



# Ride with pride

## Communication, commitment, and participation in association life

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Master's Thesis

Media Management

2023

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Ride with pride. Communication, commitment, and participation in association life.

Arcada University of Applied Sciences: Media management, 2023

## Identification number:

9195

## Abstract:

Digitalization has changed the possibilities to influence and communicate both at work and in leisure time. With new opportunities and challenges for influence, it is timely to study how communication could be utilized to serve traditional association activities. This study examines participation and commitment to association activities and how they can be influenced by means of communication. Issues related to participation and communication have been discussed in studies and literature on organizational communication. However, there has been less research related to Finnish association activities and communication in recent years. The aim of the study was to find out how communication could be used to increase participation and commitment. At the same time, the effect of professional background in creating commitment and participatory communication were explored. The research object was Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, which is a motorcycle club for law enforcement authorities in Finland. In this qualitative study, a semi-structured interview was used as the method. By interviewing members of the association, their views, and experiences regarding participation in the association's activities, commitment and communication were examined. Study results show that participation has a significant influence on the experience of commitment. However, the feeling of commitment can't be explained only with the amount of concrete input in club's actions. Commitment is also significantly impacted by the experience of togetherness and like-mindedness as well as pride in being a member of the association. The professional background of law enforcement officials has a role in the communication behavior of individuals, which was reflected, for example, in consideration and caution in operating on social media. Professional identity also proved to be a significant factor underlying the cohesion experienced by the members.

## Keywords:

Commitment, participation, communication, association, non-profit sector, like-mindedness

# Opinnäyte

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Ride With Pride. Communication, commitment and participation in association life.

Yrkeshögskolan Arcada: Media Management 2023

## Tunnistenumero:

9195

## Tiivistelmä:

Digitalisoituminen on muuttanut mahdollisuuksia vaikuttaa ja viestiä niin työssä kuin vapaa-ajalla. Uusien vaikutusmahdollisuuksien ja haasteiden myötä on ajankohtaista tutkia, miten viestintää voisi kehittää perinteistä yhdistystoimintaa palvelevaksi. Tämä tutkimus käsittelee osallistumista ja sitoutumista yhdistystoimintaan ja miten niihin voidaan vaikuttaa viestinnän keinoin. Osallistumiseen ja viestintään liittyviä kysymyksiä on käsitelty paljonkin organisaatioviestinnän tutkimuksissa ja kirjallisuudessa. Suomalaiseen yhdistystoimintaan ja viestintään liittyvää tutkimusta on viime vuosilta vähemmän. Tavoitteena tutkimuksessa oli selvittää, miten viestintää voisi käyttää osallistumisaktiivisuuden ja sitoutumisen lisäämiseksi. Samalla selvitettiin ammatillisen taustan vaikutusta sitouttamisessa ja osallistavassa viestinnässä. Tutkimuskohteena oli Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, joka on lainvalvontaviranomaisten moottoripyöräkerho Suomessa. Tässä laadullisessa tutkimuksessa menetelmänä käytettiin puolistrukturoitua haastattelua. Yhdistyksen jäseniä haastatellaan selvitettiin heidän näkemyksiään ja kokemuksiaan yhdistystoimintaan osallistumisesta, sitoutumisesta sekä viestinnästä. Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että osallistumisella on merkittävä vaikutus kokemukseen sitoutumisesta. Konkreettisen osallistumisen määrä ja yhdistystoimintaan annettu panos eivät kuitenkaan yksinään selitä sitoutuneisuuden kokemusta. Sitoutuneisuuteen vaikuttivat myös kokemus yhteenkuuluvuudesta, samanhenkisydestä sekä ylpeys yhdistyksen jäsenyydestä. Lainvalvontaviranomaisten ammatillisella taustalla on merkitystä henkilöiden viestintäkäyttäytymiseen, mikä näkyi esimerkiksi harkintana ja varovaisuutena sosiaalisessa mediassa toimimisessa. Ammatillinen identiteetti osoittautui myös merkittäväksi tekijäksi jäsenten kokeman yhteenkuuluvuuden taustalla.

## Avainsanat:

Sitoutuminen, osallistuminen, osallistaminen, viestintä, yhdistys, yhdistystoiminta, samanhenkisyys

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In Finland there are about 100.000 registered associations. Who hasn't been involved in a club, an association or a sports or other leisure team? Many Finns have backgrounds from various associations or leisure time activities. It probably also sounds familiar that many associations suffer from the lack of enthusiastic, volunteer people to run the activities. At least I have had numerous conversations with my friends, who have complained about non-participation in the hockey team's mocha pie baking, lack of volunteers in scout camp arrangements or reluctance to take on the responsibilities of the associations' board. Most of the books of today's media and communication seem to come up with the abundance of possibilities today's digital life serve us. In addition to work, countless hobbies and applications are competing for people's time. The possibilities to influence have also become more diverse. How does traditional association life cope in competition of people's time? Do we still see it as a potential way to have an influence?

In Finland we have long traditions in association life. (Patent- and Registration Office, 2019). As its name suggests, the association brings people together around something in common to its members. Development of digitalization and information and communication technology has, however, changed dramatically people's way of working and spending free time. Changes in the operating environment affect all sectors of society and not least in communication traditions. (Marjamäki & Vuorio, 2021, p. 16.) In many contexts this development is called the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution. We naturally have the need of being part of something, and the feeling of social belonging is created with communication and interaction. Digitalization and new tools affect interaction between people, the construction of social relationships and thereby the feeling of inclusion. (Pekkala & Luoma-aho, 2019, p. 10-11.)

This is how the topic of this study came up – from a real-life challenge in association life. According to my experience, a very typical situation in many associations seems to be that there is a handful of active people who take care of everything until they get exhausted when the activity starts to feel like work. It is hard to get new people more involved in association

activities and take part in shared responsibilities. The lack of time seems to be a common explanation for non-participation. Would it be possible to find out what makes people join the association, commit to it, and participate? The other question raising from this is how commitment and participation could be helped with communication? Communication, after all, is something we all have at our disposal, whether it happens online or live. What should be done to activate association members to use their time for association activities?

Many of the starting points of this research are related to my personal experiences of association activities. The research object in this study, Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, is one of the associations, of which I am a member. Choosing the Blue Knights as a research object brought one more perspective to the research topic – the influence of professional background as law and enforcement officials to communication and committing to the association.

## **1.2 Aim and research questions**

The aim of the study is to find out what makes Blue Knights members commit to the association and participate in the club activities and how commitment and participation could be supported with communication.

The study also focuses on examining the members' communication behavior and the most popular communication channels in order to take advantage of all the communicational possibilities to increase commitment and participation. Study also discusses the role of the Blue Knights as a professional association and the relevance of one's professional background to member behavior and communication. One purpose is to find ideas and solutions for a situation where the association has a crying shortage of participants and members who run the associations activities.

These topics are studied from the perspective of organizational communication and commitment. Some reflection is also done from the perspective of motivation theory. The effect of professional background and identities on communication behavior is studied from the point of view of legislation and regulations set for officials. Also, the phenomenon affecting today's authorities, online targeting and doxing, has been taken into account in the study.

The research question is as follows:

- How can communication be used to increase member commitment and participation in association activities?

And the sub-question is:

- How does professional background in law and enforcement affect personal communication and the use of different communication channels and tools?

The focus of this study is to form an understanding of the members' communication behavior and their reasons for committing and participating. The use of communication technology and different communication channels and tools is also discussed in the study, but the purpose is not to analyze the use of single applications or technologies in detail. The study does not focus in finding most suitable technologies or applications for the club.

In this study, a qualitative research method, a semi-structured interview is used. The research method was selected based on the research topic. Information is collected on the topic by directly asking club members about their thoughts and feelings about communication habits, commitment, and the importance of professional backgrounds. The data gathered from the research consist of interview recordings and transcribed interviews. The analysis of the research material has been done thematically.

### **1.3 Structure of thesis**

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the topic and its background, the aim of the study and the research questions. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework and the literature related to the topic. This chapter also briefly introduces the association in question, Blue Knights as well as the legislation and regulations regarding communication of law and enforcement officials. The purpose of this is to describe for the reader the reference group and field in which the members of Blue Knights operate, and against what background the data has also been examined and analyzed.



The research method is discussed in the chapter 3. In the chapter there is a more detailed description of the method and arguments for choosing it. In chapter 4 the implementation of the research is reviewed, from the planning of the interviews to the practical implementation, and the data obtained is presented. Chapter 5 discusses the analysis of the research material and presents the themes with which the analysis was made.

Last part of the thesis concludes the results of the research and discusses the findings. In chapter 6 the results are presented by theme. Chapter 7 deepens the discussion on the research results and reflects on them from the perspective of the research literature and research questions. This chapter aims to answer the questions of what the study results mean for the development of association life and communication. Chapter 8 includes the conclusions. In the chapter it is considered whether the research achieved the goals set for it and whether the answers to the research questions were found. In the conclusions, the use of the research method and learning outcome from the work are also evaluated.

To get some benefit for the Blue Knights, among the appendices there is a brief summary based on the research results for the association's communication. The purpose of the summary is to serve as a tool and to help, for example, in planning the association's communication (Appendice 2).

In the thesis, the terms "association" or "club" is used when talking about Blue Knights Finland 1 ry.

## **2 Commitment, participation, and communication in association life**

This chapter introduces the basic concepts and regulatory framework of associations as well as raises some points of associations' role in society in general as it relates to the subject to be examined. Different associations are also briefly presented from leisure to professional associations. The purpose of an association has an effect on the behavior and the commitment of the members, and it has been brought up also in existing literature. In this context the Blue Knights is also shortly introduced as the subject of this study. In this study the role of Blue Knights is also considered from a professional point of view, as the association has many features of professional community.

The basic concepts of organizational communication are discussed with the help of communication literature. Concepts of commitment and participation are scrutinized from the point of view of the factors underlying them. In this context, the topic will be also discussed briefly from the perspective of motivation. Commitment, participation, and motivation have points of convergence, and it can be interesting to consider whether motivational theories could help in finding the ways to get people committing and participating.

### **2.1 Associations as a part of civil society**

Freedom of association is guaranteed in the Finnish constitution, and it is one of the basic political rights. (Finnish Patent and Registration Office, 2019.) Association activities in Finland are regulated by the Associations Act, which contains provisions on, for example, the registration of the association, the definition of the association's rules and the organization of administration. According to the Associations Act an association may be founded for the common realization of a non-profit purpose. The purpose may not be contrary to law or proper behavior. (Associations Act 1989/503.)

One way of describing association activities is as part of civil society, which means the voluntary activities of citizens to build the common good (Kansalaisfoorumi, 2022). According to Tschirhart & Bielefeld (2012, p. 10) the term civil society sector emphasizes that many organizations in the sector are the embodiment of an engaged group of citizens

with a shared interest in improving their communities. In Finland the term third sector is often used to describe the association sector. One commonly used definition in the English literature is nonprofit sector, which distinguishes associations from commercial for-profit businesses (Powell & Steinberg 2006, p. 1-2). Other terms used are for example ‘voluntary sector’ emphasizing the work of volunteers, ‘independent sector’ emphasizing the role outside government or business, ‘charitable sector’ describing the role in helping those in need or philanthropic sector highlighting the charitable donations (Tschirhart & Bielefeld 2012, p. 10). In this thesis the concept of third sector is used when needed to describe the field where associations operate. The concept of non-profit organization is used to describe in general level an organization which does not have a for-profit purpose.

The role of association activities is described as very central in Finnish society. Non-profit associations are spread in many areas of everyday life like trade unions, party-political activities as well as cultural or leisure activities. (Finnish Patent and Registration Office, 2019.) According to the Finnish Patent and Registration Office (2019) it is estimated that more than 90% of all associations are engaged in important social activity, like social and health affairs or cultural fields, for example. The association is, by Martti Siisiäinen’s original (1996, p. 13) definition, an association of people that pursues a particular common goal, value, or interest (Kansalaisfoorumi, 2022). There seems to be fairly little literature or research on domestic association activities compared to the fact that there are many associations in Finland in relation to the population (City of Helsinki, 2022). Association life could be a fruitful research topic for future studies. There is a clear gap in the research on domestic, modern association activities and for example the influence of digitalization.

Collins dictionary defines the association as “an official group of people who have the same job, aim, or interest”. In contrast to this, the definition of professional association is as follows “a body of persons engaged in the same profession, formed usually to control entry into the profession, maintain standards, and represent the profession in discussions with other bodies.” (Collins, 2022.) There are many ways of defining and categorizing associations in the literature. Tschirhart (2006, p. 523) first begins with David Knoke’s (1986, p. 2) broad definition of membership association as an organized and named group of people who are not financially recompensed for their participation. As Tschirhart continues, associations are often categorized according to their purpose and to whom they serve. She also brings up that

associations can be sorted by their relation to changing existing societal structures or by territorial base or scope. (Tschirhart 2006, p. 524.)

Tschirhart doesn't specifically distinguish between professional associations as their own group, but many studies have focused on associations that fit the definition of a professional association. For example, Hager (2014, p. 1) introduces many definitions from Rusaw, Friedman and Phillips, Gruen, Summers and Acito and Gazley according to which the professional associations are organizing bodies for fields of professional practice and include elements of providing knowledge and identity for workers to gain position in their fields. Many of these studies also mention the benefits and value created by the membership. Tschirhart (2006, p. 539) brings up some benefits that membership can be considered to have from the professional point of view, such as economic implications, legitimizing and controlling professions, safeguarding specialized knowledge, dictating who can practice the profession, protecting the income and social status, privileging some fields, development and diffusion of innovations, brainstorming and sharing ideas, benchmarking and encouraging of adopting technologies.

This study scrutinizes associations more from the point of view of leisure time activity. There is some discussion of the Blue Knights' role as a professional association as the professional identity is one of the uniting factors between association's members. However, the topic is mainly examined from the point of view of leisure time.

## **2.2 Blue Knights**

Blue Knights is an international law enforcement officers' motorcycle club with has its origins in the United States of America. It is a "non-profit fraternal organization consisting of active and retired law enforcement officers who enjoy riding motorcycles". The club was first founded in 1974 in Bangor, Maine by several law enforcement officers. Today the club has about 650 chapters, over 19.500 members in 11 conferences within 29 countries. (Blue Knights International LEMC, 2018.)

Blue Knights purposes and goals are defined in bylaws:

- 1) Provide for the mutual assistance, enjoyment, entertainment, education, physical, mental and social benefit of its members and the general public.
- 2) To promote and advance the sport of motorcycling and the safety of motorcycling.
- 3) To serve the interests of motorcycle owners and users.
- 4) To promote by example and any other acceptable means, safe use, operation, and enjoyment of motorcycles.
- 5) To develop a fraternal spirit between law enforcement personnel and the general public.

(Blue Knights International LEMC, 2018.)

An important activity of the club is charity, which is especially aimed at children (Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, 2022).

In Finland Blue Knights arrived in 2003, when the first chapter, Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, was founded in Lahti. In 2018 the other chapter, Blue Knights Finland 2 was founded in Kokkola. These associations are open to all the law enforcement officers riding motorcycles. The conditions for membership are a state office and the right to arrest or detain. In Finland, members of the associations come from the Police, the Border Guard, the Defence Forces, Customs, Migri, Criminal Sanctions Agency and National Prosecution Authority. (Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, 2022.) In Finland Blue Knights is relatively small association and has about 130 members in both chapters together of which about 15 % are members of Blue Knights Finland 2 ry. All the members in Finland are also members of the Blue Knights international organization in the United States. Like mentioned in the beginning, the research object and the association in question in this study is Blue Knights Finland 1 ry.

The board of the association consist of the president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary, and directors I, II and III. In addition to this, positions outside the board include editor-in-chief, webmaster and anchormen (ankkuri), who are local active members who organize local events and activate members locally. The anchormen can be seen as local points of contact for members. The directors' areas of responsibility are international contacts, driving training, supporting and coordinating anchor activities, and managing the club's product matters. Editor-in-chief is responsible for producing the club's magazine and webmaster is responsible for maintaining the club's website. At this point, there are named 6 anchormen in

different locations around Finland. So, there are in total 15 people taking care of most club administration and activities. Two of the positions are directly related to communication, editor-in-chief and webmaster, although the club's communication is taken care of by the board in cooperation.

Blue Knights' activities in Finland are most active during summertime. Naturally, because of the Northern climate, that's the time when the motorcycles are ridden. Also, most of the Blue Knight's events also take place in spring and summer even if some events are organized also quite late in the autumn. The board activities continue throughout the year and the end of the year is quite a busy time, as the board must do the planning and the budget for the next year and organize an autumn meeting where the board personnel selections are made. Based on this, one could think that the commitment and participation of regular members is concentrated in the summertime, while the board activities require commitment for the whole year.

## **2.3 Blue Knights communication**

Blue Knights chapters in Finland have a shared website, which is produced with the services of Yhdistysavain. The official channel for Blue Knights Finland 1's and 2's internal communications is a forum on the club's website, open to members only. In addition to this, there are various Whatsapp groups that serve mainly to inform about events, as well as a Facebook group with representatives of other stakeholders in addition to the members. The printed Blue Knights magazine is published three times a year for club members and stakeholders. In addition to membership fees, advertisements in the magazine are the club's main source of income. (Blue Knights Finland 1 ry, 2022.) The association's partner in the publication of the magazine is Printmix Oy, which is responsible for the sales of the magazine's advertisements, layout, printing, and distribution of the magazine.

## 2.4 Regulations underlying professional background

The members of Blue Knights associations in Finland have all a professional background in law enforcement authorities. Typically, all the activities of these authorities are based on the law. Moreover, the employees are also bound by a duty to act in their free time as defined by the law. The meaning of professional background and identities of club members is examined against this legislative background. The examples used in this study are mainly laws, regulations and instructions concerning the police.

The regulation of the exercise of public powers begins with the Finnish Constitution. The exercise of public powers shall be based on an Act and in all public activity, the law shall be strictly observed (The Constitution of Finland 731/1999, 2§). The conduct of the police officer in office and in their free time is defined in the Act on Police Administration. The police officer is obliged to act also in the free time in the way that his or her conduct is not jeopardizing the confidence in the proper performance of his or her duties (The Act on Police Administration 1992/110 § 15f). Corresponding behavioral obligations have also been defined in the law for other security authorities. For example, the conduct of professional soldiers is defined in the Act on the Defence Forces (551/2007, 42 §). The status of the persons holding military offices is also regulated by the Constitution, which prohibits professional soldiers to be elected as representatives. This therefore has an impact on the freedom of speech of those working in certain professions. (The Constitution of Finland 731/1999, 27§, 31§.) Also, the State Civil Servants Act defines the conduct of an official (State Civil Servants Act, 750/1994, 4:14§).

The police are also bound by the values and the ethical code (The Police, 2022). In addition to the legislation and principles mentioned above, there are also guidelines specifically for communications. Central Government communication guidelines brings together the general principles of communication (Prime Minister's Office, 2016) whereas police behavior on for example social media is governed by separate guidelines.

The police's role in hybrid media environment has also been studied in Police University College. The studies have scrutinized, among other things, the requirements today's media field sets for public communication as reflected in traditional communication methods and roles. There has been identified both structural and cultural barriers, which make it difficult

for the police to participate in discussions in social media. One mentioned example of these structural barriers is the features related to the professional culture of the police, such as the traditions of hierarchical communication culture and operational information. The intractability of social media is also mentioned as one of the challenges authorities face. (Sahramäki & al, 2022, p. 4-6.)

## **2.5 The Influence of online targeting on law enforcement professionals**

When studying the communicational behavior of law enforcement officials, in addition to legislative framework, it is hard to ignore the importance of online targeting and for personal communication. Online targeting, doxing and shaming mean more or less the same thing – the situation in which one person or more or groups urge a large number of people to attack an official in different ways. Usually this happens online by sending a mass of hate mail or attacking officials personal or professional profiles in social media. (Ministry of the Interior.)

For example, Collins (2022) dictionary defines doxing as “the practice of outing someone’s personal information on the internet”. Online targeting can include different threats and focus on officials’ personal life or close ones. Targeting is often aimed to influence or criticize the entire organization, even if it is focused on private persons. (Ministry of the Interior.)

Targeting the police has increased during the recent years and is seen as a growing problem. One of the consequences of targeting, in addition to deteriorating of personal well-being, are changes in social media behavior. (Poliisi, 2022.)

## **2.6 Organizing + communication = organizational communication**

The literature on communication over the past twenty years shows that communication has changed from one-way information to interactive communication. For example, Leif Åberg’s and Anssi Siukosaari’s works, classics of their time, gave media students of the early 2000s a very different picture of organizational communication than literature does today. Also, Risto Kunelius (1997, p. 45-46) predicted the change in communication channels and infrastructure from one-way channel to an endless network of communication to consume. He already discusses participatory communication when he describes the possibilities for the public to choose contents according to their own interests and be involved and influence instead of being passive respondents. Leif Åberg (2000, p. 91) described in year 2000 organizational



communication as “a necessary exchange of messages to achieve the goals of the work community and its members”. Although the rapid development of technology and new communication channels have radically changed the nature of communication, the basic purpose of organizational communication has remained the same. According to a recent view whatever the goal of the community may be, communication is needed. We communicate all the time, even if we notice or not. Communication is present in all relationships and work. (Marjamäki & Vuorio 2021, p. 9.)

Communication can be defined as the exchange of information, creating of meaning and building connection. All of these are needed for an organization to succeed in its mission. (Marjamäki & Vuorio 2021, p. 9.) Anne M. Nicotera (2019, p. 11) begins with intertwining organizing, organization, and communication. As organizing can be defined as “the coordination of individual activities for the purposes of achieving the accomplishment of collective tasks” it is accomplished through communication. According to Nicotera human interaction and organizing communication creates organizations, which then provide a context for communication. She also highlights the organizations’ presence in all aspects of human life. From this starting point, the organizational communication theory studies the fundamental processes of human life -how individual activities are coordinated in the context of communicatively structured social collectives to “get things done, to be who we are and to create new realities and structured collectives”. (Nicotera 2019, p. 11.)

Internal communication refers to communication aimed at members of the community. The definitions used may vary in different contexts and communities. (Åberg 2000, p. 152.) Åberg also highlights the role of internal communication as a strategic resource in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2000, p. 171-172). Brad Whitworth describes the roles of organizations and internal communication by describing a team, which can accomplish more together, when the team members understand the organizations, vision, goals, and objectives. (Whitworth 2011, p. 23).

Strategic communication refers to the communication that supports the strategic goals of the organization. With strategic planning the basic lines of communication are defined. Strategic communication is thus based on the overall strategy of the organization. (Åberg 2000, p. 227.) According to Marjamäki & Vuorio (2021, p. 50) strategic communication is located in the intersection of strategy, communication management, strategic management and

communication. It is the systematic promotion of an organization's most important goals through communication (Marjamäki & Vuorio 2021, p. 50). Also, Holtzhausen et al. (2021, p. 9) emphasize the deliberate and purposive nature of strategic communication, which happens in public sphere to reach set goals. In today's complex world there is constant competition of the attention of different stakeholders, which makes the use of strategic communication more important. It is not possible to reach fragmented audiences on multiple platforms without comprehensive communication. (Holtzhausen et al 2021, p. 9.)

## **2.7 The concepts of participation and commitment**

When talking about participation and commitment, there are many different concepts in the literature, even to the point where the reader gets confused as to what they are all about. For a Finnish speaker, the spectrum of concepts also might cause confusion when using sources in Finnish. The concepts describing commitment and participation in Finnish might have several different synonyms in English. The goal is to use concepts consistently throughout the study, and to introduce the terms used here in the introduction.

Collins dictionary (2023) defines involvement as taking part in something. Involvement can also mean "the enthusiasm that you feel when you care deeply about something". According to Collins inclusion means the "act of making a person or thing part of the group or collection or the policy or practice of making sure, that everyone in society has access to resources and opportunities". The difference between these two concepts is therefore that involvement is something that a subject himself does, while inclusion is the activity directed at the subject. Also, a term "involve" can mean letting someone take part in something. However, according to Collins' examples, involving seems to be used in contexts of describing parts of entities or more neutrally to describe someone being part of something, not so much as a term describing active inclusion. The concept of participation is somewhat simpler. According to Collins dictionary (2023) participation is an act of participating or the fact of taking part, for example in a celebration. Participating can also mean a sharing, as in benefits or profits.

Commitment to the community is often seen described in terms commitment, engagement, or participation. Also, Pekkala & Luoma-aho (2019) discuss different concepts concerning participation. The concept of engagement has originally developed to describe the employees' psychological relation to their employer and to their work tasks. Participation

usually means interaction and/or experience of involvement between the subject (an employee for example) and the object (organization for example). Inclusion, in general, means making the participation possible with the means of communication and interaction. (Pekkala & Luoma-aho 2019, p. 15.)

Commitment, on the other hand, is seen to mean the person's longer-term presence, which usually includes participation and persistence in an association. (Tschirhart 2006, p. 543). In this study the topic revolves around the concept of inclusion -how to make the members participate and commit. In the study the concepts inclusion, involvement and participation are used in the same meaning as Collins Dictionary and Pekkala & Luoma-aho in describing the processes of getting people participate. A term inclusion is used more to describe the actions focused to an object and a term involvement to describe something a subject does. Participation is as well used to describe participation as a concrete action. The term commitment is used, as mentioned above, to describe longer-term, persistent involvement in an association, which includes participation in activities.

## **2.8 Concept of motivation**

Motivation can be seen as human needs and desires (Hollifield et al 2016, p. 26). This is related to the topic of the study when trying to find the reasons underlying the members' reasons to join and participate into association activities. Motivation is complicated and requires "knowing, comprehending and appropriately analyzing complex human behavior". Many times, the Maslow's hierarchy of needs is used in describing people's needs. The more the basic human needs are fulfilled, the more people can reach to the higher needs, like recognition or creativity. (Hollifield et al 2016, p. 28.)

Tschirhart & Bielefeld (2012, p. 23) describe motivation as a function of one's desire and commitment. According to them the performance is created with motivation and ability. In the case of lacking performance one can seek reasons among others from the lack of motivation, and thus the lack of desire or commitment. Lack of commitment can have roots for example in personal circumstances, like an experience of fatigue or a person can feel that despite of desire to act, their effort makes too little difference compared with the demands.

For its part, association activities can be regarded as fulfilling personal needs related to the development of individuals and communities. Hollifield et al. discuss motivation from the perspective of work, but the same laws related to human behavior could also work in other areas of life. Motivation can simply be described as a response to certain stimulus which has certain consequences. People tend to do things that are rewarded or that help them reach their goals. Some people are motivated with inequalities. Hence, to motivate people one must be aware of the complex structure in the formation of motivation and the individual tendencies of persons. (Hollifield et al. 2016, p. 28-31.)

## **2.9 Member commitment and participation in non-profit organizations**

In her article Mary Tschirhart discusses the questions of members staying and their participation to association activities. According to Tschirhart the factors explaining the members' entry to association are not the same that explain member retention and active participation. Tschirhart addresses, that participation and commitment to the association correlate often highly, albeit those are independent phenomena, which can occur independantly. (Tschirhart 2006, p. 531.)

Tschirhart extracts from the literature the factors that influence the member commitment: offering selective material and solidary incentives (Olson 1965), requiring investments and sacrifices (Kanter 1968, 1972), closing of alternative options and demands for participation (Zurcher and Snow 1981) and providing opportunities to communicate with leaders and influence organizational decision-making (Knoke 1981; Houghland and Wood 1980). She also points out, that perceptions of effectiveness and legitimacy can have an effect on member commitment and that is also proposed to be gained by having members in direct contact with other members. (Tschirhart 2006, p. 532-533.) In the article Tschirhart discusses the meaning of the desired benefits for the commitment and encouraging it. The perceptions of the possible benefits that members might have in joining associations vary, some think that gaining benefits means also contributing to the activities while high efficacy in obtaining benefits effects on individuals to join and stay. She also suggests that some members stay in associations waiting for the future benefits which are based on seniority. (Tschirhart 2006, p. 532-533.)

The relations among association members and network connections are also scrutinized in the article in relation to member participation. The author suggests that strong social cohesion and ties to other members predict more importance placed on the membership which also can have an effect on the duration of the membership. Social cohesion also has an effect on the amount of free riding instead of participating. (Tschirhart 2006, 532.) The competition between different associations of the members' time has a role on how long the commitment to the association is. As Tschirhart summarizes, that characteristics of the organization, the member and interpersonal interactions all influence commitment. (Tschirhart 2006, 532.)

Tschirhart concludes her reflection on the commitment of the members by stating that the presumed explanations for this are largely uncertain assumptions and that members' activities in associations and their mutual interaction are largely unexplored (Tschirhart 2006, p. 532-533). The author focuses on explaining for members joining and committing, but communication is not treated as means of commitment and participation.

Also, Martti Siisiäinen addresses the issue of participation in his article. He states that the lack of participation has become more and more growing problem in society and that the question of participation is diverse, encompassing different ways of participating in for example in elections, citizens' initiatives, association, and organization activities. (Siisiäinen 2010, p. 1.)

The article points out that the emphasis of the association institution has transformed from ideological and worldview associations that require comprehensive and long-term commitment to those that require light and momentary commitment and focus on relaxation and leisure activities. (Siisiäinen 2010, p. 2.)

Siisiäinen scrutinizes the concept of participation and what we mean by discussing it. He suggests that the individuals' belonging to diverse social structures presents more general level of participation and could be termed "inclusion". It is a neutral general concept for different forms of belonging and covers very different ways of active and passive participation. (Siisiäinen 2010, p. 3.)

According to Olson (in Siisiäinen 2010, p. 12) people regularly seek to pursue their own interests. A collective prize produced by an association or movement alone is not a sufficient incentive to participate, as operators generally avoid costly participation if they are able to access the fruits of voluntary organization's activities free of charge (free-riding). In order to participate in collective action, individuals need selective stimuli that they can either win or lose depending on their decision to participate. Stimulants can be divided into material (membership magazine, cash grant), solidarity (associations interactions), and goals/values. It is thus not enough for an association to produce interesting collective benefits, but the member must also consider the membership or participation as necessary for obtaining that good. (Siisiäinen 2010, p. 12; Olson 2009, p. 8)

Vilma Luoma-aho and Kaisa Pekkala discuss the participatory communication in organizations. Participation is a foundation to individual commitment, feeling of involvement and feeling of togetherness. (2019, p. 15.) According to Pekkala & Luoma-aho, communication can be used to involve but also leave out of the crowd. Involving and participation mean that the participants have the opportunity to use power and have influence. New digital communication technologies offer the variety of opportunities to participatory communication, but it also requires communicative capacities and actions from organizations and employees. The article brings out the multilevel nature of the concepts of involvement and participation. The authors recommend taking the participatory communication as a part of strategic planning together with the management. (Luoma-aho & Pekkala 2019, p. 15, 24.)

Also, David Knoke has studied commitment and detachment in relation to communication in voluntary associations. The starting point of Knoke's study is the previous research that, according to him, highlights the voluntary associations' positive effects for its members. According to Knoke "communication and participation in decisions are found to increase commitment and to reduce detachment net of other organizational and individual factors". Knoke also suggests that communication can compensate for the lack of direct participation in decision-making. (Knoke 1981, p. 141.)

There is an abundance of information and literature on association life, for example from the point of view of leadership, management, volunteering, fundraising and society. Literature on the activities of the third sector, especially in Finland, in relation to communication were harder to find. Also, the size of the field and the variety of different associations make it more

difficult to find generalizable research on the subject studied in addition to the fact that the principles and organization of the associations' activities vary from country to country. There is also different legislation concerning association life in different parts of the world. The results of the information search regarding domestic association activities in Finland showed that the interest in researching association activities seem to have diminished since 1980's onwards.

### **3 Methods**

Studying commitment and participation to association activities and communication related to associations require exploring human behavior – what makes people commit to nonprofit organizations and their actions, give their precious time to participate and how this might be affected with communication. The topic requires gathering a picture of the activities of the members in the association, including what communications channels they are used to using and what makes them participate. The topic also generally dictates the research method to be used. In this case, the topic guides the choice of research method in a humane and “soft” direction.

Traditionally research strategies are roughly divided in qualitative and quantitative research. Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (1997, p. 122-123) present Halfpenny's classic division from 1979 between these two strategies in which quantitative research is described among others as hard, rigid, objective, deductive and universal whereas qualitative research is soft, flexible, subjective, inductive, and relativistic. According to Hakala (2022, p. 97) quantitative methods offer measurable numbers and statistics whereas qualitative methods, on the other hand, require a bit of courage from the researcher in addition to basic information. Sarah J. Tracy (2019, p. 7), manages to describe qualitative research briefly and succinctly in one sentence: “Qualitative research is about immersing oneself in a scene and trying to make sense of it - whether at a company meeting, in a community festival, or during an interview”. The strength of qualitative research is that it can dig deeper in processes and meanings behind them.

For this study, the qualitative method was selected based on the topic and aim. Complex human behavior and genuine thoughts on the subject could not be reached with a structured

survey alone. As the aim is to get members' deeper insights on the subject studied, the qualitative approach better meets the goal of the research. Qualitative approach also supports the goal to create something new more than just to verify the existing theory, as well as to describe the existing situation and outline the relationships between things in it. Like Hirsjärvi et al. (1997, p. 152) point out, the qualitative research focuses on what cannot be measured quantitatively and the starting point is the depiction of real life. The concept of qualitative research includes for example interviews, participant observation and textual analysis. Qualitative research can take place almost anywhere, from the classroom to the field.

According to Hirsjärvi et al (1997, p. 192), the interview has been the main method in qualitative research. Tracy reminds of interviews' nature as common practice in a variety of life situations (2019, p. 13.). In the literature interviews are usually roughly categorized into structured, semi-structured or open according to how much the course of the interview is framed for the interviewee. Also, a theme interview is possible when the themes of the conversation have been thought out in advance, and the interview is conducted freely around them. Interviews can also take place individually, as focus group interviews, face-to-face or mediated. (Hirsjärvi et al 1997, p. 195-196, Tracy, p. 13.)

The semi-structured interview was chosen for this study. Because the goal was to get quite specific information on the topic studied, the fully open interview might lead to too broad considerations and give fewer concrete answers to the questions. Also, a possibility of a group interview was considered, but not chosen, because the hope was to get more profound insights from each interviewee. Perhaps a group situation would have left some outside the discussion. A semi-structured interview is similar in style to a themed interview, where the topics to be discussed have already been thought through. In addition to this, a semi-structured interview has a ready-made set of questions to which the interviewee can freely answer, and the researcher can add or change questions as the interview progresses. King, Horrocks and Brooks (2018, p. 16) advice to follow a "discussion guide", an interview schedule or a topic guide for a semi-structured interview. According to them it is essential to keep the schedule brief enough but favor the questions that anticipate discussion and can attract conversation between the participants.



According to Tracy interviews can also be categorized into different types according to the interview situation or what the interviewee represents in relation to subject of the study. For example, ethnographic interview happens often in the field and is very conversational or casual situation.

In this study the interviews could be categorized as respondent interviews. Respondents can belong to a social group and interviewing them aims to gather their experiences on the matter studied. In this kind of an interview the subjects talk for themselves, not for the larger group. (Tracy 2019, p.13.)

## **4 Designing the research**

To get access to the empirical data and the interviews, the idea and the draft of the study was presented to the board of the association. After informing the board and it approving the idea of the study, members were informed of the study and the interviews in board meetings, the association's discussion forum and in the club magazine. This way people were somewhat informed on the subject and would not be surprised of the interview requests.

In designing the research there was an advantage of being a member of the association in question. Membership, having ready contacts in the club and knowledge of its activities helped in getting started. Perhaps there would have been a higher threshold for the club and the members to give access to a researcher outside the club. On the other hand, as a member already familiar with the club, the researcher may end up using pre-expectations when planning the research and doing the analysis.

## **4.1 Planning the interviews**

After choosing the research method the next step was to plan the interview questions. The main topics for the interviews were divided into three themes based on the aim of the research:

- 1) communicating habits,
- 2) communication related to Blue Knights and
- 3) commitment and participation.

The interview questions were gathered under these themes. The framework and the interview questions are presented in the Appendix 1.

The number of questions was kept limited considering the length of the interview. The purpose was to leave some space for the conversation and the possibility to change questions and leave some unasked. The attention was also paid to the openness of the questions, so that the respondent would have the opportunity to freely share their thoughts. In planning the interviews, it was taken into account that people are very different in their habit of answering and sharing their thoughts. Some will speak freely for hours and some answer in only a few words. Therefore, the questions body can be considered fairly structured. With a question frame and some extra questions, it would be possible to guide the interview for the interviewees who would answer more shortly.

## **4.2 Description of the interviews and the material**

The research material consists of interviews with six members of the Blue Knights. The sample of six members was considered to be sufficiently representative to get members insights to the necessary extent. The interviews were carried out 10.8.2022 – 5.9.2022. The interviewees represented several of the law and enforcement organizations (see chapter 2.2), from which it is possible to become a member of the Blue Knights. There were not interviewees from all the organizations that are represented in the membership. The aim in selecting the interviewees was to include both long-term members of the association and newer members. The longest membership among the interviewees was about 18 years and the newest about 1,5 months. All the others ranked in between, on average, the interviewees had been a member about 13,38 years.

Before the interview, every interviewee was sent a notice about the research and the data processing in it, and they were informed in advance that the interviews would be recorded. To protect the privacy of the interviewees, no other information was collected from them in the study than the year in which they joined the association. The research does not use the information about, for example, the age or gender of the participants to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom to save time. To interview members, face to face would have been challenging due to habitation in different places and different working hours. By conducting the interviews remotely, the study would perhaps lose some of the openness and liveliness of a face-to-face meeting but would attract members to participate with the ease of the interview method. The goal was to keep the interviews about an hour long, so as to avoid demanding too much time from the interviewees.

Except for one, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed in written form during the interview. This way a written version of the conversation was ready right after the interview. This may not amount to a complete interview transcription, but is more accurate than loosely taken notes, and there is a possibility to check the wording of responses from video recordings if necessary. All the interviews were done in Finnish, because all the interviewees were Finnish speakers and using English would have possibly raised the threshold to participate in the interview too high. In the analysis the material is processed in English and, where necessary, the examples are translated from Finnish to English.

In total, the interview material, written open, is 15 pages of text and 3 hours and 9 minutes of recorded material.

## 5 Data analysis

There are many ways to analyze research data. Roughly, analysis methods can be divided into two based on what the analysis aims at. If seeking to explain causalities, the quantitative statistical analysis and drawing conclusions is usually used. If seeking to understand, the qualitative analysis and drawing conclusions is usually used. (Hirsjärvi & al 1997, p. 210.) Qualitative analysis seeks to understand the nature of phenomena and more profound meanings underlying research topic and increasing the understanding of causalities (Saaranen, Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). The strength of semi-structured interviews is their discussive nature and getting research data on interviewees' understandings on complex viewpoints and on emotional level, which might not open only with statistics and numbers.

Qualitative analysis is also used in this study to analyze the data. The aim for the analysis is to find patterns, to identify similarities and differences in the material and then discuss and compare the findings with previous studies and literature on the topic.

### 5.1 First impressions

Like Tracy (2019, p. 15) mentions, the analysis process has already begun when “you have been reading and re-reading the data along the way, recording analytic reflections, and transcribing or reviewing transcriptions of interviews”. Tracy recommends to systematically organize and prepare the data to get the most out of the analysis stage (Tracy 2019, p. 15).

Organizing the data was first done by gathering all the transcribed interviews together, divided by question. Each interviewee was given a color to make it easier to compare the answers and to identify the same respondent through different questions. By reading and organizing the written material this way it was also possible to get the first impressions of the data. What emerged clearly from the material was the importance of social contacts and professional networking which was emphasized in number of answers. Glancing at the interview material for the first time, the expressions that seemed to repeat in the answers were like-minded people, a good team and spirit and contacts to different professional groups also internationally.

## 5.2 Themes for the analysis

The main themes for the analysis were chosen based on the objectives of the study. From the research data, three themes emerged: **1) communication preferences and habits 2) commitment, and 3) influence of professional background.** The thematization of the analysis follows the structure made for the interviews into three different main topics. The themes could be described like Tracy (2019, p. 15) with the analogy of a dining table, each theme represents a table where the ingredients belonging to the same dish are collected and then mixed and tasted together.

With the thematization of the analysis, it was possible to bring out issues specifically relevant to the research questions. The analysis was also facilitated by the fact that the questions related to commitment and participation were also discussed in the interviews as their own theme, so it could be treated as separate entity. From the interview material it was noticed that in these themes the answers moved on a more abstract level than, for example, the evaluation of the use of communication channels, where the answers were very concrete. By focusing on only three main themes in the analysis, the purpose was to stick to the demarcation of the research and to make it easier to grasp the essentials.

### 5.2.1 Communication preferences and habits

The analysis of communication preferences and habits includes interview questions from the groups 1 and 2 (Appendice 1). In the questions the respondent were asked about their usage and thoughts on each channel separately. In addition to this, two of the questions asked more openly of the choice of communication channels and Blue Knight related content. To analyze the preferences and habits in using different communication channels of the interviewees, the research data was gathered to an excel-table.

In the analysis the use of different communication channels was compared in terms of popularity, reasons for preferring specific channels, purpose of use, pros and cons and usage ideas. The communication channels that were compared were the same discussed in the interviews, instant messaging, social media, email, Twitter, phone calls, meetings in person, websites, and platforms.

### **5.2.2 Commitment**

The analysis on commitment includes the interview questions from the group 3 concerning commitment and participation and one question from the group 1 about the reasons for joining the association (Appendice 1). In the analysis, in addition to the color coding, the excel table was used to visualize similarities and recurring issues.

By gathering the data on commitment to the table, the purpose was to find the similarities between the answers and which things are highlighted in order to achieve participation and commitment. In the analysis the data was also considered on a general level from the perspective of motivation theories and if there could be found any similarities regarding people's needs and the creation and maintenance of motivation.

### **5.2.3 Influence of professional background**

In the interviews, two questions dealt with the professional perspective. Firstly, interviewees were asked to evaluate the effect of their professional background on their use of communication channels. Secondly, they were asked about their experiences on professional benefits of belonging to the association.

In the analysis the recurring themes were collected from the interview data. The entire interview material was also gone through in terms of whether the interviewees had themselves brought up a professional perspective on the association's activities in some topic. Of course, the definitions of the professional association presented in the introduction had to be kept in mind in doing the analysis. In the analysis it was reflected on how well the Blue Knights fit into the framework of a professional association.

## 6 Results

In this chapter the research results are presented by theme. The chapter starts with communicational preferences and habits, where the results stay more on practical level and in which the interviewees reflect on their own communication choices and usage habits. This serves as a good basis for results regarding commitment, participation, and the influence of professional background.

### 6.1 Results on communicational preferences and habits

Speed and ease of use are the most important factors for interviewees in choosing communication channels. People don't want to open a laptop to communicate, it must happen mobile. The most used applications for interviewees were instant message apps like WhatsApp and Signal and social media platforms. Email was third in popularity. These three communication channels were clearly the most used and were reported to be used daily whereas there was more dispersion in the use of other channels asked.

*“Facebook and Whatsapp groups are easy in the smartphone age, as is email. Easy and effortless and does not require opening the computer separately.” (membership 6 years)*

Although quick and easy apps and for example Facebook were considered as the most popular channels in association communication, it was also recognized that they do not necessarily reach all age groups.

*“That group is starting to be middle-aged, there should be a channel where you can reach all age groups.” (membership 7 years)*

The other communication channels brought up in the interviews received more scattered mentions and there seems not to be so many commonly used channels. Blue Knight's own and other discussion platforms were considered outdated and with poor accessibility.

The communication channels are in some extent divided to two main categories according to the purpose for which the communication channel is used to be used -free-time and work-related. In the following the results are presented by channel.

### **6.1.1 Email**

Email is clearly a work-related tool, while social media connects with people's free time. Email was described for example with words "obligatory evil", "just to get information", or "work-related". In describing their social media use the interviewees used the words "to keep up with friends" or "to greet friends". Many also said that they follow the activities of their own and other associations or content related to other hobbies on social media.

*"For me, email is used for work purposes, of course, and for taking care of personal, more official matters. Not even necessarily on a daily bases, although I check personal email daily." (membership 6 years)*

### **6.1.2 Instant messaging applications**

In the answers of the interviewees, instant messaging applications fall somewhere between work- and freetime-related channels, they are used both in free-time and work purposes, with free-time perhaps being a little more emphasized. Whatsapp is the most used app among interviewees. The advantages of its use are agility in reaching a large number of people. The other channel mentioned was Facebook messenger. Comparing the two, Whatsapp stood out more as a tool for association and hobby activities. Facebook messenger was used more for casual communication. The reasons for the popularity of these channels correspond to general preferences underlying the choices in communication channels -speed and ease of use.

*"These [instant messaging apps] are in diligent use. For leisure and work task, of course the information security considered, it is a fast information sharing channel. At work they are used in organizing events, for example, when there is a need to get information quickly to many and be able to answer questions for many people at the same time." (membership 8 years)*

### **6.1.3 Social media platforms**

Social media platforms are not perceived so much as a tool in free time or at work. From different platforms Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and Instagram received mentions from the interviewees. Mostly these platforms are used to follow the news and keeping in touch with friends. Twitter seems to be the most popular platform for following work-related topics such as security policy and security industry. It was common in the research data that these



channels are rather monitored and used for information acquisition than for interactive communication.

*“It’s more of a place to get information, I rarely post anything myself. I’ll just follow how the others are doing.” (membership 18 years)*

#### **6.1.4 Online services and websites**

Online services and websites are used to run daily errands. Most common uses were handling banking or tax matters or matters related to different authorities like Traficom. According to the respondents, Blue Knights’ pages were not particularly popular. It seems that there must be some special need to go to the website or service.

#### **6.1.5 Discussion forums**

Discussion forums such as the club’s forum on the website are considered outdated. Following different forums is usually related to hobbies or personal interests. Several of the interviewees don’t follow any forums currently. Blue Knights’ discussion forum is widely known to members, but it is not actively used or followed. Most of the interviewees tell that they only visit forum if they get a notification of recent activity. The archiving messages was considered an advantage of the forum. Compared to the instant messaging, the forum was better at retaining information.

*“Very little in recent years [following discussion forums]. I get a notification if there is something new on the association’s website. I prefer to read it that way rather than go to the forum for reading.” (membership 7 years)*

*“It’s even more old-fashioned than I am and it’s a pretty rigid system. It may have its place as there the conversations can be traced later. Somehow it doesn’t work.” (membership 8 years)*

*“I haven’t been there.” (membership 1,5 months)*

### **6.1.6 Phone calls and personal meetings**

Traditional phone calls or personal meetings no longer seemed to be part of people's everyday communication at least in free time activities. Meetings in person are appreciated, but too difficult to include in association contacts to a great extent. Phone calls turned out to be mostly limited to members' own families during free time.

### **6.1.7 Other factors in choosing communication channels**

When the interviewees were asked to self-assess the factors influencing their choice of communication channels, the same issues emerged as in the tabulated data. In addition to the fact the speed and ease were mentioned in the answers, access to information also came up. Almost all respondents said that they search for channels where they can find the information they need.

*“They [communication channels] are generally used by a large number of people. There you can get information you expect.” (membership 18 years)*

When it comes to the content on the communication, the events stood out above the others and all the interviewees answered that they seek information about them. In terms of content, the other three most popular topics were motorcycling tips and gear, motorcycling travelogues and board work and decision-making.

### **6.1.8 Preferences on Blue Knight related channels and content**

Fragmentation had also been experienced in relation to the association's communication in general. Whereas speed and wide reach are seen as advantages of Whatsapp, its fragmentation and disorganization are perceived as disadvantages. There are several Whatsapp-groups created for different purposes and perhaps it can be seen in the answers that there is no coordination between the activities of different groups. The answers show that there are no uniform practices for communication, but information may come randomly from different channels. Sometimes getting a message depends on knowing the right person or being at a right place at a right time.

*“Of course, there is the challenge that not everyone is in every group. Information is fragmented, and when people travel, messages from a certain area may not be received.”(membership 18 years)*

*“At the main events, there was a lot of discussion that communication is quite fragmented. When we talk about events in Europe, there are good friends who share information with each other, and it doesn't necessarily come to everyone.” (membership 7 years)*

The communication channels which are used to follow and participate association's activities correlate with the results on separate channels. Most popular channels are Whatsapp and Facebook. Facebook is commonly used in following Blue Knights' international activity which can be considered a special feature of Facebook usage and is not mentioned in answers concerning other channels. Whatsapp groups are more focused on domestic communication around events and different geographical areas.

*“As stated, communication could be little more active on certain channels. Obviously, as I haven't got access or no information at all on every channel, it is difficult to assess them.” (membership 1,5 months)*

Of course, one can think that separate groups formed around some event, or a shared interest can create commitment and activity among the members. The challenge with this is that it only benefits a small group inside the association. The flip side of the ease of forming groups for example in Whatsapp can be the formation of cliques.

*“Groups created for events are good, and some of them have stayed alive after the event. People inside the group have welded together, although the purpose is no longer the same as when the group was founded for that event.”(membership 18 years)*

In general, the wishes regarding the communication channels used by the association are similar. Current channels are considered sufficient and functional, only the activity is needed.

*“It should be more active in all aspects. Sometimes I have felt that it is really dead.” (membership 1,5 years)*

*“There should be more active communication. These days people need to be reminded.” (membership 6 years)*

Events are clearly the most interesting content for members. In relation to events, members are interested in information about other's experiences of access to information related to

their own participation. The two other most interesting topics were motorcycling as a hobby, including travelogues, motorcycling gear and tips, and topics related to the administration of the association. The last one was mentioned by those who themselves were involved in board work.

*“Events, also informal events, to get into the group and get to know others. Of course, they can be found in the forum already. Then know-how about motorcycling, tips and social events.”(membership 1,5 months)*

*“Events. And perhaps, as a member I would be interested in the decision-making in the association. Maybe there should be some more information about it sometimes.”(membership 6 years)*

One thing that emerged from the research material as a clear deficiency was the lack of information and communication. Several of the respondents stated that the information is not available or does not exist, or that the member didn't even know about all channels in use or didn't have the access to them.

#### **6.1.9 Development ideas for communication channels**

From the entire research data, a few ideas for the development of communication emerged that the interviewees themselves brought up. For the use of WhatsApp, it was suggested that more consideration should be given to the user groups and purpose of use, as well as more detailed planning of rules for the use of different groups. According to suggestion the one-way communication might work better in some situations:

*“We could think about whether there should be a group with clear rules, that communication is one-way, and that not everyone gives a thumbs up to every message.”(membership 18 years)*

The other idea presented took the idea of the club's communication further. The respondent brought up the scattering of information and the difficulty of reaching the members equally and getting relevant information to everyone regardless of which channel each person uses. As a solution to this, the respondent suggests designing and acquiring an own application for the Blue Knights.

*“Yes, it is today's way to do things. We, for example, use an app on behalf of the sports club, which allows you to chat and have training programs etc. It has been functional in use. I don't think it would be the hardest thing in the world to do, and the foundations are certainly already there.”*  
(membership 7 years)

## **6.2 Results on commitment**

This chapter presents the results on commitment. The experience of commitment seems to be influenced by many factors. Concrete participation has strong correlation with commitment, but it is not the only factor explaining committing to an organization. Some factors are related to individual experiences of like-mindedness and the pride of membership, for example.

### **6.2.1 Work for the association**

Members strongly associate commitment with the amount of work done for the association. The interview answers showed that the members who had participated in the association's responsibilities and worked for the association considered it as a sign and proof of their own commitment.

*Yes, I have been quite committed and tried to work and develop this further. I've been little more than a regular member. I think I'm pretty well committed. (membership 8 years)*

In the answers, the board work was mainly thought of as working for the benefit of the association. It seems that in Blue Knights there are two kinds of the active roles in membership – you either are an ordinary member or you are a board member. As a third membership category could be called so-called “dormant” members. Dormant members are statistically members without participating in anything. The participation and the amount of work tasks varies according to these roles. As an ordinary member, you participate in

whatever you want without any special responsibility, while as a board member you are responsible for many tasks both in administration and in organizing the events.

Perhaps the role of an anchorman can be considered something between two active categories. As an anchorman it is possible to be an active member and take a role in organizing events without the board responsibilities. Some of the interviewees with a shorter membership considered an anchorman's role as a first step in getting in the association's tasks.

*Maybe I'm such a new member that being an anchorman might be the first thing that comes to mind. I could start with that. If the opportunity rises, I might consider it. As I've been in the club for so little time, I don't dare to apply for other positions yet. I need to gain a little more experience and knowledge first. (membership 1,5 years)*

Many interviewees related the board work to development of the association's activities and keeping up their motivation. The question that specifically addressed the interest to participate in the board work, highlighted the interviewees' desire to give something back and contribute to the community.

*"I'd say I'm pretty committed. I have done board work and I would like to continue as well. The desire would be to raise the club from the post-corona depression and to have quality content of various events and rides, and that the organization of events would not always fall on the necks of certain people. It binds me quite hard to the association." (membership 7 years)*

Several of the interviewees considered that taking active working role in association life is related to their personalities. Association life as such was considered an important hobby and participating administrative work as an important part of it.

*"In a way, I am a person of association activities." (membership 8 years)*

*"Maybe it's a part of my character and personal activity that I like the "old-time" association life and like to go and be part of the hustle and bustle. " (membership 18 years)*

### 6.2.2 Feeling of having an influence

Feeling of having an influence is an important factor in participation and commitment. In the interviews, participation, and the feeling of having an influence on things came out when an interviewee had been involved in managing association's common matters.

*"I was attracted to the board by another member. He got me involved. Of course, there was also a desire to participate and influence. "(membership 6 years)*

Members seem to associate influencing rather in influencing the association activities than having a broader social impact. In the interviews, the possibilities of the association's social influence did not come up. For example, increasing traffic safety or the charity work could be considered the ways to have wider social influence.

*"I want to do my bit. When I have time, I want to do things for the association and be developing activities. If we just stick to old formulas, then the motivation starts to disappear. If we succeed in pushing forward and creating high-quality events and magazine, that's the reward in the end."(membership 7 years)*

### 6.2.3 Like-mindedness

Like-mindedness is a key factor in joining, participating, and committing to association activities. Like-mindedness was repeated in the responses of the interviewees across the board when asked about the reasons for joining, staying, and participating in the association and when asked to describe one's commitment.

*"Motorcycling and like-minded people [were the reasons to join the association]." (membership 8 years)*

*"The whole thing seemed nice and fun, and there was a good group of people, that was the main reason." (membership 6 years)*

The experience of like-mindedness seems to relate to members' similar professional background and professional identities as law and enforcement officials. The values highlighted in the answers are reliability and integrity of the community. Of course, part of the like-mindedness is the common hobby for everyone, motorcycling.

*“Probably motorcycle riding and of course, a reliable group of officials. You get to meet other officials. Yes, it is mostly motorcycling and integrity of that group -there is no orientation towards crime.” (membership 1,5 years)*

*“The thing was that I wanted something more to this hobby, to meet people who have been doing this for a long time and get the feeling of security from it. And when there are clubs with a certain reputation, there is no way of being in contact with whatever club you find. (membership 1,5 months)*

The importance of like-mindedness for commitment came out more in the answers of members who had joined the association only recently and had not had time to participate in the association’s tasks or activities very much. In general, the importance of like-mindedness was emphasized in what has made the members stay involved in the association. The importance of like-mindedness is underlined in both the answers of the longest-standing and newest members of the association.

*“I would say that there is a certain like-mindedness within the association, that we are all law enforcement officials who have a shared hobby. There is no judgement of any kind, everyone can ride the bike they want and with the equipment they want, where they want. It makes you like and stick with it.” (membership 1,5 months)*

*“There is a like-minded group in general and the events have been fun. They have supported the motorcycling hobby. “(membership 18 years)*

Blue Knights values were considered important in the interviews. Many rated the importance of values high in the factors underlying the membership in the club. Perhaps the respondents see the association’s values in the like-mindedness, which was mentioned much more. Values as such were not mentioned in the answers concerning commitment, for example. Members do not seem to miss the communication of values more than at present.

*“They are important and definitely relevant. There isn’t a need to communicate more about values, I don’t think you should go to the point of imposing them.”(membership 1,5 months)*

*“The fact that they match your values well makes it easier to be a member of such an association.”(membership 18 years)*



#### **6.2.4 The length of the membership**

Also, the length of membership influences the experience of commitment. Those interviewees, who had longer memberships, had naturally had time to participate more in board work and club duties as well and feel commitment through their participation.

*“Let’s put it this way, first thing might be to get to know more deeply what the plot of the thing is as a whole. We’ll see later if there’s something in the board stuff. I am not currently in any board, have been in a few in the past.”(membership 1,5 months)*

The length of the membership has also importance in involving newer members to club activities. One of the interviewees had personal experiences in contacting new members. The faster a new member is contacted, the better. After joining the club, a new member easily feels left alone and outside if no contact is done. According to the interviewee, quick contact right at the beginning of the membership is an effective way to get a new member involved in the activity. Otherwise, he can remain a dormant member for a long or the whole time. In contacting new members, the traditional communication channels were high-lighted. First contact could happen with a phone-call or by sending a starter-pack traditionally by post.

#### **6.2.5 The pride of the membership**

The members clearly feel a certain pride of belonging to the association. The experience of pride and shared values seems to influence the commitment to the association. None of the respondents considered that they joined or committed to the association because of some benefits, but considered membership important for other, principled reasons.

*“I am proud to be a member of the Blue Knights, I want to remain a member as long as the spirit lasts.” (membership 1,5 years)*

The pride seems also to be related to shared values and professional identities. The slogan that is often seen in Blue Knight communication, “Ride with pride”, can be associated with the pride the members experience. Some wear a velcro sticker “Proud member of the good guys” on their vests. Some wear the text “99%” in retaliation to the 1% of criminal motorcycle gangs.

*“In Blue Knights you find the skill, know-how and brother- and sisterhood. It is easy to believe that everyone is on the right path. “ (membership 1,5 months)*

### **6.2.6 Benefits**

The members of the club are at least not after material benefits. In several answers, the values of the association and intangible benefits, such as like-minded contacts and the pride of the membership come before material benefits. The material benefits were seen as nice but by no means not necessary. Members consider the company of like-minded people to be one of the advantages and do not think about the benefits so much for a material point of view.

However, one of the mentioned benefits can be considered material. The club's participation in the costs of events and affordable event prices was repeated in many answers. It is appreciated but not considered a requirement for commitment or participation. None of the interviewees referred to seniority or benefits related to long membership.

*“I think we already have reasonable advantages when the club supports participation in events and the fees are quite low. I don't know what else I could want.”(membership 18 years)*

*“Yes, of course, if you get a discount from the club for the events, it would be financially pleasant. I don't think that there have to be any special advantages included, for me, it's about completely different principles here. That's enough for me, I'm not in the association because of the benefits.”(membership 1,5 years)*

Like-mindedness is emphasized in almost all the answers. In addition to it, shared values in the club are considered as desired benefits.

*“It doesn't have to be something big, usually a small principled advantage is enough. You just don't do board work because you are looking for some personal advantage, that's the wrong approach in my opinion.”(membership 1,5 months)*

In sum, the feeling of commitment can't be explained only with the amount of concrete input in club's actions. Both older and newer members feel the commitment. For those who have concretely participated in association management and tasks, the feeling of commitment is more related to promoting common cause and having influence.

## 6.3 Results on the influence of professional background

The most visible influence that professional background has on communication behavior is caution. A certain kind of caution appeared in the views of all respondents, even if they did not identify themselves as particularly cautious, which is what almost everyone assessed themselves to be. In practice, caution can be seen in what and how people appear for example on social media. Most report that they like to follow other people's posts, but rarely post anything themselves.

In the data the respondents also recognize a certain way of law enforcement to communicate, briefly and always considering of what one can or can't put online. It also seems like a practice introduced by the profession that unfinished and uncertain matters are not communicated. The answers in this topic are consistent:

*"When it comes to an organization like law enforcement, many avoid Facebook."(membership 7 years)*

*"The effect is very big, that's why I don't post anything myself. Maybe that's a small challenge. I practically only follow many channels but don't share anything about my life. This is where the professionalism comes in, that you are afraid of everything all the time."(membership 18 years)*

Only one of the interviewees believed not being particularly cautious in posting on social media. According to this view, one's work tasks are not such that it would prevent one from presenting one's own face. One factor explaining caution can therefore be the person's own work tasks, which either require invisibility on social media for security reasons or not.

### 6.3.1 Other factors explaining caution

Communication culture, however, isn't the only factor underlying the cautious behavior. Other explanatory factors may be a higher awareness of the security and reputational risks of social media, the high demands for appropriate conduct set for the authorities and good media literacy.

*"It's a bit like the way that you don't dare and that's easier when you don't post anything anywhere. Someone always gets upset nowadays. When you are there with your own name and image, you try to avoid any storms."(membership 18 years)*

*“Of course it affects, what channels you have to use for work. It’s true that I like to follow social media, but I don’t post anything there that much. It is the caution, that if I comment on something, then to a reliable party.”*  
(membership 1,5 years)

Reliability seems to be one of the important values to interviewees in club activities and in communication. Members seek reliable companionship in joining the club and are able to somewhat assess which services online are trustworthy.

Professional background has also an effect on the content followed. Several of the respondents estimate that they especially follow the news and topics of professional interest of them. For example, the Twitter emerged as a communication channel through which was possible to get current professional information, even if the channel was not interesting from a leisure time perspective.

### **6.3.2 Professional networking as an advantage**

The most important professional advantage according to the data is networking and contacts. According to all responses, networking with other members is perceived professionally useful. Several mentioned that the contacts also include international connections as well. Through contacts the interviewees considered they can share information and have professional discussions.

It was considered useful to know officials across organizational boundaries and to be able to contact them also in work matters if necessary. In the interviews the meaning of professional contacts as a personal benefit was not analyzed more deeply. The advantage of contacts seemed to be finding information about different topics or reaching right people faster and that way making work easier. None of the interviewees brought up the benefits from a career perspective, but the benefits were seen to be related to practical matters.

*“It helps to have contacts in one’s own field but also from other organizations. It is easier to get in touch if you need information when you know a name and a face.”* (membership 6 years)

*“Networks help when you know who takes care of what kind of things, then it’s easier to contact someone.”* (membership 18 years)

One explanatory factor for the valuing of contacts could be experiencing them as peer support.

*“I got good contacts also from other organizations. We could talk in a very professional manner. At the employee level, when you know people, you can exchange practical and useful tips.” (membership 8 years)*

Of course, contacts in the club were also considered as an advantage in relation to motorcycling and free time. Knowing Blue Knights internationally presents a certain safety net when travelling abroad. Some also considered Blue Knight contacts as meaningful in getting experienced motorcycling company and advice on motorcycling and in developing one's skills as a driver.

*“Of course, driving training is also an advantage. I really like it, and I would say that I have become a better motorist and I have been able to develop my own driving skills a lot.” (membership 7 years)*

## 7 Discussion

In this chapter, the topics arising from the study results are brought up for discussion. Firstly, the correlation between commitment and participation is scrutinized against the theories explaining commitment. In this context, the concept of participatory communication is also examined. Motivation is discussed as part of commitment and the importance of association activities as fulfilling personal needs and from the point of view of management theories. Secondly, the effect of fragmented field of digital communication on association life is examined from a slightly more practical point of view. Third topic brought up to discussion is the meaning of professional background to personal and association's communication.

### 7.1 Correlation between commitment and participation

Like stated in the literature chapter, commitment and participation go somewhat hand in hand and have strong correlation between each other. Despite this, they can also occur separately and thus can be explored in separate phenomena.

The correlation between commitment and participation showed in the study in the answers where the interviewees evaluated their commitment. The more a member participated, the more engaged she considered herself. This corresponds with the views Tschirhart (2006, p. 531) brings up when she describes the correlation as a feedback loop. More committed members will have higher levels of participation, and active participation will then lead to stronger commitment. The study results also seem to coincide with what Luoma-aho and Pekkala (2019, 23) write about participation and commitment: participation promotes the commitment to the organization. Luoma-aho and Pekkala also mention the social capital as the side product obtained from the participatory communication. Interpersonal networks can be considered as such, for example.

According to the study results concrete participation and contribution to the association were not the only factors explaining commitment. Also Mary Tschirhart brings out several explanations of commitment in the chapter "why stay and participate" (2006, p. 531). Tschirhart introduces the views of different theorists on the issues that explain commitment in associations: selective material or solidary incentives, future benefits and seniority, social

cohesion, strong ties with other members, network connections, the amount of demands for members, unique beliefs and values within members. According to Tschirhart (2006, p. 531) the reasons for the entry to the association and for staying and participating actively aren't necessary the same. The study showed that one of the strongest reasons for the entry to Blue Knights was the experience of like-mindedness, which had also made the members stay.

It is interesting to discuss the study results from the point of view of different benefits considered to explain the commitment. In the study the difference between tangible and intangible benefits was highlighted and the considered benefits seemed to be more unmeasurable and relate to personal experience of pride and belonging to a group, for example. For the interviewees, the value of membership was more than benefits measured in money or goods. This corresponds with many of the explanations for example Tschirhart offers for commitment, like ties with other members, social cohesion, network connections and unique beliefs and values.

Concerning the demands that the association sets for its members there seems not one straightforward effect on their commitment and participation. In the study results, for example, the board work was considered most significant in creating personal feeling of commitment. However, the reality is, that there has been a lack of enthusiasm to get new members to commit and participate to board activities. Also, Tschirhart (2006, p. 532) brings up the meaning of the demands set on members and suggests, that lower rates of demands and participation can lead to longer memberships in duration. This refers to the fact, that greater demands can lead to members experiencing conflicts with the demands from different sources and competitive pressure. In the answers, members who had participated actively, reported participation to be a factor that keeps them in the club and did not think that the amount of work and demands would drive them away. On the other hand, the interviewees were not specifically asked about the impact of the requirements or demands set by the club and the feelings related to those.

### **7.1.1 Participatory communication is more than a “throw-in”**

The research question set for this study was “How communication can be used to increase member commitment and participation in association activities? “. One important finding of the study was that communication can be used to influence the commitment and participation of members. When thinking of “how”, the answer can be found at least partially in participatory communication.

The communication should be developed to the direction of being more than a “throw-in”. For example, in studying work environments it has been noted, that the more an employee communicates work related subjects, the more she feels work engagement and involvement to the organization. It is suggested, too, that commitment does not have to be prior to participation, but participation can create commitment. (Pekkala & Luoma-aho, 2019, p. 23.) With communication the members get information about the association and events and that way can get involved in the activity. Now some of the interviewees reported that they didn’t even have access to all the channels available or they didn’t know about their existence. Communication’s role should be seen more as a way to participate and be involved. Participating in communicating club activities and shared values would increase commitment and social capital. Part of the answer to the “how” question is the choice of communication channels and planning. The study provided guidelines for this. Tools should be quick, easy and mobile and there should be some forethought and planning in using each channel.

According to Pekkala & Luoma-aho (2019, p. 15-16) participation creates a basis for individual commitment, feeling of involvement and togetherness. They highlight the meaning of participatory communication as a way to increase the feeling of having power and influence. As examples of participatory communication, they bring up employee ambassadors, who present their organizations in public or crowdsourcing, in which the organization utilizes the know-how and experiences of bigger crowds.

Compared to for example Pekkala’s and Luoma-aho’s views on participatory communication, the communication of the Blue Knights seems not to be specifically participatory but seems to be more like a throw-in, a way to get the information to recipients. The communication itself did not seem to have a direct effect on increasing the feel of commitment. Communication was not considered as a way to participate as such. Instead attending events



or board work were perceived more as ways to participate. For example, posting images to club's Facebook site or writing articles for club magazine didn't come up as ways to be involved.

### **7.1.2 The role of content in creating the feeling of content**

In the interviews, the content preferences of the members were also briefly discussed. There seemed not to emerge any specific type of content that directly affects the experience of commitment. The interviewees also felt that there is no need for more content concerning club values. In addition to participation, the factors that emerged in the study most influencing commitment were like-mindedness and to some extent professional community. From this point of view, content related to these themes can influence the feeling of commitment. At least from the point of view of participatory communication, these topics could well be such content that members themselves could produce and share, and thus, by participating, also increase commitment.

It is more difficult to assess how each individual experiences different contents, and what kind of content might increase the feeling of like-mindedness or other sense of community. Active communication was hoped for in practically all interviews. Also, the interview sessions left with the feeling that everyone had given a thought to the ways to activate the members. No one reported dissatisfaction with any particular content, but whatever was available was gladly accepted.

From this point of view, the participatory role of communication can be seen as one development area in Blue Knights communication. With participatory communication the commitment could be increased by affecting the feeling of being involved and being encouraged to participate.

## 7.2 Associations in fulfilling individual needs

From the point of view of motivational theories, the research results are interesting concerning the entry to the association and participating. When talking about individuals' motivation, the focus seems to be more deeply on complex human behavior. Hollifield et al (2016, 26) highlight the complexity of motivation and individuals' personal needs and goals underlying it. People's individual needs can be seen as explanatory factors in motivating people to join and stay in associations. The research material was quite consistent in this respect and the most common needs to join the association were networking, professional contacts, meeting like-minded people and getting support and knowledge in motorcycling hobby. These aspects seemed to be more related to quality free time than to a professional career.

This corresponds with Maslow's hierarchy of needs in levels of social needs (acceptance, belonging, group membership, love) and esteem (recognition, prestige, success). In addition to this, most people want to influence others (power) and be liked (affiliation). (Hollifield et al. 2016, 26-27). From this point of view, one could think that association activities motivate people, who have the basic needs fulfilled and have a need to achieve more and have capacity and space to have new networks in their lives. Many of the respondents mentioned opportunities for influence as one of the reasons for participating in association activities, which correlates with the mentioned need to influence others. The needs related to affiliation can be seen as one of the reasons why the importance of like-mindedness was also emphasized in the research data.

Like Hollifield et al. also point out, in an organization a manager must know and understand an employee's needs and goals (Hollifield et al. 2016, 27). This can be applied just as well in association activities. By using information about people's motivation and understanding individuals' motives, it would be possible to better plan participatory communication and increase commitment.

Motivation can also be scrutinized from the managerial point of view, like Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012, p.23). They bring up the ability as the other performance-building factor alongside motivation. Ability includes aptitude, training and resources whereas motivation, as mentioned, consists of desire and commitment. Therefore, from the management's point of

view, there are several issues in this entity to look at and influence, for example in the case of operational failure.

A more detailed consideration of individual motivation and its' role in creating performance could also benefit the Blue Knights' association activities. The study results show strong feeling of like-mindedness, shared values and pride of membership underlying member commitment and participation. From a management's point of view, it would be worthwhile to think about how these factors can be used to strengthen the desire and commitment and motivate people, and what ability factors might be missing. Of course, it must be noted that the association's activities are about leisure activities for which no one gets paid and in which participation is voluntary and therefore professional performance requirements cannot be completely generalized to association activities.

### **7.3 Digital communication scatters the field**

The results reflect to a great extent what can also be observed in the communication literature. Digital communication has increased the possibilities of participation, but at the same time the expectations have grown. The dynamics of influencing has changed with new digital ways to communicate. (Pekkala & Luoma-aho 2019, 15.) Many respondents brought up their willingness to do one's share and influence. In several answers the members reflected that their personalities fit well with traditional association activities. Association activities were in a way seen as very traditional way of influencing. The changed dynamics of influencing and the possibilities of digital communication have probably attracted some people to try newer ways to participate and contribute.

The fragmentation of information and people's communication habits in today's digital world were visible both in the study and literature. Although a lot has changed, it hasn't been a change for all. Many people still use actively printed papers, magazines, or news broadcasts from tv. There are the ones who don't want to be online, use smartphones, social media, or websites (Marjamäki & Vuorio 2021, 24-25). The most important factors for members in choosing the communication channels were the speed and ease of the channel. Instant messaging was the most used tool in free time activities. Still, the answers mentioned the gap between different age groups and that it is difficult to reach everyone for example on social media channels. However, it did not emerge from the material that age was an obstacle for

anyone to use different communication channels. According to rough estimate, about 20% of Finns don't use public web services or feel it difficult. Also, the boundaries between internal and external communication have blurred. (Marjamäki & Vuorio 2021, 24-25.) This did not come up to any significant extent in the interview responses albeit the answers showed the distribution of communication channels to some extent between work and leisure tools.

Communicative behavior can be thought of as formed according to the purpose for which communication channel was originally created. Email, videocalls or instant messages were first used in organizations, whereas social media was born for free-time. (Pekkala & Luoma-aho 2019, 20.) This was also visible in study results, in which specially the work-related role of email was very clear. The abundance of communication possibilities came out in the study in how fragmented the members' use of different communication channels was and how it was distributed among many different areas of life, not just in the meaning of work or leisure. This might be like Pekkala & Luoma-aho (2019, 20) suggest, that the use of technology is bound to context and the behavioral patterns are not unambiguous.

#### **7.4 Professional background brings caution**

The second research question used in the study was “How professional background in law and enforcement affects personal communication and the use of different communication channels and tools”.

The law-enforcement officials have a strong professional identity, and it has an effect not only on joining the association but also the communicational behavior. As the keyword was “caution”, there are concrete effects on the association's communication as well. The members reported following several channels actively without their own participation, for example publishing photos or other information related to their everyday lives. The study also clearly showed an interest in following professional topics. It seems that Blue Knights are quite media literate media users and are well aware of the behavior required by their professional background. They considered important to participate only in discussions or services of reliable parties.

#### **7.4.1 Weighing of risks is recognized**

The caution is also recognized when examining the police's communication culture and participation in social media (Sahramäki & al 2022, p. 10). According to Sahramäki & al the communication by the authorities involves a careful weighing of risks – many reported that they were considering whether to participate at all. One of the obstacles brought up was doxing. Another observation was the requirement of flawlessness for police communication, which was considered as a remarkable obstacle in taking part in social discussions. There was a need for wider understanding for the nature of social discussion and the mistakes, overreactions, and misinterpretations it includes (Sahramäki & al 2022, p. 10.). These factors relate to a great extent to the research results found in this study concerning the caution related to the authorities' communication.

Considering the caution that came out in the research results, one could think that it also correlates with the phenomenon of online targeting. Now, when targeting wasn't specifically asked about in the interviews, it is difficult to say how many think it affects their communication behavior. For comparison, according to the questionnaire made by Police Board in 2021, the 93 percent of the respondents found that the Police targeting is a problem while 36 percent reported being personally targeted during the past three years (Police 2022). You could think that the phenomenon is familiar to many and thus affects behavior in general.

When thinking of the results concerning professional background and its' influence, they seem to be in line with the requirements for the conduct of the authorities, including in their free time, set by law. A requirement on how, for example, a police officer must behave in the free time as well, so that the behavior is not likely to jeopardize trust in the proper conduct of police duties seems to be the part of the "caution" mentioned by the interviewees. This study doesn't go deeper into finding out how this legislative background is implanted in the thinking of the officials and what its effect is in the end. It could be a completely different topic of research.

#### **7.4.2 Challenges for a cautious communication culture**

Despite the caution in communication habits brought by professional background, professionalism should not be underestimated in communication planning, because according to the results, professional identities turned out to be one of the strongest factors that unite members. From the professional point of view, the most important advantage of belonging to the association was considered to be networking, professional contacts and getting experienced company in motorcycling.

When meeting Blue Knights and in Blue Knight communication you often see the slogan “Ride With Pride” used. Some also carry velcros with the text “Proud member of the good guys”. The association’s unique messages of commitment adopted by the members should be used in participatory communication also in the future. Professional identities of the members have a great importance on the experience of community, pride of the membership and encouraging individuals to communicating them.

Maybe in the future the club should provide communication tools that most members feel safe to use. This would favor the use of a communication channel that is only for the club’s internal use, be it WhatsApp-group or a separate own application. Here, of course, the challenge is the spectrum of possibilities. Content and members are divided into different communication channels. Some of the channels offer and favor very informal communication, while there is also a need for more official and possibly non-public association communication. Successful communication would definitely require planning.

From the point of view of participatory communication, the caution can be seen as a challenge. Participatory communication requires an active presence on, for example social media. Even if we might wish that all communication could be secure, the reality is that people and different organizations also live on social media and different mobile apps.

## 8 Conclusions

In sum, the study succeeded in finding answers to the research questions regarding the members' commitment and participation in the association's activities and the influence of professional identity. The study, for its part, complements findings from other studies about the role and requirements of communication in organizations. The study strengthens the picture of today's digital world, where communication, and people's free time is fast and fragmented.

The most significant and interesting result of the study is the importance of members' professional background. Professional identity not only seemed to have strong influence on the feeling of like-mindedness, but it also strongly influenced the members' ways of communicating. The points of convergence with the findings of the study examining the public communication and development needs of the Finnish police (Sahramäki & al, 2022) are interesting and worth taking a look with the eyes of association communication. The study states that police communication is still in transition and that interactive public discussion is largely just developing into a part of police communication (Sahramäki & al 2022, p.28). Some studies have used concepts of digital divide and digital inclusion related to our digital lives. Where technology is intended to improve the quality of our lives and enable, among other things, social and citizen participation activities it is important, that with inclusion we try to bridge the gap between the people who have access to technologies and those who don't. (Hoyos Muñoz & Cardona Valencia 2023.) One could think that this also applies to association activities, which seem to be considered a rather traditional and even old-fashioned way of influencing. Associations are looking for their place in the digital world.

The study also found concrete development areas in the association's communication. Blue Knights clearly have needs and shortcomings in the basic communication of the association, which if corrected would certainly yield results in the participation and commitment of members. Examples of things that could be improved would be, for example, better informing members about the communication channels used, rules for the use of different channels, more purpose-oriented use of tools or timely communication about the events and encouraging members to participate by communicating and creating content themselves. The

common denominator for all of these is communication planning. Now there really isn't a person who is responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing communication, but it belongs somewhat vaguely to the board work. The study concerning the police communication proposes several solutions to the challenges of public communication, for example clarifying the responsibilities, checking the competence needs, encouraging the employees to open communication and offering education. (Sahramäki, 2022 p. 32.) These proposals could work equally well in the communication of a leisure association, especially when you consider this against the professional background of the Blue Knights.

One viable solution could be to combine communication with the action plan of the association, in which would be added case plans for the communication of different events.

In her book, Tracy (2019, 7) uses the analogy of tools when talking about choosing a research method. Just like "a hammer is a better tool than a screwdriver for banging a nail into a wall", the qualitative method is better when you need to richly describe a scene or understand the stories people use to narrate their lives. In this study I have succeeded in painting a rich picture of Blue Knights Finland 1 as an association and the members' relation to communication, professional identities and their feeling of commitment.

One shortcoming in the study was the proportion of "dormant" members among the interviewees. Now all the respondents had participated into association activities, most even actively. It would have been good to get research material also from those who, despite their membership, would not have participated in any way. This would have widened the understanding of the reasons underlying member commitment.

While planning the study, at some point I considered conducting an ethnographic study on my topic. I could have used the summer season to be involved as much as possible in Blue Knights events and collect information about the research topic through participatory observation. It would have been easy to implement, because as a member of the club I would have been able to smoothly participate in all kinds of activities. As a research data, I could have collected the notes of the observations in the events, take pictures and interview participants in the scene. Also, I could have considered including an international event into the study to get material from the Blue Knights outside Finland. The biggest obstacle to this method of research was ultimately its time-consuming nature, I wouldn't have been able to



spend the whole summer observing and have enough time to participate. Also, the amount of research data would have been extensive. Nevertheless, I think that perhaps an ethnographic study would have been the most interesting and rewarding way to conduct the research. Then there had been a chance to see what a researcher can really get with diving deep into the topic. Also, the results would have been more profound.

Very rewarding phase of the research was conducting the interviews and talking with the members although it took time. People's genuine thoughts are extremely interesting when you start to study them more closely. One of the biggest challenges of the research work was the use of time. High-quality research and analysis require time and effort. This perhaps summarizes the core of the topic studied, which can be seen in almost all aspects of life, also in association life. Time, and what you want to use it for, and what you want to achieve with it.

Finally, I would like to thank all the interviewees and Blue Knights Finland 1 for your support in conducting this study. Ride With Pride!

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## **10 Appendices**

1. The interview framework and questions (also in Finnish)
2. Summary for the Blue Knights communication (also in Finnish)

## APPENDICE 1

1. The background of the interviewee and their communicating habits
  - When you joined the Blue Knights?
  - What were your main reasons for joining the club?
  - Which Blue Knight activities have you participated in (how many per year and what have they been)
  - What communication channels do you use on daily bases?
  - How much and to what purposes do you use following communication channels:
    - email
    - social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter...)
    - instant messaging apps (WhatsApp, Signal...)
    - websites and services
    - discussion forums
    - personal meetings
    - phone calls
    - what other?
2. Blue Knights related communication
  - What Blue Knight related communication channels do you use or follow?
  - Which communication channels would you like the association to use?
  - What thoughts do you have of the club discussion forum?
  - What thoughts do you have of the club communication?
  - What kind of Blue Knight related content interests you and why?
  - How do you think your own professional background effect on your use of different communication channels?
3. Commitment and participation
  - What has made you stay in the club?
  - How would you describe your commitment to the club?
  - What significance do you think the association's values have for its operation and to you?
  - What have been your challenges to participate to club activities?
  - What kind of advertisements would make you participate?
  - What makes you participate in the association's activities in the board?

- What kind of benefits would draw you to participate in the association's activities?
- What benefits do you think you get from the association?
- Do you feel that belonging to the association benefits you professionally, how?
- What are your hopes and thoughts for the future of association and its communication?

### 1. Haastateltavan tausta ja viestintätottumukset

- Milloin liityit Blue Knightsiin?
- Mitkä olivat tärkeimmät syysliittyä yhdistykseen?
- Mihin Blue Knightsin tapahtumiin olet osallistunut (Kuinka moneen vuodessa ja mitä ne ovat olleet)
- Mitä viestintäkanavia käytät päivittäin?
- Arvioi kanavittain, Kuinka paljon ja mihin tarkoituksiin käytät seuraavia kanavia:
  - sähköposti
  - sosiaalisen median alustat (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter...)
  - pikaviestisovellukset (WhatsApp, Signal...)
  - verkkosivut ja -palvelut
  - keskustelufoorumit
  - henkilökohtaiset tapaamiset
  - puhelut
  - muu, mikä?

### 2. Blue Knightsiin liittyvä viestintä

- Mitä Blue Knightsiin liittyviä viestintäkanavia käytät tai seuraat?
- Mitä viestintäkanavia toivoisit yhdistyksen käyttävän?
- Mitä ajatuksia sinulla kerhon keskustelufoorumista?
- Mitä ajatuksia sinulla on Blue Knightsin viestinnästä?
- Minkälainen Blue Knightsin sisältö kiinnostaa sinua ja miksi?
- Miten ajattelet oman ammatillisen taustasi vaikuttavan siihen, miten käytät eri viestintäkanavia?

### 3. Sitoutuminen ja osallistuminen

- Mikä on saanut sinut pysymään yhdistyksessä?
- Miten kuvailisit sitoutumistasi yhdistykseen?
- Mitä merkitystä ajattelet yhdistyksen arvoilla olevan sen toiminnalle ja sinulle?
- Mitä haasteita sinulla on ollut yhdistyksen toimintaan osallistumiselle?
- Minkälaisten ilmoitukset saisivat sinut osallistumaan?



- Mikä saa sinut osallistumaan yhdistyksen hallitustoimintaan?
- Mitkä edut saavat sinut osallistumaan yhdistyksen toimintaan?
- Mitä etua ajattelet sinulle olevan yhdistykseen kuulumisesta?
- Onko yhdistyksen jäsenyydestä mielestäsi sinulle ammatillista hyötyä, mitä?
- Mitä toiveita ja ajatuksia sinulla on yhdistyksen viestinnälle ja yhdistykselle tulevaisuudessa?

# COMMUNICATION

## IN CREATING COMMITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

### PARTICIPATION AND COMMITMENT

- participation and commitment have a strong correlation
- like-mindedness and pride of membership effect the feeling of commitment
- our professional identity is on important part of feeling togetherness and social cohesion
- intangible benefits overweight tangible, principals are important



### STRENGTHS

We are media literate.

We understand the meaning of reliable communication and data security.

We have passion for the hobby we love.



### NEED INSTRUCTIONS?

- norms and regulations for communication
- "What is possible"
- the possibilities of different tools
- easier content producing with simple guidelines for texts and images

### THE CHOOSE OF CHANNEL?

- speed and ease are most preferred factors
- Whatsapp and Facebook most popular
- it must happen mobile
- security also matters -members only needed
- the possibility of club app?
- with planning the possibilities of different channels could be utilised more effectively

### COMMUNICATION



- more planning is needed:
  - communication included to action plan
  - timeliness
  - utilisation of different channels and rules for use
  - resources
- communication as a way to participate, encouraging content producing
- communicating shared goals and values: creating desire and commitment for motivation

# VIESTINNÄN KEINOT

## OSALLISTUMISEEN JA SITOUTUMISEEN

### OSALLISTUMINEN JA SITOUTUMINEN

- osallistuminen vaikuttaa sitoutumisen kokemukseen
- samanhenkisyys ja ylpeys jäsenydestä saavat sitoutumaan
- ammatillinen identiteettimme on tärkeä osa yhteisöllisyyden kokemusta
- aineelliset edut eivät pääasia, tärkeämpää periaatteet



### VIESTINTÄ



- lisää suunnitelmallisuutta:
  - viestintä osaksi vuosisuunnitelmaa
  - oikea-aikaisuus
  - eri kanavien käyttö ja pelisäännöt niille
  - resurssit
- viestintä yhdeksi osallistumisen muodoksi, rohkeaisu julkaista sisältöä kerhon toiminnasta
- yhteisten tavoitteiden ja arvojen viestintä: mikä koetaan niin tärkeäksi, että se saa osallistumaan

### VAHVUUKSIA

Meillä on hyvä mediaikutaito.

Ymmärrämme luotettavan viestintäkanavan ja tietoturvan merkityksen.

Meillä on into rakastamaamme harrastukseen



### KOULUTUKSESTA APUA?

- viestinnän normit tutuiksi
- "Mitä voidaan tehdä"
- eri kanavien mahdollisuudet
- sisällöntuotanto helpommaksi, yksinkertaiset tekstit ja kuvankäsittely

### MIKÄ KANAVA?

- nopeus ja helpous koetaan tärkeimmäksi
- Whatsapp ja Facebook suosituimmat
- pitää onnistua mobiilisti
- tärkeää myös luotettavuus ja oma kanava jäsenille
- oman appin mahdollisuus?
- suunnitelmallisuudella eri kanavien hyödyt saataisiin paremmin käyttöön