Social Media Users Cyberhate Reporting Intentions: Does Users' Perceptions of Police Effectiveness Matter?

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Abstract

In Kenya, social media platforms are the primary medium for cyberhate, and it predominantly affects university students who have extensive social media usage. Although cyberhate is considered as a criminal offence in Kenya, victims, particularly young people, often do not report victimisation to the police. Despite the well-documented harmful effects of cyberhate, the cause behind its underreporting remains unclear. Studies have established the influential role of attitudes, particularly views of police effectiveness, in shaping the choice to report crimes. However, insufficient focus has been given to examining this relationship, specifically within the context of cyberhate reporting. Moreover, potential variations in perceptions of police effectiveness across different policing contexts also introduce nuances to the relationship. Guided by the Instrumental Performance-Based Model of policing, the study explored the connection between social media users' views of police effectiveness and their intention to report incidents of cyberhate victimisation to the police. A descriptive survey design utilizing a quantitative approach was adopted, targeting undergraduate students at a public university in Kenya. From this population, a sampling frame consisting of 5,121 undergraduates was created by focusing on three faculties, and stratified sampling ensured proportional selection from all strata. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire administered to a randomly selected subset of 378 respondents, of whom 261 returned completed questionnaires. Spearman's correlation results revealed a positive and significant correlation between perceived police effectiveness and cyberhate reporting intentions. The study explored the implications of this finding for the National Police Service and suggested directions for future research.

I. Introduction

The proliferation of cyberhate or online hate speech targeting ethnic groups, political affiliation, sex, race, and religion has emerged as a critical concern within the global social media sphere [3]. The prominence of this problem is closely tied to the widespread adoption and penetration of social media platforms [11]. Among the demographic groups disproportionately exposed to cyberhate are young people [5], [19] particularly university students [4], [30] who heavily rely on social media for communication, entertainment, and information [1].

Cyberhate has been linked to significant impacts, notably in exacerbating offline violence. In South Africa, for instance, inflammatory social

Production and hosting by NAUSS

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media messages that surfaced in the aftermath of the apprehension of ex-president Jacob Zuma in July 2021 resulted in anarchy, destruction, looting, and 360 fatalities [32]. Similarly, the dissemination of hate speech through social media platforms during elections in Kenya has been recognised as a catalyst for post-election violence and political unrest [9].

Given the prevalence and negative impact of cyberhate violence, globally, there has been a noticeable increase in legal actions and successful convictions related to hate speech propagated through social media platforms, particularly in cases where individuals have disseminated such hate speech while using identifiable online personas [7], [8], [21].

Despite the recent series of arrests and legal actions taken against individuals involved in cyberhate on social media in different countries, growing evidence suggests that victims of cyberhate do not report their victimisation to the authorities [2], [24]. Crime-reporting research shows that reporting victimisation is crucial in enabling law enforcers to identify perpetrators [36] and gain a deeper understanding of the extent and contextual nuances of criminal activities [39]. This knowledge, in turn, enables more efficient resource allocation by police and policymakers and the development of effective crime prevention policies [37].

Different factors can influence the choice not to notify law enforcement about criminal incidents, and among these factors are the type of crime in question [27], negative past experiences with legal authorities [40], seriousness or severity of the victimisation [16], socio-demographic characteristics such as age and gender [18] among others. While these research efforts have undoubtedly contributed to our understanding of the factors influencing the underreporting of crimes, there is still much more to be explored in this area. One noteworthy avenue of investigation revolves around attitudes and their role in shaping reporting behaviours [42].

A specific area of inquiry concerns individuals' perceptions of police effectiveness and their link to reporting behaviours. Previous research has established the influential role of individuals' attitudes, specifically their perceptions of police effectiveness, in shaping their decision to report crimes [14]. However, limited attention has been given to exploring this relationship in the context of cyberhate reporting. Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential variations in perceptions of police effectiveness across different policing contexts, as these variations can introduce nuances and complexities to the relationship. In response to the research gap outlined, the central goal of this research was to investigate the nexus between social media users' perceptions of police effectiveness (PPE) and their inclination to report cyberhate victimisation to the police.

The upcoming sections of this paper adhere to the following structure: In Section II, we conduct a comprehensive review of recent research focused on cyberhate reporting. Section III delves into the methodology adopted for our study. The results of the study are detailed in Section IV.

Section V involves a thorough discussion of these results, and in Section VI, we outline the recommendations derived from our research. Finally, Section VII draws conclusions based on the study's outcomes.

II. Literature Review

In this segment, we offer a concise review of prior research concerning the correlation between peoples' views on the effectiveness of the police and their readiness to report cyberhate to the police. Following this, we introduce the theoretical framework that underpins our study.

A. Perceptions of Police Effectiveness and Willingness to Report Cyberhate

Generally, studies have defined police effectiveness as citizens' assessment of how police have performed in their duties, such as responding in a timely manner to calls from the public, effectiveness in fighting crime, preventing crime, and solving crime [17], [34]. Research in this area has historically been concentrated in the United States of America, but it is now spreading and gaining prominence in regions such as China,

Africa, Australia, the Caribbean, and elsewhere across the globe [23], [35] (see e. Assisting law enforcement by reporting crimes or individuals involved in criminal activities is the most researched and, possibly, the most overt form of cooperation with law enforcers [27], [28], [29], [44].

Perceptions of police effectiveness have consistently been linked to individuals' willingness to report crimes. A cross-country study [15], has uncovered a correlation between individuals who believed in the competence and effectiveness of the police and their heightened propensity to report criminal incidents. Comparable results have been noted in research carried out in London [6], Ghana [35], and the Caribbean [45].

Nonetheless, there is no definitive conclusion regarding the connection between views of police efficacy and the readiness to report crimes and cooperate with law enforcement. Studies from the Netherlands, Israel, and Trinidad and Tobago have found mixed results regarding the relationship between these two variables [13], [15], [23], [46].

The existing research provides potential insights into why the results have been inconclusive. One plausible cause for the divergent effects of perceived police efficacy on reporting could be attributed to disparities in policing practices, which can vary between different nations and within local jurisdictions, given that the studies were conducted in various countries [38]. Additionally, variations in sample characteristics of studies could result in mixed findings. For instance, some studies have used non-victim samples from the general population [6], [14], resulting in varied findings compared to studies focusing on crime victims [23].

Recent investigations have underscored the significant role played by victims' views on the effectiveness of the police in shaping their decision to report bias-motivated offences, both in online and offline contexts [10], [12], [33], [47]. However, no empirical study has explored the link between victims' views of police effectiveness and their readiness to report incidents of cyberhate.

This current research endeavour aims to address the deficiencies in prior studies by examining how social media users' views of police efficacy correlate with their inclination to report incidents of cyberhate. Furthermore, this study was conducted in Kenya, recognising that variations in policing contexts worldwide can lead to inconsistent effects of police effectiveness on crime reporting. Finally, unlike previous studies involving non-victim samples, this study centres explicitly on university students who represent a potential target audience for cyberhate, enhancing its relevance.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded on the Instrumental Performance-Based Model of policing, which suggests that the public's acceptance and cooperation with the police are influenced by three key factors: risk, performance, and distributive fairness. These factors encompass the perception that the police can effectively enforce rules and sanctions (risk), effectively control and prevent crime (performance), and distribute police services fairly across communities (distributive fairness) [34]. As indicated by the model, individuals' inclination to cooperate with the police is moulded by their assessments of police performance, their perceived level of risk, and judgments concerning distributive justice. In our study, the central instrumental factor under scrutiny was police effectiveness. We posited that users' willingness to collaborate with law enforcement, particularly in the context of reporting cyberhate victimisation, is fundamentally shaped by their perceptions of how well the police perform their duties.

III. Methodology

In this section, an extensive account of the methodology adopted in the research is presented. The study employed a descriptive research design appropriate for collecting detailed data on people's attitudes, habits, and opinions [31].

A. Participants

The target population comprised 6,937 undergraduate students from nine Schools and Institutes at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (DeKUT) Main Campus [30]. Undergraduates were

targeted due to their frequent usage of social media applications [26]. The study's respondents consisted of active users of the five most prevalent social media platforms in Kenya: Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok [11].

B. Sampling Procedure

From the target population, a sampling frame of 5,121 undergraduates was created by focusing on three specific faculties. A sample size of 374 was determined through Yamane's formula [43]. Stratified sampling techniques ensured that participants were selected proportionally from each sampling frame, allowing for a representative sample. A simple random sampling method was applied to provide all population members with an equal opportunity to participate in the study. The primary data collection approach involved the administration of a questionnaire. Before commencing data collection, a pilot test was conducted to identify and address potential ambiguities in the questionnaire. The instrument's reliability was also evaluated, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7.

C. Measures

The willingness to report cyberhate to the police, our dependent variable, was assessed using one construct. Participants in the survey were asked to communicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "If someone posts hateful writings or speech on social media platform that inappropriately attack you or another person based on ethnic origin, religion, or political persuasion in the future, how likely would you be willing to contact the police and report the incident?" Participants used a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Very Unlikely) to 5 (Very Likely), to indicate their intention to report such incidents.

The independent variable, perceived police effectiveness, was assessed using four items gauging respondents' confidence in the police's ability to carry out their duties effectively, which include, "police respond timely when they are called for help", "police are effective at investigating crimes reported to them", "police are effective in arresting

suspects of crimes", and "police do a satisfactory job in preventing crimes". Participants provided ratings on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), to express their level of agreement with these statements.

D. Analysis

We analysed quantitative data in STATA 16 to investigate the link between users' perceptions of police effectiveness and their willingness to report cyberhate incidents. Spearman's rank correlation analysis was employed to gauge the strength and direction of this link.

IV. Results

This section provides an overview of the correlation results obtained in our study.

A. Correlation between PPE and Willingness to Report Cyberhate

The results in Table I show a moderate, positive, and significant correlation between PPE and willingness to report cyberhate, as indicated by a correlation coefficient rs (261) = 0.475; p =.000. The result suggests that increased positive perceptions of police effectiveness have led to a corresponding increase in willingness to report cyberhate.

We further conducted Spearman's correlation analysis test between PPE constructs and willingness to report cyberhate. The results are

TABLE I
CORRELATION BETWEEN PPE AND WILLINGNESS TO REPORT CYBERHATE

		Willingness to report	PPE
Willingness to report	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.475**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	261	261
PPE	Correlation Coefficient	.475**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	261	261

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

presented in Table II, which shows a significant positive correlation between the four sub-variables and willingness to report cyberhate. However, the strength of the correlation differs among the sub-variables.

The first sub-variable, "police respond timely when they are called for help", had the strongest correlation coefficient (rs = .505; p =.001). This suggests that social media users who perceive the police as responding timely when called for help are more likely to report cyberhate incidents. The second construct, "police are effective at investigating crimes reported to them," had a weak significant positive correlation with a coefficient (rs = .365; p =.001). This suggests that people who perceive

the police as effective in investigating crimes are more likely to report cyberhate incidents. Similarly, the third construct, " police are effective in arresting suspects of crimes", had a moderate positive correlation with a coefficient (rs = .499; p =.001). This suggests that people who perceive the police as effective in arresting suspects of crimes are more likely to report cyberhate incidents. Finally, the fourth construct, " police do a satisfactory job in preventing crimes", had a positive correlation with a coefficient (rs = .415; p =.001). This suggests that those who believe the police are effective in preventing crimes are more inclined to report instances of cyberhate.

TABLE II
Correlation Between Ppe Constructs and Willingness to Report Cyberhate

PPE Constructs		Willingness to report cyberhate
Willingness to report cyberhate	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	261
Timely response by police	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.505**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	261
Effective investigation of crimes	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	261
Arrest of crime suspects	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.499**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	261
Crime prevention	Spearman's Correlation Coefficient	.415**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	261

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

V. Discussion

This section comprehensively discusses the study's findings and explores the key insights and discoveries derived from our research efforts.

This study aimed to explore how the perceptions of police effectiveness among social media users are linked to their disposition to report incidents of cyberhate to the police. The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between how social media users perceive the effectiveness of the police and their willingness to report incidents of cyberhate to the police. Furthermore, all the coefficients had a positive value, which means that the different aspects of police effectiveness can enhance the willingness to report online hate speech in the sampled undergraduate population. The positive correlation further supports the Instrumental Performance-Based Model of policing, which posits that the level of acceptance and cooperation people are willing to extend to law enforcement is linked to their assessment of the police's effectiveness.

The findings of the current research align with prior studies conducted by [6], [16], [25], [35]. These studies have demonstrated a link between how people view the effectiveness of the police and their propensity to engage in cooperative behaviours, such as reporting incidents of victimisation. One plausible explanation for these findings is that people tend to evaluate police actions based on utilitarian criteria, which considers the effectiveness of law enforcement in achieving

desirable outcomes such as responding promptly to incidents, making arrests, investigating crimes, and preventing criminal activities. Conversely, when law enforcement falls short of these expectations, it can lead to a perceived lack of effectiveness and erode public trust in their abilities. This explanation is supported by previous research, including [35] study in Ghana, who argued that in high-crime and police misconduct contexts like Ghana, perceived police effectiveness is crucial for gaining public trust and cooperation. The aforementioned study found that negative perceptions of the police due to colonial history and poor performance resulted in diminished public willingness to cooperate with them. However, when the police were viewed as effective in reducing crime and improving safety, people were more inclined to cooperate with them. This implies that perceived effectiveness may be critical for eliciting public cooperation in contexts with legitimacy deficits. The observed relationship between perceived police effectiveness and willingness to report cyberhate may be explained by Kenya's policing context, which is marked by challenges such as police corruption and brutality, leading to an unfavorable public perception, lack of cooperation and a decline in public confidence in the police [20], [21]. This situation is similar to the Ghanaian context highlighted by [35], suggesting a shared experience in diminished public trust and cooperation with the police.

Notably, although the present study demonstrates a link between police effectiveness and propensity to report crimes, some extant literature presents opposing views. For example, [23] research showed that in Trinidad and Tobago, victims' choices to report crimes to law enforcement were not swayed by utilitarian motives, like their perception of the police's effectiveness in solving crimes, despite the country's high levels of violence and corruption. Instead, their study suggested that reporting victimisation incidents was driven by individuals' perceptions of the legitimacy of the police and their beliefs regarding procedural justice.

One potential reason for the disparity in findings between our study and theirs could be attributed to differences in the methodologies used to assess reporting behaviour. The latter measured actual behaviour while the former measured intentions. Scholars have noted a substantial gap between the stated willingness to report crimes and the actual reporting of such incidents. For instance, as outlined in [41], although nearly two-thirds of the participants expressed their readiness to report cybercrimes in the vignettes, only thirteen per cent of actual victims reported these crimes to the authorities. Future studies on cyberhate reporting should therefore consider measuring actual reporting behaviour rather than just intentions to report. Another possible explanation for the different results is using a self-administered questionnaire in our study, which may be subject to response biases and social desirability effects. In contrast, [23] used in-person interviews to gather data on reporting behaviour. Using multiple data collection methods in future studies may provide a more comprehensive insight into the nexus between perceptions of police effectiveness and reporting behaviour.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge one shortcoming of this finding. This study's measure of perceptions of police effectiveness was based on a general attitude towards the police rather than specific instances of police effectiveness or ineffectiveness. For example, a respondent may hold a favourable overall attitude towards the police but may hesitate to report a cyberhate incident due to a negative experience with a specific officer. This highlights the need for future research to conceptualize perceptions of police effectiveness more specifically and precisely, perhaps by asking about experiences with specific incidents and officers. The inclusion of vignettes could have provided a more detailed and nuanced exploration of the relationship between the study's variables. By presenting specific scenarios and interactions with police officers, respondents could have evaluated police effectiveness more accurately based on their experiences rather than relying on general attitudes towards the police.

VI. Recommendations

In this section, we delineate practical recommendations, policy suggestions and directions for future research.

The research findings indicate that social media users are more inclined to notify the police of instances of cyberhate when they perceive the police as effective in their duties. Based on this finding, a practical suggestion for improving the National Police Service's public perception would be to prioritise and emphasise utilitarian factors in their interactions and communication with the public. Firstly, to enhance their emergency response time, the NPS can invest in improving its communication infrastructure. This includes implementing reliable radio networks, advanced technology platforms like Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking, mobile applications, and real-time data-sharing platforms. These technological advancements will enable effective communication, precise location tracking, and seamless information sharing, ultimately leading to quicker and more coordinated emergency response efforts. Secondly, to enhance their investigative capabilities, the NPS should train police officers in digital forensics and strengthen its Cybercrime Unit by allocating adequate resources, including personnel and technology. The NPS should also collaborate with government organisations and international entities involved in cybercrime investigations. This collaborative engagement should span multiple facets, including information sharing, joint research endeavors, and the augmentation of training and skills explicitly addressing issues related to online hate crimes. In addition, to highlight their effectiveness through outreach efforts, the National Police Service can organize community events, use social media to provide regular updates on their activities and achievements, and use traditional media outlets to reach a broader audience. This, in turn, can increase willingness to share information and engage in crime prevention efforts like reporting crimes, including cyberhate.

Regarding policy, the study recommends that the NPS develops a metric system to measure their performance. This involves defining key performance indicators (KPIs) such as emergency response times, investigation success rates, arrest rates, and the effectiveness of crime prevention efforts. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted (and the results should be effectively publicised) and interactive approaches like engaging the public through question-and-answer sessions, polls, and contests can be utilized to assess the impact of NPS work. By doing so, the NPS can build trust and improve its public perception, which could increase the willingness to report cyberhate and other crimes.

Finally, we suggest one recommendation to improve the quality of future studies. It is important to point out that the measures for police effectiveness and procedural justice used in the research relied on general perceptions rather than specific incidents or experiences of police effectiveness or ineffectiveness. This approach may not have fully captured the nuances of participants' perceptions of police effectiveness, potentially limiting the accuracy of the findings. To improve the precision of future research, more specific measures of police effectiveness such as vignettes or scenario-based assessments, may help capture participants' experiences and perceptions towards the effectiveness of police. This approach can improve the credibility and consistency of the results and provide a more precise depiction of the connection between perceptions of police effectiveness and reporting behaviour.

VII. Conclusion

In this section, we provide the study's final thoughts and insights. The study concludes that social media users' willingness to report cyberhate incidents to the police positively correlates with their perception of police officers' effectiveness. The study suggests that when social media users perceive police officers as being effective in responding promptly to calls for assistance, conducting thorough investigations, efficiently making arrests, and overall preventing crimes in society, they are more inclined to report incidents of cyberhate to them. Nevertheless, one limitation affected the findings of the study. The police effectiveness measure was based on a general attitude rather than specific incidents or experiences of police effectiveness or ineffectiveness. It might not capture the full complexity and nuances of individuals' perspectives of police effectiveness in the context of cyberhate, highlighting the need for more precise and nuanced measurements in future research.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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