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Police Officers' Perceptions of Body-worn Camera Technology

Jonah E. Obasi, PhD

Problem

There is a concern that police officers will not use body-worn cameras, or comply with requirements if implementation is too difficult or seen negatively (Godoe & Johansen, 2012).

It is unknown if ease of use and usefulness influence the actual use of the cameras and additional research has been indicated (Daly, 2015; Fouche, 2014).

Purpose

The purposes of this study were to understand how law enforcement officers in a large size county sheriff's office in the Southern United States perceive, accept, and use body-worn camera technology and further, to identify possible additional factors that are involved in the acceptance.

Significance

The study may provide insight into how the body-worn cameras are used as a component of a southern county sheriffs' office regular uniform.

The outcomes from the study could be used to bridge a gap in literature concerning officers perceptions of the body-worn camera technology.

Knowledge gained from the results of this study may have direct implications for policymakers.

New insights gained may help law enforcement leadership with improving relationships between officers and the communities they serve.

Social Change Implications

The broader social objective is to provide safer communities for everyone. The potential of educating law enforcement leadership, giving them the newly acquired knowledge to craft policies for positive social change, by developing better training for the officers, especially the more experience officers on the importance of the body-worn cameras.

Better training for officers, subsequent acceptance, and proper use of body-worn cameras could be a deterrent against aggressive community policing.

Theory or Framework

- **The technology acceptance model (TAM)** is used by researchers to explain the relationship between a new technology user and internal psychological variables such as attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions (Davis, 1989).

Relevant Scholarship

Two obstacles against police acceptance of body-worn cameras include the **concern for individual privacy**, and **lack of adequate knowledge about the new technology** (Daly, 2015; Fouche, 2014, White, 2014).

Implementation of the camera could result in identifying and correcting internal agency problems, improving transparency, and evidence documentation for investigations and prosecutions (Miller & Toliver, 2014; Stanley, 2013).

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the statistical relationship among police officers' demographics (gender and years of service), their overall acceptance of body-worn cameras (ease of use and usefulness), and their attitudes toward using body-worn cameras?

RQ2: To what extent do police officers' demographics (gender and years of service) predict police officers' frequency of use of the body-worn cameras as a component of their regular uniform?

RQ3: To what extent do police officers' attitudes toward using body-worn cameras predict their frequency of use of the body-worn cameras as a component of their regular uniform?

RQ4: To what extent does police officers' acceptance of body-worn cameras as measured by their reported ease of use predict their frequency of use of the body-worn cameras as a component of their regular uniform?

RQ5: To what extent does police officers' acceptance of body-worn cameras as measured by their reported usefulness predict their reported frequency of use of the body-worn cameras as a component of their regular uniform?

Participants

The convenience sample size of 88 employees of a sheriff's office in the South represented the target population.

Procedures

I selected a cross-sectional quantitative method for this study.

- Correlations
- Hierarchical multiple regression

Study Variables

- Independent Variables: Officers' perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitudes, gender, and years of service.
- Dependent Variable: Frequency of use.

Data Collection/Instrumentation

- Convenience sampling.
- Paper Questionnaire
- TAM instrument
- Distributed at Training center.

Analysis

Parson product moment relations was used to determine the relationship among the independent variables.

A **hierarchical multiple regression** analysis was conducted to evaluate which independent variables predicted frequency of use of the body-worn camera..

Findings

The officers' perceptions of the ease of use of body-worn cameras were **moderately** and **positively** correlated with their perceptions of the cameras' usefulness and their attitudes toward the camera.

The relationship between usefulness and years of service was **negative**.

Officers' **attitude** toward using body-worn cameras was a predictor of their reported frequency of use of the body-worn cameras as a component of their regular uniform.

Interpretation

Some findings from the investigation into five independent variables aligned with previous research with TAM.

The relationship between usefulness and years of service was negative, indicating that as officers' length of service increased, their perceptions of body-worn cameras decreased.

Limitations

It was impossible to determine if the participants in the data collection procedure will respond promptly.

It is possible that some of the participants would not have experience with the body-worn cameras.

Participant pool was limited to convenience sample of sworn officers only.

Recommendations

Law enforcement administrations should focus on changing the attitudes of officers with more experience who are older, set in their ways, and not technically savvy.

Original TAM instrument should be modified to suit a specific electronic device in question other than its original focus, electronic mail.

Different methodology that will allow for generalization should be attempted in future studies.

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