Social Media Content Management Strategies at the National Police Service, Kenya

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the strategies used by the National Police Service (NPS) in Kenya to manage its social media content. The study from which the chapter is extracted investigated the types of social media content generated by the NPS, evaluated the competencies of the staff managing social media content, examined the policies NPS applies to social media content management, as well as analysed the challenges NPS face in managing social media content and suggest ways to overcome them. In this study, the authors focused on three social media platforms used by the NPS to interact with the general public, namely, Twitter, Facebook and the organisation's blog. Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) were used to collect data. The participants in the FGD were purposively selected from human resource, communications, information technology, and records management departments in cooperation with the Human Resource Manager. The workshops lasted 5–6 hours a day for 4 days. Three researchers were present, one working as a moderator and two as observers, who focused on the verbal and non-verbal interaction and on crucial phases of the discussions. The study found that NPS uses a variety of tools to manage its social media content but lack competent staff to deal with them. The NPS also does not have a policy on managing social media content. Most of the staff managing records have inadequate skills to manage social media contents due to limited IT skills. The organisation needs to develop policies and procedures for the management of social media content and train its staff on use of ICTs to support social media content management.

Keywords: *Social media, Social media content, Posts, Strategies, National Police Service.*

1 Introduction

According to Kwanya and Stilwell (2015), the origin of the term social media is fuzzy with many people claiming to have coined it. However, there seems to be a consensus that the term was coined in America Online (AOL) in the early 1990s around the time the company developed Instant Messenger which enabled registered users to communicate in real time (Bercovici, 2010). Many definitions of the term exist but it is generally perceived as any online platform or channel which disseminates user generated content and facilitates extensive user participation. Consequently, social media tools and techniques are permanently changing the way information is created and passed across societies and around the world (Smith, 2009). Safko (2010) defines social media simply as the media humans use to be social. He explains further that social media is how humans use emerging technologies to effectively reach out and connect to the other human beings, create a relationship, build trust and be there for each other. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Thus, they perceive social media as comprising of technological platforms, tools and applications which people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives.

Although social media is ever growing and ever evolving, its basic tenets remain the same. People have been creating or joining groups of other like-minded persons for ages. Therefore, social media are about how humans reach out and connect to other humans, create a relationship and build trust necessary to create a closely knit unit. Thus social media is construed to be the collection of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration and is a reflection of the ordinary conversations happening every day in people's lives offline in the markets, village paths, churches and households. Nonetheless, social media augments and escalates the breadth and depth of the conversations. Agichtein *et al.* (2008) argue that social media is different from the traditional media in terms of quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence. Kietzmann (2011) proposes a social media honeycomb which consists of the participants' identity, conversations, sharing, presence awareness, relationships, reputation and groups.

According to Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008) social media exhibit certain key characteristics. These include unlimited space to share content; involvement of the participants in the networks to create, share or evaluate all or most of the content; anchoring on social interactions; linking of content with other external media; and interlinking of users to each other. Tesorero (2013) suggests that most social media platforms encourage feedback and contributions from all the participants; are open to feedback and participation through voting, commenting or sharing of content; facilitate conversation; allow communities to form quickly and communicate effectively; as well as thrive on their connectedness and making use of links, resources and people. Saxena (2013) adds that social media platforms generally provide free web space for the community members to create content on; give the users unique identities by which they become known

online; enable the users to build profiles which are used to connect them to the other users having similar interests; encourage the users to post both personal and professional information onto the platforms; enable conversations by giving the users the right and tools to comment on posts by other members; and time-stamp all posts to make them easy to follow. On his part, Dube (2007) explains that social media are user-based, interactive, and community-driven, thrive on relationships, and enrich communication with emotional support and assurance which other techno-based communication approaches do not facilitate.

Social media currently exist in several categories according to their areas of application. According to Safko (2010), the categories include social networking, publishing, photo sharing, audio management, videos, microblogging, livecasting, virtual world, gaming, productivity applications, aggregation, syndication, searching, mobile communication, and interpersonal relationships. Grahl (2014) proposes six categories of social media: social networks, bookmarking sites, social news, media sharing, microblogging and blog forums. Some examples of social media tools include Facebook, twitter, Google+, hi5, LinkedIn, MyLife, blogs, flickr, YouTube, howcast, MySpace, Picasa, vimeo, buffer, dig, Instagram, Pinterest, Quora, SlideShare, StumbleUpon, yelp, fotolog, GetGlue, MEETin, tribe.net, virb, yammer, and scribd, among others.

Nielsen (2012) reports that most people spend more time on social media than on the other media categories; time spent on social media continues to increase exponentially; the use of mobile devices to connect to social media is increasing rapidly; social media has overtaken pornography as the prominent activity on the Internet; one out of eight spouses in the United States first met on social media while one out of every five divorce cases have been blamed on social media. Social media have had an impact on personal and professional relationships; culture and society; economics and commerce; empowerment of the masses; creation, use and sharing of new knowledge; created new ethical and legal issues relating to information management and use (Curtis, 2013). The members of user communities in social media need to disclose as much information about them as possible to enhance their acceptance and interaction on these platforms. Appropriate user disclosure enables the users to enhance their personal identity; manage or maintain a relationship; seek approval and support from the other members; obtain benefits and information from others; express feelings, thoughts and experiences; and create enjoyment and pleasure (Bazarova and Choi, 2014).

2 Contextual Information

The creation of the Kenya National Police Service (NPS) is provided for by the Constitution of Kenya, the National Police Service Act (2011) and the National Police Service Commission Act (2011). In accordance with the legal provisions above, the National Police Service consists of the 1) Kenya Police Service; 2) Administrative Police Service; and 3) Directorate of Criminal Investigation. The mission of the NPS is to provide professional and people-centred police service through community partnership and upholding the rule of law for a safe and secure society.

According to Article 244 of the Constitution, the NPS shall strive for the highest standards of professionalism and discipline among its members; prevent corruption and promote practices which encourage transparency and accountability; comply with constitutional standards of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and train staff to the highest possible standards of competence, integrity, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and dignity, as well as foster and promote relationships with the broader society. The priority areas of the NPS include: 1) implementation of reforms in the Service; 2) strengthening of policy regime; 3) development of physical facilities; 4) application of ICT in policing work; 5) improvement of staff welfare in terms of housing, salaries and allowances; 6) capacity building and enhancement of the skills of the officers; 7) research and development in crime areas; and 8) changing the image and culture of the police service.

3 Rationale and Methodology of the Study

Very few scholarly studies have been conducted on the Kenya National Police Service. Some of the existing studies include the influence of leadership development training on the performance of the National Police Service in Kenya (Mwangi, 2018); effect of workforce diversity on the performance of the National Police Service in Nakuru County, Kenya (Kathimba and Anyieni, 2018); security sector reforms influencing the transformation of the national police service, Nairobi and Kiambu counties, Kenya (Muthondeki, 2017); factors affecting change management in the disciplined forces in Kenya: a case study of National Police Service Commission (Mulyungi, 2017); implementation of gender mainstreaming policies at the National Police Service, case study of Administration Police Training College, Nairobi County, Kenya (Njoka, 2017); and determinants of employee job satisfaction in the public security sector in Kenya: a case of National Police Service (Kemboi, 2016). Other studies have covered challenges associated with strategy implementation (Mutua, 2016); employee perception of strategic change management (Ojwang, 2016); challenges associated with strategy implementation (Otieno, 2015); policies on employee performance (Ndanyi, 2015; Kipkirui, 2014); factors influencing service delivery (Ngugi *et al.*, 2012); and the role of employee welfare services on the performance of the NPS staff (Nyakundi *et al.*, 2012; Nyamwamu *et al.* 2012).

It is evident from the foregoing that the existing studies focus on strategy implementation, service delivery, employee welfare, and performance. No study has been conducted on public communication and its role in enhancing service delivery by the NPS. It is also clear from the literature review that no study has been conducted on the use of emerging new media by the NPS to support its strategic and operational activities. Recognising the fact the NPS has embraced community policing, the use of social media to engage with the public is at the core of its strategy in delivering its mandate. There is need, therefore, to assess how social media content generated by the NPS platforms is managed as a means of enhancing its capacity to deliver its services effectively. The current study was designed to address this gap in literature. The objectives of the current study were to find out the types of social media content generated by the NPS; evaluate the competencies of the NPS staff managing social media content; examine policies in place for social media content management; as well as to determine the challenges the NPS faces in managing social media content and to suggest possible solutions for the same.

This study applied a qualitative research design. The researchers used a focus group design, but narrowed further on a workshop approach. The workshops consisted of 16 employees from NPS who deal with records. The participants were purposively selected from communications, human resource, information technology, and records management departments in cooperation with the Human Resource Manager. The FGDs lasted 5-6 hours a day for 4 days. Three researchers were present, one working as moderator and two as observers, who focused on the verbal and non-verbal interaction and on crucial phases of the discussions. The collected data was analysed thematically.

4 Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study are presented and discussed hereunder according to the objectives of the study.

4.1 Type of social media content created by NPS

Content creation is one of the most important communication strategies used by the NPS to reach out to its publics. It emerged from the FGDs that the NPS uses three main types of social media to create content and disseminate it to the public. These are Facebook, Twitter and Web blogs. The type of content created by NPS as mentioned by the participants includes photographs, videos, online commentary, and tweets. The content includes original information that they post through the NPS social media sites, but some originate from the people they interact with. The participants had the following to say about content creation:

"It is unrealistic to create content that is original at all times. Therefore, we share posts that have been created by the public if it is of importance to the functions of the NPS. Approximately 60% – 80% of content created at the NPS comprises content shared and interactions. The NPS regards all content and links created through our social networks whether original or shared as appropriate so long as the content aligns with our agency guidelines."

During the discussion it emerged that not every employee at the NPS may post anything on social media sites used for interacting with the public (Twitter, blogs and Facebook) without approval since the NPS has a strict communication policy. Updating the social media information at the NPS meant for the public is mainly the responsibility of the Communications Officer with the assistance from the ICT personnel. However, there are social media tools for internal interaction such as WhatsApp which can be used by any employee to communicate internally.

4.2 Tools used in managing social media content

The tools used include cloud-based backup systems like Backupify, cloud-based information services such as Social Safe and Archive Social, social media monitoring or dashboard tools, general third party, cloud-based reporting tools like Storify, RSS feed and use of Screenshots.

4.2.1 Cloud-based backup systems

The ICT staff present identified the use of cloud-based backup systems like Backupify which offers free, basic online services and support a wide variety of social media applications. They noted that:

"Information can be regularly exported and brought back into corporate control. Some can be exported in open, non-proprietary formats, for example, generation of Twitter reports in PDF. They can automatically export information out of social media applications but downloading the information out of the cloud is not."

"These services can be applied to a range of social media channels, including Google apps. However, these tools are just back up tools, not information management tools. Their interfaces and data exports are designed to satisfy IT and backup requirements, not organisations or information management needs."

"Downloading and capturing of content into corporate systems must still be performed as a manual, scheduled process and the same legacy data will generally be downloaded each time you do a backup, resulting in significant amounts of duplication for high transaction accounts. These services also change. Hence we don't rely on them much"

4.2.2 Local backup systems

While commenting on the use of local backup system Digi.me, one of the ICT staff mentioned the following:

"We use local backup systems such as Digi.me to support a wide variety of social media applications. We take snapshot copies of our data and load them onto local servers. However, this information is flat and not dynamically available to reuse or repurpose..."

4.2.3 Social media monitoring or dashboard tools

The participants indicated that they know of the application of many third-party, cloud-based tools that are free, such as HootSuite which can help them to aggregate information from several social media channels. But their application by the NPS was limited as indicated by one of the ICT staff:

"These tools can piggyback information management needs on the back of existing reporting or monitoring arrangements, provide reporting and listening services to monitor the effectiveness and impact of social media presence. However, they have limited information accessibility if a log-in is required to view or use and data exportability of their information needs to be verified. There may also be limits on the reporting and analysis information that is available for export and can be expensive to deploy and maintain. We, therefore, rarely use them."

4.2.4 Reporting tools embedded on social media application

All the records management and ICT staff were aware of and made use of reporting tools that come with social media application, such as Facebook activity logs to manage their social media content. These tools generally exported social media content to PDF and other widely open, accessible formats. They also capture all activities that occur on social media sites. However, they noted that the export needs to be manually performed and information is flat and not dynamically available to reuse or repurpose.

4.2.5 Analytic tools

Analytic tools such as Google Analytics or blog software analytics were identified as available tools that are free, online services. They have proved useful for monitoring blog use, search engine terms, referring sites, top posts and pages, hence the reason for their popularity. They allow information to be exported. Their application is limited though. For example, it may not export reports in business-ready formats. Because of this, they need to be supported with screenshots, written reports or other ways of capturing the business information. The excerpt below documents this.

"To help us with reporting on correspondence, our ICT web team showed us how to access the comprehensive and free details about the traffic on our site on Google Analytics. This helped enormously when our seniors ask for regular progress updates on open public submissions. This helps us keep them up-to-date based on the comments that are being received so we can make decisions and monitor progress. Regular reporting also gives us the opportunity to reflect as a team, and to think about deploying further strategies when communicating with the public."

4.2.6 Screenshots

This is also another strategy which was noted as popular among Records Management, ICT staff and Communications Officers. They explained that:

"The screenshot images provide an exact representation of the content as it appeared in the social media application and have been submitted as evidence in legal cases but the information is flat and not dynamically available for reuse or repurpose. For active accounts, there is a significant cost in staff time since information needs to be manually updated. It requires regular staff commitment to keep up to date."

4.2.7 RSS feed

This was another technique whose usage was noted among the ICT staff. They indicated that it is useful for a range of social media applications. It is useful for auto-populating Twitter and Facebook based on blog updates. It can be configured to send an email containing a complete blog post, or tweet or comment among others to a designated account. It allows NPS, when seeking information from the community or consulting via social media, to direct people back to its organisational blog to provide feedback. The NPS blog was set up with an RSS feed so that any comments received on it were emailed automatically to relevant staff. Thus, staff can capture these emails into the corporate records system based on existing processes and procedures. However, it was reported by the participants that its application on emails requires manual intervention to capture it into corporate systems for accessibility and usability. As such it was tedious to use and hence not popular.

4.2.9 Reports of pre-scheduled posts

This is information compiled by the communications officers, the records managers and ICT staff as part of process of developing and authorising social media posts at the NPS. Information is not an exact representation of what was posted on social media sites but is an approved record of what was authorised for posting.

When prodded further, the participants explained that the most strategic way they manage their social media content was to leave them in their native social media application. The reason given by most participants was that no separate information management effort was required. The participants also indicated that additional software or applications software was not required as captured below.

"Staff using the application only needs to know how to access and use the information it contains, therefore, short term value information is not likely to be at risk. However, long term value or high accountability information is at risk because of the projected frequency of system change. Another risk is on-going information accessibility because information remains under the control of an external third party. It limits corporate information accessibility if a log-in is required to view or use the data."

4.2.10 Use of Application Programming Interface (APIs)

The NPS uses APIs to regularly export information from social media applications. It was noted that information is regularly exported into corporate system thereby bringing corporate information back into corporate control. Therefore, exported information can be fed into relevant systems and processes. The APIs can also change and so API-based export strategies may require on-going update. In addition, different APIs is required for each social media channel. The tools mentioned by the staff include Archive Social, Brolly, PageFreezer, and Social SafeGuard. These types of social media archiving services can capture content from a variety of social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Pinterest and YouTube. The participants, however, indicated that this is done by the technical team in ICT because it requires technical knowledge which most did not possess.

4.2.11 Purpose-built software tool

The authors inquired whether the NPS uses purposefully built or tailor-made software to manage the organisation's social media content. The participants indicated that they are aware of software that can be designed to meet specific business requirements and can be designed to integrate and share information within business applications. Although they noted that such software can provide a comprehensive and accountable recordkeeping solution and can allow information capture and management through automation, the NPS was yet to acquire any. However, they were aware of a plan to do so. The hindrance to acquisition was noted by the Communications Officer as follows:

"The use of this software involves initial purchase and subsequent licensing costs. It takes NPS time and money to implement effectively. It may also pose a challenge to constantly upgrade since social media applications and approaches change rapidly."

4.3 Competencies of the staff managing social media content

In order to support records compliance, social media content must be properly archived and be producible. To also ensure the authenticity of the record, the associated metadata must be captured. However, it is important to note that the majority of the records staff that deal with both printed and electronic records (especially social media records) at NPS do not understand how to capture and retain metadata that validates the authenticity of the communication since they lack ICT skills.

During the discussion some of the records managers had this to say:

"Handling electronic records, especially social media, make us stressed. Some of us, until recently, did not know that social media are records."

"It is not easy to manage and supervise the creation of social media content since most of us have not had adequate training in IT and the volume of the records created through electronic means is enormous! We heavily depend on the IT staff to support us manage electronic records since they are the ones with the requisite skills and knowledge"

Technology should make life easier for the records team, and help people in the records and related department to follow the regulatory rules, makes communication and preservation of the records safe and secure, and enhance automated capture of social media records. However, if most of the people who handle electronic records are IT illiterate then it becomes not only a challenge to the staff but to the entire organization to manage their social media generated content. The Human Resource representative opined that:

"We have taken note that the three departments (IT, HR and Records) need to work together and share skills and learn from each other in order to effectively manage records at NPS. We are planning to offer a joint training for all the staff dealing with records irrespective of their departments so that they share experiences and learn from each other and from outside the organisation"

The sentiments above were also expressed by the communications officers who are currently in charge of all outwards communications at NPS.

4.4 Policies in place for social media content management

It emerged that there is no specific in-house social media management policies and adoption of international standards (such as ISO standards) on such has not been done. More than a half of the participants reported that the organisation has formal policies for records and information management. However, they do not adequately cover social media content management. The policies are also not consistently applied. The dynamic nature and growth of social media content is making it even more challenging to keep policies relevant, current and compliant.

The participants said they were unaware that they are legally liable for their social media content. All the participants described the social media content as "unmanaged and chaotic." They cannot classify and index user-created records at the time of their creation or later on in their life cycle.

4.5 Challenges of social media content management

Several findings and clear themes emerged from the FGDs. For instance, the NPS communication officers and records managers had a shared view that social media content management was not allocated budget like traditional recorded media. They indicated that social media tools were not given priority in the form of resources and budgets. They also held a similar view that they have no clear guidelines when dealing with strategy to manage social media content since no policies were in place. Lack of staff training and capacity building on social media content management was mentioned as well. Also prominently mentioned is the discrepancy in handling social media records between ICT professionals, Records and Information Management (RIM) professionals and Human Resource within the organisation. Without this type of unified and collaborative approach, the organisation is at a risk of regulatory non-compliance, loss of important records, failure to meet eDiscovery demands in a reasonable time period and other challenges that can lead to fines, penalties and damage to the organisation's reputation and productivity.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that the NPS uses a variety of tools to manage its social media content but lack competent staff to deal with them. The NPS also does not have a policy on managing social media content. Most of the staff managing records have inadequate skills to manage social media contents due to limited IT skills. In order for the NPS to get control over the management of their social media records, it is important to understand that these records are part of a much bigger organisational picture. Social media records must be managed in the context of all records management within the organisation. The researcher recommends that the following should be done at NPS:

1. Organise regular social media trainings and sensitisation programmes between IT professionals and RIM professionals and other staff within NPS.

2. The NPS should focus on the adoption best practices for on creation, storage, security and privacy of data and individual identity by addressing how and where social media records are stored, how long they are kept, where they are kept, how they are disposed of, how they are tagged and how they are accessed.

3. The NPS should create in-house policies on social media content management and they should be in line with the International Standards (such ISO Standards) best practices.

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