



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LAW AND SOCIETY
BERKELEY LAW

CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

Monday, September 17, 2018

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“Code of the Tweet: Urban Violence and Criminal Justice Responses in the Social Media Age”

According to recent reports, gang-affiliated youth increasingly use social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to taunt rivals, boast of crimes, and coordinate retaliation in ways that lead to offline, physical violence. In order to combat this phenomenon, police departments across the country have launched dedicated “social media units” to drag a wide net over social media platforms in search of aggressive statements, photos of firearms, and other putatively gang-related content. Despite the long-standing research on urban violence, as well as the growing public alarm and intensified policing surrounding digital social media, there is virtually no empirical research about how social media are actually implicated in urban violence and to what consequence. Academic and media accounts remain primarily speculative, based on limited or no data. In order to address this lacuna, this article provides one of the first empirical case studies to examine the role played by digital social media in gang conflicts and urban violence more generally. Drawing on two years of ethnographic fieldwork alongside gang-affiliated youth on Chicago’s South Side, I offer a conceptual framework for analyzing and understanding precisely how digital communication technologies mediate urban violence. Empirically, I identify the primary ways in which gang-involved youth exploit the unique affordances of social media to challenge rivals, perpetrate attacks, and build status. I also demonstrate how social media influence youths’ capacities to de-escalate conflicts in the short term, desist from violence in the long term, and attain fair criminal justice outcomes.

PLACE Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue
TIME **12:45 – 2:00pm.** Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>
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