

THE ROLE OF INSTAGRAM IN THE BRAZILIAN PENAL POLICE: THE POPULARITY OF PRISON AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION CONTENT

O PAPEL DO INSTAGRAM NA POLÍCIA PENAL BRASILEIRA: A POPULARIDADE DE CONTEÚDOS SOBRE PRISÃO E REINTEGRAÇÃO SOCIAL

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ABSTRACT

Police agencies worldwide use social media to communicate with the community. Correctional officers in Brazil became a police force in 2019, expanding their role beyond prisons. In Piauí, Instagram is used to share content on prisons and social reintegration. Reels were automatically collected from the @sejus_piaui profile to assess whether their popularity changed after the police status shift and varied by content type. No change following police status was observed; however, reels depicting social reintegration efforts received less engagement, while those focused on facilities or surroundings drew more interaction. The findings reveal high public interest in the prison environment and highlight the need to understand who is consuming this type of content. Low engagement with reintegration efforts suggests social resistance, and sentiment analysis may further test this hypothesis.

Keywords: Social Media Platform. Prison. Penal Police.

RESUMO

Agências policiais em todo o mundo usam redes sociais para comunicação com a comunidade. A Polícia Penal tornou-se força policial no Brasil em 2019, expandindo sua atuação além das prisões. No Piauí, o Instagram é usado para divulgar conteúdos sobre as prisões e reintegração social. Reels foram coletados automaticamente do perfil @sejus_piaui para testar se sua popularidade mudou com o status de força policial e com o tipo de conteúdo exibido. Inexistiu alteração após a mudança; porém, reels que mostram reintegração social são menos populares, enquanto aqueles voltados ao interior ou exterior das prisões são mais populares. Os achados mostram elevado interesse público no ambiente prisional e apontam a necessidade de entender quem consome esse conteúdo. O baixo engajamento com conteúdo de reintegração sugere resistência social, e futuras análises de sentimento podem testar essa hipótese.

Palavras-chave: Plataforma de Redes Sociais. Prisão. Polícia Penal.

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INTRODUCTION

Public perceptions of trust and legitimacy in law enforcement agencies are strongly shaped by media consumption or information exchanged through informal contacts (Asad; Zia, 2025; Miller, 2025; Ricciardelli *et al.*, 2024; Schafer *et al.*, 2003). Traditional communication channels often spread fragmented information, which contributes to a persistent negative image of the police (Ricciardelli *et al.*, 2024; Vickovic *et al.*, 2013; Schafer *et al.*, 2003). To ensure institutional sustainability, public managers must strengthen a positive public image perception, especially given the negative impact of unfavorable information on youth interest in law enforcement careers (Cross; Fine, 2021; Wang, 2023) and prestige (Novich; Zduniak, 2021). The emergence of the internet has offered public institutions a valuable opportunity to strengthen their bonds with the community and cultivate a positive image of their legitimacy. This effort is increasingly amplified by the widespread use of popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Tavares *et al.*, 2023; Bullock, 2018; Silva, 2016; Lieberman *et al.*, 2013; Crump, 2011; Mawby, 2010).

Police agencies around the world have expanded the use of social media to foster direct police-community interaction (Valadares; Silva, 2025; Simpson, 2023; Livingstone, 2021; Hu *et al.*, 2020; Boateng; Chenane, 2020; Walsh, 2019; Fernandez *et al.*, 2017; Ruddell; Jones, 2013). In the U.S., over 94% of police agencies use Facebook, Twitter, and/or YouTube, a fact that prompted chiefs of police to establish an institutional center to guide the effective use of these platforms (IACP, 2015). Despite the abundance of literature on this topic, studies have focused basically on describing how social media is used by the police (Lieberman *et al.*, 2013), its seasonal use patterns (Boateng; Chenane, 2020), and the institutional impact of these platforms on the public perception (Grimmelikhuijsen; Meijer, 2015). In addition, we also know that these tools are used in the Northern Hemisphere to promote police recruitment (Babic; Simpson, 2024; Johnston; Ricciardelli, 2025), share tips about crime hotspots and crime statistics, and show law enforcement efforts (Akkaya *et al.*, 2019; Lieberman *et al.*, 2013; Heverin; Zach, 2010). By contrast, studies from the Southern Hemisphere highlight that unstrategic use of these platforms can expose police to potential attacks (Ribeiro, 2023; Assumpcao, 2019), while strategic use can redefine the negative public perception of the police (Tavares *et al.*, 2023).

Future studies should explore which types of content are more effective in capturing public interest, for example, using metrics such as the number of likes and comments (Hu *et al.* 2018). For instance, Lieberman *et al.* (2013) found that posts about injured officers on Facebook tend to generate higher engagement, whereas posts focusing solely on crimes are less popular. Similarly, Hu *et al.* (2020) noted that posts highlighting exemplary police officers and physical community interactions are more popular than any other type of content, including those solely about crimes. A plausible explanation for these patterns is that they showcase duties already expected of the police, which may lead the public to perceive them as a form of excessive self-promotion

(Hu *et al.*, 2020). Since most studies about social media use have been conducted in police agencies located in the U.S. and EUROPE (Santos, 2023; Van De Velde *et al.*, 2015), where police-community ties differ from those observed in the Southern Hemisphere (i.e., citizen-police trust is weakened by poor crime reduction, largely due to limited resources; Blair *et al.*, 2021), further studies are essential to deepen our understanding of the role social media plays in police-community relations on a global scale.

Unlike other public careers, correctional officers remain hidden behind prison walls from a community view, and what the community knows about these professionals is derived from media consumption (Ricciardelli *et al.*, 2024; Bennett; Knight, 2021; Jewkes, 2002). As pointed out by Novek (2009) and Cecil (2017), society has a fascination with the prison environment, and the media plays a pivotal role in constructing public perceptions of the correctional system. Historically, correctional officers have been depicted in films and other media as untrained, corrupt, and abusive, while prison facilities are often portrayed as unsanitary and violent spaces (Miller, 2025; Sabaini, 2009). Despite being one of the oldest careers, correctional officers were only formally recognized as police force in Brazil in December 2019, through a constitutional amendment that renamed the career from Penitentiary Agents to Penal Police (Nascimento, 2022). Until this data, the Penitentiary Agents career was regarded as low-prestige and powerless. In fact, to avoid stigma, physical attacks, and negative social perceptions, penitentiary agents often chose to conceal their professional identity within the community (Nascimento, 2022; Moraes, 2013). As a police force, its professionals now have a unique opportunity to self-promote their image within the community, which in turn may be fostered by social media engagement. However, as criminal organizations in Brazil are known to invest time and energy in gathering information about these officers and their facilities to plan invasions and physical attacks, it is crucial to strategically coordinate the use of such tools to mitigate institutional risks (G1 PI, 2024; G1 BA 2024; Santana, 2023; Fernandes, 2016; G1 AC, 2016).

The Secretaria de Justiça (SEJUS) is responsible for the Penal Police in the Piauí state (PI) in Brazil and uses social media to share content showing officers, prison facilities, and social reintegration efforts, including an Instagram profile with approximately 46.6 thousand followers, created in 2015. These platforms help bridge the gap between people deprived of liberty and their families (e.g., by showcasing individuals engaged in social reintegration activities while preserving their anonymity) and promote public service transparency (e.g., such as public investment in improving the quality of facilities and social reintegration efforts). In Brazil, the law ensures that social reintegration efforts encompass material, educational, religious, legal aid, social, health, and labor assistance, being all promoted and/or supported by the government (Brazil, 1984). Although social reintegration is enforced in Piauí (Santana, 2024), it is known that this right remains far from being fully realized in several correctional facilities throughout Brazil (Carneiro; Macedo, 2024). Despite the crucial role of these efforts, Brazilian citizens generally show little concern, often viewing these initiatives as unnecessary privileges (Carvalho, 2018; Reis, 2012). While the literature has explored the unauthorized use of social

media by people deprived of liberty (Reid; Niebuhr, 2023; Gutierrez *et al.*, 2023), it is unclear even on a global scale how social media can foster correctional officer-community interaction, as well as which types of content tend to attract the most public engagement. Since 2015, SEJUS-PI's Instagram has created a valuable archive of photos and short video posts (reels), offering a unique opportunity to explore the role of this social media in Brazil's emerging police forces.

In this study, we arbitrarily focused on reels to examine whether (i) the popularity of posts increased after the recognition of correctional officers as a police force. We hypothesize that content with correctional themes became more popular following their constitutional recognition in December 2019 (Nascimento, 2022), as these professionals began operating more extensively beyond prison walls and became more visible to society. At the same time, we also examine whether (II) reel's popularity varies according to the visual content, predicting high popularity when prison facilities and surroundings are displayed, as the general community is often curious about prison-related themes (Novek, 2009; Cecil, 2017). Despite the importance of social reintegration efforts for people deprived of liberty, we (III) anticipated low popularity when reels showed social reintegration efforts, as citizens often view these efforts as unnecessary privileges (Carvalho, 2018; Reis, 2012). In addition, we investigated whether (IV) the popularity of reels featuring social reintegration efforts varies according to the type of effort, predicting higher popularity for content showing people deprived of liberty participating in labor and educational activities, given their recognized role in social reintegration (Pressuto, 2021; Ellison *et al.*, 2017).

1. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

1.1 General Procedures

Data were collected from @sejus_piaui, the official Instagram profile of the Secretaria de Justiça do Estado do Piauí (SEJUS-PI), the public agency responsible for managing the state correctional police force in Piauí. The procedure included the collection of reels and their respective public engagement metrics (i.e., number of likes and comments), covering the period up to March 27, 2025. No personal user information was collected, and access to the data was obtained without login, as all information was publicly available. To do this, all URLs available on the profile were first filtered using the *document.querySelectorAll('a')* command in the Google Chrome Developer Tools. A filter function *filter (href => href.includes('/reel/'))* was applied to retain only URLs containing the term *"/reel/"*, which identifies Instagram reels in Instagram. Each extracted URL was then assigned a unique ID number to ensure traceability. Metadata associated with the reel URLs was later retrieved using the *read_html()* function in R 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025) to collect public engagement metrics. Following the adaptation of Manikonda *et al.* (2016), popularity in this study is defined as the sum of likes and

comments for each reel post. A total of 1,009 reels were extracted from the SEJUS-PI Instagram profile.

1.2 Data Extraction

The *yt-dlp tool* (Naim, 2021) was used in Windows PowerShell (Microsoft, 2021) to extract all public reels in MP4 format. To do this, all URLs were first assigned to the *\$videos* command variable, and then the *yt-dlp.exe* command was executed. The parameter *-o "\$id.%(ext)s"* was used to rename the videos according to their assigned ID numbers. Finally, the parameter *-f "bestvideo[height<=360]+bestaudio/best"* was applied to extract all reels with a maximum resolution of 360 pixels. Then the *FFmpeg*, an open-source tool that enables automated processing of audiovisual files (FFmpeg, 2021), was used to determine each reel duration in seconds. Since the aim was to analyze content originally produced and disseminated by SEJUS-PI, non-original posts, such as news report videos (n = 63), were excluded from the analysis. We also remove reels with missing information about the popularity (n = 3). The detailed steps and code used to extract links and videos are available in the Mendeley repository (<https://data.mendeley.com/datasets/XXXXXXX>).

1.3 Data Classification

Given that the reels published on the SEJUS-PI profile primarily showcase penal police operations, prison facilities (including the renovation and construction of prison facilities), people deprived of liberty participating in social reintegration efforts, administrative meetings involving operational, tactical, and strategic authorities, as well as the delivery of police equipment, we categorized the reels into three main groups: reels that (i) depict prison facilities (yes/no), (ii) feature social reintegration efforts (yes/no), and (iii) others. "Prison facilities" were defined as any visual image of internal areas of the 16 correctional units in Piauí, Brazil (7.1150° S, 41.5210° W), including their external and immediate surroundings. This includes reels recorded in front of the prison entrances, inside the facilities, or those that display the physical structure or its immediate perimeter at any point in the video. "Social reintegration efforts" were defined as any image in which people deprived of liberty appear receiving and/or participating in social reintegration efforts (i.e., legal aid, social, health, religious, educational, or any type of work). This class encompasses, for instance, people deprived of liberty participating in or leading religious services, engaging in construction or agricultural work, or receiving medical or nursing care. Except for external labor (e.g., such as revitalization of public spaces, participation in professional fairs), most social reintegration efforts took place within the walls or within their perimeter, resulting in some reels featuring both the prison facility and social reintegration efforts. To evaluate differences in the popularity of reels showcasing social reintegration efforts, we grouped the reels based on the similarity (arbitrarily defined) of their social reintegration efforts into three categories: constructive (educational/labor), mediator (legal aid/social), and restorative (religious/health).

1.4 Statistical Analysis

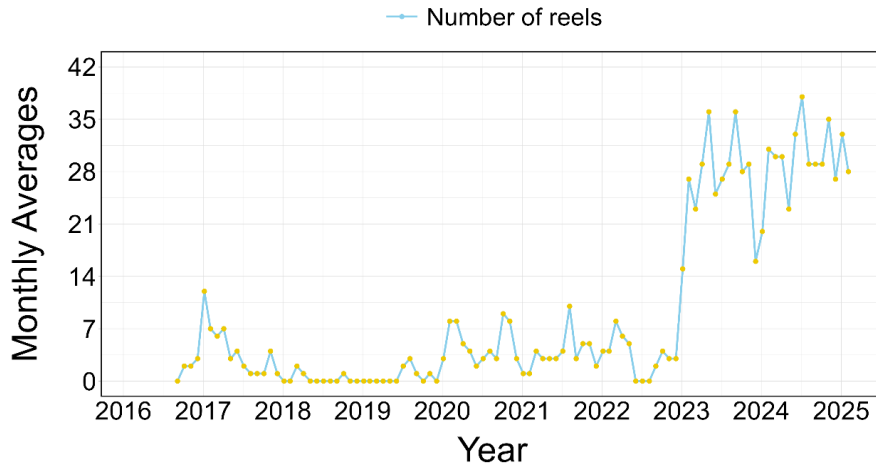
To examine whether the popularity of reels is associated with content type, a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM, Gamma family with log link) from the *lme4* package (Bates *et al.*, 2015) in R 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025) was used. Reel popularity was modeled as a function of the nomenclature of correctional officers at the time of reel publication (i.e., Penitentiary Agents vs. Penal Police), the type of content (whether the reels show prison facilities or not and whether they depict or not social reintegration efforts, including an interaction between these two predictors), as well as reel duration (in seconds) as a covariate. The month-year of the reels post was included as a random effect, and a square root transformation was applied to both the response variable and the reels duration. AIC from the *MASS* package (Venables; Ripley, 2002) was used for model selection, and the *DHARMA* package (Hartig, 2024) for model validation. The Wald test (Type II) from the *car* package (Fox; Weisberg, 2019) was used to assess the overall significance of each variable in the model, considering $\alpha = 0.05$. The *effsize* package (Torchiano, 2020) was used to calculate the effect size of the predictor variables. Finally, to evaluate whether the popularity in reels that show social reintegration efforts varies among assistance categories (constructive, mediator, and restorative), a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used. Differences between categories were determined using Dunn's post-hoc test with Bonferroni correction from the *rstatix* package (Kassambara, 2023).

2. RESULTS

Social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has become an important tool for communication between law enforcement agencies and the public, enabling institutions to increase transparency and engage communities (Livingstone, 2021; Walsh, 2019; Ruddell; Jones, 2013). In Brazil, correctional officers were constitutionally recognized as a police force in December 2019, expanding their roles beyond the prison walls (Nascimento, 2022), which may have reflected an increase in public recognition of their roles and functions. Through the use of institutional social media channels to disseminate content related to correctional activities, including social reintegration efforts for people deprived of liberty and the physical structure of prison facilities, the community may, in theory, gain greater access to previously obscured aspects of the prison system, thereby addressing public curiosity and expanding societal knowledge.

In this study a total of 1,009 reels were extracted from the SEJUS-PI Instagram profile. A total of 63 videos, consisting of long excerpts or news reports, were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 946 reels. The first reel was published in September of 2016, and a noticeable increase in posting frequency of reels began in March of 2023 (Figure 1). The reels averaged 72 ± 37 seconds (mean $\pm$ SD) in duration, ranging from 2 to 348 seconds. By March 27, 2025, the last day of data extraction, SEJUS-PI had published a total of 19 hours and 39 minutes of reels.

Figure 1 – Average monthly reel posts on the SEJUS-PI profile from September 9, 2016, to March 27, 2025. The blue line shows overall monthly averages, black dots indicate exact monthly averages, and the light red dashed line marks the point of a significant increase in published reels.



Source: Original data obtained through the research developed in this study.

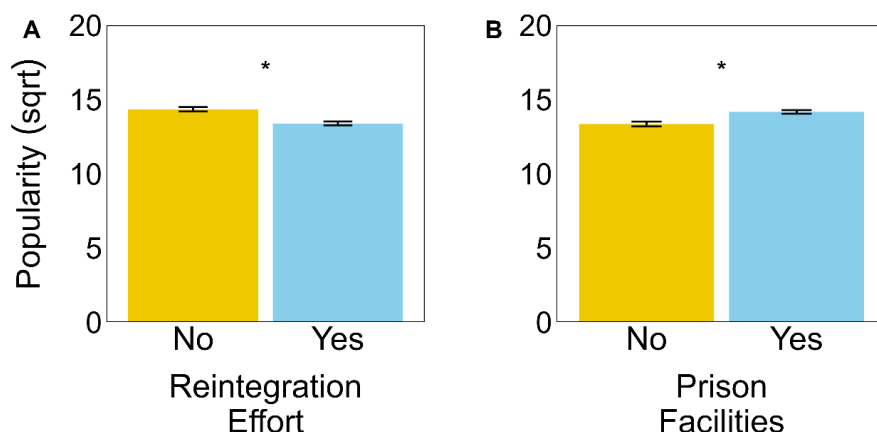
Three additional reels were removed from our dataset due to missing popularity information, resulting in a final sample of 943 reels. Reel popularity, measured as the total number of likes and comments for each reel, averaged 223 ± 171 (mean $\pm$ SD), with popularity values ranging from 5 to 1,110. Of the total sample, 7.08% ($n = 67$) of the reels were published during the period in which correctional officers in Brazil were named Penitentiary Agents (up to 03/12/2019), whereas 92.92% ($n = 879$) were published after the constitutional transition to the Penal Police (after 04/12/2019).

Regarding content, approximately 63.1% of the reels ($n = 597$) depicted prison facilities, while 36.9% ($n = 349$) did not. Social reintegration efforts were shown in 49.8% ($n = 471$) of the reels, whereas 50.2% ($n = 475$) did not feature them. When analyzing overlaps, 47.15% ($n = 446$) showed both prison facilities and social reintegration efforts, 15.96% ($n = 151$) showed only social reintegration efforts, 2.64% ($n = 25$) only prison facilities, and 34.25% ($n = 324$) showed none of the studied classes (i.e., such as administrative tasks, external events, and other similar administrative subjects).

The average popularity of reels depicting prison facilities was observed to be approximately 6% higher than that of reels not showing such facilities (mean $\pm$ SD: 228 ± 163 vs. 215 ± 183 , respectively). In contrast, reels featuring social reintegration efforts had an average popularity approximately 14.9% lower than those without such content (mean $\pm$ SD: 205 ± 148 vs. 241 ± 189 , respectively).

The statistical model indicated that reel popularity did not vary according to the nomenclature of correctional officers at the time of reel publication, with similar popularity levels observed during both the Penitentiary Agents and Penal Police phases ($\beta \pm SE: 0.38 \pm 0.23$; $\chi^2: 2.87$; $p: 0.090$). However, content type significantly affected the popularity: reels showing prison facilities and/or their surroundings were more popular ($\beta \pm SE: 0.17 \pm 0.03$; $\chi^2 = 37.26$; $p < 0.001$; Figure 2A), whereas those depicting people deprived of liberty engaged in social reintegration efforts were associated with a significant decrease in popularity ($\beta \pm SE: -0.17 \pm 0.03$; $\chi^2 = 39.03$; $p < 0.001$; Figure 2B). No effect of reel duration (square root transformed) on popularity was observed ($n = 916$; $\beta \pm SE: 0.00 \pm 0.01$; $\chi^2 = 0.48$; $p = 0.486$). Both binary variables showed small effect sizes (Cohen's $d = -0.27$ for prison facilities and 0.32 for social reintegration efforts).

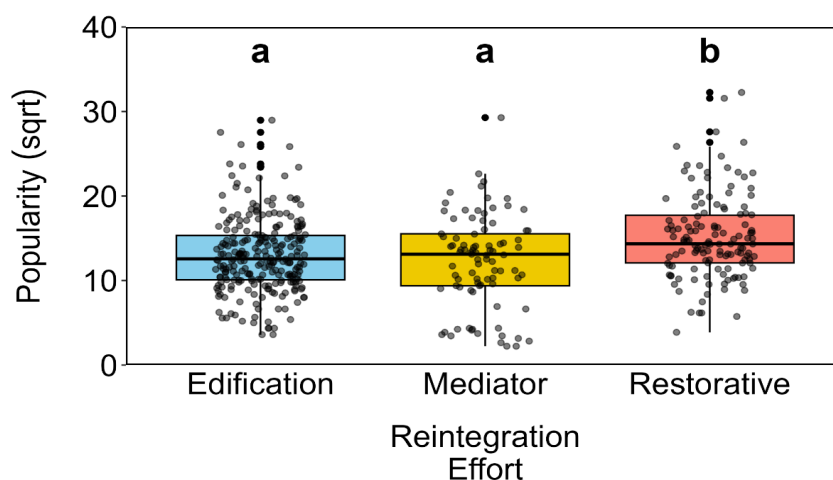
Figure 2 – Predicted reel popularity (square root transformed) from the SEJUS-PI Instagram profile: (A) prison facilities (internal and surrounding areas) and (B) social reintegration efforts. Significant differences ($\alpha < 0.05$) are marked with an asterisk (*).



Source: Original data obtained through the research developed in this study.

In the subset of reels depicting social reintegration efforts ($n = 471$), popularity (square root transformed) differed significantly across the social reintegration category (Kruskal-Wallis test: $\chi^2 = 45.48$, $p = 0.013$). Specifically, reels displaying restorative efforts (health and/or religious activities) differ from the popularity observed in reels displaying constructive assistance (educational and/or labor activities) (Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction: $Z = 6.20$, $p < 0.001$) and mediator assistance (legal aid and/or social activities) ($Z = -6.29$, $p < 0.001$). No significant difference in popularity was observed between reels displaying constructive and mediator assistance ($Z = -0.471$, $p = 0.319$) (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Boxplot showing the popularity of reels (square root transformed) featuring people deprived of liberty engaged in or receiving social reintegration efforts. Efforts were grouped into three categories based on their nature: mediator (legal/social assistance), restorative (health/religion), and constructive (education/work). Statistical differences between groups ($\alpha < 0.05$, adjusted) are indicated by different letters.



Source: Original data obtained through the research developed in this study.

3. DISCUSSION

An extensive use of Instagram by SEJUS-PI to disseminate content related to the Penal Police was observed, particularly after the first quarter of 2023. Contrary to our initial prediction, no significant differences in reel popularity were observed on career designation, with similar popularity levels for reels featuring either Brazilian correctional officers classified as Penitentiary Agents or Penal Police officers. As expected, reels showing prison facilities or their immediate surroundings tended to be more popular than those that did not, conforming to our hypothesis that such content would generate high public interest. Moreover, consistent with our hypothesis, reels featuring people deprived of liberty engaged in social reintegration efforts were generally less popular than those without this content, suggesting that audiences may view such efforts as unnecessary privileges. Among the types of social reintegration offered by the government, reels highlighting restorative efforts (e.g., health and religion) received higher popularity compared to those showing mediator (legal aid/social) or educational/labor activities.

The transition to penal police marked a significant milestone in Brazil for strengthening public security, formalized by constitutional amendment nº 104/2019. This change redefined the roles of these correctional officers, expanding their responsibilities beyond prison walls

to strategic functions that increase their visibility and impact within society (Margarido; Sabino, 2024). In our study, we predicted that reel popularity would increase after the constitutional recognition of penitentiary agents as a police force, as this law enforcement police branch gained more visibility in society. However, at least in this study, no effect was observed in reels' popularity after the career status change in December 2019. Although the correctional officer career is one of the oldest in history, it ranks among the occupations with the lowest social prestige (Miller, 2025). This viewpoint is partly motivated by the perspective constructed by traditional media, which portrays correctional officers as untrustworthy, corrupt, and violent (Miller, 2025; Sabaini, 2009). In Brazil, it is true that these professionals are exposed to vulnerabilities that go beyond the walls (G1 PI, 2024; G1 BA, 2024; Santana, 2023; Bentes; Schroeder, 2022; G1 AC, 2016). Moreover, many Penal Police officers in Brazil still experience mental health challenges, largely due to inadequate working conditions and job dissatisfaction (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2023). Developing communication strategies that consistently highlight exemplary correctional officers (Hu *et al.*, 2020) and clearly present the benefits and career advancement can play a key role in enhancing the Penal Police public image. These strategies could also enhance the popularity of Penal Police content on Instagram and promote a more positive public perception about this type of correction officer career.

Reels featuring people deprived of liberty engaging in social reintegration efforts are less popular than those without such content, suggesting that these efforts may be perceived by some audiences as unnecessary privileges. In Brazil, imprisonment serves not only to repair the harm caused but also to prevent further crimes and to reintegrate people deprived of liberty through a range of social reintegration efforts provided by the state (Bitencourt, 2012). Despite the importance of social reintegration, Brazilian society shows skepticism, partly influenced by the high recidivism rate and a persistent desire for revenge against those who have committed crimes (Lima; Araújo, 2022; Santos *et al.*, 2018). It is important to highlight that recidivism in Brazil is not solely the result of ineffective social reintegration efforts. Other factors also contribute to its likelihood, including prison overcrowding, lack of employment opportunities (Costa, 2024; Lauermann; Guazina, 2013), and debts accumulated by people deprived of liberty during incarceration, often owed to other prisoners (Nasser, 2024). Future studies could test this hypothesis by including sentiment analysis of comments on reels featuring social reintegration efforts to identify the presence of negative comments. According to Dum *et al.* (2022), citizens who have had any prior contact with former people deprived of liberty tend to exhibit less intolerance and show greater support for social reintegration policies. With that in mind, some strategies that showcase people deprived of liberty involved in social reintegration efforts through reels and engage them in community work can be used to improve social perception of this marginalized population. As pointed out by Dum *et al.* (2022), these interactions do not necessarily need to be in person: social reintegration efforts involving music, books, or poetry can generate content that transcends prison walls and may increase public tolerance.

Another pattern noted is the greater popularity of reels that showed prison facilities, thus supporting our initial prediction that society is interested in knowing about prison life (Novek, 2009; Cecil, 2017). Historically, social media has been used to disseminate law enforcement content (Babic; Simpson, 2024; Simpson, 2023), and for a long time, what the community knew about the prison system came mainly from movies (Cecil, 2017), negative media diets, and unauthorized inmate-recorded images (Ricciardelli *et al.*, 2024; Rudnicki; Veeck, 2018). Our results show that Instagram can be used to foster penal police-community interaction, with content being more popular when prison facilities or their surroundings are displayed. While other factors may contribute to this outcome, we argue that Brazilian society may be particularly interested in the penal police activities, as well as in learning about the daily life inside the prison. This hypothesis appears plausible, as the prison system is largely inaccessible to the public and has historically been depicted as a dirty, corrupt, and violent environment (Bennett, 2023). To redefine the social image and demonstrate institutional relevance (Miller, 2025; Bennett, 2023), institutional leaders should focus on sharing more institutional content. However, it is crucial to go beyond Instagram by promoting direct society interactions, since mere virtual exposure to police images does not significantly influence positive perceptions (Wozniak *et al.*, 2020). In Canada, correctional officers recognize that social media can be used to improve the image of the service provided; however, many feel insecure about using social media, since sensitive information data that could compromise their safety and that of their families can be accessed by people deprived of liberty (Adorjan; Ricciardelli, 2023). Future studies could investigate how popular institutional profiles, such as SEJUS-PI's, are perceived by correctional professionals whose names and images are publicized, as well as examine in detail whether the content displayed by these profiles inadvertently exposes vulnerabilities of prison facilities, which in turn could be exploited by criminal groups.

Although all social reintegration efforts are important, reels featuring people deprived of liberty engaged in restorative efforts (health and/or religious activities) were more popular than those showcasing constructive (educational and/or labor activities) or mediating assistance (legal aid and/or social activities). While constructive efforts have been shown to increase the likelihood of people deprived of liberty obtaining employment (Ellison *et al.*, 2017), Brazilian society appear to places greater credibility on restorative efforts, possibly due to the stereotype that criminal behavior is driven by illness and/or lack of spirituality (Ali *et al.*, 2024; Jang *et al.*, 2023; Noon *et al.*, 2003).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This is an initial study that aims to evaluate the use of Instagram within the scope of the Penal Police (a correctional officer in Brazil) and to raise hypotheses for future research. Together, our results show that Instagram can be used by the Penal Police to share valuable insights about the prison system. Future research should investigate the use

of these communication channels at both national and global levels to elucidate how society engages with and responds to issues related to the prison system.

By identifying which types of reels generate higher engagement, future content can be planned more strategically, aligning with institutional objectives while maximizing public reach. Nevertheless, it is essential that communication managers remain vigilant about potential structural or operational vulnerabilities that may be inadvertently revealed in such content, as this information could be exploited by criminal organizations to plan attacks or breaches. In this context, the findings of this study may inform evidence-based decision-making to both enhance the institutional image of the Penal Police and ensure the safety and security of correctional facilities and their personnel.

Future research could investigate whether the popularity of reels featuring prison facilities is associated with the extent of sensitive information inadvertently disclosed. Although visual representations of social reintegration efforts are important, they tend to generate lower engagement and, on their own, do not promote meaningful reintegration. Therefore, it is essential to develop additional strategies that bring the community closer to people deprived of liberty, thereby strengthening effective social reintegration and improving public perception of these efforts.

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