# "Influence of social media on organizational communication and organizational culture at the South African Social Security Agency in South Africa"

AUTHORS	Sabo Dlelengana (b) Rufus Adebayo (b) Tatenda Chikukwa (b)	
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Sabo Dlelengana, MSc., Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology, South Africa. (Corresponding author)

Rufus Adebayo, Ph.D., Lecturer, Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology, South Africa.

Tatenda Chikukwa, MSc., Department of Human Resources Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology, South Africa.

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### INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### **Abstract**

Social media is a potent drive in the modern landscape of organizational dynamics, influencing cultural norms and communication styles. The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex effects of social media on organizational culture and communication. The paper explores how social media platforms have changed communication channels, interaction dynamics, and organizational culture, drawing on a mixture of previous research and pragmatic studies. A quantitative research paradigm was employed and a sample of 140 sample respondents was selected using simple random sampling. The sample respondents were employees at a selected South African Social Security Agency branch in South Africa. The results revealed that Facebook was the most used platform and that employees use social media for both work and non-work related purposes. The study concluded a positive and significant relationship between social media usage and social media enhancing the organizational culture (r = 0.227; p < 0.05). Moreover, the study found no relationship between social media usage influencing employee behavior and social media restrictions impacting employee morale negatively (r = 0.036; p > 0.05). The findings highlight valuable insights on the role of social media and its effect on organizational culture and communication. It is also evident from the results that social media usage presents opportunities and challenges for organizations. Hence, the paper concludes that organizations can use social media to create a communicative, flexible, and resilient organizational culture in digital time by recognizing the dynamics at work and taking proactive measures.

**Keywords** social media, social networking sites, organizational culture, communication, branding, Facebook

**JEL Classification** J24, L20, M54, O15

#### INTRODUCTION

The workplace is only one of the many spheres of daily life into which social media has made significant inroads. Social media networks are a common way for co-workers to communicate with one another (Awolusi, 2012; Bolton et al., 2013; Deters, 2015). Many organizations, mainly government agencies, utilize social media networks for different purposes, such as internal and external communication and information gathering. Social media stimulates brands and organizational image; thus, messaging, content, and distribution need to be focused at customer and brand engagement (Berz, 2016). Particularly noteworthy is the increase in the amount of time adolescents and young adults spend on social networking sites, online games, texting, and other types of social media (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Dhir et al. (2018) and Tateno et al. (2019) have theorized that globally, social me-

dia users' habits have changed, as have the ways in which people communicate with one another. As a result, there are more concerns about the probable harmful effects of social media addiction, particularly on psychological well-being (Swar & Hameed, 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016; Jiao et al., 2017; Choi & Noh, 2020; Chatterjee, 2020). Glucksman (2017) states that social media platforms are rapidly changing organizational communication and culture.

In the context of communication and culture, organizations are vulnerable to reputational damages (Van Den Berg & Struwig, 2016). Utilizing social media tools to interact with customers provides information in real time and allows employees to access information equally. Cyber security issues, reputation management, engaging in two-way dialogue, and issues surrounding organizational culture, such as conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality, and language, may influence the extent to which employees use social media. Despite various research studies on the effect of social media usage on communication, Roshan et al. (2016) and Schlagwein and Hu (2017) highlight limited studies investigating social media, organizational culture, and organizational communication.

Apart from low budgets and low priority given to service delivery, most government departments in South Africa use traditional media, such as radio and newspapers, to communicate with its targeted audience and the public (Thatcher, 2004). This one-way communication channel is attributed to the government's low feedback and low participation among its targeted audience and the public. Moreover, the non-regulation of social media at local, provincial, and national government levels, as well as the underutilization of social media, have often resulted in a failure to communicate adequately between the organization and its beneficiaries. Fraud, fake advertising of vacancies, and misleading announcements have also become a prominent issue (Nair, 2021; Kahla, 2023). Therefore, the study seeks to investigate the influence of social media on organizational communication and organizational culture at a South African Social Security Agency in South Africa.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Social media is a developing phenomenon connected with a new change associated with social media platforms and applications, transforming how human beings interact, work, and innovate (Kaplan et al., 2013; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bhimani et al., 2019). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media refers to websites that permit profile creation and the display of user relationships. It also relates to webbased applications or a set of information technologies/internet-based applications that harness collective intelligence. They include functionality for sharing, relationships, groups, conversations, and profiles (Keller, 2001; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013; Kapoor et al., 2018). Moreover, Web 2.0 technologies were necessary to create and adopt social media. The use of social media platforms reduces social isolation because it makes users connected to relevant people (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Through social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn, employees have constant network connectedness (Asur & Huberman, 2010). Scheinbaum (2017) acknowledges that social media platforms ensure simple interaction between people and organizations, as well as independent sharing across all genders and age groups. In addition, Boyd and Ellison (2007) state that a well-designed social media communication system is necessary for adopting organizational and managerial tasks, for which information sharing within and outside the organization is necessary.

Social media provides leverage in building a sense of belonging through online communities and a number of avenues to communicate with both strong and weak ties, including co-workers, acquaintances, and relatives (Twenge & Campbell 2019; Roberts & David, 2020). With the transition of the internet from a read-only medium to an interactive virtual world and the growing use of cell phones, communication has taken on a new dimension (Reichers, 1985). Social media networks are used expansively in most walks of life

and many different disciplines for various purposes. Social media serves as a bridge between an organization and its intended audience, raising knowledge of the latter while having the potential to have a positive effect on the target group.

As a result of their ability to connect with their audience, organizations are able to gain public support. Through social media, organizations can learn more about their markets, rivals, and key customers. The importance of social media continues to grow for people and organizations. These technologies have changed the role of web administration from being consumption-based to becoming collective and collaborative, building opportunities for communication between the open public and organizations (Henderson & Bowley, 2010). Employees post what is trending in their office, professional obstacles, and stress all the time. Social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook are frequently utilized as news sources to monitor rivals and market trends. The line between social and proficient life is virtually eradicated. Social media has changed the way employees and managers interconnect, do business, and form relationships (Henderson & Bowley, 2010).

Despite no accepted definition of organizational communication, researchers have acknowledged that organizational communication comprises a process of interaction between two people or more within an environment. McCroskey et al. (2006) highlight that communication evokes meaning in the minds of others through spoken and non-verbal exchanges within a formal setting of a specific organization. Despite face-toface interaction being necessary for conventional communication, communication via social media platforms involves replying to someone else's status update, making comments, or even striking up a dialogue with another user. In an organizational setting, employees must communicate more frequently and efficiently with one another using existing internal communication structures. Organizational communication comprises internal communication within the organization and external communication between the organization and its stakeholders through various modes and channels. Employees' behavior inside and outside the organization is influenced/shaped by how the organization manages communication. For instance, interpersonal communication helps management in ensuring that employees in a team get along with one another, as well as facilitating effective operations among the different parts of the organization (Ali & Bhasin, 2019). In addition, effective organizational communication assists management in executing their primary role of setting policies and providing guidance, thereby enhancing effectiveness and efficiency.

The development of social media has influenced, simplified, and facilitated open communication in organizations, as well as how it is practiced. It has equally re-designed the ordinary practices of organizational communication and culture. According to Parveen et al. (2015), organizations are now creating and managing social media public pages to increase interest in their organizations, improve their social network salience, and develop interactions with the online public as a result of realizing the significance of Web 2.0 applications. On the other hand, organizations are increasingly using social media as a crucial strategic tool. For instance, social media changes the nature of relationships within an organization by enabling conversations and increasing understanding among the organization and its employees (Culnan, 1986; Hanna et al., 2011). Mangold and Faulds (2009) highlight that through social media, organizations can share and exchange content on work-related activities, which may potentially enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency. It is evident that the crucial role of social media in organizations is to enable conversations and increase understanding among the organization, its employees, and other stakeholders.

Over the past few decades, social scientists have investigated the idea of organizational culture as a perspective in organizational theory. Robbins et al. (2016) highlight that organizational culture is "a system of shared meaning held by members, distinguishing the organization from other organizations." In addition, Schein (1985) defines organizational culture as "a sequence of basic assumptions developed, identified or constructed by an organization as it learns to cope with its problems of external change and internal cohesion that have proven successful enough to be considered valid, and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation

to those problems." According to Moerdyk et al. (2024), organizational culture comprises values, standards, and cultural patterns formed and dispersed in the social community. This collective, which is founded on a group of shared values, customs, and cultural norms, is the organization in terms of organizational culture. O'Connor et al. (2016) highlight that social media remains a crucial tool for developing organizational culture as it promotes various relationships between leaders, managers, employees, and other stakeholders. Social media in organizational communication and culture plays a critical role in ensuring that the organization enjoys public support acceptance, which makes the organization effective and productive. All organizations benefit from having a social media strategy, a related crisis communication plan, and issues management.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of social media usage in organizational communication and organizational culture. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are developed:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a relationship between social media being an effective communication tool and the organization sharing business results regularly.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a relationship between social media being an effective communication tool and social media raising awareness about new developments.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a relationship between social media usage improving the image of the organization and social media being essential in strengthening personal relations and organizational culture among employees.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a relationship between social media usage improving the image of the organization and social media bringing positive changes to the workplace.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a relationship between social media usage and employees' commitment to innovation and development.
- $H_6$ : There is a relationship between restrictions on social media usage and employee morale.

#### 2. METHOD

A quantitative approach entails the collection of numerical data and generalizing them across groups of people or clarifying a specific concept. A closed-ended structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from a sample size of 140 respondents. The sample size was calculated via systematic random sampling from a target population of 210 employees using Sekaran and Bougie's approach (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

A structured closed-ended questionnaire was adopted as it is less costly, easier to analyze and administer, and provides respondents with simplicity (Polit & Hungler, 2016; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The structured closed-ended questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A comprised the cover letter and biographical questions. Section B comprised questions/statements related to social media, organizational communication, and organizational culture. Furthermore, the closed-ended questionnaire also offered a cover letter and consent form that ensured that respondents voluntarily participated, ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity.

A letter of permission to conduct the study was obtained from the selected government department in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and the Institutional Research Ethics Committee. After the data collection, the study applied the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Moreover, the quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### 3. RESULTS

The gender breakdown of the sample respondents shows that 36% were males, while 64% were females. The sample population is relatively young, as the majority are 35 and younger. For instance, respondents between 31 to 35 years comprised 41.4%. Respondents between 21 to 30 years equated to 20.7%, while 16.4% fell into the age category of 36 to 40, while those aged 41 to 50 constituted 12.1% and 20 to 25 constituted 7.9%. A meager 1.4% were above 51 years. A significant portion (40.7%) had more than 5 years of service at the selected organization, 16.42% had 11 to 15 years of service,

**Table 1.** Social media as an effective communication tool

Statement	Statistical Test	Sharing business results is now regular due to social media	Social media is useful in increasing awareness about new developments
Social media is effective as a communication tool	Pearson Correlation	0.207	0.340
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.014	0.000
	N	140	140

while a mere 2.14% worked for 16 to 20 years. The majority (73.60%) speak IsiXhosa, 22.90% speak English, 1.40% speak IsiZulu, and only 2.1% speak Afrikaans. Moreover, most (63.6%) spend between 3-7 hours on social media a day. In addition, 82% indicated that they use social media for work-related purposes during the day, while 17% use social media for non-work-related purposes. The results show that 67.9% of the sample respondents use Facebook, 30.7% use Twitter, and 1.4% use LinkedIn daily.

Table 1 analyzes the relationship between social media being an effective communication tool and (a) organization regularly sharing business results with employees and (b) social media being a useful communication tool in increasing awareness within the organization. Based on the Pearson correlation results in Table 1, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between social media being an effective communication tool and the organization regularly sharing business results (r = 0.207, p < 0.05). Therefore,  $H_1$  is accepted. In addition, there is a statistically significant correlation between social media being an effective communication tool and social media being a useful tool in in-

creasing awareness about new developments in the organization (r = 0.340, p < 0.05). Therefore, H<sub>2</sub> is accepted.

Table 2 illustrates the empirical findings on the role of social media in organizational culture and reputation. Based on Table 2, p = 0.007 (p < 0.05). Therefore,  $H_3$  is accepted: there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between social media usage improving the image of the organization and social media being essential in strengthening personal relations among employees and enhancing organizational culture. Furthermore, Table 2 depicts a statistically insignificant relationship between social media usage improving the image of the organization and social media usage bringing positive changes to the workplace, as p = 0.378 (p > 0.05). Therefore,  $H_4$  is rejected.

Table 3 analyzes the relationship between social media usage and employees' commitment to innovation and development. Table 3 illustrates a positive and statistically significant relationship between the presence of social media at work and employees being committed to innovation and development, as p = 0.006 (p < 0.05). Therefore, H<sub>5</sub> is accepted.

Table 2. The role of social media in organizational culture and organizational reputation

Statement	Statistical Test	Social media is essential in building and strengthening personal relations and a positive organizational culture	Social media brings positive changes to the workplace
The image of the organization can	Pearson Correlation	0.227	0.075
be improved through the use of	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.007	0.378
social media	N	140	140

Table 3. The relationship between social media and innovation and development

Statement	Statistical Test	Employees are committed to innovation and development with the use of social media
In the presence of social media, employees feel confident	Pearson Correlation	0.229
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.006
	N	140

**Table 4.** Social media usage and employee morale

Statement	Statistical Test	Restrictions on social media networks negatively impact employee morale
Employee behavior is influenced by social media usage	Pearson Correlation	0.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.670
	N	140

Table 4 analyzes the relationship between social media usage and employee morale. Based on Pearson correlations in Table 4, p=0.670~(p>0.05). Thus,  $\rm H_6$  is rejected as there is no statistically significant relationship between employee behavior being influenced by social media usage and social media restrictions impacting negatively on employee morale.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The study found that Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform. This finding concurs with Tulu (2017), who found that Facebook is the most-used social media platform in the workplace. Next, the study concluded a relationship between social media being an effective communication tool and raising awareness within the organization, as well as the organization being able to share organizational results with employees. Jafar et al. (2019) found that personal and work-related use of social media has the potential to enhance employee effectiveness and performance through knowledge-sharing. According to Siddiqui and Singh (2016), social media has enhanced two-way communication and transformed communication by bringing knowledge and information to those previously faced with limited or no access, as well as those in remote areas. This is because social media has a significant influence on the organization as it can be a source of educational and non-educational information, facilitating quick interactions and allowing information to be easily conveyed (Davis, 1989; Dixon, 2024; Tulu, 2017).

Third, the study found a relationship between social media usage improving the image of the organization and social media strengthening relations among employees as well as organizational culture. According to Arslan and Zaman (2014), social media pervades all aspects of organizational life and significantly affects organizational

culture. Siddiqui and Singh (2016) and Aguenza et al. (2012) affirm that social media usage in an organization has the potential to help an organization maintain, develop, and promote its existing brand and strategy, as well as give the organization a voice. Fourth, the study showed a relationship between the presence of social media at work and employees being committed to innovation and development within the organization. Deng et al. (2017), Johnson et al. (2017), and Nkwe and Cohen (2017) acknowledge that social media presence and usage at work allow employees to assess alternatives when making decisions and also make timely and meaningful decisions.

Fifth, the study revealed no relationship between social media communication influencing employee behavior and social media having a negative effect on employee morale and organizational culture. Furthermore, the study found no relationship between social media usage improving the image of the organization and social media usage bringing positive changes to the workplace. These findings contradict previous results. For instance, Arslan and Zaman (2014) concluded that an increase in the usage of social media for work purposes results in improved communication and culture within an organization. Song et al. (2019) acknowledge that employees expect both work-oriented and socialization-oriented social media to co-exist and create synergies in the workplace that improve team and employee performances through effective communication, job monitoring, knowledge-sharing, social and emotional connections, affective relationships, and trust. Luo et al. (2018) affirm that non-work-related corporate blogging activities have positive effects on employee's affective commitment. In addition, a study by Marbun et al. (2020) in Medan City in Indonesia among teachers and government employees concluded that social media facilitates knowledge transfer if it is part of organizational culture. Moreover, Charoensukmongkol (2014) concluded that co-worker support, supervisor support, and job demands explain why employees feel a greater or lesser attachment to social media at work. Social media usage at work may not necessarily be associated with negative job-related outcomes. Despite frequency and du-

ration affecting employee productivity negatively, Tulu (2017) also found that social media usage for work and non-work-related activities has the potential to positively influence employee productivity.

#### CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of social media usage on organizational communication and organizational culture at the selected government department in South Africa. The study found that social media usage among employees positively influences organizational image and organizational culture. It is evident that social media plays a significant role in organizational communication, as well as in shaping the organizational culture. Based on the findings, the organization should adopt a comprehensive and structured social media framework and include social media in the organization's communication strategy. The integration of social media as part of the organization's communication methods is vital in enhancing effective communication. Furthermore, a structured and well-communicated social media policy is of paramount consideration. The ability to handle social media is vital in addressing the risks associated with work and non-work-related social media usage.

The study contributes to theory and practice on the relationship among social media usage, organizational communication, and organizational culture in public enterprises in South Africa. Future research may adopt a mixed or qualitative methodology since the adopted methodology did not provide a detailed narrative analysis. Since the study was conducted at a selected government department in South Africa, the empirical findings cannot be generalized to other government departments in South Africa as situations and circumstantial factors may differ.

#### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Conceptualization: Sabo Dlelengana.

Formal analysis: Sabo Dlelengana, Tatenda Chikukwa.

Funding acquisition: Rufus Adebayo.

Investigation: Sabo Dlelengana, Tatenda Chikukwa. Methodology: Sabo Dlelengana, Tatenda Chikukwa.

Project administration: Sabo Dlelengana, Tatenda Chikukwa.

Resources: Rufus Adebayo. Supervision: Rufus Adebayo. Validation: Rufus Adebayo.

Writing – original draft: Sabo Dlelengana, Tatenda Chikukwa.

Writing - review & editing: Rufus Adebayo.

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