPF decided that it would create a social network group and allow producers and other roleplayers in the red meat industry to post livestock theft cases on the forum to create public awareness and, where possible, share intelligence. This initiative is known as crowdsourcing which is a collective for the practice to use social media to get a lot of people together with the same interest. Crowdsourcing gathers together service, ideas or content from a large group of people and this is easily done by social media networks (Arriola, 2013).

The group *Veediefstal Aanmelding en Statistieke (VAS)* [Livestock Theft Reporting and Statistics] (see <https://www.Facebook.com/groups/113457748851009/>) was created on Facebook as a form of informal social control. The group attracted more than 500 members within the first 24 hours of its creation. The rapid growth in the number of members alerted the group administrators to the need for caution, as potential opportunistic criminals might join. This realisation was based on the known fact that the social media have in fact made certain crimes easier to commit. Of the social networks, Facebook provides the greatest opportunity for crime, and offenders could easily mine for the personal information of victims or red meat producers. Mining for personal information is one of the nine most common crimes committed via Facebook (Sauter, Poltrack & Allen, 2012). As a precaution, the group settings were set for a person to apply to become part of the group, with application requests being validated by a member of the Gauteng Stock Theft Unit (GSFU), since suspected livestock thieves are known based on basic police intelligence. The group attracted ever-increasing numbers of members, and the cases reported on in this article resulted in an even more rapid growth in membership once these were reported.

Mergel, Mugar and Jarrahi, (2012: 152) mention three distinct pathways of social media adoption namely: (1) early adopters; (2) internal mavericks; and (3) bandwagon jumpers. From the information regarding the research done and challenges faced, it can be argued that the GSTPF was an early adopter of social media with specific unique characteristics as a social media platform. The existence of a Facebook page to address a specific crime is, however, limited to livestock theft in South Africa. The page is unique as nowhere in the world is there a facebook page addressing one specific crime within a country which is the aim of the social media page.

THE CASE STUDY INVOLVING SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER NODES OF COMMUNICATION**Case Number 1**

On 31 July 2013a members of the VAS posted the following:

Last night near Olifantsnek Dam (Rustenburg district) approximately 45 12-month old Simbra/Bonsmara cross heifers were stolen from Mr R.O. and possibly also 5 cows. A large truck with trailer or possibly two trucks are involved. The heifers are branded with the mark BRF and a number 2. [Author's own translation from the Afrikaans].

On the basis of this information, a press statement was issued by the GPSTPF to media houses to inform the general public. The estimated value of the stolen cattle of approximately R450 000 was a motivating factor, as was the emotional effect of the crime on the victims. Various media houses posted the case on their websites and social media pages and it was also reported in the print media. As a result of the media statement, the author was invited to appear on the morning TV show 'Dagbreek' to be interviewed about the livestock theft case and the circumstances under which similar crimes are committed (Breytenbach, 2013).

On 5 August 2013 a newspaper article mentioned that on 26 June 2013, 13 heifers were stolen from Mr Kobus van Zyl near Beestekraal, in the province of North West, and on 26 July 2013, 29 cows were stolen from the same owner, as well as five cows from a neighbour (Anon, 2013: 1). The author called the owner on 7 August 2013 and conducted an unstructured interview regarding the crime scene. It was ascertained that the cattle had been stolen not far from a major road. The cattle pens were dilapidated and no longer in use, and a vehicle had collided with the structure, with parts of the vehicle having broken off in the process, and having been found at the crime scene. The most significant observation was the presence of traces of blue paint on the pens (Van Zyl, 2013). On 7 August 2013 the following post was made on the Facebook page:

51 cattle stolen Monday night [5 August 2013] between Kranskop Toll Plaza and the Kranskop Mountain. Game fencing was cut and the cattle loaded from the N1 highway. The truck was identified by means of a tollgate surveillance camera as a white MAN [horse] and white trailer.

The author responded to the post and obtained the phone number of the owner/victim and then held an unstructured telephonic interview to obtain basic information. Some pieces of the truck had been left behind at the scene and traces of blue paint had been left on the cattle pens during the process of loading the animals (Smit, 2013).

On 16 August 2013 the author received an SMS from the Cullinan Stock Theft unit and reposted it on the Facebook forum, as follows:

25 Brahman stud cows were stolen from Willem Barnard next to the N1 highway near Potgietersrus [Mokopane]. Branded with the marks BAR or TCR or LT. Truck-was pulling a blue trailer and the modus operandi is the same as in Nylstroom, wire next to raid was cut and animals loaded. [Author's own translation].

On 18 August 2013 Mr W Barnard issued a statement via e-mail confirming the content of the above SMS and providing a photo of the suspected truck obtained from the surveillance cameras at the Kranskop tollgate (Barnard, 2013). The e-mail was sent to various people in organised agriculture and the red meat industry as well as the author. The content of the statement was then again posted on the Facebook webpage. Based on what was known about the previous cases reported and the Barnard case, the GPSTPF on 19 August 2013 issued a

media statement accompanied by the photo of the truck. Media support was again overwhelming (Janeke, 2013; Van Rooyen, 2013; De Villiers, 2013). The press statement and publication of information in the media ensured the interest of producers and the general public.

On 21 August 2013 the author received a telephone call from a member of the Cullinan Stock Theft Unit indicating that an SAPS informant in Soweto had called a producer near Moloto in Gauteng, and that the informant was certain that the owner of the truck was a known farmer in the industry. As soon as a name was available, it would be made known. The informant also stated that the truck had gone missing after the photos had been posted on 18 August 2013 (Corbett, 2013). On the same day Mr Barnard phoned the author, stating that he had received the same information, but from the producer from Moloto in person. Mr Barnard also stated that he had obtained video footage from the Kranskop tollgate of both instances where the truck had travelled through the gate.

On 22 August 2013, although there was constant telephonic contact, behind-the-scenes communication and contact on Facebook between Lt. Col. Johan Scott, the co-ordinator of Livestock Theft Gauteng and the author as the saga developed, there were no personal face-to-face meetings. On 22 August the author told Lt. Col. Scott about the video footage and Mr Barnard's willingness to share it with the GSTPF.

On 23 August 2013, before receiving the video footage from Mr Barnard from Mokopane, the author received a phone call from the Cullinan Stock Theft Unit during which it was learnt that the informant had identified the owner of the truck as a Mr X.² Lt. Col. Scott and the author viewed the video footage together, and agreed that there was enough footage to make a good edited version of the events at the Kranskop tollgate. It was decided that the GPSTPF could publish the content of the videos without prior approval from the SAPS and that broadcasting the video would alert the general public to the extent of livestock theft. It was decided that although a possible suspect had been identified, the person's name would not be released before more information had been gathered.

The author contacted Mr Andries Cornelius, director of eNuus, and based on the information in the previous media statements it was agreed that eNuus would edit the video and broadcast the content on the seven o'clock evening news. The content of the videos was also supplied to *Veeplaas* magazine, who also agreed to compile an edited version and place it on Facebook and the VAS (Louw, 2013). The video clips containing all the relevant information were broadcast on the seven o'clock evening news and then posted on the Facebook Forum (Cornelius, 2013a). Following the broadcast of the video, Lt. Col. Scott called the author and mentioned that he had visited the premises of the suspected offender, as he knew him, but that there was no sign of the truck suspected to have been used to committed the crimes. At approximately 11: 50 pm Lt. Col. Scott called the author again and mentioned that the truck had been found in a yard in the industrial area of Meyerton, Gauteng. He also mentioned that the truck and trailer were extensively damaged, and that the cattle railings had been removed. Mr X was not arrested at this stage.

Between 24 August 2013 to 26 August 2013 the author received phone calls from various sources and had a number of communications with Lt. Col. Scott. The suspected offender was at large, and various posts were made by concerned members on VAS.

On 26 August 2013 Mr Y,³ the driver of the truck, had been arrested and confessed to some of the crimes that had been committed. Mr Y also confessed to two more crimes committed near Rustenburg that the SAPS and the VAS were not aware of. The suspect also admitted that Mr Barnard's cattle had been taken to Villiers Abattoir in the Free State to be slaughtered. Later that day it was confirmed that the cattle had been slaughtered at the abattoir.

On 27 August 2013 Lt. Col. Scott mentioned that Mr X was in hiding and that the GPSTPF should issue a new media statement exposing him to the public in the hope that he would hand himself over. A photo of the suspect was retrieved from his Facebook profile. A media statement was issued to eNuus on 27 August 2013 to the effect that the Lt Col Scott wished to get in touch with Mr X concerning the theft of livestock (Cornelius, 2013b). eNuus broadcast the statement and Mr X was exposed, as the VAS had intended.

On 28 August 2013 Mr X contacted Lt Col Scott indicating that he would hand himself over as soon as possible with his legal representative. However, he did not hand himself over, and on 29 August 2013 made the following post on his Facebook wall:

Julle moet weet dat julle verkeerd is kry FEITE REG !!!!!!! EK NIKS GESTEEL NIE EKS NIE N DIEF NIE EK BOER SELF!!!!!!!!!!!!!! DIE BEESTE IS GEKOOP BY MENSE ON [SIC] HET BEWYSE MAAR DIE HOF [SIC] SAL BESLUIT (<https://www.Facebook.com/tinus.groenewald.12?fref=ts>) [You are wrong get FACTS STRAIGHT !!!!!!! I HAVEN'T STOLEN ANYTHING I'M NOT A THIEF I'M A FARMER MYSELF!!!!!!!!!!!!!! BOUGHT THE CATTLE FROM PEOPLE HAVE PROOF BUT COURT WILL DECIDE] [Author's own translation].

On 31 August 2014 eventually the suspect handed himself over to the Modimolle Stock Theft Unit and was taken into custody. At the time of writing, the suspects were awaiting trial and have gone to the extent of appealing the refusal of bail but were unsuccessful.

Case Number 2

On 15 February 2014 the following post with a photograph was made on the Facebook page: *"I have seen six cows at the De Deur they are possibly stolen here is a picture of the identification"* [author's own translation]. Later on 15 February 2014 the same person posted that: *"The cows were stolen in the Frankfort District. Capt. Odendaal of the Vrede Stock Unit is investigating the case and the victim is missing 11 cows."*

On 19 February 2014 Capt. Odendaal made the following post on the Facebook page:

The six cows that was observed by the group member at De Deur and reported to the group were indeed stolen cattle. The owner was not aware that the cattle were stolen. The member also send me the photo and as the cattle was branded the owner was only found on Monday and only Tuesday the owner were able to confirm that 11 head of cattle was stolen. The information was followed up 3 of the cattle was found alive in Fochville. Unfortunately 3 was already slaughtered at Vanderbijlpark abattoir. The hides of the carcasses were seized. The criminal are still at large but known as they were released form prisons in November 2013. The auctioneer was already informed on Saturday that the cheque must be crossed and stopped at the bank which resulted in the criminal not making any money from the deal as they could not cash the cheques. We wish to thank the member of the group who was at tentative and informed the group and the police.

Case Number 3

On 19 may 2014 the following posts with photographs were made by Capt. Odendaal:

These Simmentalers was found at a known livestock thief in Deneysville on Friday. In total they are 9 (nine) well cared for animals but unfortunately they are not marked properly. The criminal is operating in the Eastern Free State and Gauteng. Please help to find the owner.

After an inquiry by a group member, Capt. Odendaal mentioned that the reason for success was because of the existence of good communication between himself and another officer at another investigating unit in the Free State. Furthermore that the cattle were found with the same person that was the suspect in Case Number 2 above. The suspect was now behind bars. His alibi being that he inherited the cattle from the estate of his late brother who had recently passed away.

The prosecutor was positive (at the time of writing) that bail would be denied in court and it would not be necessary for any of the members in the formal social networks to testify against bail being granted due to that fact that the accused had a long criminal record.

Another member (of Facebook Forum), without indicating from where he was from, then made the following remark: "*Here are livestock theft [occurring] but they [SAPS] do not have transport to further investigate the case*". Capt. Odendaal then made the following post:

I do not know what you are talking about, but transport is a challenge all over, please remain positive and influences your police officers in a positive manner. All officers can have success with a little bit of encouragement. I do have a very positive group of officers, but unfortunately there are members within the community that do make them extremely negative. The reason is unnecessary negative criticism and accusations please start making a difference.

Various other posts were made by members of the community to try and assist in locating the owner over the period but without any success. On 6 June 2014, a member wrote the following post:

Did the owner realise that his cattle are missing. Capt. Odendaal then mentioned that there are [sic] no success as a possible victim did come to the fore but were not able to provide the necessary proof of ownership. DNS testing cannot be done due to the fact that the victim cannot provide a bull to be tested.

On 12 June, the following post was made by a VAS member: "*I have driven between Parys and Fochville about two weeks ago and saw a herd of Simmentaler cattle that looks similar to these cattle on the photo. I will make the necessary inquiry.*" Later that day Capt. Odendaal wrote the following post:

Thanks to the member of the public for between attentive and the follows up made, the owner was located in the Buffelshoek area near Fochville. A number of suspects are involved originally 25 head of cattle was stolen. The suspects are from Eldorado near Johannesburg, Sebokeng and then the suspect from Deneysville. The case is now further investigated, for some obscure reason no case was opened although the owner did report the matter. The owner was only given a visitor card with a few telephone numbers. That is why we struggled to find the owner.

ANALYSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS SOCIAL MEDIA AND CASE STUDY INFORMATION

The Formal Social Networks

The formal social networks were created long before the invention of electronic technology in South Africa, as internet was only introduced during 1996 in some organisations and Universities. The formal networks were an attempt to address crime as an industry together with roleplayers within the criminal justice system and Non-Government Organisations (NGO). Currently the NSTPF only meets twice per year and with the constant occurrence of crimes, the question needs to be asked if it is still a viable option in the age of technology, as most of the information provided at the meetings can be given electronically via e-mails. The

reporting of hot spot stations etc. without providing the information to the community must be seriously questioned.

When analysing the minutes of the meetings over the past five years it becomes evident that the NSTPF does not make any significant contribution towards the combating of livestock theft. The time has maybe come for the formal social networks to access their strategic goal in line with new developments in solving livestock theft crimes. The current form of meeting is a report back session of the provinces and other role-players with no impact on crime reduction, mainly because no strategy exists to reduce the crime as a reactive mode is followed instead of a proactive mode of crime prevention. This laid back approach filters through to most provinces and livestock theft is then reduced to a lesser agricultural crime addressed by rural safety groups instead of the livestock theft prevention forms. This claim is based on the fact that in Mpumalanga there is no active forum and in Limpopo province there has not been a forum for the past five years and a new forum was established during 2014. In the Northern and Western Cape, livestock theft is incorporated within the ambit of the overall Rural Safety Plan. In the Free State, Eastern Cape and Gauteng there are dedicated Stock Theft Prevention Forums that focus only on this crime. Accordingly, this crime is not dealt with in these three provinces within the overall Rural Safety Programme. However, overall nationally the consequences of livestock loss remain unbelievably high.

Informal social media

Interest in using social media as an information source is fairly new but based on the rapid growth of social media networks over the last decade it is not strange as it provides access to a large volume of information that was not previously available (Salve, 2014). South Africa is not the exception as the technology is available to most technological advanced citizens of which Facebook currently is the most popular social media form, with 9.6 million users (Meier, 2013). A challenge that was posed to the establishment of the social media group was the impact it will have on the formal social network of government structures such as the criminal justice system and formal arrangements with roleplayers within the NSTPF. No prior arrangements were made with the NSTPF as provinces are regarded as autonomous entities based on the constitution of the country and the NSTPF. These challenges are not unique to the NSTPF and the social media, as most organisations struggle to merge the challenges of social media with organisational strategies (Mergel et al, 2012: 152).

The establishment of the VAS social media group is in accordance with global evidence that communities respond to crimes using social media and referred to as a Co-ordinated Community Response (CCR) with a definite objective to prevent crimes and assist the victims of crime (Shorey, Tirone & Stuart, 2014: 364). Co-ordinated Community Response in South Africa, according to Singh (2005: 43) is mainly found within the poorer crime ravaged communities and understandable in the absence of effective public criminal justice components. Singh (2005), in this article, focused on visible community response, contrary to the focus of the VAS, which is on the use of social media in responding to crime and criminal events. In exploring the social media, it was established that in the more affluent communities where there are easier access to the internet, Co-ordinated Community Response does exist in the form of Community Police Forums, commonly known as CPFs. This made Co-ordinated Community Response more accessible and closer to residents (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2006: 302). Examples of Co-ordinated Community Response Facebook pages can be found for Amamzimtoti, Kwazulu-Natal; Helderberg, Western Cape, Glenvista (Johannesburg) and Naboomspruit Crime Watch (Limpopo Province) to name but a few. The VAS social media group are therefore unique as it involves a specific group of nodes and tiers and it focuses on the prevention of a single crime and not crime in a general sense.

There is no standardised protocol for implementing Co-ordinated Community Response, therefore the spontaneous establishment of the VAS in South Africa and the way it was established as an early adopter cannot be criticised or evaluated against a set of rules. Vice versa, there is no protocol for evaluating the effectiveness of existing CCR's (Shorey et al 2014: 364). As there are no established evaluating mechanisms to evaluate a CCR, the same will apply to the VAS. Creativity is required and evaluating aspects need to be adopted from other related criminal justice studies. Tilley, (2013) devoted a whole book on the evaluation of successes in crime reduction, involving the public, but in all cases addressed a series of crimes.

In this research article, contrary to an intensive approach, the focus was on a few selected cases with limited comparison possibilities. Evaluating aspects that could be adopted were identified as i) advocacy; ii) uniqueness of the group; and iii) the relationships within criminal justice system and with the public.

Advocacy

Advocacy is an action normally undertaken a group to force governments to attend to a particular course (Young & Everitt, 2011: 3). In the case of livestock theft in South Africa, it is clear that through the NSTPF, the government and the organised agricultural community is attending to the matter. The argument is based on the fact that livestock theft is still one of the few crimes in South Africa that is served by a specialised unit. As government is prioritising the matter, the question should rather be: Are the red meat producers farming livestock and the community at large satisfied with the actions and attempts of government if a group such as the VAS is established? The growth of the numbers of an advocacy group indicates the effectiveness and need for the group (Young & Everitt, 2011: 5). In the case of this group, the numbers rose dramatically in the first few hours to over 250 people, but ever since the amount of people joining the group has been steady and the group currently just boasts over 1350 members. The fact is that the main purpose of the group is more focussed on the solving of crimes than on changing social policy or legislation at the present moment. It is, however, not an impossible cause that the influences of the group may inspire the SAPS to become more involved with social media which may result in policy changes.

Uniqueness of the group

What makes this social media event unique, is that this social media group is driven by public demand and is not government related. The police officers involved in the social media are involved in their personal capacities irrespective that some are involved in the formal networks based on their job descriptions.

The uniqueness of the formation of the VAS on Facebook must be seen as a result of frustration amongst members of the informal community to rebel against insufficiency experienced in the formal social networks for not solving or reducing livestock crimes. The establishment of the Facebook page is a mechanism adopted in response to livestock crimes with an assumption to work in ~~the~~ one or another way to influence the perceptions of the offender, victims, and the perception and relationships between the communities, the criminal justice system and estimate the chances of success. Before analysing these factors it will be important to look at the profile of the group.

Profile of the people who joined the group

It is not possible to provide information such a sex and age of the group members, as it is not captured within the group settings of the VAS. In general the group is diverse in nature comprising of members of organised agriculture, journalists with and interest in agriculture and crime, police officers, red meat producers, etc. More female members are involved, but when analysing there profiles it becomes obvious they are married to producers or have relatives as producers or are involved in the production of red meat. As usual, one finds the

optimist who joins the group to advertise his/her products, but it is a rule that no products may be posted on the group, only information that is related to livestock theft.

Changing the perception of the offender

The cases provided are diverse in nature and possibly gives an indication to the diversity in the South Africa community. Very little information exists about the offenders and their knowledge about social media and the influence it may have on changing their perceptions about the crime. A reason ~~been~~ being, that the profile of the livestock perpetrator has never been studied globally and it can therefore be argued that it is long overdue.

In Case Number 1, it is obvious that the offender was aware of the existence of Facebook with a profile and using social media. At first, when the information became available that there is a possible suspect in the case, the members of the group were able to intrude on his privacy and download his picture for display on television. This confirms the fact that people use Facebook to disclose information of the self without necessary taking into account the consequences (Ellison, Vitak, Steinfield, Gray & Lampe, 2011: 20; Roos, 2012: 6). The disclosure of private information on Facebook and the utilisation of the information was argued in the prominent ground breaking case of HvW, where Judge Wills made an important finding about the publication of information that will change the tone of how the courts and people go about with private information (Jacobson, 2013). When the suspect became aware of the fact that his picture had been downloaded, he made a post that he was innocent and is also a farmer. The suspect was, however, not aware of the existence of the Facebook page and the fact that members of the community was involved in his identification and apprehension.

In cases number 2 and 3, the same suspects were involved, but there are no indications that they were aware of the existence of social media and the fact that the community was involved in assisting with their apprehension. The use of Facebook by criminals to taunt victims from custody is common place in the United Kingdom where in one year 350 illicit posts were made on Facebook, whilst serving a sentence and the amount is doubling every year (Anon, 2012; Rush, 2013). In South Africa there are also known cases where sentenced inmates illegally use Facebook from correctional centres to socialise with relatives and friends (Scholtz, 2011).

Accept for cybercrimes there are very few cases were offenders use Facebook to commit crimes or attempt to detect if they are under surveillance. It, however, has becomes common knowledge in the developed world that criminals are caught, based on the fact that they had disclosed (on various internet sites and other electronic communication mediums) information about crimes that they had committed (Skelton, 2012).

Changing the perception of the victims

In none of the cases in which the victims of the crime were involved with Facebook or social media, were any analysis or conclusions jeopardised. In the Barnard case, the victim issued information via e-mail to a personal network of friends. It is, however, established that up until the writing of this article none of the victims had joined Facebook or the VAS forum, despite the fact that they were fully aware that the offenders were apprehended through social media actions. Only in one case, which is not part of this article, was the victim of livestock theft a member of Facebook but not a member of the VAS. Immediately after discovering the assistance from the group, the victim joined the group and thanked the group. The reason why the case is not mentioned in the newspapers is that it is very similar to case numbers 2 and 3 where cattle were stolen without the knowledge of the owner.

In other countries, victims are not so apathetic towards Facebook and use social media to apprehend the people offending them is more common and one prominent case is where a victim conned the robbers of his cell phone into selling it to him at a later stage (see Anon., 2012).

Relationships between victims and the other roleplayers

Other role-players refer to people or entities who are not part of the formal or informal networks, but who by implication became involved with the VAS and its activities. The relationship between the victims and other roleplayers is evident from a couple of the cases within Case Number 1. In the case near Olifantshoek, the relationship between the victims and the Vice Chairperson of GSTPF is obvious and this led to the fact that the post was made on the VAS. In the case of Mr Barnard, the positive relationships between the victim the SAPS and the operator of the Tollgate gave rise to the fact that a photo of the truck was made available and later full videos for distribution to News Channels. In the Beestekraal case the relationship between the victim and the local media contributed to the fact that the matter was made public.

Relationship between Community Red Meat Producers and Criminal Justice System

Crowdsourcing is part of the methodology adopted in the article and also used in the cases in question in this article to obtain information rapidly. The gathering and distribution of information involves three distinct problems: mobilising participants, aggregating information, and verifying information (Rahwan, Dsouza, Rutherford, Naroditskiy, McInerney, Venanzi, Jenning & Cebrian, 2013: 69). By addressing these three distinct problems the relationship between the community, red meat producers and the criminal justice system are illustrated.

Mobilising participants to join the group was not a challenge as from the formation of the VAS, until a number of members were above 250, took approximately two hours.. What is, however, a challenge is to keep people interested in the activities of the VAS. Irrespective of the growth of the VAS, it is dominated by people from Gauteng, Free State, Mpumalanga and North West. The other provinces are underrepresented and it may be due to either a lack of interest or that people are not aware of the group, or do not use Facebook. This is actually a disturbing situation, as the provinces with the highest incidents of livestock theft is Eastern Cape, Kwazulu-Natal and Mpumalanga (Clack, 2014: 61). Something that is found disturbing is the knowledge shared by the informal VAS with the formal NSTPF that do not contribute to more formal involvement. This may be contributed to personality characteristics or a lack of technological advancement (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering & Orr, 2009: 580)

In all the cases it is common knowledge that as soon as a case was posted on Facebook there was immediate mobilisation and interaction amongst the roleplayers in the criminal justice system, the community and red meat producers. In Case Number 1, the beginning of the case the absence of members of the criminal justice system was obvious. An impression was created that the police officers did not want to be identified as being involved with social media. The police officers became much more involved behind the scenes than realised. It was therefore a challenge to keep the community and red meat producers motivated and involved. The fact that the group was able to use other media such as the printed media and television, was, however, a good source of motivation. This is concluded from the fact that the VAS group members downloaded the articles and YouTube inputs to the VAS page on Facebook book to ensure that the group members remained motivated.

In Case-Number 2 the crime was reported by a member of the group who became suspicious. The reaction time of members of the police in this case was immediately and they also became involved with the social media immediately. The result was that the owner was informed of the loss before even realising that he/she was a victim of a crime. Note the fact that the victims were only able to confirm the loss two days after being informed that livestock had been stolen.

In Case Number 3, the police where the initiators on the VAS, asking for assistance from the public to locate the lawful owner of the cattle. The time it took to identify the owner did have a bearing on the motivation of the group members. The fact that very few leads were

provided indicated demotivation except for the one member of the group who, after an extended period of time, while driving on a public road identified similar cattle.

The fact that a group is motivated does not necessary mean that the information provided is reliable, visualised and synthesised (Rahwan et al 2013: 70). The need to aggregate the contributions of the VAS into useable information is a challenge. The main reason is especially with Case Number 1, that the VAS group members became emotionally involved in the solving of a crime due to the involvement of so many other roleplayers and the electronic and printed media. Not only was information in abundance via various communication canals, but as with crime of all kinds the gossiping and the spread of wrong information was rife. The fact that very experienced SAPS officers were directly and indirectly involved made the aggregation of information simple. As is indicated, the author had many behind the scene contact with members of the SAPS, who consistently gave direction as to what should be communicated to the VAS group and what must be removed etc. In the end in all the cases the patience and the correct handling of the information was fruitful and needs to be applauded.

Verification of the information provided was not such a challenge as there was no person who could benefit from providing false information to sabotage the objectives of the group. In all the cases, reliable information was found. During interviews it was later established that a lot of the information used in the bail hearings of the accused in case member 1 came from family members and friends who did not concur with the activities of the offenders that became known to the exposure of the case in the media by the VAS (Scott, 2014).

CONCLUSION

As a social media tool, Facebook, since its development, has attracted considerable interest, revolutionised the way society networks operate and augmented the Social Network Theory. Using social media in crime prevention creates an interest from the community in the same social problem or social ill (evil). The use of Facebook occurs in foreign countries and their police forces harness social media in crime prevention. In South Africa, the use of social media is limited and mainly involves community policing.

Two distinct forms of social networks and media as well as their developments and interrelationships were discussed at length. The formal networks are not functioning to a meaningful potential and the need to review the practices of formal social networks is long overdue to ensure change in strategic direction. Contrary to the formal networks, the informal networks, which are usually a spontaneous reaction from the community, have made inroads into livestock crime and actually contribute to the reduction of this particular crime. The formation of the social media challenges the strategies of the more formal social networks. Social media in South Africa is more common in the affluent communities and from the VAS used it is evident that the involvement of the community and the relationships do have a direct impact on crime reduction.

In this article selected case studies from Facebook were used to illustrate how specific livestock crimes were solved using social media and other networks. The involvement of the criminal justice system, the community, the victims of crime and the community via different social networks and media in preventing livestock theft are of note and should be employed more widely to prevent crimes as a whole and to apprehend suspects. In future, social media may influence the social direction and policies of the more formal networks, legislation and a more formal involvement of the SAPS in social media.

The VAS is unique as a social media group driven by public demand and no formal government involvement. Only in South Africa is there this group that only focuses on prevention of one specific crime. The formation of the group demonstrates frustration amongst members of the community with a rebelling attitude towards insufficiency experienced in the formal social networks for not solving or reducing the livestock crimes.

The VAS group created a mechanism in response to livestock crimes with an assumption to influence the perceptions of the offender, victims and the perceptions and relationships between the communities and the criminal justice system.

Currently it is obvious that the existence of the group is not really known amongst perpetrators or the victims of livestock theft crimes. The fact that the perpetrators do not know, may be regarded as a blessing but the involvement of red meat producers in the social media will need to be sought in order to assist in the reduction of livestock theft. The offenders were aware of the existence of Facebook, some even with their own Facebook profiles and using social media. The community and some people within the formal criminal justice sector are involved in this venture. But with reference to victims, more involvement by them needs to be encouraged and created. The rural poor communities in the Eastern Cape, Kwazulu-Natal and other provinces that are particularly affected and hard hit by livestock theft need to be made more aware of the existence and use of social media in order to better prevent livestock theft.

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ENDNOTES

1. Nodes are the members or units that are connected by the relationships and refer commonly to persons or organisations.
2. For ethical reason the name of the perpetrator is withheld and referred to as Mr X.
3. For ethical reason the name of the perpetrator is withheld and referred to as Mr Y.