

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE and the **MEDIA**:

## TWEETING ABOUT CRIME

Based on the long history of research that showed consistent temporal and geographic patterns surrounding crime, Matthew Gerber, a researcher at the University of Virginia, examined whether Twitter feeds could be used to predict crimes that occurred in Chicago over a three-month timeframe. Reviewing tweets and crimes reported to the police over this period, and using “Twitter-specific linguistic analysis and statistical topic modeling to automatically identify discussion topics,” (p. 115), Gerber found that his program was able to predict 19 of 25 crimes at a better rate than standard prediction strategies. In particular,

this strategy was able to predict the crimes of drug offenses, stalking, and criminal damage. It makes sense when you think about it. Tweets have a time stamp and the location from which tweets were sent can be determined through GPS. Given that both time and location are tied to crime patterns, Twitter might be a valuable tool for predicting future crime. Gerber recommended, in particular, that this might be a viable strategy for allocating police resources.

Gerber, M. (2014). Predicting crime using Twitter and kernel density estimation. *Decision Support Systems*, 61, 115–125.