

The rise of police PR

May 1 2014, by Luke O'Neill

Police PR is increasingly bypassing traditional news outlets by turning to social media and reality television, according to Associate Professor Murray Lee.

State police forces are producing their own multimedia content and turning to [social media](#) and [reality television](#) to deliver 'preferred images' of policing, according to Associate Professor Lee.

Associate Professor Lee and Dr Alyce McGovern, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of New South Wales, have co-written Policing and Media, a new book that critically explores the shifting relationship between Australian police forces, the media and the public.

"So much of policing is symbolic, it's about image. If the police do not have a good image, the job of policing becomes so much more difficult," said Associate Professor Lee.

"One of our big focuses in the book was the use of social media. Queensland in particular was a leader in terms of its response to the floods. But other states have led in other ways. NSW Police has perhaps been ahead in developing Operation Eyewatch, effectively a neighbourhood watch on Facebook," he said.

The authors explored the growing use of reality television to disseminate [public safety](#) and deterrence messages and found viewers of such programs often feel 'safer' in society.

"The one great mechanism police are using is the reality TV program. Programs such as Recruits and RBT emanate from TV producers going into contracts with police. They have approval over what is aired," he said.

"These programs have a deterrent effect on viewers. RBT is almost all about showing people out there getting arrested for drink driving and doing stupid things. It's part of a [police forces](#)' public safety messaging."

And the public has its own 'preferred image' of police, he explained.

Associate Professor Lee said the growing role of PR can have both positive and negative effects for journalists on crime and police beats.

"This has both pros and cons. One of the cons is the lessened capacity for the media to act as gatekeeper. It's certainly something that the public and the [police](#) need to be aware of.

"If we're talking about journalists putting together material for the local paper or local radio station, then central media offices come in useful, because media with fewer resources often regurgitate provided information."

"But for investigative, questioning journalists it's still about sources. Investigative journalists have their own sources and they will go to them, often instead of or after going to the media office," he said.

Provided by University of Sydney

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