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## 7 Social media for universities' strategic communication

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In the field of digitalisation and the acceptance of technologies, African universities are seriously behind the movement of their counterparts in Europe, the USA, and Asia. At a time when universities in different continents are facing increasing competition, they have come to realise that social media is a powerful and effective way to promote their activities and thus significantly improve the sector. This study informs about the purpose of social media in higher education in Africa, in that it assesses the various potentials and objectives that African universities can achieve using social media. Also, the chapter draws a holistic vision while focusing specifically on social media for communication in an African context, recognising the specific challenges facing African universities. Subsequently, the chapter lists several vital social media that are typically used by universities with a focus on the type of use and the different scopes. The chapter also highlights best practices for universities wishing to improve their social media communication strategies while listing potential implications for university engagement via social media.

Keywords: social media, education, universities, communication, Africa

### Introduction

Nowadays, information and communication technologies in general, and Web 2.0 technologies in particular, have become the first concern of young people as well as adults. Social networks have taken the lead in terms of number of users on all continents. Their use is often associated with the exchange and sharing of different content, with Internet users who can subsequently accept in friendship.

The African continent has recorded since 2010 an explosion in the use of mobile phones, gravitating around 65% according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU, 2018). A mobile phone is, therefore, an essential tool for Internet users who wish to have access to technological innovations, communicate with their friends, and share diverse contents (Aker & Mbiti, 2010; Bonjawo, 2002). This is necessarily the consequence of obsolescence of fixed telephone lines and also the acquisition of computers that can sometimes be expensive (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Lal, 2005).

Social media has seized the academic world and education for more than a decade. Some universities, institutes, and training centres have created some kinds of social media intending to simplify communication, better-coordinating exchanges and learning, with relevant stakeholders (Gachago & Ivala, 2012; Watat, Wamba, & Kamdjoug, 2018). Social media has demonstrated its strengths in connecting several stakeholders, including students to each other, teachers to themselves, students and teachers, all the entities in the university, as well as external actors (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). This link creates a community of

people who share the same interests, the same challenges, and the same objectives, to help one another and create social cohesion.

Social media is transforming how consumers interact with brands and how brand-related content is consumed (Mogaji, 2016). The advent of readily available social media applications has created opportunities for dialogic and more interactive engagement (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013). Universities are not excluded from using social media to engage with their stakeholders. Unlike most other brands, universities do have a diverse range of stakeholders which inadvertently influences their communication strategies, suggesting the need to recognise and embrace the benefits and opportunities that social media can bring as a tool.

Universities communicate with prospective students for student recruitment purposes, they communicate with current students through providing updates, and they also communicate with the public and funders about their research activities and innovation. While recognising these diverse communication strands, this chapter aims to address and explore the universities' strategic communication while using social media.

Given that the European and American universities are widely in the lead in terms of marketing strategies and communication via social media, it is clear that African universities are lagging (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). In a study in 2015, ARCES reports that 97% of French universities and colleges of higher learning use social media (Küster, Vila, & Planning, 2006; Peruta & Shields, 2017). Very few African universities have communication strategies and are present on social media, whereas Africa has one of the highest rates of social media use, given that young people are strongly represented. For many African institutions, social media is limited to entertainment and friendly exchanges. The 'strategic communication' aspect is strongly neglected. Social media is exponentially invading many parts of African society, and education is the most affected sector. This is because the majority of Internet users in Africa are mostly young, and this amount has doubled since 2010 (Kemp, 2018).

Previous academic studies have explored social media in the context of marketing communication strategies by universities to reach prospective customers, social media for brand engagement and social media for teaching. While this chapter aims to provide a holistic view, it will also be specifically focusing on social media for communication within the African context and also recognising the challenges that are specific to the continent.

The chapter highlights the purpose of social media, arguing that it is not just for marketing communications, but a dialogical engagement between a university and its stakeholders. The stakeholders and their expectation within the context of the university system, are also

discussed to understand the content creating and scheduling strategies to be implemented. The chapter further explores selected social media network sites that are often used by universities. Also, there is recognition of the human resources in achieving the set objectives for the social media strategy.

Specifically, this chapter has three objectives:

1. To understand the benefits of social media for strategic communication by universities.
2. To recognise the African context that makes strategic communications on social media unique.
3. To offer recommendations on how African universities can adopt social media for strategic communication.

While acknowledging that this chapter is not empirically driven, it offers implications for managers of universities' social media profile. The chapter highlights best practice for universities, aiming to improve their existing use of social media for strategic communications and those working to develop a new one. The chapter further offers practical action plans and recommendations for managers who aim to develop a new team for social media engagement and those who want to improve their team's performance.

### [Theoretical framework](#)

Usually, any organisation or university that uses social media, whether for profit or not, does so for commercial purposes. It can be to promote their training, the propaganda of its number of graduates and their smooth integration into the professional world, or for the popularisation of its teachings. Dahl's work is based on the assumption that social media is used by the majority of universities for the same purpose – to raise more funds at the university while providing better service to students (Dahl, 2018). Besides, this determination generally involves the strengthening of already existing links between the stakeholders, leading to increased spending (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Quantifying this commitment of universities via social media can be done by comparing reactions (follow, like, and retweet on Twitter; I like, I share on Facebook ... comments following a topic, or from a given point of view (Dahl, 2018).

Before the advent of the Internet, universities, especially those in the USA, focused their efforts on training and passing on knowledge to students. Marketing and communication strategies, therefore, took a back seat (Veysey, 1981). Shortly before the 1950s, rivalries between universities created a quasi-corporate environment (Blackwell, 1936; Canterbury, 2000). Currents of thought about communication strategies and marketing grew in the 1970s, with the advent of several marketing and strategic theories in universities (Krachenberg,

1972). There has been a massive flow of students attending universities. This was necessary due to the end of the war in Vietnam and the military service made compulsory (Discenza, Ferguson, & Wisner, 1985). It was therefore noticed that there was a disinterest in the progress of an education that trains man through the transmission of humanist culture. On the other hand, they turned to fields that could lead to job opportunities, leaving universities to reshape their job-oriented training and graduation models (Doyle & Newbould, 1980).

The arrival of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the early 2000s has been a boost for universities. Several interdisciplinary research projects, like the works of Klassen and services (2002), Gomes and Murphy (2003), have emerged to explain marketing psychology and technological understanding. Most universities in Europe and the USA have a website. These websites served as dynamic showcases, aimed at attracting potential students while encouraging former students to promote their institution (Gomes & Murphy, 2003). In addition to its beginnings, Ganster and Schumacher (2009) state that several universities around the world were late in taking a hand in the use of social media. They felt they were not the target (Raineri, Fudge, & Hall, 2015). However, the social and informational nature of social media such as Twitter and Facebook has been demonstrated several times, and it is observed that several universities have joined such trend (Bélanger, Bali, Longden, & Management, 2014). All in all, it is undeniable to mention the fact that most universities in Africa and the world are modernised by the use of social media for marketing purposes of maintaining its image of brands among stakeholders.

### Social media networks

Social media can be defined as a group of technologies that foster engagement where individuals are active participants in creating, organising, editing, combining, sharing, commenting, and rating Web content, as well as forming a social networks through interacting and linking to each other (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010; Criado, Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2013). These technologies include social networking (e.g., Facebook), microblogging (e.g., Twitter) and multimedia sharing (e.g., YouTube). Social media is no longer new. The implementation of content management, engagement, and measurements are the new challenges.

Organisations are increasingly adopting social media for strategic corporate and organisational communication and public relations (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). It has been hailed as transformative which allows brands to engage with their stakeholders (Mogaji, Farinloye, & Aririguzoh, 2016). Universities are not exempted in using it as well for strategic

communications to engage with stakeholders with Internet access. Social media provides a wide range of audio, video, and interactive capabilities without substantial costs (Hrdinová, Helbig, & Peters, 2010).

There are different social media for different purposes, and universities need to choose the platform upon which they want to engage with their stakeholders. This chapter, however, recognises seven social media that are often used by universities. Spencer (2019) and Worthy (2019) of Hootsuite presents a glossary of social media:

**Facebook** – Presently the largest social networking site in the world and one of the most widely used. It connects friends and relatives to create a network. Brands can have their profile pages and engage with those who have liked their pages. Users can share comments, upload their images, and engage with the university.

**Twitter** – A social network and media platform where users communicate with 280-character messages, along with photos, videos, and other content. Twitter is known for real-time discussions on breaking news stories and trends. Brands have their profile, (which can be verified), they follow other profiles, and they are followed as well. Brands can send tweets, and they can retweet tweets, converse through direct messages, and reply to tweets.

**Instagram** – A free online photo-sharing app that is independent of, but owned by Facebook. It allows for the addition of several filters, editing, and sharing options. Brands can have their verified profile and share photographs, video, stories, which they use as a mode of engaging with their followers. Conversations can also be carried out using direct messages, which are private conversations.

**Snapchat** – A photo- and video-messaging app launched in 2011. It enables the user to chat with friends by using pictures. Users can add filters, text, drawings, or emoji to their content before sending it to their recipients. Individual messages last only up to 10 seconds before they are entirely removed from the company's servers. This feature gives the user control over their post and makes it unique and attractive to its users.

**LinkedIn** – Acquired by Microsoft in 2016, LinkedIn is one of the most popular professional social networking sites. It is used across the globe by all types of professionals and serves as an ideal platform to connect with different businesses, locate, and hire ideal candidates. Individuals have their page which serves as an online CV, and they can share video, images, and live streams with their connections. Brands as well do have their page, where they share contents, including job vacancies.

**WhatsApp** – Another social media technology which joined Facebook in 2014 but continues to operate as a separate app, with a laser focus on building a messaging service that works fast and reliably anywhere in the world. This is linked with specific telephone numbers and allows chat and phone calls. More than 1 billion people in over 180 countries use WhatsApp. Businesses do have their pages and can communicate with brands. It is often integrated as a chatbot and AI assistance on websites.

**YouTube** – Operating as one of Google's subsidiaries, YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing social networking site that enables users to upload and share videos, view them, comment on them and like them. This social network is accessible across the globe and even enables users to create a YouTube channel where they can upload all their personally recorded videos to showcase to their friends and followers.

## The stakeholders

For effective communication to take place, it is essential to identify the key players within the communication cycle. A university has many stakeholders with varying interests and commitments. Thus, identifying the right communication media for a specific stakeholder is essential to elicit stakeholder engagement (Payne & Calton, 2017). This section identifies three forms of stakeholder engagement identified by Mogaji (2019) and how it influences the strategic communications of the universities. These are:

1. **Recruit** – These are communications geared towards prospective students and their parents. The aim of communicating with these stakeholders is to recruit students. The university may use their social media profile to provide prospective students and their parents with relevant information so that they can make an informed choice. For prospective students, this may include the support available for filling out the application form, invitation to Open Day, comments and testimonies from present students, sharing images of the campus, and the student life. This also includes an opportunity to ask questions and engage through messengers, chatbot or by replying to comments or tweets. This strategic communication also involves sharing the story of an alumnus who has successfully graduated from the university.
2. **Retain** – These are communications geared towards stakeholders who are already within the university. This includes the staff and the students. The present students are considered the most significant stakeholder in the university. They need to know the events and activities that are going on within the campus. They need to be informed in case of an emergency. Dabner (2012) reported how the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, used social media as a channel to carefully control their response to an earthquake that affected their city. This provides further evidence that social media can effectively support information sharing, communication and collaboration in higher education contexts, particularly in times of crisis. Likewise, staff needs to be engaged with as part of this group of stakeholders. Research activities and achievements of staff may be shared on social media.
3. **Report** – These are communication aimed at stakeholders that need to be updated about the progress within the university. These include alumni that need to know what is going on within the university and how best they can contribute back to the university. Besides, the funders and research partners need to be updated about research activities. These are groups of stakeholders that have interest in the university, and there are possibilities for engagement on social media.

It is essential to recognise that these stakeholders have different expectations from the university, and the university should be able to communicate with them almost at a personal level, which includes sharing information that is relevant to each group. It is, however, possible that some information might be relevant to all the stakeholders at once.

## The purpose

With the understanding of these different stakeholders and their expectation, universities need to identify their purpose on the network, as the purpose of adopting social media abounds.

Though primarily it is all about communications, it is varied across different sectors and industry. The way a FTSE 100 uses social media will be different from a charity organisation. They both have different values and objectives. Likewise, their target audience and stakeholder interested in their social media posts are different. This will suggest the need for them to adopt different communication strategies.

As stated earlier, universities do have diverse stakeholders, and each stakeholder expects different communications. A prospective undergraduate student may not find tweets about the latest research findings very relevant, compared to a tweet about the Open Day. While recognising this broad spectrum of expectation, universities need to understand that their purpose on social media is not just for marketing purposes, but for engagement – a dialogical engagement between the university and their stakeholders

From a practical perspective, being on social media may indicate an intention to actively engage with the stakeholders (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). It is, however, paramount to be strategic about this. The fact that every organisation is on social media is not enough justification to jump on the bandwagon without having clear objectives and goals.

Social media can be used as a tool for student recruitment, perhaps moving away from the idea of prospectuses and websites. Social media also can offer insight into university life, and students can engage with admission staff through chats and direct messages.

Likewise, social media can be used as a tool to promote research activities and innovation. As an effort to highlight achievements and contribution, universities can use their social media pages to promote their latest research findings, their research team, and activities that are being carried out within the university.

Additionally, alumni often want to keep up with what is going on in universities. They are still a part of the stakeholders that need to be engaged with; either because they may be interested in postgraduate studies, they may be interested in mentoring students, establishing industry partnership, or making financial contributions. Social media can be used for alumni engagement and as a fundraising tool.

For universities with a large following of students, social media updates can be used as a crisis communication tool. Perhaps if there is an emergency on the campus, social media becomes handy. The official university handle can be used to provide updates and keep everyone informed about the situation of things.

Besides, universities are always seeking to sell their brand to potential students. According to Kishun (2011), there is a considerable increase in the number of African students enrolled in foreign universities outside their country of origin. This migration, coupled with accelerated



population growth, is leading some countries to increase their demand for higher education through the creation of new academic institutions. Thus, in the face of increasing competition, universities are required to review their communication and product promotion strategies if they hope to achieve their goals and disseminate their products to any potentially interested student. For an institution to stand out from others through its strategies and its quality of communication, the public it targets, as well as the products presented, it must watch over its branding. This will lead to making the institution unforgettable in the minds of the stakeholders and allowing them to discover more. The university owns and is responsible for the brand it conveys to stakeholders. It is considered by McAlexander, Koenig, and Schouten (2006) as a community of brands where connected stakeholders are gathered.

It is important to note that the student engagement on universities' social media platform is also essential. Allowing students to co-create the content, using hashtag and sharing pictures of their experience on campus. This is not just limited to Instagram. Students can share their experience of Open Day, clearing or exam pressure on YouTube, providing relevant content for prospective and present students.

The purpose of social media is more than just communicating to make sales, and it is about building relationship, engaging with stakeholders, providing relevant content and a reason for them to want to engage. It is not surprising to see that students' tweets at their universities to make complains or ask question and universities are expected to respond to their concerns.

With the understanding of different stakeholders in the university and their expectation with regards to communications, it is not surprising to see universities creating different profiles, on different social media network, to communicate with their stakeholders. While there is the primary account often used by the university, there are other profiles for student unions to communicate with the students, faculties profile to communicate events and activities going on within the faculty. There may also be a profile page for research groups, which communicates what they are doing within the group.

Harmonising these different profiles is, however, very important. Firstly, to avoid parody account which may confuse the stakeholders. Secondly, consistency in the description and header images should be considered, perhaps if they can have similar form of header. Thirdly, aligning with the leading university account (including it in their description) is essential as well.

## The African challenge

Various challenges are militating against successful integration of most social media for strategic communications in Africa. These highlighted challenges are from the perspective of the university as they make effort to engage with their stakeholders.

1. The Motivation to Engage – There appeared to be a lack of motivation by African universities to engage on social media. There are challenges with the content to be updated, the frequency, and the relevance of the content. Marketing to reach prospective students is often limited because the universities are oversubscribed. If universities, especially the public universities, do not market, they are guaranteed of recruiting their students.
2. The Content Creation – universities in the developed world showcase their facilities, campuses, and students having a good time around their campus. However, there is a challenge with African universities with regards to what they can showcase. There are funding challenges, and the facilities are often in poor state which cannot be showcased. Research activities are limited.
3. The Technical Skills – Olaleye (2017) reported the lack of creative designs in African universities, highlighting the limited technical skills to adopt social media for effective communications with stakeholders.
4. Internet Bandwidth – Africa is still considered an emerging market, with the rate of Internet penetration still quite low as compared to her Western counterparts (Wawira, 2017). By June 2019, Internet World Stats estimates a 39.8% Internet penetration rate in Africa, contributing to only 11.9% of the world users (IWS, 2019). This means that most people are still offline. While the universities are willing to engage, the challenges of Internet bandwidth inhibits the stakeholders, especially the prospective students who have limited access to the Internet.
5. Languages – Linguistic mismatch is another challenge towards the process of strategic communications with stakeholders in Africa. In some regions of Tunisia and Algeria, students are taught in Arabic while some books are written in French instead of English, which is a universal language (Ndofirepi et al, Forthcoming). In the south of Africa, especially South Africa where the constitution recognises 11 official languages, the adopted language of communication can pose a challenge as they try to engage with stakeholders.

## The managerial implication

### Designated team

The human resources in achieving the social media objective are acknowledged. There should be a dedicated team responsible for social media engagement. This may be within the communications team or the marketing team (Department of Public Relations & Communications). Importantly, if possible, bring together a multi-functional team, including all stakeholders from communication, legal, technology, human resources, and programme units (Hrdinová, Helbig, & Peters, 2010). With such a big team, it is essential to have some responsibility for managing the social media strategies, to coordinate different activities from different platforms, and to make sure they are all aligned towards the strategic direction of the

university. There should be a designated online spokesperson to reply to messages or enquires which may be out of scope for staff (or students) who manage these accounts. It is essential to recognise that there will be trolls online sending abusive and vile messages, therefore measures for support must be in place for staff reading these messages. Staff should not take these personally.

### [The content creating strategy](#)

The content creating strategy is also essential. The designated team should take responsibility for content creation and engagement on social media platforms. Managers should consider the personal characteristics of the stakeholders when designing marketing strategies (Adefulu et al., 2019, Dwivedi, et al, 2019).

Contents provided on social media should aim at communicating the universities' brand value and key messages to the stakeholders. The content strategy provides an effort to present content in meaningful, useful, and relevant contexts within the user experience. It is essential to recognise the different characteristics of stakeholders through research and provide personalised experience for them. The strategy should ensure that the right content reaches the right stakeholder at the right time and for the right reason.

The idea of having different social media platform for different university groups is supported. However, messages should be coherently and consistently provided. The contents must be aligned with the strategic direction of the university. It must also align with the brand identity of the university. If possible, the username should present an alliance with the university. Account profile information should clearly state the purpose of the account and the hours during which it is monitored.

While the list is inexhaustible, there are some content strategies that can be considered by the university

- Images of Campus – These are images or video showing different buildings and facilities, for example, the library, lecture theatres, iconic buildings, accommodation, and the landscaped gardens and other naturel elements on campus. These images can be taken during different times of the day and during different seasons. Creation of user-generated content should also be encouraged where the university allows the students to share pictures of campus using branded hashtags, and cultivating a more inclusive and diverse campus community.
- Images of Mascot or Brand Identity – Universities can use their social media platform to integrate their brands and create more awareness. Often universities have mascots or animals that represent the university. Images of these mascots can be taken around the university. This could also be with students at different occasions, like graduation or Open Day. Brand identities like the school anthem, logo, sports team uniform, souvenirs and other brand items, can also be showcased on the platform. Likewise,

changes to the university's brand identity can be announced. When a university changes its logo, updates should be shared on its social media platform.

- Images of activities on Campus – These are images or video of events such as Open Days – showing present student participating, wearing their branded T-shirt, and helping prospective students and parents who have come visiting. Images during graduation, showing excited graduates and their family are also examples of images of activities on campus. Universities can also share and retweet these images that have been created by the students on their account. Student union activities on campus should also be featured, to give an insight into life as a student. This can be from the student union profile, but can also be shared by the university's main profile. Special guest visiting the university can also be featured on the university's social media profile.
- Images of activities outside the Campus – This gives the university the opportunity to tell its story in a different context, an opportunity to share what life is like outside the university, and how its students can stand out. A very good example is sports events, perhaps winning a competition, or other student activities that showcase the university among other universities. It showcases the ability of the university to stand out and excel outside its comfort zone.
- Images of Host Community – Acknowledging that universities are situated in a location with their own identity and has been found to influence student choice, it is important for universities to create content around their location in order to showcase what they have to offer. These images can include a known landmark, transport connection, social life, and activities around the city.
- Student Stories – This can be a short video for Instagram or a longer video for YouTube whereby the students shares their stories about how they considered the university, the admission process, and the support they have received in order to settle down very well. This can also involve featuring students from diverse backgrounds, like international students, students with a form of disability, or a different culture to cultivate and showcase a more inclusive and diverse campus community. This will give insight into the university and be able to assist others who are thinking of coming to the university.
- Staff Stories – Like student sharing their stories, staff can also share their story on the university. Explaining their research to non-experts and highlighting the impact their research is making in the community. The professional and support services staff such as the facilities manager, marketing communications team and librarians can also give insights into their day and effort they are making in enhancing the students' teaching and learning experiences. This could be a video or a profile picture that is followed up with a story or a blog post.
- Alumni Stories – This highlights the success stories of alumni as a way of encouraging present and prospective students to work harder and achieve their goals. The university can also use this to reinforce their values and support they provide for their students, in other to achieve greatness. These videos can be uploaded on LinkedIn among other platforms, as it is considered a social media networking site for professionals. Also, it can be shared elsewhere. The University of Toronto shared a video on Instagram where they took pride in the fact that their alumni include four prime ministers, two governors-general and two astronauts. This kind of message arouses a positive attitude towards the university's brands.
- Infographics – These are graphics illustration that can be used to keep the stakeholders updated about development in the university. These are often suitable for Twitter and Instagram. An example could be the latest ranking of the university and

the progress the university has made on the league table. The university can also showcase the number of followers on the platform as a means of credibility and appreciate those who are engaging with them. Step-by-step insight into problems faced by students can also be graphically presented. This can also provide insight into activities for prospective students as they settle down on campus. Quotes from individuals or other motivational quotes can also be shared on the platform as a means of motivating the students.

- **Help Guides and Supports** – Universities can provide content around help guide and support available for students –both present students and prospective students. Prospective students may be interested in how to book accommodations, access the library and eLearning platform, how to submit their assignment, or deal with stress during exams. Universities can gain insight from their research, understand what problems students encounter, and provide help and support to solve those problems. Prospective students can be provided with tips and advice on how to navigate the application process successfully. This can also include Webinars, Question and Answer session with the university’s management team, the Head of Department, or Live Chats. Here students can call in or chat to get answers.
- **Listicle** – This is a piece of writing or other content presented wholly or partly in the form of a list. It evolves from the concept of the help guides and support, but instead of having a long blog list, it provides short bullet-point insight. This can be used to give students’ insight into the university. Prospective students and their parents may be interested in Top 10 reasons why they should consider the university, or Top 10 things that the student enjoy about the university. These articles can be made available on different social media platform and accompanied with relevant images. It is aimed at effectively and promptly engaging with the stakeholders who might not want to read a long blogpost.
- **Invitation** – There are many events and activities going on in the university, from graduation to Open Day to Taster days and conferences. To keep stakeholders up to date about these events are important. Information about these events can also be shared on the social media platform. Likewise, photography and video from the events can also be shared to further engage with the stakeholders. Branded hashtags for events are also essentials in order to track and measure the level of engagement.

The execution, creation, and management of this content is essential in order to present a coherent strategic communication successfully. The team need to recognise that the implementation of this strategy requires time. It is no use having a profile and not engaging with other users or update with relevant content. Efforts should be made towards achieving a structured approach to creating and managing timely postings of these social media contents. As part of the content strategy, the team should monitor references to the university on social media and the Internet, and act accordingly. This might suggest a timely response while the momentum is still on. The strategy should include overall objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), an outline of measurement methods and explain how social media communication is integrated with the university’s strategic plans (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

[Ecityinteractive \(2019\)](#) describes the idea of content governance, which illustrates how digital content is presented in a controlled and orderly fashion. This helps in visualising the content creation workflows. Identifying what tasks need to be done, who is responsible for such tasks, and what tools are necessary to support these activities. Importantly content governance recommends the Plan > Create > Edit > Approve Publish > Review workflow.

While recognising that social media offers the opportunity to engage, it is essential to note that responses of stakeholder to the content may change the direction of the conversation. Other users on the social media profile can comment online, post videos and photos, and tag the university. This highlights the possibilities of losing control over messages, and this has been cited as the major obstacle and risk in using social media ([Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012](#)). The 'loss of control' can expect the social media team to react professionally promptly to take back control of the conversation. Not surprisingly some social media like YouTube and Instagram have the tool to disable comments.

Challenges with Internet bandwidth and access should be considered as this presents a practical implication for content design, size of images, and duration of videos. Likewise, while there is a limitation with subtitles during live events, for the sake of accessibility, all audio and video content in the social media campaign must have subtitles.

### Verified account

It is also important to work towards getting their profiles verified and engaging more with the stakeholders as there are many parody accounts. These parody accounts do not represent the university and can confuse the stakeholders who are willing to engage ([Mogaji & Erkan, 2019](#)). Often, these parody accounts, especially on Facebook, share irrelevant posts, and as the pages are often created to attract followers and used for advertisements and sponsored post. Universities, starting with their social media strategy, need to search for any existing site claiming to be the official profile for the university. This is another reason for the universities to take ownership of their social media profile and take charge of their communication strategies, as prospective students may not be able to identify the real profile by a simple search on the social media platform.

### Technical skill training

To maintain the accounts, training should be towards improving the technical skills of the team, such as familiarisation with different software and tools. Social media analytics, to understand the key drivers of engagement, is essential. The team should endeavour to measure the impact of their campaigns, track the performance of posts, and discover what

resonates with the stakeholders by tracking performance at the post level. These insights can be used to create better content, inform campaign strategy, and better engage your stakeholders. Tools for the entire publishing process should be considered based on the significant number of stakeholders to engage with.

### Soft skill training

Staff training is essential and should be ongoing. Staff should be made aware of the basic etiquette of customer services, even though they are behind the scene. Likewise, for accounts to be managed by students, they should be trained on conduct and practices on social media while representing the university. The fact that they are conversant with social media in their personal life does not exclude them from proper training. Students, especially managing social media accounts related to the university brands, should make the effort to separate it from their accounts. While employees who are ‘official’ Twitter users for the university are identified as such, they must focus solely on engagement and not unnecessary banter which may bring the university into disrepute. Sometimes this banter can be very humorous and go viral. While there is a positive twist to that, staff should be very mindful. It is becoming a common practice that university staff on social media, especially Twitter, are including the caveat that their social media postings are theirs – and theirs alone – and not associated with the university, as an effort to differentiate themselves from the university. While some students may contribute to the university’s official social media activities as part of their role, they should be well trained and supported through the process

### Coordinated media profile

Considering that there are social media profiles from different faculties, departments and group in the university, it is essential to coordinate and ensure all profiles reflect the values of the university. As social media presences and postings of employees can be problematic for organisations (O’Connor, Schmidt, & Drouin, 2016), there should be a central control team, developing guidelines to guide employee content and bringing the guidelines to the attention of the employee. Likewise, there should support for the administrator of the social media profile that will be associated with the university and those who have the intention to develop theirs.

### The social media policy

With different stakeholders to be engaged with, different messages from different channels, and different profiles disseminating information, it is essential to put policies and guidelines in place. [Hrdinová et al. \(2010\)](#) differentiated between social media policies and guidelines –

guidelines provide advice on how to best use social media tools to achieve the desired result, while policies, on the other hand, represent official positions that govern the use of social media by employees in the organisation.

Hrdinová et al. (2010) analysed various government social media policies to identify the core elements of a social media policy, and they identified eight essential elements for a social media policy. These are: 1) employee access, 2) account management, 3) acceptable use, 4) employee conduct, 5) content, 6) security, 7) legal issues, and 8) citizen conduct. Pomerantz et al. (2015) also analysed social media policies for American institutions and found that they addressed three categories which are the appropriateness of posts (e.g., appropriate content, appropriate tone), representing the institution (e.g., branding, public image, posting in the institution's name), and ensuring that posts comply with the law.

This highlights the importance of this policy to guide the staff and protect the university's brand reputation. The social media policy should set expectations for everyone involved within the university's social media, and universities need to do significantly more to inform staff and students involved in social media policies. Likewise, the guideline should identify the designated person who can speak on behalf of the organisation in social media and under what circumstances (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

There should be contingency plans for continuity in case staff leave, and they do not leave with the password. Staff are trained on tools to engage effectively and professionally. The ever-changing landscape of the social media environment should be acknowledged. Staff must keep themselves updated with developments, and likewise the policy should reflect these changes. Moreover, as with any other policy, social media policies should be reviewed periodically (Hrdinová, Helbig, & Peters, 2010) to ensure that they continue to reflect the universities' changing strategy and priorities.

## Conclusion

This chapter recognises the importance of social media in communicating with stakeholders. Universities are also known to use social media to communicate. While recognising the challenges in communicating with a diverse audience, this chapter explores the challenges of African universities as they use social media to engage. The high cost of devices, lack of infrastructure, and low bandwidth and access to Internet (Oji, Iwu, & Tengeh, 2017), the linguistic challenges (Ndofirepi & Mogaji, 2019) and lack of strategic ideas for content creation affecting how African universities use website for strategic communications.



In view of various technological evolutions and the expansion of teaching according to methods more and more adapted to realities, the ever-increasing rivalries between universities and higher education institutions inevitably lead them to review the methods used to implement cutting-edge communication strategies to better position themselves in the minds of their stakeholders, regardless of the geographical area in which they are located (Bower, 2001; Wolff & Learning, 2002). For example, building an active and strong community through social media is an ideal option if universities want to attract more students. However, more importantly, to retain them so that they can, in turn, spread the reputation of the institution. Through social media, universities will perfect the experiences of their students, since they will adapt to the realities and tools they use widely (Bosch, 2009). They will also improve their communication with former students and thus increase the development of their brand. Social media also improves the marketing identity of the university and perpetuates the dedication of students by taking into account the desires and aspirations of newcomers to the digital world. McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, (2005) have demonstrated in their work that adherents of a robust, effective and popular academic brand congregation tend to develop positive attitudes towards the university. Thus, there are often alumni and other stakeholders making donations to the university or still promoting the university in various secondary schools to attract potential students (Chisenga, 2006). The brand community, therefore, includes all stakeholders who are interested in the brand according to its relevance, and also the various relationships that make them particularly interested in using the brand.

Right or wrong, it is therefore clear that Web 2.0 technologies represent a real and robust challenge for the African education system as it exists today (Abugre, 2018). They are seen as having an impact on the supply of education and training. Whatever their nature or type, social media is out of step with the current educational foundations in Africa. Indeed, the use of social media in education in Africa is conditioned by the fact that the student must first be an 'active co-producer' of knowledge rather than a 'passive consumer' of content. Besides, training must be a 'participatory social process' (Lee & McLoughlin, 2011). That is why there are two streams of thought: those who believe that social media can be used to strengthen relationships between stakeholders and improve the functioning of the university in its current form, and those who are rather demoralising, believing that social media is created to disrupt students and replace the essential vision of the university. The continued and rapid proliferation of social media is a clear challenge to the future of university provision and training in higher education in Africa. In the case of already existing technologies, empirical and practical studies remain mostly speculative rather than

affirmative and concrete. Let us note nevertheless, the existence of an emerging and very promising literature which testifies to the benefits of the use of social media in the education. One can list the benefits associated with Facebook usage for learning and assimilating lessons, where still is the need to integrate Twitter into the collaborative process and communication between students and teachers.

The chapter offers managerial implications for university managers who want to adopt social media for effective strategic communications. The challenges are presented as it requires a considerable amount of effort for planning and human resources. However, the opportunity abounds to effectively communicate the universities' values aligned with the strategic plans and engaging with the stakeholders with personalised content.

A content creation was provided which highlights how universities can create content to share on social media. These content creation ideas include images of the campus, the facilities and the host community. Likewise, there are stories told by staff, students and alumni, full of emotions and positive narratives, providing informative, relevant, useful and timely information for existing students and prospective students through blogs, help guides and infographics.

While this information can be shared through various university social media handles, the designated team needs to make sure the profile accounts are well managed and aligned with the values of the university. The chapter recognises that there are also several risks associated with the use of social media which could ultimately impact on the university's reputation and this suggests the need to have a social media policy to guide and assist that staff and everyone involved in the universities' social media. Regular updates to the policy are recommended as social media are ever-changing.

Even though the chapter is not backed upon by any theoretical underpinning or empirical research, it offers practical implications based on academic research and practices to inform the strategic use of social media for communications in the university. This is not just limited to African universities, but other universities can find the content relevant and applicable. It is, however, noted as well, that social media use by a university is not solely meant for marketing purposes. Building a community through engagement and interaction is essential towards achieving the overall goal of the university.

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