Social Media Policy

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Social Media Policy

1 Preamble

As a pre-eminent university in Africa, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation, with a unique institutional culture based upon the values the university espouses, the North-West University (hereinafter referred to as NWU) has adopted this Social Media Policy on 17 November 2016.

This policy replaces any previous versions of a Social Media Policy or guidelines that may exist/have existed at any of the campuses of the NWU.

2 Policy statement

It is in the best interest of the NWU to adhere to a social media policy that supports the overall strategy of the university, as well as the current advancement goals of the institution, while simultaneously maintaining optimal relationships with social media users – both in South Africa and internationally. Branding and promoting the public image of the institution facilitate the university's ability to be successful at its core business and such image is in turn directly impacted by what happens on social media– hence, the rationale for overseeing the NWU's social media activities by means of this policy.

The overarching purpose of the policy is to enhance the university's public image, in particular by guiding staff and students on best practices regarding the establishment and use of social media platforms. The policy is based on a number of fundamental principles, including:

- NWU values freedom of expression, a plurality of diverse views, academic freedom and critical thinking, but does not subscribe to any form or advocacy of discrimination on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation or other grounds as contained in the South African Constitution, or that which causes incitement to harm (such as "hate speech").
- The university encourages both transparent contact via social media by internal stakeholders and recognises social media to be an important role-player within an increasingly competitive Higher Education (HE) sector generally, and in influencing public attitudes towards and perceptions of the NWU, in particular. In an ever-changing, technology-driven and instant communication society, managing the flow of information and optimising social media conduct/exposure is becoming an increasingly important, but challenging aspect of advancing the university.
- The NWU has a strong preference for honest, open communication that is timeous and accurate, as well as a definite leaning towards building irreproachable stakeholder relationships through rapid response rates and relevant feedback to questions or during discussions on social media platforms.

The policy does not derive from a frame of reference that is aimed at restricting the constitutional rights to freedom of expression/speech/association, but quite to the contrary, aims to facilitate the promotion and positioning of the NWU and its achievements in the public domain in a professionally accountable manner. However, all constitutional rights invoke corresponding responsibilities and hence internal role-players at the institution should realise their obligation for promoting the image/reputation of the NWU and that they will be held responsible for harming the good standing of the university by means of public commentary that might bring the university into disrepute.

The policy promotes the dissemination of current, informative and engaging material that is presented in a consistent, accurate and professional manner during all forms of social media interaction. It also provides practical guidelines (please refer to the NWU Social Media Best Practices document, attached as an addendum to the policy document) for managing the various aspects of conduct on social media.

3 Scope of application

This policy applies to all operational units of the university – including its staff and students – at institutional, campus and faculty-based levels. For the sake of clarity, differentiation is made between official and unofficial (or private) conduct when interacting through social media by employees, temporary staff, students and contractors of the NWU:

- The policy does not aim to constrain academic members of staff, researchers or discipline/topic-specific experts to hold or share any particular views/beliefs/thoughts/opinions, provided that the information that is provided to the public through social media does not undermine the professional trust relationship between the individual and his/her employer or breaches any confidentiality agreements that might harm the business and/or brand of the university. Academic personnel are thus indeed encouraged to also freely comment on their respective fields of expertise and to share relevant information through relevant social media platforms.
- The policy does not aim to regulate the private receiving or imparting of information by staff/students, except for in instances where such conduct directly harms the good standing of the employer (and which is regulated by the prevailing NWU Code of Conduct), or where the behaviour of the individual directly impacts the functioning and/or brand of the university negatively. The NWU endorses the concepts and practice of freedom of opinion/expression as essential to implementing the core business of the university – including teaching, research and the pursuit of academic scholarship. This right does invoke the responsibility by staff and students to use these privileges in a manner that remains consistent with an accountable, honest search for knowledge and truth, grounded in scholarly evidence and taking cognisance of the university's vision, mission and values.
- Staff and students should take particular care in social media conduct to clarify that the information that is being disseminated or the response that they might be offering in reaction to an inquiry, is put forward in either their official capacity as an authorised representative/spokesperson of the university/a unit within the university; or that they are commenting in their role as a discipline-specific/academic expert on the topic at hand; or that they are acting in their personal capacity. Particularly in the instance of social media, these lines are easily blurred.
- While this is the NWU's policy, it is also the responsibility of users of social media to adhere to the terms of use of the various individual platforms.

The policy explicitly does not apply to instances of protected disclosures (or "whistle-blowing"), which is separately regulated by the relevant legislation on the topic in South Africa.

This policy should be read together with other existing NWU policies.

4 Definitions

Social media is a broad term used to describe a host of web-based technologies and developments, and describes how modern Internet users typically consume as well as generate content.

The following are examples of social media applications:
- Social networking sites: Facebook, Google Plus, CafeMom, Gather.
- Micro-blogging sites: Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat, Posterous
- Publishing tools: WordPress, Blogger, Squarespace
- Collaboration tools: Wikipedia, WikiTravel, WikiBooks
- Rating/review sites: Amazon ratings, Angie's List
- Photo sharing sites: Flickr, Instagram,
- Video sharing sites: YouTube, Vimeo, Viddler, Vine
- Personal broadcasting tools: Blog Talk radio, Ustream, Livestream
- Virtual worlds: Second Life, World of Warcraft, Farmville
- Location-based services: Check-ins, Facebook Places, Foursquare, Yelp
- Widgets: profile badges, like buttons
- Social bookmarking and news aggregation: Digg, Delicious, Pinterest
- Group buying: Groupon, Living Social, Crowdsavings
- Electronic communication:, Blackberry Voice Call; Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Google Hangouts, MSN Messenger, chat rooms, email, etc.

Above examples may undergo name changes, or future developments could take its place

5   Roles and responsibilities

As a general principle, the relevant social media representatives are the first point of referral for all enquiries regarding a particular social media account. NWU staff is strongly advised to contact/refer questions to this person as a very first step, who will channel the request to the appropriate function/person and will also monitor that the matter receives the required attention.

The roles and responsibilities of the various role-players are summarised as follows:

5.1   Director: Communication

Under the guidance of the Executive Director: Corporate Communication, the Director: Communication is responsible for implementing the NWU social media policy. Responsible persons will identified and intervene if necessary when social media issues escalate beyond regular interaction to a point where brand/reputation damage could be likely.

5.2   Social Media Representatives

Social media representatives across the NWU maintain and monitor all relevant NWU accounts (a comprehensive online directory will be available on http://www.nwu.ac.za/connect)

5.3   Academia

All academic staff members and topic experts are encouraged to engage in public debate and to provide commentary within their area of expertise.

Notwithstanding the right to express their academic views without restriction, it is strongly advised that experts who want to discuss controversial issues/findings/announcements (such that could generate robust debate or interaction) which may directly reflect on this university and wish to do so via social media, shall liaise, with the Director Communication first, in order to ensure effective coverage and to limit any possible negative publicity.

5.4   Staff and students

Staff or students who require a social media presence with regards to the NWU or affiliations of the NWU are requested to contact the Director: Communication to assist with best practices, and to approve branding and the use of corporate identity. This process will be handled by the NWU Social Media Forum.

6   Rules in terms of the Social Media Policy

Rules for specific aspects of managing social media engagement are attached as an addendum to the policy, including the following:

6.1 Rules for management issues and crisis communication
6.2 Rules for social media assistance
6.3 Rules for social media engagement
6.4 Rules for social media monitoring
6.5 Rules for non-compliance
6.6 Rules for confidentiality
6.7 Rules for discretion
6.8 Rules for language

7   Guidelines in terms of best practice for Social Media

Guidelines in terms of best practice for social media are attached as an addendum to the policy:

7.1 Social media considerations
7.2 Process to follow
7.3 Best practices to keep in mind
7.4 NWU Social Media Forum contact details

8   Social Media Establishment Form

ADDENDUM: NWU Social Media Engagement

6   Rules in terms of the Social Media Policy

6.1   Management issues and crisis communication

- All staff and students are expected to bring any emerging issues of potential social media or public interest/sensitivity related to the NWU to the immediate attention of the Director: Communication, who will activate the university's crisis communication plan if deemed necessary.
- The Director: Communication, along with the relevant staff, will then develop a social media response that is consistent with the NWU's media strategy.
- No individual staff member or students are authorised to speak via social media on behalf of any campus, faculty or NWU in its entirety as an institution in the event of any crisis, unless authorised to do so in writing and in accordance with the emergency/crisis communication plan and Media Policy

6.2   Social media assistance

- The NWU Social Media Forum is available to assist members of staff and students with matters related to social media interaction (NWU relevant), including assistance with account set-up, best practices guidance and support in attending to enquiries. Before new accounts are set up, a social media establishment form as provided by the NWU Social Media Forum must be completed.

6.3   Social media engagement

- The NWU has dedicated spokespersons. Unless given permission, a member of staff or student is not authorised to speak on behalf of the NWU nor may he or she create the impression that he or she does in fact speak on behalf of the NWU.
- All information that is provided via social media should be truthful, accurate, unambiguous, clear and factual. Social media responses are hence always "on the record".
- Remarks may not include any disparaging comments about the NWU and its partner organisations/stakeholders, other organisations, groups or individuals, as also stipulated in the terms of use of various social media platforms.
- A member of staff or student's online presence is furthermore a reflection on the NWU, and images, posts or comments can reflect on the NWU even if the member of staff or student is acting in a personal capacity.
- The NWU reserves the right to request the removal of its name, symbol or any registered trademarks from social media accounts. Social media activities may not interfere with employment or educational commitments.
- It is the NWU's prerogative to request a member of staff or student to remove a post from a social media platform if the NWU believes the post to be inappropriate in any way.
- All social media accounts or profiles that represent the NWU should strictly adhere to the NWU's corporate identity guidelines. Contact the Director: Communication for assistance in this regard.
- Members of staff and students with responsibilities of administering social networking accounts in the name of the NWU should make themselves known to the NWU Social Media Forum. This helps ensure consistent messages and practices, and most importantly to keep a list of official NWU social media accounts.

6.4   Social media monitoring

- The Director: Communication assumes responsibility for ensuring that a media monitoring service is in place to monitor the NWU's social media activities and to assist in managing the reputation of the institution.
- The NWU reserves the right to monitor any online activity relating to the official NWU accounts and to remove inappropriate posts, or block disruptive users.

6.5 Non-compliance

- When completing the Social Media Establishment document, you are entering into an agreement with the NWU in which you undertake to adhere fully to the requirements as was set out in the form. Non-compliance could lead to termination of your account or further actions.

- You are required to adhere to the rules for the use of NWU computers and computer facilities – non-compliance may lead to disciplinary action in terms of the applicable processes.

6.6 Confidentiality

- Personal or contact details of staff, members of the Institutional Management (IM) and Council, as well as those of NWU students are protected by the stipulations of the [Protection of Personal Information Act](#) and such details may hence not be shared through social media without their explicit prior consent. This does not include official spokespersons or experts who have agreed to their contact details being made known.
- The release of any information about NWU staff will be managed consistently with the institution's human capital and confidentiality policies.

6.7 Discretion

- Proper consideration must always be given to the sensitivities and potential for causing offence when discussing the topics of religion, sexual preferences, race, politics or any other controversial issues that may provoke a charged, emotional response.

6.8 Language

- It is important that the language of NWU social media content adheres to the NWU's language policy.
- Be sure to take note of (and adhere to) the terms of use/rules of various social media platforms.

7 Guidelines in terms of best practice for social media engagement

7.1 Considering social media?

The North-West University (NWU*)* recognises the importance and benefits of communicating through social media. It is a powerful vehicle through which the NWU communicates relevant news to our community, listens to voices and perceptions of NWU, connects with our audience online, and builds goodwill.
Social media platforms are typically easy and free, but a successful social media strategy requires research, clearly-outlined goals and objectives, smart tactics, and dedicated effort.
Answer these questions first:

- **What would you like to accomplish?**
If you want to promote an event or share news about your faculty/department/centre, submitting content for consideration on the NWU's existing social media sites might be a better choice for you. Social media outposts, such as those on Facebook and Twitter, require daily maintenance as well as a desire to engage with others.

- **Who is your audience?**
Researching the type of people you want to have a conversation with will help determine which platforms are best for you, and the kind of content you should share with that audience.

- **Do you have what it takes?**
To be successful at social media not only takes time and strategy, but also an outgoing personality, enjoyment in providing helpful information, knowledge to make connections, and a thick skin. You will also have to monitor your platforms and upload and schedule content daily. The accounts cannot be shut down during holidays or at weekends.

- **How is this in the best interests of the NWU?**
Any activity on social media on behalf of the NWU should align directly and measurably with the NWU strategic plan, dream, purpose and values.

- **Are you authorised?**
All official social media accounts at the NWU, with the name and contact information for the account manager, must be registered with the NWU Social Media Forum. You may only post on behalf of the NWU or its affiliates

in an official capacity where you have been explicitly authorised to do so. You may only create an account in the name of a recognised NWU entity only if you are authorised to represent that entity, and if you have completed a Social Media Establishment form. The NWU Social Media Forum then has to grant clearance.

Staff and students with responsibilities for administering social networking accounts in the name of the NWU should make themselves known to their respective campus social media representatives. These representatives may also be included as administrators for emergency posts and social media audit purposes.

7.2 Follow the process

If after considering the above you still feel that you want to use social media in your professional capacity, kindly contact the NWU Social Media Forum to complete a NWU Social Media Establishment Form and to receive guidance in getting started.

Everyone starting/maintaining NWU social media accounts must refer to the **NWU Social Media Policy.** The NWU Social Media Forum can furthermore provide guidelines for specific social media platforms, and you should also be sure to adhere to the *terms of use* of the various social media platforms.

That, in conjunction with the suggestions and best practices outlined here, can help you to use social media channels effectively while protecting your personal and professional reputation.

- Important to remember: Include "NWU" in your **account names**
- Images and graphics should adhere to NWU corporate identity. Logos, for example, should be used in compliance with the Corporate Identity (CID) Manual that is available on the intranet. Check with the NWU Social Media Forum for assistance in this regard
- Don't use **copyrighted material**. Ensure that you have permission when using images or graphics. If a video you post is set to music, you must use royalty-free music and sound effects. To use a copyrighted piece, you must contact the owner. Most often the owner or publisher will be listed on sheet music or a CD label.
- Note that all three campuses have YouTube channels and it would be mutually beneficial to upload your videos on these channels. Contact the NWU Social Media Forum for help.
- **Check pages/profiles/accounts** in the morning, at midday and before you leave work. You should also have **24/7 access** to pages and be able to instantly respond to urgent queries or deal with crisis situations.

7.3 Best practices to keep in mind

- **Be respectful**

Anything you post in your role as a NWU ambassador reflects on the institution. Be professional and respectful at all times and do not engage in arguments or extensive debates with naysayers.

- **Be transparent**

Make it clear that you are blogging/tweeting/Facebooking, etc. in your own department's capacity, not on behalf of the NWU. Kindly use the following disclaimer in the "About us" or similar section of your social media account:

The opinions of the individuals on this social media account are not an official statement or opinion of the NWU. NWU reserves the right to remove members, comments or other information that is contradicting the vision, mission and values of the NWU and which are detrimental to the good name, order, discipline or performance of the work of the University or of any part of the University, including any office bearer, supporter, member of staff or student thereof.

- **Listen attentively**

Listen to online conversations via your preferred channels (whether blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) to maintain a clear and current understanding of what is relevant and of interest to your community/target audience.

- **Be active**

Social media involvement requires diligent and regular care. If you do not have the time or resources to check in on these sites for at least a few minutes each day, and to post fresh content several times a week (the exact amount of times is to be indicated in the Social Media Establishment form), you should reconsider using social

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media at this time. **Your site is only as interesting as your last post** - if that post is several months old, visitors will consider it out-dated.

- **Be prompt**

One of the great benefits of social media is the ability to share information almost instantly with a global audience. Be prepared to move quickly in response to new developments, trends, announcements, or emergencies with relevant information on your platform.

- **Be careful**

Think before you post. Remember that anything you share on social media, even within a closed network, is not private. It can and will be shared, stored, and spread globally. Don't post anything online you would feel uncomfortable seeing on the front page of the newspaper.

- **Commenting**

Social media is not only about sharing your news and successes, but also information that is of interest to your readers and viewers. When commenting as part of your role, be sure to indicate who you are, and your affiliation with the NWU. If you see a post that you think requires, or would benefit from, an official NWU response, please contact your campus social media representative.

Be prepared to accept, and respond to, comments. To protect your site, moderate all comments before posting them. Understand that not all comments will be positive. Respond to negative comments professionally and by providing any additional information that may help resolve the issue. Acknowledge the negative post/comment, and pursue it further offline. *Inbox* or *Direct Message (DM)* the person to ask for more information and contact details. Post a disclaimer on your site stating that you reserve the right to remove inappropriate comments. Remove any comments containing vulgar language, those that attack a specific group or individual, and those that are obviously spam.

- **Separate personal from professional**

Balancing your professional and personal social media presences can be difficult, particularly if you are a user in both areas. Content that is appropriate and of interest to your personal friends is most probably not appropriate or of interest to your department's "friends". Keep these two presences as separate as possible by restricting content about your personal life to your personal page.

- **Networking**

Be polite and accessible, keeping in mind all the guidelines offered here. Having a personality and a voice will help you build your audience. Once you have established your social media presence, cross-promote in your various channels, both online and offline.

Do not judge your success solely by numbers. While it is tempting to use views, fans, or followers as a measure to assess your engagement in social media, it is not the ideal measurement.

Success with building community via social media is not an end result. It is a process.

- **Crisis management**

When in crisis mode, work first to understand the level of severity, identify potential risks, and react accordingly. Acknowledge that you have received the negative comment/post, and take it offline. *Inbox*/*DM* the person to ask for more information and contact details. Notify the NWU Social Media Forum so that they can assist you with the correct answer/response. Work through the crisis by listening intently, showing empathy, transparency, and a willingness to correct whatever wrong has been done.

- **Maintenance**

Social media accounts at the NWU must be logged into at least once per day to monitor and respond to posts, comments, mentions, etc. Being present and responsive will gain you credibility and value. When using social media, people (such as prospective students asking about deadlines and parents enquiring about events for example) will engage with you and expect a response. Establishing a social media channel, and then deserting or not checking it regularly, will reflect poorly on the university.

- **Defining and measuring success**

What do you hope to gain? How will you know when you have achieved it? Do you want increased traffic to your website? More energetic *give-and-take* with prospective students? Do you want to reach out to new colleagues on campus or around the world?

Define success, how you will measure it, and the tools you need to measure it (e.g Hootsuite). Also make sure to check the built-in tools provided by your platform regularly to monitor engagement (an example is *Facebook Insights* which can monitor engagement with pages or posts). Using this information, you can make necessary changes to your content strategy in order to encourage more engagement.

7.4   Contacts: NWU Social Media Forum

Corporate Communication: Web and Electronic Media
Moira Müller
018 299 4913
moira.muller@nwu.ac.za

Corporate Communication: Social Media Representative
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8   NWU Social Media Establishment Form

Please fill out this form and submit to the NWU Social Media Forum:

Name	
Staff number	
Department	
Contact number	

1   What is our main purpose for wanting to create a social media account?

2   Who is your intended audience?

3   Which platforms do you wish to use?

Facebook	
Twitter	
LinkedIn	
YouTube	
Google+	
Blog [identify blog host site]	

Other:_____

4   What will be the name(s) of your account(s)?

5   Who will manage the account(s)? (provide names and e-mail addresses)

6   How often do you intend to check into your account(s)?

7   How often do you intend to update/post to your account(s)?

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:70px"></div>

8   How will you monitor response and success?

<div style="border:1px solid #000; height:70px"></div>

9   How will you get the word out about your social media accounts?

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