

SMS Africa – Kenya – December 2015_2

Media and Security

On December 16th, the Media Council of Kenya hosted security agencies at a Nairobi hotel, for a workshop-style event. It appeared from tweets that the goal was to discuss the interface of their roles and working relationship.

Media and Security breakfast forum organized by @MediaCouncilK at Nairobi Safari Club (NPSOfficial_KE, 2015)

We have had a very good working relationship with the media. Let us protect this country by reporting accurately and in an unbiased way (NPSOfficial_KE, 2015)

Whereas we must inform the public, we must not popularize terrorism and terror related activities:-Col Obonyo @MediaCouncilK (NPSOfficial_KE, 2015)

We engage the media so that we can tell the story in an accurate way. The way we report can make or break this country:-KDF Spokesperson (NPSOfficial_KE, 2015)

@NPSOfficial_KE stop engaging the media. They work for the enemy. The earlier you realize that the better. (SSulisuli, 2015)

These highlight that the view held by security agencies is that reportage has security implications. *Twitter* user SSulisuli's sees the media as antagonistic towards the security agencies, it would be interesting to know who "the enemy" is in his mind. Is it that they act as an enemy by taking an oppositional stance/only reporting on negative incidences or is there a specific enemy entity that the media supports or speaks on behalf of.

Kenya Police Service spokesperson's exhortation that "we should strive to promote the relationship between the police and public" (NPSOfficial_KE, 2015) is in harmony with the feeling that the media has influence over public attitudes; a power that is not held by security agencies. Some of those reading the tweets identified other reasons (other than media) for the tenuous relationship public and security services:

@NPSOfficial_KE @MediaCouncilK the onus is on the police (OleNaado, 2015)

@NPSOfficial_KE @bettywaitherero @MediaCouncilK the police should stop harassing the public and the feeling of being above the law (Kisacheienock, 2015)

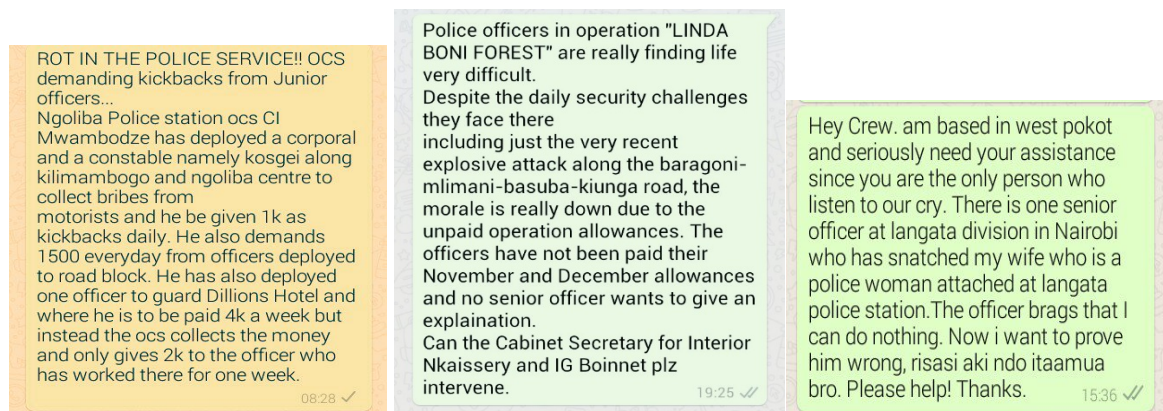
@NPSOfficial_KE @MediaCouncilK it isn't possible, unless possible, unless the cruel police Training is reverted to customer care training (Oireosabera, 2015)

There were those with positive feedback:

@NPSOfficial_KE @Rnagila @MediaCouncilK police are progressively doing a commendable job on securing us (Padhoch, 2015)

Meanwhile, on other social networking platforms...

Moderncorps sometimes shares screenshots of *Whatsapp* messages on *Twitter*, presumably as corroborating evidence. It also seems to occur when a matter is not relevant or of interest to a general audience. It is not clear if he receives the messages directly, or they are forwarded to him. The answer is probably: both. The third screen caption looks like the message was sent to a ‘crew’, rather than an individual:



Source: Moderncorps Twitter feed. Link in references

Figure 1: Screen captions of *Whatsapp* message reportedly sent to moderncorps

However, it appears that the sharing of *Whatsapp* messages amongst personnel has gotten out of hand. Moderncorps attaches a picture of a memo sent to police stations around the country from Nairobi HQ, to the below tweet:

Kenya Police boss warns police officers against sharing information on whatsapp.
Hii udigital imetufikisha hapo [This digitisation has gotten us to this point]
(Moderncorps, 2015)

It may have been prompted by an incident, or one like it, where a *Whatsapp* message that seemed to be sent to personnel was shared with the public on *Twitter*—my retweet of moderncorps tweet with the attached *Whatsapp* message must have been deleted for it is no longer available. However, I still have moderncorps’ tweet that misinterprets the note from I.G. Boinnet and reports it as a confirmation of the *Whatsapp* message, rather than a refutation:

IG BOINNET issues alert on Ford Ranger Police vehicle REG NO. GKB 595J stolen in Lamu, says can be misused by Thugs (Moderncorps, 2015)

ATTENTION!
WE ARE AWARE THAT THERE IS A MESSAGE
DOING ROUNDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA THAT ONE
OF THE VEHICLES THAT WAS CARJACKED
DURING AN ATTACK BY SUSPECTED TERROR
ELEMENTS IN LAMU COUNTY ON 16/12/2015
WAS REPORTED IN ONE OF OUR CITIES.KINDLY
NOTE THAT THE VEHICLE REG NO. GKB
595J,FORD RANGER WAS NOT SIGHTED IN ANY
OF OUR TOWNS AS ALLEGED. SECURITY
FORCES ARE ON A HIGH LOOK OUT FOR THE
SAID VEHICLE.
KINDLY IGNORE THE RUMOURS. BE ALERT.

Source: Moderncorps' Twitter feed

Figure 2: I.G. Boinnet's refutation of *Whatsapp* message that had been captured and shared on social media, which claimed that a vehicle stolen by Al Shabaab was seen in major city.

It also seems that not everyone can report about police and then go on about their business unscathed, as moderncorps seems to do. A civilian named Steve Njuguna posted a picture of a policeman squatting next to a rear tire of a car and claimed that the officer was letting the air out of it. He then instructed social media users to “make this Lang’ata policeman famous”.

The result:

Steve Njuguna arrested for posting false information w/t verifying, to appear in court today. (Famkiuma, 2015)

Famkiuma, the author of the above tweet, seemed very well-informed regarding this story and reported, when prompted by other *Twitter* users, that the charge was ‘misuse of licensed communications gadgets’, which was also conveyed by an obscure internet news source, *RadioJambo* (<https://radiojambo.co.ke/man-arrested-for-allegedly-posting-photo-of-police-officer-on-facebook>).

Heh. Mboss. But actually which law did they use for this? (Bettywaitherero, 2015)

--Charges: Misuse of licenced communication system (Famkiuma, 2015)

--LOL Kenya inavituko - who owns the license for facebook? the suspect?
loolll... (Bettywaitherero, 2015)

Bettywaitherero may have a valid question or may have misunderstood which ‘communication system’ was the subject of the law and what the license covers. Perhaps, taking a picture of the policeman was the ‘misuse’ in question, which would make the mobile phone rather than *Facebook*, the ‘communication system’. The application of laws related to

social media and security keeps coming up as an area that requires insights from an expert who is familiar with the interpretation of these laws and their history. Moderncorps has fallen afoul of these regulations in the past but has been fortunate that prosecution was not pursued:

BREAKING: Police in mpeketoni have withdrawn a case where I had been charged for an "annoying" tweet (Moderncorps, 2015)

Police confiscated my new laptop worthy 53k. They are now giving me back a laptop with a broken screen and that is not even turning ON (Moderncorps, 2015)

Moderncorps recently posted a *Twitter* survey that was answered by 67 individuals:

Do you Trust the POLICE? (Moderncorps, 2015)

The results were No: 69% and Yes: 31%

The validity of a *Twitter* poll is probably questionable but it makes for a nice illustration.

Profiling

Over the holidays there were calls for heightened vigilance from official accounts and unofficial sources and news that the Al Shabab were coming, in droves:

ALERT: Intelligence reports indicate that more than 200 Al-Shabaab might have crossed into the country from Somalia ready to launch attacks (Moderncorps, 2015)

@moderncorps according to my source this is the second group, the last crossed btw 10th nd 13th (Dejodgeskip, 2015)

Thus, a piece of news about how Muslim bus passengers had protected Christian counterparts was a ray of sunshine that stimulated good feeling and patriotic sentiment:

Solidarity at its best. Muslims refused to be separated from non Muslim in Mandera dawn bus attack. Then all instinctively decided to run (GroundHawkKE, 2015)

Kenyans for Kenya. Sad about the deaths but proud of our people facing al Shabaab (Johngithongo, 2015)

Unfortunately, the heart-warmth quickly dissipated after an incident where KDF fired upon a vehicle and killed three young Somalis. The incident led to #ManderaHeroesBetrayed trending on *Twitter*. The premise being that the heroes who had protected their fellow passengers, had been betrayed by the killing of Muslim youths.

Not only did #Mandera vote Jubilee overwhelmingly, but produced heroes who "defeated" terror, only to be neglected #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (AyubAbdikadir, 2015)

The KDF version of events indicated that they had interpreted the actions of the youth as a threat (they suspected that they may have been carrying an IED) and had acted when the driver of the car had failed to stop, when commanded to do so. The CTNSIS twitter account linked to a report by intelligencerief.com that absolved the soldiers of unwarranted, indiscriminate killing but advised that the KDF needed to do a better job of informing local populations about various protocols.

Threat of Al-Shabaab Terrorists SVBIED Attacks on Kenya Army in Mandera Against Trends #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (CTNSIS, 2015)

For some, the explanation that had filtered through was garbled:

KDF said the probox exploded but everybody can see the vehicle has bullet holes but no signs of explosions. #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (Nuuriega22, 2015)

Why do we have judiciary in place if at all we kill all 'suspects', is this the Kenya we want #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (Aly_adan, 2015)

Then there were those who saw the action as valid, post explanation:

Perhaps its better to get facts right before trending #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (KorirTowett, 2015)

#ManderaHeroesBetrayed, If it was the KDF soldiers who were killed instead, would there be any hashtag trending today.....just asking (Antoniwanyoike8, 2015)

ManderaHeroesBetrayed if you are stopped by police of military and you defy/refuse to stop,then bullets SHOULD stop you (Mbikuchis_mzito, 2015)

@mkibuchis_Mzito @CTNSIS Exactly pple should know Mil is different with police. They'll consider you hostile if you don't heed. So Obey! (Tomclemensombija, 2015)

Past actions came back to haunt:

With the probox shooting,how do you trust Nkaisery's stand on Almarhuma #Isnina? #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (FauzKhalid, 2015)

#ManderaHeroesBetrayed I've always hated KDF since them being caught in camera with Nakumatt polythene bags. Was that proffessional? (Makvaliken, 2015)

For some trust of information from any source was hard to come by:

The truth is hard to get cause everybody is corrupt in Kenya #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (Eugenewekulo, 2015)

Last time it was KDF had mass graves filled with Somali's and it was a lie, now KDF is targeting Somalis? this is BS #ManderaHeroesBetrayed (Sesomkegz, 2015)

It seems a difficult juggling act that needs a strategy: trying to disseminate information that is useful and relevant to the public, secreting information that is useful and relevant only to personnel, gathering information from digital communication sources, enforcing 'misuse' while also managing PR and propaganda that gains trust and maintains authority.

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