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**INTERACT**

***Investigating New Types of Engagement, Response and Contact  
Technologies in Policing***

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**Prof Liz Aston** & Dr Estelle Clayton (Edinburgh Napier University),

Dr Helen Wells & Dr Will Andrews (Keele),

Prof Ben Bradford & Dr Arabella Kyprianides (UCL)

Prof Megan O'Neill (Dundee) & Dr Rob Skinner (Proximity Interpreting)

<https://www.sipr.ac.uk/interact/>

@INTERACTpolice 

# about SIPR

*"SIPR's mission is to support internationally excellent, multi-disciplinary policing research to enable evidence informed policy & practice."*

## theme 1:

Policing and health, safety and well-being



## theme 2:

Technology and digital policing



## theme 3:

Policing systems capability and resilience



## OUR AIMS

### 1. RESEARCH



Facilitating internationally excellent, independent research of relevance to policing.

### 2. KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE



Engaging in a range of knowledge exchange activities to strengthen the evidence base on which policy and practice are improved & developed nationally and internationally.

### 3. LEARNING AND INNOVATION



Nurturing a culture of learning & innovation.

### 4. PARTNERSHIPS



Promoting the development of national & international partnerships with researcher, practitioner and policing communities.



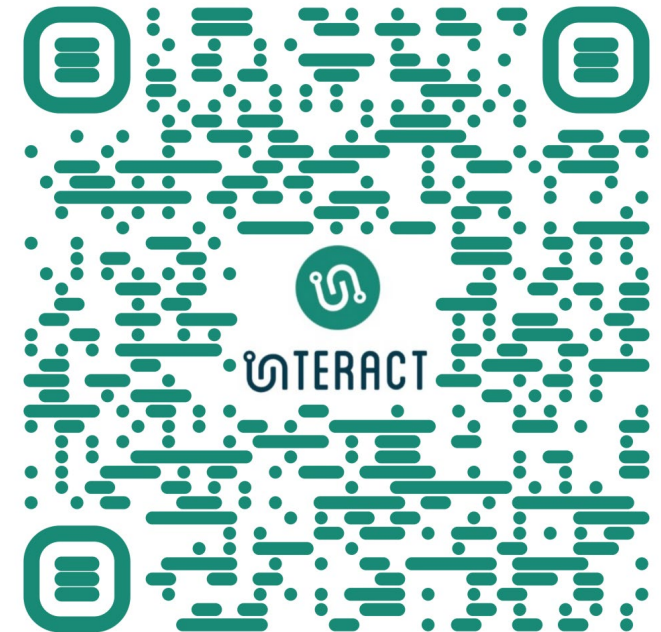
- Background: strategic context, literature & theory
- Research Questions & methods
- Highlight key findings from across the project
- Spotlight on force level strategic interviews & key themes: demand, accessibility, visibility, trust, confidence and legitimacy
- Implications and recommendations



## Background: Strategic Context



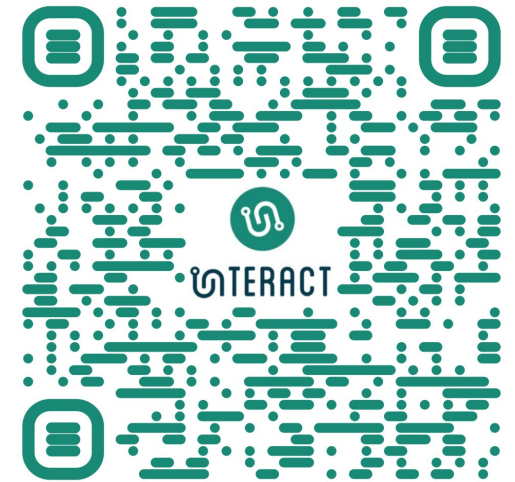
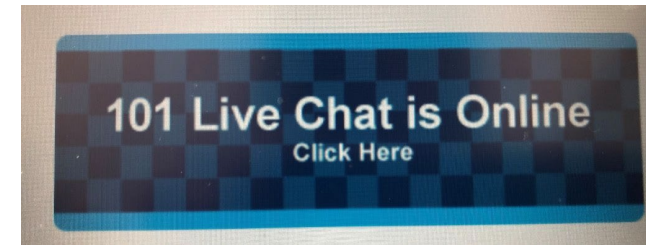
- “Public expectations of how they interact with policing are changing. The **public now expect** us to have a significant **online presence**, with a similar level of **functionality** and **ease of use** to **other services** they access on a daily basis” (*NPCC, n.d.*)
- “In a world where technology and population change at pace, we must adapt our approaches and **transform digitally** to continue to **meet public needs**.” (Police Scotland Public Contact and Engagement Strategy, 2020).
- '**Channel shift**' ([Wells et al., 2022](#)): diversion of police public contact to online & technologically mediated modes of interaction
- In parallel police agenda re. public confidence, legitimacy, PJ





## Background: Literature

- PJT research has focussed on a dyadic & human encounter
- Expansion of technologically mediated contact on police legitimacy underexplored (Aston et al. 2022, Wells et al. 2022)
- Abstract police (Terpstra et al. 2019), visibility & accessibility
- Henry (2021) value of Interaction Ritual Theory, cites Collins (mediated rituals less effective than physical in generating emotional energy & solidarity)
- Importance of in-person community engagement to building confidence in sharing information online (Aston et al. 2021)
- European research finds that digitally mediated interactions have a complex bearing on police legitimacy (EJPS Special Issue, 2024)





## Background: Procedural Justice Theory

- PJT forefronts the *process*, not the outcome, of a police-citizen interaction as central to leveraging police legitimacy, public trust and confidence, and compliance with the law (Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler, 2003; Bradford, 2017).
- PJT has significant empirical support and appears to be incorporated into much current UK police policy and practice (Wells et al. 2022)
- Key elements of this process include consistency, neutrality, transparency, respect, and voice (the opportunity and ability to communicate and *feel* listened to).
- Need to future proof PJT (Wells et al. 2022), 'human' antecedents & technologically mediated encounters –digital contact is transforming relationships



# Research Questions

- How do the **police and public experience and perceive** technologically mediated contact across the UK in a **diverse range of contexts**?
- What is the **potential impact** of different types of technologically mediated contact on **police legitimacy for various publics**?
- What does '**visible**' and '**accessible**' policing mean in the digital age, to both the police and various publics?
- What is the role of technologically mediated contact in building police legitimacy, and **how do police organisations best work towards this end**?
- **How can theories of legitimacy and procedural justice be developed** such that they are applicable in times of rapid technological development?



## Methods -phase 2

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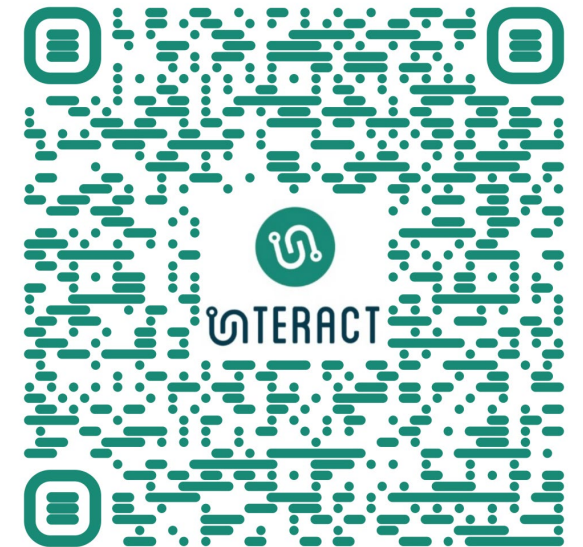
### Stakeholder interviews (n=52)

- UK strategic (n=7 key informant interviews, purposive sampling); Wells et al. (2024) EJPS
- Force strategic & operational (n=45)

### Observations

- Non-emergency teams
- Resolution Centres
- Digital 101 handlers
- Workshops

Jan 22 – Sept 22





## Methods -phase 3

### Online panel survey experiments

- Experiment comparing live chat with human and AI operators (Kryprianides et al. submission 2024)
- Second experiment exploring PJ (politeness & respect) in human versus AI live chat
- *Further experiments/surveys in progress*

### Public contact observations

Rural and urban site observation complete

- Case studies 1 & 2 (250 hours)
- Case study 3 & 4 (249 hours)

**Public focus groups** in case study areas (4 complete, n=25, *more planned*), interviews

### Communities of interest

#### Deaf community

- BSL Focus Groups (2, n=10)
- Interviews (n=2)

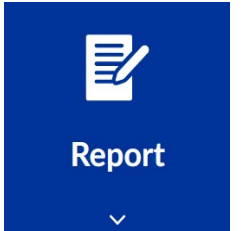
#### Autistic community

Focus groups /Interviews (n=9 so far)

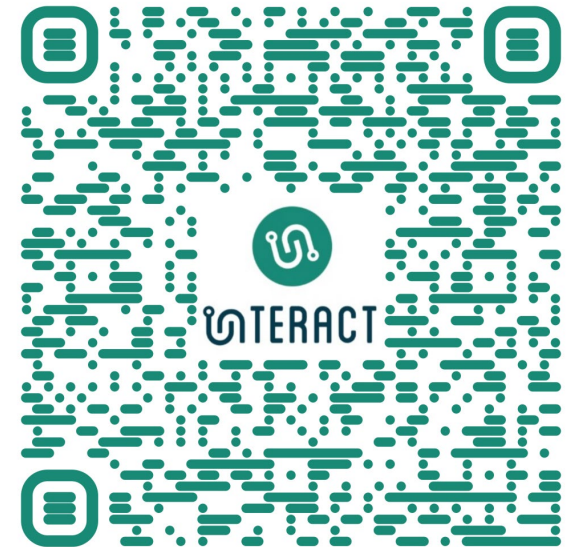
Oct 22 – May 24



# Digital reporting and contact: self-service

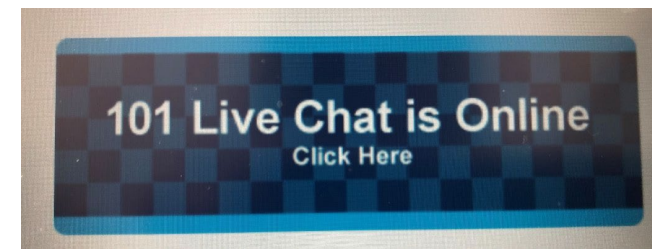


- ④ End-user engagement is needed to design the right service(s)
- ④ Demand /efficiency as a key driver (Wells et al., 2024) 'Free text is essentially the enemy of what we're trying to achieve': the framing of a national vision for delivering digital police contact.
- ④ Services designed and determined by the police
  - ④ Shift of responsibility onto public to know what they need—often get it wrong? Voice?
  - ④ Assumption self-service is what public want
- Digital reporting/contact as start of the journey not self-contained





# Online panel survey experiments



1) Crime reporting to police via live chat (human Vs AI chat-bot operators)

- Public have preference for human operator over chatbot
- More positive when crime less serious and when outcome proactive (police attendance) than passive (simple recording)
- Importance of Procedural Justice & communication clarity

2) PJ people are more attuned to Procedural Justice (politeness & respect) in interactions with humans than machines





# Mobile Devices: attentiveness & eye contact

Technology is a significant element of in-person encounters for both parties, an expression of police power but public often have devices as well

## 🕒 Dividing attention

...It can be difficult, if you have an MoP who you need to keep an eye on, but you need to check their details on the MDT. In this case P2 notes that they prefer to ask for the details over the radio, so that they can **keep their attention on them.** (Force 3).

## 🕒 Device use can feel impersonal

being at the scene with an MoP who is in distress and having to keep looking down at your screen to type things in, can feel uncomfortable and have to keep saying “I’m not on Facebook”...sometimes **it doesn’t feel right because of the need to break eye contact to use the device** (Force 3)





## BWV as protection & visual record

[The officer] says the BWV has helped to protect the officers [against complaints] because it has shown what really played out in that instance [its] useful to the police as a **self-protection mechanism** (Force 1).

P2 explains that BWV [is] an “**extra pair of eyes**” – noting that ‘you can’t always see everything’. (Force 3).

...conversation turns to BWV and both officers explain that they like it because its helps to **back them up if complaints are received**...Both also mention that judges **prefer to see BWV footage in court** now, rather than refer to witness statements alone. (Force 2)





# Drones: (In)Visibility

- Need to ensure both physical visibility to the public, as in overt surveillance guidance, but also to inform the public about how this technology is used in policing.

“I think a lot of that [fear of surveillance] comes back to our **engagement with the public** in the first place...it's that kind of **awareness** of that, things like the 'Sky Coppers' does a great job in saying actually 'what we do is catch the bad guys, you know, we aren't there sitting watching your back door'" (Police Advisor).

- (In) Visibility: Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLoS) trials (Drones-as First Responders, payload carrying drones) but not currently permitted





# Communities of Interest: BSL using Deaf Community



- Technologically-mediated contact that requires written English is either inaccessible to BSL users. Instead they want language-concordant services from the first-point of contact and throughout the process:

*“P5: **not many deaf people understand English**, so how are they supposed to use the service?”*

*P2: if I want to make a complaint it's all like: you have to do it by the telephone or by e-mail, that's **inaccessible** to me.*

*P5: I think they've still got a lot of learning to do. We all **prefer to communicate in BSL**. I think all of them [the police], I think they need to become better for all deaf people”*

(Deaf Community Focus Group).



# Trust is a pre-condition of technology adoption

- Technology is not viewed as a way to *build* trust, but rather, *trust in policing (and other public services)* is a precondition of technology adoption:

“So, I think the reality is the technology is there and coming. So, in a way I don't think it's either or, I think it's **how do you build that trust with the people in order to remove those barriers to them accessing** whatever it is they're going to access?... and so, I think it's...actually if they really want it to solve those problems then they still need to **put that extra work into engaging and building that trust** with those with those people”. (Participant 1, Autistic Community Interviews)





# PUBLIC FOCUS GROUPS



- Digital patrols not a sufficient -want in-person community policing
- Digital communications can lack clarity –want more immediate acknowledgment/response
- Too many contact options may create confusion regarding how to contact police
- Statements transformed into police language in MDT and feel alien to reporter  
*“honestly, when I read that thing out, it wasn’t even anything like what I said to her”* (focus group participant force 1)
- Participants would like BWV to be announced, explained & to have a say in whether the camera is turned on or off
- Reliance on digital evidence for investigation -passing responsibility onto citizen



## DEMAND (rather than need)



- Talk about demand rather than public *need* (expectations differ regarding appropriate ask)
- Forces think technology will help (efficiency etc.)
- It suits a police *need* to believe tech is the answer
- Personal anecdote being used as evidence
- Narrative of 'Channel Choice' but investment is in digital reporting



## Demand, access & triage



- But technology increasing demand may be embraced due to inclusion narrative
- Some demand cannot be met so all demand is triaged so resources are allocated efficiently
- Public are increasingly expected to triage & assess what response is appropriate
- Self-service –satisfaction?
- But don't want to make it too easy –public may get it wrong (perceived as inappropriate demand)



# ACCESSIBILITY



- Both autistic and deaf participants key concerns re online forms –but multiple modes of contact increase choice
- Technology as a symbol –communicates value & understanding
- Social media, accessibility and age
- Some acknowledgement of disabilities and access needs, use of plain English, other languages
- Diversity, minoritised groups, balance with in-person
- But accessibility can be shaped by requirements /architecture of the application



## VISIBILITY

- Untapped potential of social media pics/updates to show what commanders/officers have been doing or misplaced assumptions of benefits of visibility via SM?
- Communities notice the decrease in visibility/ physical presence of community policing and don't see digital community policing as sufficient
- Visibility of drones important (to be overt)





# TRUST, CONFIDENCE, LEGITIMACY



- Legitimacy mentioned occasionally alongside main driver of efficiency
- Trust, confidence & community engagement (not necessarily connected to digital shifts in policing)
- Impact of use of tech on public confidence and how to build trust in digital worlds = knowledge gap
- Informing the public (e.g. drones) important to trust & confidence
- Tech can provide solutions e.g. automatic updates
- VOICE: PJ less effective when communication is not direct. Socio-cultural needs of communication
- Importance of in-person contact to trust –communicate in ways that indicate awareness & understanding of neurodivergence



# IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



- View contact as a journey

- Importance of public consultation & engagement, EDI & co-design, channel choice



- Tech not silver bullet to remedy inequalities & accessibility: language concordat services, deaf officers

- Importance of human & PJ in online digital reporting



- Transparency & visibility –announce BWV, inform public re drones

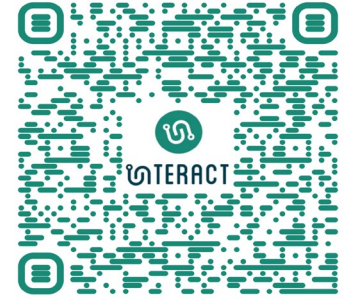
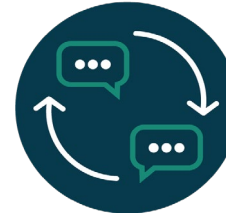
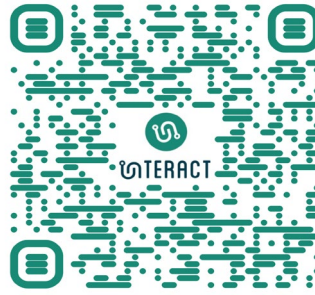
- Responsibilisation re digital evidence – inequalities



- In-person and two-way engagement



# INTERACT sources



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[l.aston@napier.ac.uk](mailto:l.aston@napier.ac.uk)

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