

Factors Contributing to Volunteer Smartphone Patrol App Adoption in Community Policing

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ABSTRACT

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Social media platforms are becoming increasingly vital for businesses and non-profits alike. These advantages should translate well for police departments' use of social media. Even though many police departments have widely used social media in criminal investigations, many still could not adopt it effectively as it does not provide an exclusive platform for engagement and interaction between the citizens and the police. Meanwhile, the advancement of technology, particularly in digital media, has improved relations between police and citizens by incorporating people into policing activities through Community Policing (CP) mobile applications. Malaysia was not left behind in adopting the CP mobile application as it has its own Volunteer Smartphone Patrol (VSP) application supporting community policing activities, especially crime prevention. The engagement and interaction between citizens and police through VSP for crime prevention has assisted the transition from traditional policing to CP more effectively. This study aims to discover the factors contributing to the VSP app adoption by citizens in community policing. Using a case study design, salient discoveries were obtained through in-depth interviews with 9 VSP users in Klang Valley. The NVivo 12.0 software was used in the process of open, axial and selective coding. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This study found that the factors contributing to the VSP app adoption by citizens in community policing are practicality, responsiveness, surveillance, and security.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 outlined a key objective of reducing crime by 5% annually while focusing on increasing public perception of safety from 39% in 2014 to 60% in 2020. In the Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021-2025, it was revealed that based on the performance of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, five of ten targets were achieved; among them were index crime cases, which was reduced to 194 cases instead of the initial target set at 342 cases per 100,000 population and perception of being safe with 60.6% instead of the initial target set at 60% (Economic Planning Unit of Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2021). The Twelfth Malaysia Plan also highlighted that crime prevention measures would be stepped up by implementing various programmes involving RMP, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and the citizens. Collaboration with these parties will boost community policing (Economic Planning Unit of Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2021). The goal of reducing and preventing crime should be pursued consistently by all parties to ensure Malaysia's safety, as crime can occur at any time and in any location.

The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) has a total of 137,574 officers and staff, which explains the breadth of their duties and responsibilities, from the General Tasks, which perform traditional police functions standing side by side with the civilians, to the General Operations Force performing 'non-regulatory' functions such as preventing illegal immigrants from entering and combating terrorism (Urus Setia KPN Komunikasi Korporat, Ibu Pejabat Polis Diraja Malaysia Bukit Aman, 2022). Preventing crime is not only the responsibility of the RMP and other law enforcement agencies in Malaysia but everyone. It is quite impossible to rely solely on the RMP when we know that citizens outnumber law enforcers. Thus, the RMP is aided in satisfying the public's trust and obligation by support organisations comprised of Supplementary Police, Police Volunteers, Auxiliary Police, Police Cadets, and civil servants, which have a substantial impact on the country's security and well-being. Hence, there is no exception for the citizens not to get involved with crime prevention.

The new community policing initiative by RMP, Volunteer Smartphone Patrol (VSP), was first introduced on 19 May 2016 during the National Blue Ocean Strategy Conference (NBOS) in Putrajaya. RMP then launched VSP mobile application in July 2018 under the Department of Crime Prevention and Community Security or Jabatan Pencegahan Jenayah dan Keselamatan Komuniti (JPJKK), which aimed at fostering strategic collaboration with community participation and interaction in the fight against crime (Harun et al., 2018). VSP is a continuation and development of RMP's earlier community policing programme, *Rakan Cop*, but with more sophisticated technology capabilities. With the establishment of VSP in Malaysia, the community is no longer required to visit a police station, phone the RMP hotline at 999, or even send an SMS to report a crime, as was previously the case with *Rakan Cop*. Instead, they can easily report crimes and channel information to the police with various advanced functions such as sharing photos, videos and GPS coordinates of the crime scene straightaway from their mobile phones.

Although the VSP programme has expanded the community's bilateral communication with the RMP, some people remain unwilling to testify in a police case. Meanwhile, many civilians are averse to disclosing information to authorities, fearful of being identified or targeted by criminals. According to King (2016), numerous citizens desired anonymity out of fear of being identified with or risking reprisal when using the Community on Patrol app (COP) developed by the Miami-Dade Police Department (King, 2016). Nevertheless, there is evidence that information and communication technologies (ICTs) help to improve e-policing and digital civic engagement with much Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) research focusing on online

community usage behaviour, social media e-policing systems, and the development of new technologies that facilitate community engagement in policing (Park et al., 2017). As indicated in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021-2025, the community participation and volunteerism programmes provided citizens with opportunities to safeguard the nation and uplift the spirit of togetherness in combatting crimes. In 2020, a total of 837,728 volunteers registered under the Volunteer Smartphone Patrol (VSP) programme to assist in the crime prevention (Economic Planning Unit of Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2021). Thus, this study aims to discover the factors contributing to the VSP app adoption by citizens in community policing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Engagement is of essential significance in human-machine interaction, shaping the design and implementation of interfaces and allowing more complex, user-adaptive interfaces (Oertel et al., 2020). This is especially true when the interface is a virtual or robotic agent communicating with human users. On the other hand, Doherty and Doherty (2019) indicated that engagement has also been positioned as a characteristic of interaction rather than a property of states or mediators. Meanwhile, an exchange can refer to the activities and relationships between states, agents, and objects at certain points in time or across a period which is frequently used as a direct proxy for engagement in the engagement literature, connecting engagement to a scale of use with interaction as the unit of measurement (Doherty & Doherty, 2019). This suggests that engagement and interaction are always contextualised in the same way they represent and are related.

On the concept of engagement and interaction via mobile apps, Pantano and Priporas (2016) indicated that many branded mobile apps have effectively engaged customers by increasing virtual connectivity and boosting context-dependent features of advanced mobile technologies. Additionally, Kim and Baek (2018) argued that from the mobile app engagement, the quality of motivational experiences customers have while connecting with a mobile app and the extent to which those experiences meet their functional, experiential, and social expectations can be observed. Since both studies focused solely on engagement and not interact with the mobile apps, distinguishing the line between these two in mobile application adoption is also as challenging as the other contexts because it has always been contextualised in the same way.

Previous empirical studies demonstrate that crime prevention requires a comprehensive system and consistent momentum to effectively control and prevent crime (Harun et al., 2018). Technological advancements, particularly in digital media, have enhanced interactions between police and people by involving them in policing activities, a practice known as Community Policing (CP). However, the study only discussed the function of the VSP app as an information distributor among people and lacked the identification of the contributing factors behind their adoption. Thus, this present study needs to discover the factors contributing to people adopting this app in community policing.

Despite widespread adoption and investigation of the concept of CP, there are barriers to transitioning from traditional policing to CP (Park et al., 2017). However, it is observed that police departments in several countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of community policing through mobile applications, including Australia's 'Neighborhood Watch,' Canada's 'Base Team Policing,' Japan's 'Koban' system, Indonesia's Community Development and Order System, and Singapore's 'Neighborhood Police Force' (Harun et al., 2018). In Malaysia, the RMP leadership has emphasised the need for 'Community-Oriented Policing' to achieve maximum safety sustainability through community participation (Urusetia KPN Komunikasi Koporat, Ibu Pejabat Polis Diraja Malaysia Bukit Aman, 2022). The community can assist RMP

in combating and preventing crime by participating in Community-Oriented Policing. This is where VSP mobile application eases the process just from the fingertips.

The community was previously introduced to the *Rakan Cop* community policing programme, which utilised the RMP hotline and SMS service (32728) for communicating with the RMP (Harun et al., 2018). However, it has been replaced with the VSP application since most of the community now own a mobile smartphone, helping the VSP application gain traction in the community due to the speedier dissemination of information and the ability of the RMP to act quickly. Such efforts can only be successful if the community's volunteerism is encouraging. However, as indicated in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan 2021-2025, volunteerism for safety and security is still low due to a lack of engagement and cooperation with relevant agencies (Economic Planning Unit of Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2021).

On the other hand, Yasah et al. (2021) argued that although reporting criminal activities via the VSP application is simple and cheap, it is discovered VSP that application membership in VSP is still insufficient and that some of its own VSP members do not utilise the VSP programme to prevent crime in their area. Regardless of dissatisfaction with this programme, the findings indicate that consumers still believe it is user-friendly and straightforward. According to the study, if the government emphasises resolving issues, it can persuade more people to become VSP users and members. As emphasised by Zhang et al. (2020), the pervasiveness of mobile devices opens up new avenues for police to interact with the community anywhere and at any time.

In the context of this study, as the engagement and interaction between citizens with RMP occurs during the process of community policing in the effort to prevent crime, the study needs to discover the factors contributing to the VSP app adoption by the citizens in community policing.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative methodology incorporating the interpretative paradigm to demonstrate how people in natural settings create meaning and understand daily occurrences in their world (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Anuar et al. (2022) reiterate that a qualitative technique is utilised to obtain the most significant data, provide a plausible interpretation, and draw the proper conclusions from the study. It is critical for this study to interpret informants' experiences from different aspects of their personal experiences as VSP users to draw conclusions. Creswell and Porth (2016) explained that the researcher's background influences the interpretation, and it is their responsibility as an instrument to evaluate how successfully the explication based on cultural, personal, and historical experiences is carried out.

3.1 The Case Study Approach

A case study is “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used*” (Yin, 1984, p.23). In layman's terms, it is an in-depth and extensive examination of the evolution of a single event, situation, or individual across time. Case studies frequently investigate and uncover complicated subjects such as societal concerns and crimes. As asserted by Hasa (2017), numerous researchers apply the case study approach to investigate socioeconomic issues such as prostitution, substance abuse, unemployment, and poverty.

In this paper, since the study aimed to elicit informants' perspectives on the factors contributing to the Volunteer Smartphone Patrol (VSP) app adoption in community policing, a case study approach was used to provide comprehensive data. According to Yin (2014), a case study research process is a "*linear but iterative process*" that includes practical and technical conversations about each of the six components of case study research: planning, designing, preparing, data gathering, analysing, and reporting. Hence, the researchers in this study adopted Yin's (2014) case study procedures and steps as follows:

- i) It begins with the identification and definition of the research problem;
- ii) The researchers then select cases;
- iii) Determines data gathering and analysis methodologies;
- iv) This is followed by field data collection;
- v) Evaluation and analysis;
- vi) The final stage in doing a case study is to write the research report.

This approach makes qualitative research extremely adaptable because the process is constantly growing and unfolding. Creswell (2013) stated that a research design is a comprehensive research process that begins with conceiving an issue and developing research questions and continues through data collecting, analysis, and interpretation. Since this study aimed to explore citizens' engagement and interaction of VSP app adoption in crime prevention through their perspectives on the VSP app, which is participant-centred and focused on their human lived experience, the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was utilised. IPA's goal is to show, teach, and understand themes by firmly anchoring findings in direct excerpts from participants (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, the researcher is the most important person in understanding what the participants are going through. It involves a two-step procedure in which the researcher seeks to interpret how the participants make sense of their experience (Pringle et al., 2011). To ensure the validity of the phenomenological data collection and analysis, the researchers employed a peer-checking approach and audit trail. As Alase (2016) emphasised, this is to aid in authenticating and validating the selected tools. To reduce participant bias, open-ended questions were phrased so that participants would not simply agree or disagree. During the interview, probing questions were also asked to obtain sincere responses. The researchers ensured that every question was answered accordingly by asking questions and probing in different ways. In addition, researchers must constantly do self-reminding to maintain neutrality to avoid influencing participants' responses. On the other hand, in addressing the researcher bias, a personal log was employed in this study to record actions or inaccessible conduct during interviews. This allows the researchers to reflect on the activity and serves as a monitoring tool to eliminate the risk of the researchers influencing the interpretation of the data.

3.1 Non-probability – Purposive Sampling

As Polit and Beck (2010) professed, the goal of most qualitative research is not to generalise but rather to provide a deep, contextualised understanding of some aspect of human experience through the in-depth study of specific examples. Thus, this study chose non-probability sampling as the sampling method. Furthermore, purposive sampling with criterion was applied to the study as it is the most appropriate sampling technique because it represents individuals

who have encountered the phenomena. As defined by Patton (2002) in Harsh (2011), criteria sampling entails revising and reading 'all examples that satisfy some predefined criterion of significance. Additionally, as Creswell (2007) explained, informants must have firsthand knowledge of the studied phenomena. Indeed, criterion sampling is the most appropriate sampling technique since it identifies individuals who have personally witnessed the phenomena. Thus, to accomplish the study's purpose, the researcher has defined the criteria below:

- i) Malaysian Citizens aged ranging from 18-60 (born between 1960 and 2002);
- ii) Residing in Klang Valley, regardless of their origin;
- iii) Must possess VSP app installed in mobile phone/gadget;
- iv) Registered and active VSP user;
- v) Regardless of marital status;
- vi) Regardless of race and gender;
- vii) Regardless of political ideology.

There are no definite numbers for the sample because it will be determined by the success of the interview process, the quality of the data obtained, the development of data analysis, and the availability of sufficient resources to support the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Creswell (2007) recommended between five and twenty-five informants, while Morse (1994) recommended at least six informants as a reference for establishing the sample size for qualitative research. Nonetheless, it is contingent upon the factors critical to the study's objectives. As Charmaz (2006) hypothesised, the smaller the study (modest claim), the sooner the data saturation occurs. Overall, nine informants' interviews were conducted among the VSP users and data were gathered for this study.

3.3 In-depth Interview and Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis

The researchers have used in-depth interviews to get information about behaviour, feelings, and how people see things. To ensure that the in-depth interview ran smoothly, the interview protocol developed from the research questions was outlined as a guide for the procedure. The researcher used six types of questions, as suggested by Patton (2002), to elicit responses from the informant: demographics questions, experience and behaviour questions, opinion and values questions feeling questions, knowledge questions, and sensory questions. The semi-structured interviews with the VSP users were conducted through one-to-one private interviews recorded using Google Meet and Zoom online to protect their identity and safety. According to Hamzah, Wan Zainodin, & Esa (2022), each interview was done in a relaxed yet systematic manner, eliciting meaningful information and experiences from each informant. All informants were asked to sign a consent form as an agreement to conduct the interview.

Meanwhile, Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) in this study employed a modified version of the StevickColaizzi-Keen method as outlined in Creswell (2007). This method, as described by Moustakas (1994) and modified by Creswell (2007), consists of the following six steps:

- i. Researcher relates their own experiences, in this example as a mentee, with the subject under study
- ii. Researcher compiles a list of noteworthy remarks on the mentoring experiences of the participants after reading the transcripts of their interviews
- iii. Researcher organises together noteworthy remarks into broader sections or themes
- iv. Researcher produces a "what" explanation utilising direct quotes from participant interviews regarding their mentoring experiences
- v. Researcher provides a "how" explanation of the environment and situation in which the participants were mentored
- vi. Researcher develops a composite description of the participants' mentoring experiences, including textual and structural descriptions

This study employed IPA because it is participant-centred and focuses on human lived experience. The researchers only have access to the participants' experiences through their reports, which are viewed through the researchers' experiential lens.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Theme 1: Practicality

The program's usability influences a user's propensity to try the VSP application (Yasah, 2021). The results indicated that individuals consider the VSP programme to be user-friendly and straightforward. Consequently, its practicality and user-friendliness will increase engagement and interaction between citizens and the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) in community policing. Meanwhile, the responses of VSP users from the current study have proven how VSP app adoption helps in the engagement and interaction between them and RMP in community policing:

"The involvement that I have noticed so far is just the involvement of aa ... like RMP aa ... like the information that we channel aa ... it is directly channelled to RMP meaning the latest information. Meaning the moment we get one information, for example, aa ... there is illegal racing ... example of illegal motor racing ... meaning it will be channelled directly. Meaning there is relation that we convey directly through VSP. If we want to go through this ... If you want to make a call whatsoever ... it's a little late. By using VSP, it's just easy take a picture, send it, straightaway type it aa ... that information." (Informant 9 Line 117 – 123)

"For me, this VSP, the first reason is because it is simple because this thing is already in the apps. So, we don't need to call, don't need any cost and we can do this thing at any time and what I like the most aa ... about this VSP is that when we want to make a complaint, we can aa ... download evidence of photographs as well as videos. At the same time, we can also enter the location where em ... the crime took place. So, that's what makes me feel comfortable with these apps. Em ..." (Informant 11 Line 250 – 255)

Furthermore, the outcomes of this study revealed that the VSP app is seen as more practical and user-friendly than RMP's prior Community Policing programme, known as *Rakan Cop*. This is reinforced by the following excerpts from VSP users of this study:

"Okay. Aa ... we took the example from the previous Rakan Cop, eh. I took the example of the Rakan Cop or a hotline. Aa ... we. I have also made a complaint through Rakan Cop and hotline. Aa ... the first... the police will ask for information. Name information ... After the information, they want to know the location. And then what form of complaint? After they knew...they asked for the form of"

complaint ... When they asked for the form of complaint, they asked again. They asked again. So it took aa ... maybe aa ... five to six minutes to explain the answers to those questions. If it's VSP, we just grab our smartphone, we just key in, key in, key in and then pin the location. That's all.” (Informant 5 Line 776 – 783)

“When we had Rakan Cop before, we had a p ... aa ... flyer, right? Share share share share. Aa ... I remember aa ... their number was 699, it's their number. But with this VSP, it feels much easier. I go to the web, just signing up. Sometimes, my friends don't really know about VSP very well, even though VSP is easier than Rakan Cop. That's why... aa ... from the VSP... the important information needed are just the place, location, who, incident, what time, vehicle, Malay man or whoever ... That is important. (Informant 8 Line 350 - 353)

Based on the findings, the usefulness and simplicity of VSP, which is also deserving to be labelled as a user-friendly mobile app, demonstrate the practicality of this medium in promoting engagement and interaction between VSP users and VSP enforcers in community policing efforts. Consequently, the development and mobilisation of technology not only complement the mainstream but have also posed a challenge to the conventional method of community policing.

4.2 Theme 2: Responsiveness

Previous research has demonstrated that internet consumers desire a prompt response from the provider or server to engage and connect more effectively. In a study about User Generated Online Video (UGOV) and its virality among Generation Y political activists, Wan Zainodin (2017) found that UGOV users emphasised the importance of the government utilising social media platforms, particularly YouTube, by providing prompt responses and genuine interaction. In community policing, prompt action and response by the police are essential for fostering citizen participation and interaction, which is crucial for assisting law enforcement in combating crime. This is because each informant will have different expectations on how quickly each report or piece of information should be acted upon. In other words, whether or not law enforcement responds and takes action in response to the supplied information. This study reveals that the RMP law enforcement swiftly acted upon and responded to information VSP users transmitted via the VSP app. The expressions of VSP users are reflected in the following excerpts:

“That's right ... aa ... technology ... faster. Because previously even if we want to call, sometimes we want to call, it takes time for them to come or what, so when there is VSP, the information they received is more clear.” (Informant 10 Line 174 – 176)

“Police don't have to look around for crime anymore, okay, who's who, who's who. But it is the community that has helped to approach and find out for the police and facilitate the work of the police to come fast right away to the scene. Like that.” (Informant 13 Line 874 – 876)

“This means that the VSP function is fast and safe for me. It means when I send it; it means there is a response. If we are like aa ... we report through the phone call it's a little late for its' response but with this VSP, it is really immediate ... they take immediate action. So I am satisfied with VSP.” (Informant 9 Line 214 – 217)

As denoted by Spanoudaki et al. (2019), in a police environment, decisions may be affected by organisational, societal, or individual pressures, time-limited investigations, and demands, such as moving as quickly as possible from the investigation mode to the verification mode. With the latest technology and the growing role of community policing programmes, mobile apps like Volunteer Smartphone Patrol (VSP) can help ensure that every report and piece of information is acted on quickly, changing how citizens and RMP law enforcement engage and interact.

4.3 Theme 3: Surveillance

As cited in Walsh and O'Connor (2019), social media interactions include citizens confiscating and reporting illegal activities. Their research reflects efforts to engage individuals as additional "eyes and ears." Authorities frequently use digital platforms as extensions of Crime Stoppers and other watch programmes, issuing Amber alerts, distributing virtual wanted posters, advertising tip lines, and posting (sometimes live streaming) CCTV footage to promote public vigilance and broaden their view, reach, and knowledge. (Myers & Staples, 2017). With a new app that turns civilians into the force's eyes and ears, police are relying on the public to use smartphones to assist in curbing crime and notify them of anything requiring their attention (Zolkepli & Ahmad Tarmizi, 2017). This study demonstrates that this 'eyes and ears of the police' idea is evident in Malaysia through the mobile application of VSP, as it depicts the engagement and interaction between citizens and RMP in this medium to combat crime. Impressions such as "I think it helps VSP as the eyes and ears of the police", "We as the public become the eyes and ears of the police", and "It's like spies of police" exemplify their recognition of this condition. The excerpts from VSP users in this study validated how VSP app adoption engages and interacts with RMP in community policing:

"Okay, for sis aa ... when there is this VSP, we as the public become the eyes and ears of the police. Okay, so aa ... the engagement of this interaction is okay aa ... not necessarily over the phone, okay now this interaction is aa ... either through people say like people say ... sharing pictures, sharing texts, even videos people say interactions between the public with police." (Informant 10 Line 162 - 166)

"I think it helps VSP as the eyes and ears of the police. This VSP is very good because if ... if we look at it ... in the ASP function ... aa ... There is also a VSP... what function eh ... aa ... aa ... there is a function to upload images ... I think that's the role of society." (Informant 5 Line 1399 – 1401)

"After there is awareness, then aa ... we can get closer to aa ... what ... get closer to aa ... we are with ... I know about this VSP; I can also share it with other people ... other public people regarding the benefits of this VSP so that we can both be the eyes and ears of the police." (Informant 11 Line 102 - 105)

This study shows that the VSP application allows citizens to engage and interact with the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) in community policing by serving as the police's eyes and ears. Altunbas (2013) explained that authorities disseminate materials containing suspect images and details about the crime to solicit tips. As a result, law enforcement agencies must maintain a strong relationship with the community, whose members serve as their eyes and ears and assist in solving crimes and directing police to the proper path. This is also supported by Yasah (2021), who stated that to combat crime and maintain public order, the RMP in Malaysia is not left behind in its use of technology and extensive improvement of information systems. Consequently, the Volunteer Smartphone Patrol (VSP) application is a new PDRM project to promote collaboration and strategic cooperation in crime prevention, with local communities acting as a surveillance system.

4.4 Theme 4: Security

In the U.S., the National Sheriffs Association, which sets up the neighbourhood watch groups, introduced the ICE BlackBox, a mobile app that lets people record video, track location, and report to the police safely (Park et al., 2017). In Malaysia, past research indicated that a comprehensive framework and sustained momentum are essential to minimise and prevent crime. RMP can utilise this strategy to educate and enlighten the community about their involvement in fighting crime, as well as preventative actions that can be implemented. The effectiveness of this crime prevention programme can satisfy the community's desire for a safe

and secure environment while reducing the community's "fear of crime" (Harun et al., 2018). According to the findings of this study, VSP users feel safe and secure when using the VSP application to transmit information to the police, which is believed to have generated engagement and interaction between residents and RMP in community policing. The following excerpts contain various responses from VSP users regarding how the VSP application engages and interacts with citizens and RMP in community policing:

"There is no fear ... because aa ... all of our information is protected. Aa ... okay so aa ... when our information is protected, we feel safe and confident aa ... so whatever information is aa ... in ... we channel it, the police will keep it secret." (Informant 10 Line 624 – 627)

"If you ask me what are the disadvantages of VSP, so far I have not seen it. Aa ... I think so far there is nothing wrong. Because we also ... aa ... their ... they asked for our details but only nickname. And I also asked my friend em ... RMP, about this VSP. I asked him is it true. Later what if I enter my phone number, he knew or scam later? Aa ... So, he also shared, he said, aa ... the phone number didn't even appear. Aa ... no ... anything ... the police don't even know our phone number. Aa ... So indeed ... actually, it is safe. No problem." (Informant 11 Line 519 – 525)

"Aa ... I uses this VSP ... it is simple. Just at your fingertips. No need to call ... no need to do anything. Open VSP type complaint, that's all. That means no one ... no one knows ... we sent information other people won't know ... It's just us with the RMP. That means people don't know who got the information. That's what's important. If we call this, it's like the office people can tell here who the informant is or informant, means other people will know. If it's VSP, people won't know. That means our information is safe. Not leak." (Informant 9 Line 199 – 204)

Prior research indicated that the function of law enforcement is to protect, inform, and prevent crime while ensuring the safety and security of our society. According to Harun et al. (2018), while using the previous Friends of Cops system, it is possible to track the registered individual's name through the phone number, even if a nickname is used, but in VSP, the user may use a nickname and is not obligated to reveal their identity to ensure the safety of the complaint. This study found that VSP users feel safe and secure when using the application to transmit information to the police. Whether they are sharing crime-related information or using the 'Balik Kampung' function to update when they leave their homes unoccupied for a trip back to their hometown or a vacation, they are sharing their data in the app. Therefore, engagement and interaction between individuals and RMP law enforcement occur here as part of community policing.

5. CONCLUSION

First, technology that can be used on the go has made it easier for citizens and RMP officers to work together and communicate. The first community policing (CP) mobile app like VSP in Malaysia has helped the effort in many ways, as it is not only useful but because it is also practical and straightforward. This study has shown that citizens and RMP law enforcement can more easily engage and interact with each other through the VSP app platform. This is made possible using technology. The usefulness and ease of use of VSP, which could also be called a "user-friendly" mobile app, show that this is a good way for VSP users and VSP enforcers to connect and work together on community policing. Moreover, VSP users in this study also professed that the VSP app is more practical if compared with the previous community policing programme called the *Rakan Cop*, which did not involve any specific development of a mobile application but rather depended on the hotline call number and SMS which can be costly over time. Hence, due to advances in technology, not only does it complement but also challenges traditional community policing methods.

Second, VSP users in this study praise the VSP app's responsiveness. They stated that their quick response and action from using this app led to their engagement and interaction with RMP law enforcement for community policing goals. This is because, in community policing, how quickly the police act and respond is a big part of getting people involved and interacting with them, which is vital for helping the police fight crime. Each person who shares information will know how long it should take to act on a report or piece of information. In other words, whether the police respond to them and act on the information they give. It was revealed from this study that the system within the app itself enables VSP enforcers to react immediately to informants after they click the "submit" button before taking further action. Depending on the case investigation, people who supplied information via VSP may have received a response in less than twenty-four hours. Thus, the fast response and action enable crimes to be solved faster.

Third, the findings of this study also indicate that when the citizen is engaged and interacts with the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) law enforcement through the VSP application as the police's eyes and ears, the application becomes a direct information channel for surveillance activities between the public and the police. Police forces all over the world before this have been practising the same method of putting up information out there with photographs of suspects, and information about the crime that happened, to get tips from the community. But with the existence of mobile applications for community policing like the VSP app in Malaysia, it was revealed that RMP could receive vast information from the VSP users directly. Thus, law enforcement agencies must establish strong relationships with the community since they are their eyes and ears, assisting police in solving crimes and directing them in the proper direction. To put it another way, this study exposed that the VSP application is helping to engage and interact with citizens with the RMP by acting as the police's eyes and ears when citizens voluntarily communicate and upload information concerning crime to the RMP, which is an act of surveillance.

Lastly, the efficiency of this programme for preventing crime can make it possible for the community to meet its requirements for living in a safe and secure environment while also reducing the amount of 'fear of crime among the community members. It is evident from the findings of this study that VSP users experience a sense of safety and security when using the VSP application to channel information to the police. This is seen as the driving force behind the engagement and interaction between citizens and RMP in the context of community policing. This is because the platform offers a protected method to conceal the identities of VSP informants through the utilisation of nicknames and a protected registration through the utilisation of the Transaction Authorisation Code (TAC) number. Additionally, when citizens feel safe communicating with RMP law enforcement via the VSP app, more crime-related information can be securely channelled, more crimes can be averted and subsequently solved, and the environment is protected, as well as community safety. This is critical in creating a peaceful area with fewer crimes. VSP users in this study professed that they feel safer leaving the house because of the '*Balik Kampung*' option in VSP, which acts as a safe house campaign and allows users to notify the police anytime they leave the house, for example, to return to their hometown.

The study's results have contributed significant insights to reflect on the factors contributing to the VSP app adoption in community policing. Above all, research revealed that the VSP app must be considered essential by the government and Royal Malaysia Police in Malaysia. The shifting from conventional policing to community policing via mobile application has sent a strong message to the citizens to change how crime issues are reported to the police.

Nevertheless, this case study also comes with certain limitations. First, in terms of research methodology, this study utilised a purely qualitative method instead of integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a mixed method. The researcher could have chosen a hybrid method to understand the issue better. As denoted by Creswell (2013), comparing distinct viewpoints derived from quantitative and qualitative data is an effective method for gaining a more comprehensive knowledge of research challenges and concerns. Second, from the research design aspect, the present study has chosen in-depth interviews over other data collection approaches, such as audience observation and focus groups. The researcher could have broadened the findings by using different approaches to explain the situation thoroughly. Given that qualitative research is conducted in natural settings, it would be ideal if communication could be enhanced by removing errors from the commencement of fieldwork.

To conclude, this may be addressed in future research by employing a quantitative or mixed-method approach to acquire a wider variety of results. This might contribute to the growth of this field of study and have far-reaching implications for law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and mobile app developers. Moreover, future researchers can also conduct their studies based on the same VSP app or other mobile apps, such as the My Sejahtera mobile app by the Malaysian Ministry of Health, which involves different demography samples to compare the findings for further discussion on factors contributing to the mobile app adoption by users.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

GG contributed to the introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis, findings, and conclusion sections. WHWZ refined the data analysis, findings, and implication sections. AHY contributed to the interpretation of the findings and conclusion. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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