



POLICY ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE
PUBLIC SERVICE



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(Revision of OPM no 21/2015 – Policy on the use of social media in the Public Service)

For the attention of:

Public Officers or any other Public Employee or person on a position of trust performing Public Service duties, and persons forming part of Boards and/or Committees addressing Public Service exigencies, working on a full-time/part-time, temporary/back-to-back, or on an apprenticeship basis, including student workers.

Any individual who is authorized in writing by the Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable, to engage in social media for official use.

1. Introduction

In the past years, social and digital media have become an integral part of our lives. To this effect, the Public Service strives to be at the forefront of having a presence on social media. Social Media is a source of information and serves as a platform for individuals and organizations to collaborate, interact and exchange knowledge and information with different stakeholders. It contributes to making the Public Service more accessible, whilst helping it communicate with the public, be more transparent and accountable.

Alongside the benefits that social media brings, there are also certain responsibilities of which public officers must be aware when using social media to communicate, whether on official business or, for personal use.

2. Purpose

This policy aims to promote the benefits from the use of social media whilst outlining a set of principles as a guide for its appropriate use within the Public Service, to minimize risks to the reputation of the individual and that of the Public Service and to its confidential or proprietary information. Such risks can jeopardize Public Service compliance in general and its legal obligations.

3. Scope and Applicability

This policy is a guide on the proper use of social media by individuals, both for official purposes and for personal use, whilst ensuring that the use of such means of communication does not degrade, degenerate or in any way jeopardize the reputation of the Public Service.

Subject to the concurrence of the respective Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at law, as applicable, Heads of Department may draw up their own internal written policies specially customized to meet the needs of their respective department. The principles and procedures outlined in this policy apply to the professional and personal use of social media, during and outside official hours, whether using official or personal ICT equipment.

4. Principles

4.1 Use of social media for Personal Purposes

4.1.1. When posting comments online in a personal capacity, employees shall neither claim nor imply that they are speaking on behalf of government or the public service. **Individuals should include a disclaimer stating that the views expressed are one's own and do not reflect the views of the Ministry /department /board /committee concerned**, albeit they are not obliged to do so for each post they make. Nevertheless, the use of a disclaimer does not automatically exempt individuals from being held responsible for making inappropriate comments or other communication which may offend, denigrate, defame, harass, or negatively affect the public administration, colleagues, public persons or any other individual. The provisions of Section 5 of Directive 5 regarding contributions to the Media and Public Comments by Public Officers shall also apply.

4.1.2. Under no circumstances may an individual speak in a personal capacity in cases where the topic in question falls under the official work remit of or any other work entrusted to such individual. Individuals may however re-post news items related to his/her work remit, for dissemination purposes, if such re-posts do not degrade, degenerate or in any way jeopardize the reputation of the Public Service.

4.1.3. Online / Social Media posts should not disclose any information that is confidential, sensitive, or work-related. Any information and photos related to official duties and official meetings and events, shall not be disclosed, published, or made public on the media.

4.1.4. An individual shall not use official accounts/websites for personal reasons, provided that an authorized individual may only use personal accounts in an official capacity if he/she is obliged to do so due to technical reasons. Should an individual receive requests/queries from the public through his/her personal social networking account, it is recommended that he/she directs the public to the appropriate official channels, or an official email account in cases where an official Social Media page or channel is not set up. On the other hand, should an individual receive personal messages/requests/queries on official accounts, he/she should re-direct the sender accordingly.

4.1.5. Whilst it is being made clear that this policy does not prevent the linking of colleagues on social media, it is recommended that proper assessment is made of any implications that this may have on the organizational climate and on the image of the Public Service.

4.2 Use of social media for Professional Purposes

All individuals are expected to:

4.2.1. Use social media appropriately:

01. Any context expressed in other Public Service policies also applies to Social Media Use.
02. During office hours, individuals must ensure that any use of social media does not compromise or negatively impact their productivity.
03. All individuals are expected to maintain the same high standards of professional conduct and behavior online as would be expected elsewhere.

4.2.2. Respect Information Sensitivity — Share information carefully:

Publication of any data owned by, stored by, and exchanged by the Public Service on any social media platform shall be commensurate with security classification applicable to the Public Service.

4.2.3. Protect their reputation and that of the Public Service:

Since an Individual making use of social media may be associated with the Public Service directly or indirectly, the individual shall ensure that any activity carried out does not bring the Public Service into disrepute and is in line with any clauses referred to in the Code of Ethics (<https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/595/eng/pdf>)

4.2.4. Provide identification and be responsible:

01. Any Social Media engagement on behalf of the Public Service should only be made if the individual is an Authorized Individual.

02. If an Individual encounters any activity that falls within the boundaries of those listed below, the Individual is obliged to bring such activity to the attention of the respective Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable, or his/her delegate:

i; Groups, accounts or any other online presence referring to / representing the Public Service that are not listed as Official Social Media Platforms.

ii. Any activity which goes against the principles of this Policy.

03. Any Authorized Individuals should identify themselves as such in any form of Official Social Media engagement.

4.2.5. Think before you engage

01. Individuals are responsible for their online activity.

02. Individuals shall always presume that what they publish on social media platforms cannot be unpublished.

03. The Public Service shall consider any activity as published content even if such activity has been removed /deleted.

04 If the activity is breaching any Public Service policy or direction, the Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable, or his/her delegate reserves the right to instruct any individual to undo any activity that refers, or which may be implied to refer to the Public Service.

4.2.6. Respect standing laws, directives, and policies.

01. In the event where a provision of this policy conflicts with any provisions of any laws, directives and policies governing the workings of a particular Ministry, Department, Directorate, Board or Committee, such laws, directives, and policies shall prevail.

02. Any applicable laws, directives and policies shall be respected, including but not limited to the:

(a.) Public Administration Act (PAA) inclusive of the Code of Ethics

(<https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/595/eng/pdf>)

(b.) Official Secrets Act

(<https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/50/eng/pdf>)

(c.) Data Protection Act

(<https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/586/eng/pdf>)

(d.) Public Service Management Code

(<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/Documents/Public%20Service%20Management%20Code/PSMC.pdf>)

(e.) Directive 4 - Consolidated Service Quality Standards

(<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/Directives/Directive-4.2.pdf>)

(f.) Directive 5 — Political Participation and Communications with the Media

(<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/Directives/Directive-5.pdf>)

(<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/Directives/Directive-5-1.pdf>)

(g.) Harassment and Bullying Free Workplace Policy

(<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/People-Support-Wellbeing/Policies%20and%20Guidelines/EmployeeWellbeingAHarassmentandBullyingFreeWorkplace.pdf>)

(h.) Equality Policy

(<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/People-Support-Wellbeing/Policies%20and%20Guidelines/Equality%20Policy.pdf>)

(i.) GMICT policies

(<https://mita.gov.mt/portfolio/ict-policy-and-strategy/gmict-policies/>)

03. All online submissions shall respect the privacy of others, shall not be defamatory and shall not constitute any conflict of interest.

4.2.7. Earn respect - Be Honest and Transparent

01. Any content directly or indirectly related to the Public Service published in error or in contradiction to this policy should be acknowledged immediately and brought to the attention of the respective Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable, or his/her delegate.

02. If the Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable, is of the opinion that content was published with malicious intent or gross negligence, this shall constitute in breach of policy.

4.2.8. Use the Public Service Official Social Media Platforms diligently

01. No individual has the authority to create/manage Social Media platforms portraying the Public Service's identity unless explicitly authorized in writing by the respective Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable.

02. The Official Social Media Platforms of the Public Service shall be used according to this Policy and other Terms of Use of the specific platform including any additional statements deemed necessary.

5. Responsibility

Permanent Secretaries and Heads responsible at Law, shall oversee the effective implementation and operation of this policy within their respective ministries and departments. They are to ensure that all their employees understand the implications of this policy. Any breaches of this policy are to be reported immediately to the respective Permanent Secretary or Head responsible at Law, as applicable, or his/her delegate.

Anything posted on the Internet is public, searchable, and retrievable, and ultimately the responsibility to ensure that the content of the posts does not breach the law and/or government policies, rests on the person who posted the material online. To this effect, individuals are strongly advised to comply with the principles outlined in this policy, and that their participation on social media is ethically and professionally appropriate.

Authorized Individuals are required to keep the Ministry/Department/Board/Committee websites and social media pages, or channels constantly updated.

6. Breach of Policy

Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action.

7. Annexes

The following annexed documents are relevant to individuals involved in the administration of

Official Social Media pages or channels and are complementary to this policy:

- i. Public Digital Services – A Social Media Playbook explaining social media best practices within the Public Service of Malta and its departments/ directorates.
- ii. Social Media Plan Approval Sheet to be filled in for the setting up of new channels by departments/ directorates falling under the Public Service.

Annex 1

Public Digital Services – A Social Media Playbook

A guide for the Public Service Social Media Admins.

As the Public Service recognizes the benefits of the use of social media, this document outlines a set of guidelines and best practices earmarked for effective social media administration. This document ensured guidance to social media administrators to make the most of social media, limit risks and engage with the public in an appropriate manner.

1. Account Management

1.1 All **official accounts and their administrators should be documented.**

- Record must be kept of each social media account available, including but not limited to: Facebook; Instagram; Twitter; LinkedIn; YouTube; Pinterest; Blog pages etc.
- Record must be kept of the social media administrators of the accounts and of whoever has access to the same accounts.

1.2 When **new official social media presence** is required to be created, it is important to:

- Determine who will administer these accounts
- Have clear and identifiable objectives
- Ensure that a content strategy is in place and properly formulated
- Ensure that the best practices found on the next page of this document are well understood and followed to ensure effectiveness and ROI.
- Make sure that the social media plan sheet, available as an annex with this document, is properly filled and approval from respective headship and OPPS Communications Office is sourced.

2. Best Practices

To ensure you're making the most of social media, it's important to undertake planning and research to:

- establish the objectives of your channels
- identify your audience
- build your strategy

We've outlined some best practices and guidelines to follow so you'll end up with a clear social media strategy that will allow you to demonstrate the benefits of social media to your organisation.

- Start by identifying the role you want social media to play across your organisation, **set KPIs and ensure objectives are measurable.**
- **Know your audience** – thoroughly research who your audience is and what it is they need to know so that all promotional material can point to that
- Choose which channels are ideal for the audience you want to target. **Build a presence on the right social media networks** and make sure you have the correct branding, messaging collateral and an initial post in place before you launch.
- **Audit performance:** run a monthly social media audit; experiment with posting content on different days and times; survey your audience to ask them what they want; use analytics to find your top-performing content.
- **Employee rule book:** develop guidelines to provide structure to your employees on what topics may be off limits to post about when representing your company — even on their personal accounts. This eliminates confusion, encourages employees to share positive content, and establishes clear consequences for violating terms.
- **Plan and schedule content in advance:** Planning your social media content allows space to create high-quality content, logically put together campaigns and to seek collaboration and feedback from your team. Tip: use an editorial calendar to plan content month by month.
- **Repurpose and adapt content:** tailor your content to what each social media platform excels at to cultivate meaningful engagement and drive traffic. Moreover, make sure that your visual content such as photos are posted in high resolution.
- Have a **content approval process** that is effective and efficient. Remember two pairs of eyes are better than one.
- Evaluate **trends** before jumping aboard. Make sure that current trends match your company values and that they are understood or appropriate for your existing audience.

- **Posting Frequency:** every social media account is unique, so testing and analyzing your results is key. As a starting point and general rule of thumb it would be ideal to post no more than two times a day. This ensures a good balance of content for your audience.
- **Emoji etiquette:** emojis are an excellent way to add some spice to your social media captions. When used correctly, emojis have been proven to increase engagement. Your audience demographics will play a huge role in how and when you should use marketing emoji in your campaigns. Before adding emoji to your marketing strategy, ask yourself if it aligns with the tone of your brand. Also, make sure that you do the research to find out the meanings of different emoji before you use them.
- **Social tagging etiquette:** social media tagging is a great way to give your posts more exposure and encourage engagement. When done correctly, tagging other accounts in your photos and copy can be mutually beneficial for everyone involved. Make sure to always tag professional profiles and/ or departmental pages rather than personal profiles.

3. **Guide to coherent branding:**

It is imperative that branding and imagery are given their due importance to enhance engagement and present a consistent brand to the follower.

- A brand guidelines document is a must to ensure that all branding from visuals, to captions and tone of voice, to replying to queries or comments are coherent across the board.
- Care should be given in the use of an appropriate tone of voice. Whilst an informal tone may be more fitting in certain social media types, others may require a more personal/ corporate tone.
- Branding across social media and other parallel media should be coherent to ensure maximum brand awareness.
- Extra care must be placed when using images from third parties or stock photos. Proper authorization must be ensured in using such photos or any other intellectual property. This can give rise to Copyright issues.
- When using photos of individuals, ensure that proper consent is sought, especially when using photos of children/ minors.
- All biographies, information, descriptions, and details must be properly articulated and clearly visible in the page description.

4. Social media as a customer service platform:

Social media is all about two-way communication. Attention must be given to comments and direct messages (DM). Clear communication guidelines must be available.

- Besides tagging you in a post, users are also messaging you or leaving comments on your social media posts with customer service inquiries. **Make sure to respond to any DMs and comments in adequate time.** It is recommended that comments are replied to in a private message and if further details are required that the user is informed to DM accordingly with their query. Ensure you have a way of assigning conversations to keep things organized and deliver the fastest response times.
- Periodic average response time should be identified and measured.
- The terms of use shall highlight the standard office hours when followers can expect to get replies to their comments.
- **Coach your team on how to handle negative situations** and offer solutions to angry customers. For criticism of company actions or values, ensure everyone on your team knows how to respond in an appropriate and ethical way. Make sure to approach every interaction with a solution-oriented mindset.
- It is important to **distinguish between spam, offensive and constructive criticism** in the terms of use.
- **Personal information shall never be disclosed.** Personal issues must always be disclosed offline or in a private message.
- It is important to monitor the brand or any other specific keywords relevant to the brand being used across socials. Admins are encouraged to engage with specific individuals posting questions or queries in other unofficial channels, only if such engagement adds value.

5. Guide to creating engaging social media content:

Good content is not enough. Sharing relevant content for the right target audience is key to drive engagement and meet the set objectives.

- The content posted must be relevant and useful to the audience. The role of the administrator is to help customers as representatives of the public service. If what is posted is not mainly intended to help or inform a customer, perhaps it should not be posted in the first place.
- Any content that may be deemed offensive should not be posted.

- Use relatable moments in visually creative ways to connect with your audience. **Create more relevant content** by viewing the most engaging posts across similar channels to yours. From there, model after those high-performing posts and incorporate similar ones into your own strategy.
- Posts must be kept short, but not too short.
- It must be made sure that content does not infringe copyright or data protection laws.
- It is crucial that correct use of Maltese / English and punctuation is always ensured.
- Stories emotionally move and inspire people. Tell a story the audience will listen to. Create characters that resonate with your audience. **Storytelling** can be incorporated on all social media platforms.
- Utilise **User-generated content or employee-generated content**. Create a social media challenge or contest to cultivate user-generated content. Employee-generated content can also improve brand trust for the audience, whilst providing a fresh perspective and allowing them to share their work-life experience.
- **Share interesting content** that resonates with your brand values and audience from other sources. When sharing content from other sources, it should be made sure that such sources are credible and factual.
- The brain processes images and videos 60,000 times faster than text can. So, when planning your social media content, switch it up with some **visually appealing graphics**. Use a variety of visuals such as videos; photos, animations, GIFs, and infographics to entice attention.
- Researching the **right hashtags** is key to your social media strategy. Make sure to keep hashtags simple and spelled correctly; use trending hashtags when you can; less is more when it comes to hashtags, it's best to use hashtags moderately; use your branded hashtags.
- **Political content:** Public Service departments must ensure that their promotional posts are not politicised.

6. Security Considerations

It is advisable that the security considerations shown below are well understood and enforced by social media admins and/ or any other approved authorized individuals. While an element of risk is accepted, lack of compliance will increase the possibility of issues escalating significantly if such considerations are not well enforced.

- Only content that is earmarked for consumption should be posted. If in doubt the administrator should refrain from posting and/ or get clearance from senior management.
- Posted links must only direct to secure targets.
- Settings should be set appropriately and endorsed by the social media admin. Use of default settings is not advisable unless reviewed and approved.
- Administrative privileges, account settings and other security considerations should be constantly reviewed.
- Any personnel having authorized access to any official social media presence should be aware of these guidelines.
- Users should change their social media passwords frequently and ensure that two-factor authentication is set up.
- It is strongly advisable that authorized individuals do not make use of social media platforms when connected to public Wi-Fi or connections in public places, unless explicitly required to do so. If such facilities are used the user is to make sure that they are logged out before leaving and consider changing their password after use.
- Any security issues or incidents should be carefully documented and reported accordingly.
- All systems should be kept up to date with the most recent security updates. Properly patched and updated anti-virus and firewall software should be used.
- Mobile devices should be secured with security access codes and/or encryption keys.
- Lost or stolen mobile devices should be reported to senior management and passwords changed immediately.

Annex 2

Social Media Plan Approval Sheet

Ministry/Department/Board/Committee: _____

Type of Social Media Platform proposed: _____

Name of Social Media page or channel: _____

1. Writing your Social Media plan:

Specify who is involved in writing the social media plan and specify their roles within the department:

State your objectives:

Specify who the Social Media Administrator (Primary Owner of the Account) and Deputy Social Media Administrator are and whom they report to:

Assess your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

2. Composition of social media team

Specify the composition of your social media team and the role of each member. Include all Primary Stakeholders even though some do not work in your department.

3. Strategy

How frequently do you plan to update your social media channel(s)?

Topic	Social Media Platform	Daily	Weekly (include day if applicable)	bi-Weekly (include day if applicable)	Monthly
<include name of topic>	<Include any social media platform content will be posted on>	<mark with X where applicable>	<mark with X where applicable>	<mark with X where applicable>	<mark with X where applicable>

Describe your strategy to reply to the posts (both positive and negative), comments and messages received on your social media channels:

4. Target Audience

Provide description of the audience whom your posts will most probably be relevant to:

Focus of Topics to be posted on Social Media Presence (state the purpose e.g., awareness, educational etc.)
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<i><include related topics></i>

List of hashtags or other profile handles being used

<i><include any possible list of hashtags to be used></i>

List of major anticipated Events schedule (if applicable)
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<i><list of major events or milestones to be featured through social media></i>

5. Conclusion

What do you envisage your difficulties in executing your social media plan might be and how do you plan to overcome them?

Endorsement by Head of Department

Endorsement by the Communications Department within OPPS