

# Reaching Out to the People, Even When It Hurts

By DEBORAH STRANGE



*In response to a request on Twitter for feel-good photographs of New York City police, a scene from an Occupy Wall Street protest was posted. (ASSOCIATED PRESS)*

Chief William J. Bratton of the New York Police Department wanted to connect with the city’s people. So after a bit of deliberation, the N.Y.P.D. started a Twitter campaign, asking citizens to post a smiling picture with an officer and attach the hashtag #myNYPD.

But instead of happy photos, the hashtag elicited criticism of the department’s stop-and-frisk policy and its heavyhanded response to Occupy Wall Street, The Times reported.

“I would call this a rookie move,” Scott Galloway, a professor of marketing at New York University, said. “Doing it on Twitter is no different as if they’d changed their uniforms to bull’s-eyes.”

The N.Y.P.D. learned the hard way that it is difficult to control your public image in the Wild West of the Internet.

Some in the department questioned the decision to engage on Twitter, where a series of embarrassing photographs showed officers restraining a photographer, aiming a gun at a dog and apparently sleeping on the subway, The Times reported.

But some public servants, including Mr. Bratton, see social media as a forum that government agencies need to participate in, even if their efforts are poorly received. Mr. Bratton said any publicity is good publicity.

The personal Instagram account of Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles draws attention because it shows daily life from the perspective of a resident with better-than-average access.

His official governmental account, lamayorsoffice, has pictures of Town Hall meetings, speeches and other city officials. But on the account ericgarcetti, the mayor posts artistic pictures of his city up close: President Obama deplaning Air Force One, the view from behind the famous Hollywood sign, costumed minions from “Despicable Me” at Universal Studios, a mural of a tooth apparently in love, with “Korsen?!” (In his caption, Mayor Garcetti asked “#whoiskorsen?”)

“The contrast between Mayor Garcetti and most everyone else is striking,” John Della Volpe, who directs polling at the Institute of Politics at Harvard University, told The Times. “Garcetti’s shows a portrait of LOS ANGELES. Both beautiful and brilliant.”

The mayor reaches younger voters, who are more likely to browse the site, and builds a rapport with other citizens.

“People are spending billions of dollars giving voters what they don’t want, which are tricky ads,” Mayor Garcetti told The Times. “We spend no time giving voters what they do want, which is a truer connection with their government and opportunities to engage.”

Another goal for politicians using social media is to create a sense of unity.

After more than 200 Nigerian schoolgirls were kidnapped in April, Senator Barbara Mikulski, Democrat of Maryland, gathered 11 of the 20 females serving in the United States Senate for a picture. They held a sign with #BringBackOurGirls, the hashtag created to raise awareness of the kidnappings. Many of the senators tweeted the picture, The Times reported.

Michelle Obama started the Twitter campaign, posting a picture with the same inscribed sign on May 7 with the tweet: “Our prayers are with the missing Nigerian girls and their families. It’s time to #BringBackOurGirls. -mo.”

“I think when the women of the Senate come together across party lines, it’s very powerful and effective,” Senator Mary L. Landrieu, Democrat of Louisiana, told The Times. “I think when the women stand united on an issue like this, we can bring a tremendous amount of moral authority to the issue.”