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## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS POLICY WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*When it comes to social networks utilisation, the bottom line is that it's less about "micro-managing" employees and more about giving employees the tools needed to successfully represent themselves and the business, within the rules set and in compliance with the law. The aim of the research paper is to identify the social networks policy gaps in the South African government department. The study was conducted in five (5) national government departments in South Africa. A qualitative, interpretive research method was used. The interpretative method allowed the researcher to have a deeper sense of making of the qualitative data. Face to face semi-structure open-ended interviews were used to collect data. A total of seventeen (17) directors and deputy directors were interviewed from the five National department.*

*The analysis and interpretation of empirical data indicated that disclaimer must be put in place as one of social network standard code of conduct, however this should not replace social network policy, furthermore the analysis indicated that social networks should also be included in the employment of agreement which will compel all employees to behave accordingly when using social networks during working hours even outside working hours.*

*It is critical that regulatory policies governing the use of technology be in place. There few social networks gaps identified in the standardised government codes of conduct and performance of agreement. In some department policies are non-existent and this has led to some government departments practicing as they deem fit. Though social networks platforms are still new in the public sector, it is recommended that government implement policies and procedures for social networks uses and that employees should agree to the terms and condition prior using social networks platforms, so that they can be held accountable for unacceptable behaviour not the government.*

**Keywords:** Social networks, regulations, governance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to identify the importance of social networks within the government sector. The benefits of social networks platforms vary based on platform type, features and the organisation itself (Dickson & Holley, 2010:04). However, for social networks to be effective and efficient tight rules and regulation should in place except the codes of conduct and standard of performance. In a complex environment such as government sector, policy and regulations cannot be neglected. The aim of the research is to identify social network policy gap in the South African Government departments.

Social network is very complex. It requires procedures and restrictions. These components contribute to the success or failure of utilising social

networks tools to improve organisational effectiveness (Van Zyl, 2009:03). Public sector cannot be better understood without processes and regulations. These organisational resources are complimentary and integrated in the organisation as they are essential pillars for effective innovation (Hering & Phillips, 2005:3). The reason why social networks were implemented in the South African government departments was to serve as knowledge management tool to improve skills that to ensure effective workflow, encouraging creativity and innovation among employees (Van Zyl, 2009:03), and employee contributes to its success. However, the success of social networks will not be possible in instances where employees do not understand operational policy and behavioural policy of social networks both inside and outside the workplace (Sunassee & Sewry, 2002:235).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social networks are more developed to solve problems, it however has certain unforeseen circumstances (Nye, 2016:65). It has limitation and dilemmas. The limitation of social networks is more based on the procedures and process of company, and it can be successful when the regulatory environment and the accompanying policies are understood and adhered to (Stohl, Etter, Banghart & Woo, 2017:413). The tougher the rules the more efficient and the greater benefit (Sacco & Bossio, 2017:177). It will however continue to leave some doubt and discomfort to employees in instances where employees are not sure of the company's technological procedures (Nye, 2016:65). Hence is very important for employees to be fully aware of operational and behavioural social networks procedures within the government departments (Rathore, Sharma, Loia, Jeong & Park, 2017:43). To create organisational effectiveness, it is critical to have the right people doing the right things the right way at the right time (Stack, 2016:18).

Social networks are the infrastructure that is required to support the needs of the enterprise and innovation within the organisation for it to operate effectively and compete globally (Vetráková, Hitka, Potkány, Lorincová & Smerek, 2018:1670). It is designed to integrate workflow processes. Social Networks contributes to the government 's economical advantage by enabling people to respond quickly to market opportunities. It increases the government's ability to respond to changing environments (Stohl, Etter, Banghart & Woo, 2017:413) and supports an organisation should it wish to compete globally (Lin, Singer & Ha, 2010:38).

Interacting through social networks introduces new challenges related to privacy, security and reputation (Ahmed, Ab Hamid, Gani & Khan, 2019:145). Hence the guiding processes and regulations are very important. Process is an ongoing activity in an organisation and entails the engagement of employees. It is carried out differently, in different organisations, by different people. Process, according to Sacco and Bossio (2017:177), is “the component which kick starts the possibility for the development and implementation of IT strategy”. A process consists of the programme code that might be shared with other processes executing the same programme. Organisations and government departments adhere to policies and regulations that regulate the deployment and usage of information and communications technology (ICT) in the workplace. These policies and regulations can be enablers or barriers for organisation deploying ICT in their environment (Ballon & Van Heesvelde, 2011:703).

There is an increasing need for technological services to be employed in government departments, particularly the services that are enabled and supported by Internet infrastructure, such as social networks. It permits the departments to create new approaches when doing business and providing service delivery. This will help government to improving public

communication and monitors media coverage for government programmes from a communication's perspective. South African government departments are working towards bringing change and uplifting communities. Social networking is one of the strategies that can be put in place by these government departments as a development strategy. These can enable employees to efficiently improve performance. However, not all government departments in South Africa have social networks policy, except the norms and codes of conduct.

Regulation plays an important role in the Information Communication Technology environment. This field is strictly regulated by the South African government through the Electronic Communications Act 36 of 2005 (ECT) and the State Information Technology Agency Act 38 of 2002. These ICT acts are a set of interrelated principles, laws, guidelines, regulations and procedures guiding the flow and the management of the information life cycle within the working atmosphere (Rabina & Johnston, 2010:181). These acts protect digital data transfer (Hernon & Relyea, 2003:1300) and contain legislation and strategies that formulate the information society. The Electronic Information Policy Act 25 of 2002 governs the collection, storage and dissemination of official information within specific jurisdictions (Hernon & Relyea, 2003:1300). On the other hand, the State Information Technology Agency Act is designed to be operational and is executed by a series of laws and regulations (Granovetter, 2005:33).

These regulatory structures represent key factors for innovative processes in the infrastructure sectors as they guide the direction of the deployment and utility of these technologies (social networks) in the country (Bento & Fontes, 2019:66). For this reason, Government should design internal policies and procedures that will guide employees when using technology, social networks in particular. The content of different networks should comply not only with the regulations of the company, but with the laws and regulations of the country as well (Stohl, Etter, Banghart & Woo, 2017:413).

It is important for employees to familiarise themselves with social networks codes of conduct and policies. Lack of understanding towards social networks policy and codes and conduct might result in employees not interested or avoiding using social networks platforms, this might result in killing employee morale. Morale can be regarded as a vehicle that drive the success of the organisation. This vehicle is more concern about the firms' performance and efficiency and pushes away employees' displeasure and minimise the high rate of unproductivity (Akinwale, 2019:97). Numerous researchers have mentioned and identified the relationship between morale and productivity (Stack, 2016:18). Negative morale comes with a high price label while positive morale comes with productivity and victory.

Jost, Barberá, Bonneau, Langer, Metzger, Nagler, Sterling and Tucker (2018:85) asserts that organisations should have ethics and morals when it comes to the use of social networks with regard to policy and limitations, and trust and privacy. Trust is to a large degree associated with information disclosure. It is important that organisations require all employees to sign an agreement related to the use of social networking in the working environment, and ensure that all sites are monitored by an information technology (IT) administrator at all times (Akinwale, 2019:97). This will assist organisations to outline actions against non-compliant users and prevent situations where employees may misuse social technologies in the organisation (Sillic, 2019:108).

## **2.1 Existing gaps in the policy**

Social networks are exploring though out the world with a fast pace. Although government has beautiful policies, it struggles to keep up with the fast-moving pace of technology especially on newly introduced social networks and the appropriate behaviour around it, during working hours and outside the work environment (Electronic Communication Act, 2005). Government is operating with standard performance and norms when it comes to the use of social network. Social networks in the government is still at the introduction stage, hence they operate with norms that are being used by media (Mushwana & Bezuidenhout, 2014:64). The current

Information Communication Technology and media policies do not adequately address the technological capacities, operations, or functions of social networks (Kaupins & Park, 2010:01). Social networks policies should be subject to traditional employment law in the government sector. The use of social networks in the workplace should not involve any materials that could be viewed as being in any way discriminatory (Kaupins & Park, 2010:01). In addressing matters such as discriminatory, The United Kingdom Equality created an Act 2010 that comprises legislation relating to discrimination. (Fenner, 2012:14). It is important that organizations have appropriate computer usage policies in place, and ideally social networks specific usage policies. Social networks usage policy for an organization might typically cover the standards of behaviour expected from employees regarding the use of social networks in a clear and unambiguous manner. This should cover the use of social networks by employees both within and outside the place of work.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research paper, qualitative research methodology was adopted. Research methodology refer to the techniques and processes which were applied in order to achieve the objectives of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017:15). During the research project the researcher interacted with participants to understand participants experience and perception regarding the use of social networks and also to understand the current procedures and regulations that the government has implemented in order to manage the utilisation of social networks in the government sector. This approach is better for understanding the reality of what takes place in an organisation (Myers, 2013:8).

In a qualitative research method, there are various approaches to choose from, including positivist, interpretive and critical approach (Myers, 2013:42). The study adopted interpretive research approach. Interpretative

research known for its popularity for building and maintaining a trusting social relationship. The researcher had the chance to interpret what people do, see or hear.

### **3.1 Data collection**

Data serves as the foundation for research study (Yin, 2011:129), while data gathering is a sequence of interconnected activities directed at collecting important information to answer the research question (De Vos et al., 2011:116). Data has been classified as a product of interaction between the participants and the researcher (Yin, 2011:129). Data was collected using qualitative open-ended semi-structured interviews. Open-ended gave the participants the opportunity to express the views and facts freely. Interviews take the form of face-to-face interaction between the researcher and participants (Yin, 2011:138). Specific participants were selected. A total of 17 directors and deputy directors within the selected government departments, were interviewed, which were Government information and communication systems, Department of Labour, Department of Higher education and training, Public Works and Rural Development and Land Reform. Participants are thus chosen purely based on who have relevant knowledge and experience about the phenomena. The concern was not how much data was gathered, or how many participants were interviewed, but to gather sufficient rich information. Appointments were made to participating department and interviews were recorded for analysis purpose.

### **3.2 Data analysis**

A true talent and competency of the researcher is seen in the analysis. Data analysis is the processes and procedures that are used to help to moderate, adjust, organise and connect data with the aim of providing better understanding and good explanation of the situation (Welma & Kruger, 2001:70). In this paper, content analysis was used to analyse data.



#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A government policy is a rule or principle that hopefully better guides decisions, resulting in positive outcomes that enhance unity within the public sector. Government policies contain the reasons things are to be done in a certain way and why they are being done. Policies are not laws, but they can lead to laws as a results. Various companies and organisation confirmed the benefits of social networks, however social networks can be used effectively and efficient if they are proper policies and regulations specifically designed for it, which is one the critical issue that government is facing currently. Government does not have specified social networks policies, they operating with norms as mentioned by one manager: *“We have norms and standard that incorporate social network. Initially it was just a protocol document that was talking to media” (DRDLR01, 03:66-69).*

Norms and standard document provided guidelines and policies on how government departments should handle their information and communication matters. Its aim was not to educate people about social network behavioural policy and enforce people to do what they say, except following the right procedures when communicating with the public. Therefore, it is critical that government have specifically social networks policy in place, which is still a major challenge according to management, as mentioned by one of the managers: *“department of GCIS always provides guidelines on government documents for uniformity when communicating on social sites but people fails to comply with guidelines as provided” (DGCIS04, 17:486-490).*

Organisations adopting innovative technological processes without policies and regulations to govern their use face the risk of a security breach. Although government have norms and standard procedures, it seems to be showing that government do not have employees behaviours policy during and after working hours. Regardless is their work or their personal devices, as one manager mentioned: *“There are no social network policies from DPSA and SITA. This makes it impossible for us as managers to control the*

*use of social networks within our respective divisions” (DGCIS04, 09:272-273). “There was no overall regulatory framework to guide government departments on the use of social network (GCIS04, 12:340-341).*

Different views were raised in terms of policies governing the use of Internet services such as social networks. Lacking education or misunderstanding the role played by policies. Without proper understanding of social networks regulatory and policy measures in place, employees can use social networks as they wish. Although some participants argued that there are no policies that govern the use of social networks, some mentioned that they are policies however employees are not aware of the policies and they do not understand the policies. *“for the two years that I have been working in the government sector, I have never seen an email communicate to us regarding the use social network, hence I am scared to use them because I am not sure of what is expected, this frustrate me because I think it might have a negative impact on my performance” (DRDLR03, 07:192-193).*

The social networks policy should have clear guidelines and clear rules and should also address issues of privacy, confidentiality and security, the management of grievances and monitoring of social media by the employer. However, the policy was basic and did not regulate social media misconduct outside working hours or using private tools. Furthermore, it was recommended by other scholars, that disclaimer be put in place which will remind and bind the employees on the appropriate use of social networks. Some participants mentioned that for employees are ignorance, as a result, they are not aware of the social networks policy within the government sector.

Regulation is a legal norm intended to shape conduct. It is a mechanism that monitors or enforces rules. Regulation is considered essential to create an enabling environment for accessibility to and use of technological

services. the results of the study have indicated that there are no regulations or procedures that guide the utilisation of social networks, instead they operate with norms and codes of conducts. This has discouraged other government departments to allow their employees to utilisation social networks for their daily operations, while in some department specific group of people were given access to utilise social networks, but on specific times. Though in some department all employees were given permission to utilise social networks daily, due to lack on policies to guide the utilisation, some employees had fear of using the platform due to the fact they did not want to get in to trouble. Individuals use social sites for different reasons based on their interest. Clear technology employment processes should be defined by policy, which would provide guidelines on what employees can or cannot do with technology in an organisation. Furthermore, policy would ensure employee compliance to ethical processes when using technological services such as social networks. However, since there was no standard regulatory process in existence for government departments, this resulted in different departments implementing various approaches.

In Addition to that, social network disclaimer does not exist in anywhere in the codes of conduct and norms. Social networks disclaimer should be added as one of the social networks policies. Disclaimer prevent people from posting false sense of information which might ruin the reputation of the of the organisation. Although disclaimer should not in any way be an acceptable replacement for social network policy. People are associated with what they do or say, and their perception after that can be a damaging factor to the organisation. Public employees are different than private sector workers, they become part of the public record. Public employees are held to a higher standard and need to conduct themselves knowing they work for a public entity and whatever you do could be reflected onto the organization,” From this day forward participates suggested that social network behavioural policy to be put in place to state how employees are expected to behave during working hours and after working hours, even when using their own devices, as long work for the government sector. when one employee began presenting his opinions online, the department

should ask employees to add a disclaimer to their profile to make it clear that their opinions did not represent that of department. Although social networks policies and terms of use may be changed at any time, without notice, the challenging is that government does not have the necessary capacity to control information or content once published on its social network sites

It is critical that regulatory policies governing the use of technology be in place. So far, there are no standardised policies governing the use of social networks across government departments except the codes of conduct and performance agreement, this has led to some government departments practicing as they deem fit.

From the analysis it was recommended that social network policy be included in the employment contract as one of the critical policy. Breach of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the government or the department Code of Conduct for employees, Rules for discipline and other relevant government policies, which may lead to disciplinary action or other relevant sanctions. Where inappropriate use under this policy constitutes a breach of any law, action may also be taken in accordance with that law by government. Considering the pace at which social networks is growing and the change of impetus of social networks engagement in the workplace including possible employee advocacy, employers need more than a social networks policy or social networks guidelines to manage social networks in the workplace

## **5. RECOMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

When it comes to social network management, the bottom line is that it's less about "micro-managing" employees and more about giving employees the tools needed to successfully represent themselves and the business, within the rules set by the organisation and in compliance with the law. It is important that employers include specific provisions in the contract of employment that regulate the use of social media in the workplace. This

makes the employee aware that responsible social network use is an important condition of employment.

The overall proposal that comes out of this research paper is that it is the responsibility of every employee working in a government department to familiarise and behave according to the standard codes of conduct as stipulated. The department aims to provide a high standard of service to the nation by adopting the best communication systems for efficient government communication. The department's objectives are to communicate with the nation about policies, programmes, plans and the government's achievements. It is important that government departments adopted the disclaimer as one their guidelines that employees should agree to prior the social network utilisation, and failure to do that they will result in serious consequences.

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