
The Pros and Cons of Sharing Security Information Without Police Clearance in Ghana: Balancing Public Safety and Privacy

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Abstract

Rapid sharing of information is crucial for educating the individuals within the community on security issues and the general enhancement of security. However, the issue of sharing security information by private individuals without the approval of the Ghana police service has formed part of major discussions. To contribute to the ongoing debates, this study examined the pros and cons of sharing security information without police clearance in Ghana. The qualitative research approach was employed to gather and analyse data. The participants were selected from the Greater Accra, Ashanti and Northern Regions of Ghana, through purposive sampling and interview guidance was used to gather primary data through face-to-face interviews. The findings from the thematic analysis revealed that sharing security information by private individuals without the approval of the Ghana police service improves the dissemination of security information, increases community vigilance and augments police efforts. Some of the disadvantages observed from the interview include misinformation and panic, privacy violations, undermining law enforcement and risk of vigilantism. The study concludes by making recommendations for policy and practice to enhance security information sharing between the community and the police for public safety.

Keywords: Law enforcement, Police clearance, Privacy, Public Safety, Security Information

1. Introduction

The safety of people and their belongings is essential to society's ability to function in today's worldwide government structures. In this direction, evidence keeps highlighting the roles played by both state and non-state actors. As a state actor, the government's main priorities are the welfare and security of its people, which it accomplishes through a variety of institutions (Odeyem and Obiyan, 2018). These include the armed forces, law enforcement, paramilitary organizations, and intelligence services, among other basic security agencies; powers in the legislative and executive branches handling oversight and administration of security, as well as

judicial and legal institutions of enforcement and non-statutory security forces (Ivanytsia et al., 2023).

The police service has been recognised as the main institution task with the role of protecting lives and properties within many jurisdictions (Villiers, 2009). Jones and Newburn (2006) defined policing as those organized forms of order maintenance, peacekeeping, rule or law enforcement, crime investigation and prevention, and other forms of investigation and associated information-brokering which may involve the conscious use of force. The police are supposed to enforce the law, prevent crime, protect people and their property, maintain peace and order, and enforce the law in addition to providing a wide range of services to the public (Villiers, 2009). The Ghana Police Service is recognised by the 1992 constitution as the institution mandated to maintain social order and the application of the law in Ghana. The Ghana Police Service Act 1970 (Act 350), one of the most important pieces of law controlling the Ghana Police Service (GPS), defines and gives authority to the police service in Ghana by providing detailed guidelines for many parts of its administrative administration (Fiadjoe, 1972). The following are the duties of the police organization as outlined in the Act: The Police Service is responsible for preventing and detecting crime, apprehending offenders, and ensuring public order as well as the safety of people and property (Fiadjoe, 1972).

1.1 Impact of Technology on Police Operations

One of the major developments that is impacting police operations is technological advancement. Undoubtedly, the significance of technology in aiding law enforcement agencies such as the police in their efforts to combat crime cannot be overstated (Frank and Binpe, 2014). Technological developments are especially important to policing because they are thought to have a direct impact on how police are organized and operate, which is closely related to their role in controlling crime. Police transportation, new and more effective methods of detecting crimes, and police-to-police communication all have an impact on how well police perform their role as a team of crime fighters as well as the degree of legitimacy they enjoy with the general public and pertinent governmental bodies (Rogers and Scally, 2018).

Accessing and sharing information is one of the major aspects of policing that has been influenced by technology. The detection, investigation, prosecution, and prevention of crime in law enforcement are facilitated by technologies like surveillance cameras, data gathering systems, heat sensors, facial recognition, GPS tracking, Internet and telecommunications systems, and so on (Manes, 2019). For example, the police can view traffic photos and use CCTV to link them to incidents occurring on the ground (Manes, 2019). Suleiman et al. (2020) noted that one of the largest monitoring systems in the nation is the London Metropolitan Police. This monitors the major thoroughfares in central London, the M25, and all highways both inside and outside of Westminster (Suleiman et al., 2020). Also, the police in Western Australia have used GPS maps that highlight crime hotspots and predictive analytics to minimize crime. It has been able to compile a picture of the crimes committed during the previous five years by employing business intelligence (BI) (Samoei, 2020).

The Ghana police service also makes use of information and communication technologies such as Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) to improve security and deter the activities of criminals, especially in urban areas (Okafor and Obika, 2022). For example, Okafor and Obika (2022) noted that the Ghana Police Service has installed CCTVs in strategic public areas and facilities to allow real-time monitoring and hasten the detection and response to criminal events. It has long been acknowledged that technology plays an important but sometimes contradictory role in police practices and institutions (Ogunbameru, 2008). While the use of technologies to share information can improve the security of Ghana, a critical issue arises. Awuni et al. (2023) reported that some Ghanaians share security information recorded by their private CCTVs and personal cameras without obtaining clearance from the police. Gadjanova et al. (2022) further indicated that some Ghanaians post security-related videos and information on social media and other online media platforms report incidences of crime, emergencies and suspicious activities. People rapidly share these recordings across several media to enhance public awareness or ask for the assistance of the public and the police (Gadjanova et al., 2022). These instances demonstrate a trend where ordinary citizens take part in proactive community policing through the use of technological devices that are easily accessible to record and share real-time security data events without the awareness or permission of the Ghana Police Service.

1.2 Focus of the Study

This study argues that the rapid sharing of information is crucial for the enhancement of security and educating the individuals within the community on security issues. However, the issue of sharing security information by private individuals without the approval of the Ghana police service has formed part of major discussions. While the dissemination of information without approval may improve security awareness, it may also infringe on the right to privacy of the individuals involved and may also interfere with law enforcement operations. However, the review of empirical literature shows that there is a dearth of studies in this regard. For example, studies such as (Aubyn, 2022; Boachie and Asare, 2015; Okafor and Obika, 2022) focused on how technologies impact policing in Ghana. None of these studies provided evidence of the impact of sharing security information on digital platforms by private individuals without police clearance. This study therefore sought to examine the benefits and challenges involved in sharing security information without the approval of the Ghana Police Service.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of technology and law enforcement in Ghana has become increasingly prominent, especially with the advent of private individuals sharing security information without police clearance. This act, while enhancing rapid information dissemination and community vigilance, also raises significant concerns regarding privacy and the efficacy of law enforcement (Manes, 2019; Okafor and Obika, 2022).

2.1 Regional Analysis of Crime and Public Safety in Ghana

In 2021, Ghana witnessed varying levels of public safety concerns and crime rates across different regions (Bureau of Public Safety, 2022). This regional detail is particularly germane to discussions regarding the pros and cons of sharing security information without police clearance

in Ghana. Understanding the specific crime trends in the Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Northern regions serves to more than underscore the complexity of public safety management but is also relevant for highlighting the necessity for a nuanced approach to the dissemination of information.

The Greater Accra and Ashanti regions, cited by the Bureau of Public Safety (2022) as having recorded high incidents of violent crimes such as armed robberies and homicides, represent areas with situations where rapid and controlled sharing of security information could potentially enhance public safety and aid in quick response measures. On the other hand, the risks associated with such sharing, like the potential spread of misinformation and the resultant panic or breakdown of community-police trust, are significant concerns that must be addressed. These considerations are critical in regions like the Northern Region, where specific data on violent crimes is not as pronounced but road safety issues are a notable challenge.

In this context, the following table presents key statistics from the 2021 Ghana Public Safety and Crime Report (Bureau of Public Safety, 2022), providing a clear picture of regional crime dynamics in the regions selected for this study. This data is essential for developing effective strategies and interventions tailored to the specific needs and conditions of each area, thereby improving the overall framework for sharing security information responsibly.

Table 1: 2021 Crime and Public Safety Statistics on the Greater Accra, Ashanti and Northern Regions

Region	Type of Incident	Statistics	Details
Greater Accra	Armed Robbery	19% of national incidents	Ranked high in armed robbery incidents alongside Ashanti Region
Ashanti Region	Armed Robbery	19% of national incidents	Highest incidents of armed robberies in the country
	Homicide (Murder/Manslaughter)	23% of national homicide cases	Referred to as the murder capital of the country
Northern Region	Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs)	Specific data not provided in the excerpt	Mentioned in the context of RTCs, indicating safety concerns

Source: Bureau of Public Safety (2022)

2.2 Technology's Impact on Policing

The use of technology in policing—specifically, surveillance technologies such as CCTV and GPS tracking—has been well-documented for its role in enhancing the efficiency of crime detection and prevention (Chavis, 2021; Davies and Krame, 2023). These technologies provide law enforcement agencies with crucial tools to improve public safety. However, the ease of access to such technologies by the public has led to challenges, including the unauthorised dissemination of potentially sensitive security information (Manes, 2019; Okafor and Obika, 2022).

2.3 Existing Research and Identified Gaps

While extensive literature discusses the integration of technology in policing, few studies specifically address the outcomes of unauthorised information sharing by private citizens (Gadjanova et al., 2022; Okafor and Obika, 2022). Most existing research tends to focus on the broader technological impacts without delving into the nuanced effects of such practices by non-state actors. This gap in empirical research highlights the need for studies that examine both the positive and negative implications of this phenomenon on public safety and privacy.

2.4 Critical Review of Literature

The current body of literature often highlights the advantages of technology in policing, such as improved surveillance and increased community collaboration with law enforcement (Chavis, 2021; Gill et al., 2014; Ratcliffe et al., 2009). However, these benefits are contrasted by significant risks including misinformation, privacy violations, and the potential undermining of formal law enforcement processes. The literature reveals a critical need for regulatory frameworks that can balance the benefits of rapid information dissemination with the risks associated with privacy and security breaches (Byrne and Marx, 2011; Chavis, 2021; Jones and Newburn, 2006; Villiers, 2009).

2.5 Theoretical Contributions

This study aims to fill the identified gap by providing a focused analysis on the specific impacts of sharing security information without police clearance. It contributes to the theoretical understanding by proposing a nuanced exploration of how such practices affect law enforcement operations and public safety in Ghana. The findings could offer insights into policy adjustments that might be necessary to harness the benefits of technology in community policing while mitigating its risks.

The literature review identifies a substantial gap in the current academic discourse regarding the specific consequences of unauthorised security information sharing by private individuals in Ghana. It underscores the need for targeted research that can guide policy and operational adjustments to better balance the technological empowerment of citizens with the essential privacy and security protocols.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Review

Author(s) & Date	Subject	Key Findings	Relevance to Review
Manes (2019)	Technological impact on policing, especially surveillance and data systems	Technologies like CCTV and GPS tracking enhance the efficiency of crime detection and prevention.	Highlights how technological advancements have directly influenced police operations and public safety.
Okafor and Obika (2022)	Use of ICT in policing in Ghana, specifically CCTV	Ghana Police Service uses CCTV to improve security, especially in urban areas,	Provides a local context on how technology is being employed by the Ghana

		facilitating real-time monitoring.	Police Service to enhance security operations.
Gadjanova et al. (2022)	Sharing of security information on digital platforms without police clearance	Unauthorised sharing by citizens can help in crime reporting and community vigilance but also poses risks.	Examines the implications of non-official dissemination of security information, which is central to the study's focus.
Chavis (2021)	Surveillance technologies and community collaboration in policing in vulnerable communities	Technology fosters improved surveillance and increased community collaboration with law enforcement.	Relevant for understanding the dual role of technology in both enhancing and complicating policing efforts.
Byrne and Marx (2011)	Technological innovations in crime prevention and policing	Technological tools can significantly aid policing but require careful implementation to avoid negative consequences.	Contextualizes the broader impact of technology on policing, stressing the need for balanced implementation.
Gill et al. (2014)	Community-oriented policing and technology	Community involvement through technology can enhance security information dissemination among police and the public.	Directly relevant to the study as it discusses the community's role in security through the use of technology.

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3. Research Methodology

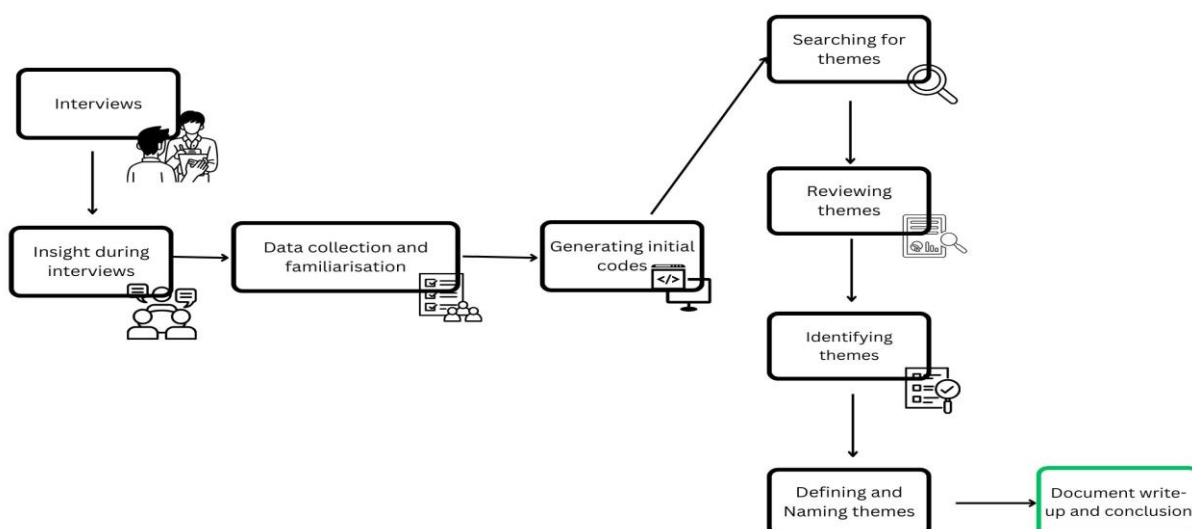


Figure 1: Conceptual model of study. Source: Nweke O.C & Francis S. (2024)

3.1 Research Approach

The study employed the qualitative research approach. The goal of qualitative research is to investigate more complex manifestations of relationships, interactions, and experiences that cannot be arbitrarily measured and reduced to operationalized variables (Ormston et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher gathered data on the meaning, attitudes, aspirations, and values of individuals on sharing security information without the clearance of the Ghana Police Service. The researcher thus, gathered data from several perspectives to elucidate the potential benefits and disadvantages of sharing security information without the clearance of the Police Service in Ghana.

3.2 Research Design

The descriptive case study design is used in this study. A descriptive case study design investigates the nature of a particular phenomenon (Bibri, 2020). The descriptive case study enabled the researcher to rely on a descriptive narrative to explain the pros and cons of sharing security information without the clearance of the Ghana Police Service. This design was appropriate for this study because it offers in-depth accounts of the experiences of experts on sharing security information without the clearance of the Ghana Police Service.

3.3 Population and sample

Population refers to the total collection of elements that one would like to study or make inferences about (Stratton, 2021). The population of this study comprise key individuals whom the researcher perceived to have the appropriate knowledge, experience and expertise to provide the data needed for the study. As such the population of the study, comprised personnel of the Ghana police service, security experts, community leaders and members of the media. Twenty-four (24) participants were involved in the study. Out of these 15 were members of the Ghana Police Service, 3 were security experts 3 were media personnel, and 3 were community leaders.

Table 2: Demographic Breakdown of Study Participants

Participant Group	Number	Percentage (%)
Ghana Police Service	15	62.5
Security Experts	3	12.5
Media Personnel	3	12.5
Community Leaders	3	12.5
Total	24	100

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The figure below is a visualisation of the demography of the participants of this study

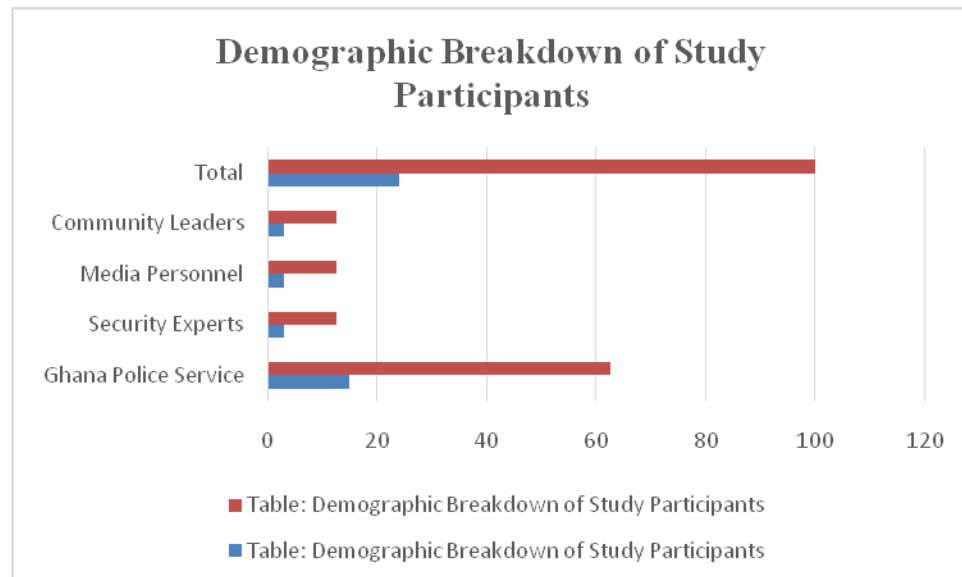


Figure 2: Breakdown of Participants. Nweke & Francis (2024)

3.4 Sampling and sampling procedure

The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The purpose of the sampling was because the researcher sought participants with specific knowledge that may be useful for the study. Thus, using purposive sampling, the researcher selected participants from the Greater Accra Region, Ashanti Region and the Northern Region. These regions were selected because they have the biggest cities such as Accra, Kumasi and Tamale with the highest crime rates and the most CCTV cameras installed (Agyemang, 2021). Thus, focusing on these areas made the researcher obtain data from individuals with first-hand experience and in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Moreover, analysing data from these regions gives a fair representation and can enhance the generalisation of the study's findings to Ghana. This is because the analysis data from the Greater Accra, Ashanti and Northern regions gives a fair representation of the Southern belts, Middle belts and Northern belts respectively.

3.5 Instrument and data collection procedure

The study used a semi-structured interview guide for the collection of data from participants (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). The researcher informed the participants of the purpose of the study and obtained the informed consent of the participants before the interview began. The researcher then proceeded to interview individuals who agreed to take part in the study. The study data was gathered through a face-to-face interview. With the personnel from the Ghana police service and the media, the interview was conducted at the premises of the various stations of the personnel. However, the interviews with the security experts were conducted at a comfortable location agreed upon by both the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher sought the consent of the participants to record the interview on an audio device for later referral. Each interview with the participants covered an average of 35 minutes.

3.6 Methods of data analysis

The thematic analysis was used to analyse the data for the study (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). The researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interview and developed additional transcripts from the notes taken from the interviews where audio recording was not approved. The researcher read through the transcribed interview multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data. The researcher also shared the transcripts with the participants for confirmation that their views had been appropriately represented. The researcher then proceeded to identify codes and generate emerging themes from the interview to answer the research questions. The findings of the study were presented in narrative-supported direct quotes identified from the interview.

4. Analysis and Findings

The study sought to achieve two main objectives; to examine the advantages of sharing security information without police clearance in Ghana and the disadvantages of sharing security information without police clearance in Ghana. The findings of the study are presented as follows.

4.1 Advantages of sharing security information without police clearance in Ghana

The study found that the advantages of sharing security information without police clearance in Ghana include rapid dissemination of information, enhanced community vigilance and augmentation of police efforts.

4.1.1 Rapid dissemination of information

The interview showed that the sharing of security information without the approval of the security enhances the dissemination of information. It was revealed that the sharing of such information creates awareness among individuals in the community about security issues and informs them to take the necessary actions to ensure safety. For example, one of the participants had this to say;

“Sharing security information without the approval of the Ghana police service ensures that the public becomes aware of the threats at a time and takes the necessary cautions”[Participant 3, Police Officer].

It was revealed that the quick sharing of information empowers the community members to take action to prevent the occurrence of criminal activities and help prompt the apprehension of suspects. The interview showed that the Ghana police service is sometimes informed about an impending danger or a criminal activity by the information shared by individuals in the community. This is what a participant;

“Sharing information without the police helps a times. For example, sometimes armed robbers may attack an individual or an organisation and such robbers may be on the run. However, the sharing of the videos or footage of the robbery incident enables the community to be alert and help in arresting these robbers before they can escape”[Participant 6, Police Officer].

Another participant also indicated;

“Sometimes the only way individuals in the community report crime scenes to the police is by sharing it first without the approval of the police. So, sometimes police service comes to know about this crime activities through unapproved videos shared by individuals, especially on social media” [Participant 7, Police Officer].

All things considered, the participants believed that quick distribution of security information improves public safety by making the community more vigilant and knowledgeable. They believe that by being proactive in providing information, they greatly aid in the neighbourhood’s overall security efforts.

4.1.2 Increased community vigilance

Increased community vigilance was one of the advantages that emerged from the interview. The participants narrated that sharing information on security issues fosters a sense of unity among the community members in combating crime in society. The participants were of the view that sharing such information indicates the concerns of the general public in ensuring the safety of their community. For example, a participant emphatically stated;

“The information shared by individuals reveals the level of concern they have in safeguarding the society. This is because the people share this information intending to seek rescue or help for individuals who are affected” [Participant 1, Media Personal].

Thus, the participants perceive that sharing information serves as a way through which community members create awareness among individuals to combat crime in society. Some of the participants reported that some residents quickly realised the CCTV footage of criminal activities captured within their locality. A participant said;

“There have been instances where some residents have released the criminal activities captured against their neighbours within the same residential area which were captured by their CCTV. This makes the residents alert on dealing with crime in their communities” [Participant 11, Community member].

The participants expressed that individuals become more equipped to address local security issues through the exchange of security information. Thus, the quick sharing of information empowers individuals and fosters solidarity among residents to mitigate crime in their neighbourhoods.

4.1.3 Augmentation of police efforts

The interview revealed that the sharing of information without clearance from the police augments the effort of the police. The participants expressed that the Ghana Police Service obtained security intelligence from the videos circulated by civilians, especially on social media. The majority of the participants indicated that the videos from security cameras and personal cameras provide evidence for further investigation by the police. For example, the participants said,

“The videos shared by the civilians help for further investigation. For example, there have been scenarios where individuals have shared videos of individuals brandishing weapons and threats on social media. These videos helped in easy identification of the suspects and aid in further investigation” [Participant 9, Police Officer].

Another participant also said;

“The videos posted by community members have helped lead us to deal with some issues that we may not have even heard about. This is because the individuals stay with suspected criminals in the same community, so their ability to share that information gives us first-hand notice for onward investigation” [Participant 2, Police Officer].

Furthermore, it was revealed that the sharing of security information helps the police in the optimisation of resources. The participants revealed that the sharing of information helps the Ghana police service to prioritise the resources to quickly deal with the most important and urgent security issues. This is what a participant had to say;

“The sharing of such security information helps us to respond more faster and effectively to the available investigative resources.” [Participants 10, Police Officer].

4.2 Disadvantages of sharing security information without police clearance in Ghana

The findings of the study also revealed that sharing security information without police clearance has some disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages observed from the interview include misinformation and panic, privacy violations, undermining law enforcement and risk of vigilantism.

4.2.1 Misinformation and panic

The study found that the sharing of security information by individuals without the approval of the police leads to misinformation and panic among community members. The spread of false information was a major concern expressed by the participants. It was revealed that individuals share false security information on social media and other digital platforms when such information is not verified by the police service. For example, one of the participants said;

“Some of the unverified security information shared by the individuals are false and misinforms the general public and the police service” [Participant 7, Police Officer].

The main concern expressed by the participants was that the spread of false security information triggers unnecessary panic and confusion among members of the community. This fear and confusion influence individuals to take misguided actions or responses. One of the participants stated emphatically,

“Some of this information creates panic among us. I remember one time they shared information on our WhatsApp platform that there has a patrol tanker had been involved in an accident at a location close to our neighbourhood. I was very afraid because I thought it might fire and may burn to our houses. So, we had to run away with our

children and a few of the belongings we thought were necessary to run with. Later we realised that the information was false” [Participant 12, Community Member].

The interview further showed that the sharing of false security information erodes the trust the public has in both community and law enforcement sources of security information. The persistent sharing of false security information reduces the trust the individuals have in the subsequent security data shared through the same platforms which limits the ability to mobilise the support of the community to deal with security issues. A participant had this say;

“Sometimes, community members do not trust security information shared by individuals because of the increased misinformation. I mean, individuals do not believe future security information shared by community members and the media because they may think such information is false due to their past experiences”[Participant 5, Media personal].

Another also said;

“The issue of misinformation is more critical because the public sometimes even end up thinking that the security information and alerts issued by the police are false due to their past experiences with unverified security information shared by private individuals” [Participant 2, Security expert].

4.2.2 Privacy violations

The participants also expressed concern about privacy violations with the sharing of security information without the clearance of the police. It was revealed that individuals’ right to privacy may be violated through the sharing of unapproved security information. The participants were of the view that individuals may be stigmatized or harmed if their private or delicate information is shared by individuals without the approval of the police. This is what a participant had to say;

“The sharing of security information without the approval of the police sometimes violates the rights of individuals. For example, there was a video circulation that portrayed one individual as a criminal. However, our investigations revealed that the individual is not a criminal or has no criminal records. However, the video had already circulated and people may forever stigmatise him as a criminal”[Participant 7, Police officer].

The participants discussed the legal consequences that come with the sharing of unauthorised security information that violates the privacy rights of individuals. The participants expressed that victims may seek legal redress and compensation for the damages caused by the circulation of false information without informed consent. A participant stated;

“There have been situations where sharing of security information without our approval has resulted in legal prosecutions. This is because the information contained in such videos is false and was shared without the consent of the police or the individuals in the video.” [Participant 15, Police Officer].

4.2.3 Undermining law enforcement

The interview further revealed that the sharing of security information by private individuals brings difficulties to the Ghana police service in carrying out further investigations. Thus, the

premature exposure of security information jeopardizes the efforts of ongoing police investigations. The indication is that private individuals may share important security intelligence with criminals which may make it difficult to further evidence or apprehend suspects. One participant narrated;

“It is sometimes difficult to apprehend suspects when security information is already shared by private individuals. It is significant for individuals to have trust in us and seek our clearance before they share any security information with the public so that they do not hinder our ongoing investigations”[Participant 5, Police Officer].

The participants expressed that strategic preparation and planning are essential for the police to successfully respond and prevent crime in the community. Therefore, the sharing of security information may affect the operations and plans of the police, especially when such information is false. The participants expressed that sharing incomplete or inconsistent information may limit the general efficiency of the police in protecting the safety of the police. One of the participants said;

“Effective law enforcement is contingent on careful preparation and execution. The sharing of security information without the approval of the police may unintentionally interfere with the plans and strategies of the police; thereby making it difficult for them to act quickly and forcefully”[Participant 4, Security expert].

4.2.4 Risk of vigilantism

The study also found that sharing security information without the clearance of the police sometimes leads to vigilantism in the community. The participants expressed that some sections of the community members are sometimes incited by videos shared by individuals to engage in uncontrolled behaviours. It was revealed that community members sometimes confront suspects contained in the video or seek to address security issues with the advice of the police. One of the participants said;

“There was one instance where someone shared a video describing one man as a criminal and associated with robbery. Later, some community members saw a man and thought he was the one described in the said video. Some group of community members beat this man before the police arrived on the scene. Later we realised the man was not the one described in the video. He only resembled him”[Participant 8, Police Officer].

Another also stated;

“We have seen instances when the youth in some communities have engaged by serious and unnecessary conflict due to security information circulated without police clearance”[Security expert].

Thus, the sharing of unapproved security information by individuals incites community members to engage in vigilantism in an attempt to defend themselves or their interests. This further escalates the insecurity in the community and may create a thriving condition for criminals to breed.

Table 3: Pros and Cons of Sharing Security Information Without Police Clearance

Advantages	Disadvantages
Rapid dissemination of information	Misinformation and panic
Enhanced community vigilance	Privacy violations
Augmentation of police efforts	Undermining law enforcement
Empowers community proactive engagement	Risk of vigilantism
Immediate public awareness of threats	Legal consequences of unauthorised sharing

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5. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study have revealed that the sharing of security information without the clearance of the police has both advantages and disadvantages. It is revealed that sharing security information may ensure rapid dissemination of information, enhanced community vigilance and augmentation of police efforts. The findings of this study affirm that earlier researchers such as (Suton et al., 2008; Lindsay, 2011; Gill et al., 2014) have all found some importance in sharing or disseminating information quickly within the community. For example, Gill et al. (2014) indicated that the involvement of individuals in community policing improves the dissemination of security information among the community and between the community members and the police. Ratcliffe et al. (2009) also observed the benefits of privately owned CCTV cameras in capturing and disseminating information about crime activities to aid the police in investigations in the USA. Thus, it is noteworthy that the sharing of security information by private individuals may have its risks and challenges, but it has some advantages that cannot be overlooked.

5.1 Advantages of Unregulated Information Sharing

One of the major advantages observed in this study is the rapid dissemination of information. Orlansky (2019) highlighted the importance of obtaining a police clearance before the dissemination of any security information. However, the majority of the individuals in Ghana are not aware of the procedures involved in obtaining clearance from the police before sharing security information. The sharing of security information by individuals implies that the members of the community do not have to go through the long procedures and bureaucratic procedures that are involved before clearance. In other words, individuals bypass the usually time-consuming procedures involved in obtaining the approval or clearance of the police to share security information. Security information is an important element that can help individuals and the police in making decisions to deal with crime and enhance public safety. Thus, the quick dissemination of security information can enable the members of the community to plan and make decisions to mitigate impending threats and limit criminal activities in the community.

One major advantage of informed community members is the enhancement of community vigilance. The quick dissemination of security information creates awareness among the community members of the dangers and security threats. The community can join forces together to work towards the safety and security of their neighbourhood. For example, individuals in the community can come together to help arrest a criminal if the information about the criminal is shared with the public. As noted by Arisukwu et al. (2020) the criminals stay in the community with the members, so the closed entities who can identify these criminals are the people. It could

be indicated that the creation of awareness among the people on security issues empowers the local people to take proactive measures in promoting safety and the ensuing security of the community. The community also augment the efforts of the police. The police is the formal institution recognised by the constitution to promote the security and safety of individuals and property in the community. However, sharing security information can empower the local people to aid the police in preventing crime in the community. The community can serve as the ear and the eye of the police in places where there is no police station or where there is a limited number of personnel. The sharing of such security information serves as a means through which the community members report the happenings of criminal activities in the communities to the police. Thus, such activities may not have been noticed by the police. Moreover, the sharing of security information enables the police to channel the available resources towards the prevention of crime in a more efficient manner. In sum, sharing security information without police clearance though may have its consequences, but some of the advantages it provides cannot be overlooked.

5.2 Disadvantages of Unregulated Information Sharing

Notwithstanding the advantages of sharing security information without the clearance of the police, the disadvantages are enormous. The findings of this study revealed some of the disadvantages such as misinformation and panic, privacy violations, undermining law enforcement and risk of vigilantism. Misinformation and panic emerged as one of the most critical issues associated with the sharing of security information without the approval of the police. The majority of the individuals in the communities treat emergency issues as threats to their lives. This is particularly because many of the individuals do not have the requisite knowledge on how to deal with security issues and so they are rendered helpless when they are made aware of emerging security threats without appropriate caution. Misinformation through unauthorised videos creates panic and fear among people. Jordan et al. (2020), noted that the creation of panic and fear may influence the health condition of individuals. According to Jordan et al. (2020), there is a reduction in blood flow to the brain during moments of terror and panic. Consequently, fear distorts our thinking and makes it less logical. Our bodies cannot stay in this state for very long since running away or fighting requires a significant amount of energy. The panic and bodily symptoms subside rapidly after the threat has passed. These implications underscore the need to verify security information before dissemination.

The study also revealed privacy violations as a significant consequence of sharing security information without the approval of the police. The sharing of security information without the approval of the police may result in the sharing of private or personal details of individuals involved or entities who are suspected to be criminals. Nissenbaum (2020) observed that these incidents can lead to the violations of individual privacy and expose them to several risks such as stigmatisation, identity theft and possible physical harassment. It is noteworthy that the spreading of security information may reveal the identities of suspects or witnesses. This exposure may retard the safety of especially witnesses who may suffer possible retaliation from suspects. Also, individuals who are wrongly accused or suspected of the criminals in a circulated security information face social stigmatisation from the individuals in the community. According

to Garcia-Lorenzo et al. (2022), stigmatisation based on security reasons can lead to the loss of jobs of individuals involved. Moreover, the violation of privacy may erode the existing trust and collaboration between community members and the police service (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2022). For example, individuals may be unwilling to share security details with the police service for fear that their identity may not be protected. The unwillingness on the part of community members to share information with the police can limit proper investigations and impede the efficiency of law enforcement in the community.

5.3 Impact on Legal and Privacy Concerns

Furthermore, as noted by Solove and Schwartz (2020) the violation of individual privacy may lead to legal implications. The 1992 constitution of Ghana recognises the right to privacy of individuals. Hence, dissemination of information that breaches the privacy of individuals without the appropriate authorisation may lead to legal actions against entities involved which may further complicate the safety and security of the community.

Moreover, the sharing of security information without police clearance raises significant privacy concerns under Ghanaian law, specifically the Data Protection Act, 2012 (Act 843). This Act mandates the protection of individual privacy by regulating the processing of personal data, emphasizing lawful, fair, and transparent processing without infringing on privacy rights.

Unauthorised sharing of security information can lead to the public dissemination of personal information without consent, which is in direct violation of the principles set out in Sections 17 to 19 of Act 843, which demand consent and justification for data processing, as well as minimality in data collection. Moreover, unauthorised information sharing often bypasses the stringent security measures required under Section 28, leaving personal data vulnerable to unauthorised access and breaches.

Additionally, the Electronic Transactions Act, 2008 (Act 772) provides a legal framework for electronic transactions and data handling, which includes provisions on data integrity and the admissibility of electronic records. Sections 7 and 8 of the Act address the admissibility and retention of electronic records, ensuring that electronic data, including potentially sensitive security information, is handled with appropriate security measures to prevent unauthorised access or alterations.

The analysis further revealed that the dissemination of information without the approval of the police can undermine law enforcement and lead to vigilantism. As indicated earlier in the discussion, sharing information without the clearance of the police may result in misinformation. The spread of misinformation on security issues in the public may erode the trust the public has in the release of security information. Thus, the public may not trust subsequent security alerts communicated by the police due to their experience with untrue alerts issued by private individuals. In essence, the community members may not treat security information from the police with the urgency it needs to help curb criminal activities in the community. Thus, misinformation may undermine the collaboration between the police and the community in dealing with the crime. Furthermore, as argued by Li et al. (2021) the spread of security

information may also inform criminals of the appropriate decisions to take to commit their activities. As much as the spread of security information by private individuals gives intelligence to the police, criminals are also informed based on the evidence available to the public. Thus, it may be difficult for the police to apprehend suspects involved in criminal activities since both parties may have access to the same security intelligence. This underscores the need for the police to vet security information before they are disseminated to the public.

Also, vigilantism is one of the risks associated with sharing security information without the approval of the police. Robin (2022) defined vigilantism as the act of preventing, looking into, and punishing alleged crimes and offences without following the law. The sharing of security information without the approval of the police may incite members of the community to engage in vigilantism, practice public safety, or pursue retributive justice without being asked. For example, there have been instances where individuals have shared videos describing others as criminals or associated with robbery. This incited some members of the community to bully the suspects without the knowledge of the police. Thus, while these activities infringe on the human rights of the victims, they also endanger the peace and security of the community. The findings and discussions of this study reveal that sharing security information without the approval of the police has both positive and negative implications; it is incumbent on the appropriate authorities and stakeholders to streamline activities to effectively harness the collaboration between the police and the community for effective information sharing and improved security and safety.

6. Conclusion

The study examined the impact of disseminating security information without approval from the police on public safety and community dynamics. It has been observed that the practice of sharing security information without the approval of the police has some benefits such as the creation of awareness among community members, enhanced community vigilance and augmentation of the police effort by community members. The practice also has some disadvantages such as misinformation and panic among individuals, risk of vigilantism and undermining of law enforcement operations by the police. The finding shows that community members can play an important role in improving the safety and security of the neighbourhood by harnessing their practice of rapid information sharing and the collection role in providing security. However, it is significant to address the dangers associated with the sharing of security information without the clearance of the police.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. In the first place, the study recommends the creation of clear guidelines for the sharing of security information which emphasises obtaining verification from the police and protection of privacy. The police can conduct regular training and education programmes to educate and create awareness among community members on the best practices involved in reporting or sharing security information with the public. The education may also focus on the risks and punishments associated with the sharing of misinformation about security issues and the breach of individuals' privacy. These

training and awareness programmes can foster strong collaboration between the police and the community to improve safety and security. Also, the police service may create secure and easy-to-use digital platforms that may be used to report all security information that may be obtained by private individuals. This may ensure that the police get access to security information and scrutinise them before they appear in the public domain. It is further recommended, that existing legal frameworks be scrutinized and strengthened where necessary, in order to deter irresponsible behaviour and unguarded information sharing. This includes amending the Data Protection Act to introduce harsher penalties for breaches involving unauthorised information sharing and enhancing the enforcement mechanisms to ensure better compliance. Similarly, the Electronic Transactions Act could be updated to tighten the security requirements for electronic data processing and to expand its scope to cover all forms of digital data handling, not just those intended for electronic transactions

6.2 Areas for Future Research

Further research is recommended to expand the scope of this study into a comparative analysis across different regions within Ghana, which may have varying levels of technological integration and different policing challenges. Additionally, employing quantitative methods could provide a broader statistical basis to understand the prevalence and impact of unauthorised information sharing.

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