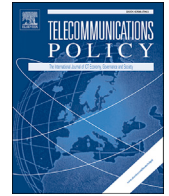


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## When I chat online, I feel relaxed and work better: Exploring the use of social media in the public sector workplace in Rwanda

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of social media in the public sector workplace in Rwanda, a country that encourages new media technologies in all areas, including public institutions. In particular, we investigate how public employees reconcile job-related and private uses of social media in the workplace. To answer this question, in-depth interviews were conducted both with employees and employers. Our key findings reveal that social media are increasingly playing a central role in how public institutions function, and they are used to coordinate various activities (e.g., meetings and sharing information). Although social media are often feared for their potential to distract employees from work, in our study private uses of social media were seen as compatible with work in most institutions. Even where shortcomings were noted, they were too minimal to constitute a real threat to public institutions' productivity.

This paper explores the use of social media in the public sector workplace in Rwanda, a country that is strongly committed to mainstreaming the use of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) to leapfrog from an impoverished economy to a middle-income and knowledge-based economy. In the last few years, this trend has been hailed by many as bearing positive effects on Rwanda's GDP. The choice of Rwanda for this study was strongly motivated by the country's ICT policies and their implementation. The Rwandan government has set up policies and initiatives aiming at encouraging the use of new media technologies in various sectors in general and in public institutions in particular. These policies have been driven by the need to speed up the delivery of services, which has ushered in important progress in various fields such as education, health, agriculture, trade, and job creation (Ministry of Youth and ICT, 2014). In 2015, the country was noted by the World Economic Forum as being the best promoter of the ICT sector (World Economic Forum, 2015). Rwanda is also an interesting case in that it is often looked at as a good example of countries with effective leadership (OECD, 2011), which is perceived by many as a key factor of public sector's effectiveness (Fourie & Poggenpoel, 2016, pp. 1–12).

Various government officials and institutions have been called to embrace these new media channels in order to support citizens' queries. Several top leaders, including the President and his Ministers, regularly use social media such as Twitter and Facebook to interact with citizens. In doing so, problems are solved at low cost and with only a minimum of time delay. For example, the Minister of Health engages in Q&A sessions in what is dubbed “#MinisterMondays” in which she answers questions from different people involved in the health sector. Many Rwandans are now using social media platforms to discuss with high-level or local government authorities. These platforms are regarded being an important way of holding leaders accountable for the implementation of public policies (Kalisa,

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2014). The government issued directives in early 2011 to encourage top officials to adopt the use of social media in order to respond to citizens' queries (Rwanda Governance Board, 2013).

Social media, dominated by Facebook and Twitter, are mostly used in cities rather than in rural areas (Kalisa, 2014). Research has shown that social media in local governments are mostly used by individuals for their own rather than work-related purposes, especially in a bid to nurture their personal relationships (Rwandese Association of Local Government Authorities, 2012). Social media have become popular due to the increased popularity and availability of the Internet and mobile phones in Rwanda compared with the rest of the East African Region (Kalemera, Nalwoga, Nanfuka, & Wakabi, 2014). Official sources report a mobile teledensity rate of 72.6% and an Internet penetration rate of 31.5% (Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, 2015). Although Internet access has significantly increased within the last few years, it is still a main challenge impeding the use of social media in Rwanda, along with illiteracy.

This study focuses on public institutions (including state agencies), which are often regarded as imperfect entities in many countries. Even so, public institutions are often the shapers of public action. Weaknesses in the public sector strongly impact the growth of many developing countries since their consequences are also felt by the private sector. Most problems in these institutions are generally connected to rampant corruption, bureaucracy, and poor decision-making (Independent Evaluation Group, 2008). Rwanda may not be an exception since it has been reported that the performance of its public institutions is marred by a number of shortcomings, including bureaucracy, duplication of responsibilities (Government of the Republic of Rwanda, 2014), and non-compliance with human resources management rules (Public Service Commission, 2013). With this background in mind, we believe that it is legitimate to probe the role that social media play in the functioning of the public sector.

The situation noted above drew our attention to the larger number of users who claim to use the Internet on the job, even for leisure purposes. In addition, the increasing ubiquity of social networks in Rwanda leads one to question the impact social media might have on organizational performance. We were accordingly motivated to shed light on this question with a special focus on public institutions. A particular focus in this investigation concerns the extent to which public employees reconcile job-related and private uses of social media (for example, managing family events such as weddings, burials, and entertainment while one is at work).

### 1. Unpacking the concept of social media

Social media platforms (and social network sites, which are often used interchangeably) allow people to communicate and collaborate online through various means such as blogs, emails, and instant messages, to name a few (Broughton, Higgins, Hicks, & Cox, 2009). Through various forms including microblogging, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, and video, social media have the advantage of connecting two people or groups of people. Social media are particularly popular among individuals in younger generations who are eager to keep in touch with their peers (Baruah, 2012). Social media are also hailed for revolutionizing the way communication is conducted by allowing a two-way type of communication between users as opposed to the one-way communication, which prevails in other types of mass media such as radio and television. Different categories of social media users nowadays make their decisions based on the content of social media, which in fact constitutes an online version of offline exchanges. This content, however, is viewed by some people as having serious shortcomings due mostly to its anonymous and ephemeral nature (Dellarocas, 2003).

In short, we understand social media as various Internet-based services including Facebook, Twitter, Kakaotalk, WhatsApp, and Instagram, which allow people to create, share, or view user-generated content. A multitude of content, including videos, photographs, speech or sound, is transmitted and accessed via the Internet on different devices such as mobile phones or computers.

### 2. Social media use in the workplace

The interest in social media in general, and their use in the workplace, in particular, has ballooned within the last few years (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Robert & Namusonge, 2015; Wang & Kobsa, 2009). A wide body of research has concentrated on the use of social media in various types of institutions such as non-profit organizations (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013), political/inter-governmental institutions (Robert & Namusonge, 2015), academic institutions (Lupton, 2014), and hospitality and tourism companies (Pan & Crotts, 2012). Research has also focused on privacy issues in the use of social media platforms at work (Wang & Kobsa, 2009). Social media have been theorized in frameworks in a bid to comprehend their nature and the real motives underpinning their use, the structure of their content, and the processes involved in the production and sharing of information among users (Pan & Crotts, 2012).

The majority of studies pertaining to social media have centered on how social media are used to trigger internal and external communication of organizations (Gibbs, Rozaidi, & Eisenberg, 2013; Sloan, Checél, & Yang, 2012). The trend is nowadays for each institution to have its own official social media accounts for employee/employer discussions and for public relations and marketing purposes. Employees and employers are now able to send messages of all sorts through different platforms such as Twitter and YouTube in order to reach wide audiences (Sloan et al., 2012).

### 3. Social media's advantages

The debate about the use of social media in the workplace is surrounded by controversy. Some individuals are adopting a deterministic approach toward these tools that views social media as having revolutionized institutional communication and the way knowledge is shared among companies' members, hence increasing its visibility and efficiency (Gibbs et al., 2013; Sloan et al., 2012). Social media are often viewed as organizational communication tools that are meant to facilitate the flow of information among

coworkers. In this process, messages are posted and shared among the members of an organization (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013). The advantages linked to the use of social media in the workplace vary and depend on the motives of each user. Other studies credit social media with advantages such as making it possible to share information and ideas, easing contacts between people of different social statuses, and enabling low-cost and effective communication.

Some scholars mention social media's positive or negative impact on employees' productivity (Humphry, 2014). The latter is understood as what an employee can produce from the resources available in an institution. Productivity, often referred to in terms of quantity and quality, is measured on the basis of labor hours that an employee spends fulfilling a given duty (Aguenza, Al-Kassem & Som, 2012). Social media are believed to enhance employees' productivity, particularly when combined with face-to-face interactions. Motivated employees have an increased sense of innovation. Social media also increase employee retention rates since these tools help employees feel more attached to their companies and consequently refrain from unnecessary absenteeism (Garrett & Danziger, 2008). In other words, productivity is closely linked to employees' well-being, a subjective concept which defines a situation where social media use allows individuals to satisfy basic psychological needs. These needs may include a sense of relatedness (the need to live together with others) and a collective self-esteem (an individual's relational value to other people), among others (Hoffman & Novak, 2012, pp. 1–33). As such, research has shown that individuals who experience lengthy online interactions are likely to be more satisfied, hence achieving more for their institutions (Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000).

#### 4. Social media's disadvantages

Another school of thought insists on social media's disadvantages and cautions the widespread but dangerous tendency to use social media, particularly in the workplace. Social media are blamed for their intrusion into people's privacy and lack of performance in different organizations (Baruah, 2012). Broughton et al. (2009) illustrate this situation with two situations in which employees found themselves in trouble for using social media in an undesired way. The first case was an instance in which employees used social media, for example, Twitter or Facebook, to expose their misbehaviors such as failing to complete work-related duties for unjustified reasons. The second case referred to using social media to engage in discussions that an organization found inappropriate. In the same vein, some institutions restrict Internet and social media use during work hours by blocking access to some content such as pornographic websites.

It is also argued that exposure to many forms of data on social media platforms may lead employees to quit their organization due to the varied and more interesting job opportunities they can access. Social media uses such as instant messages, whether from within the company or from friends and families, may disrupt employees' concentration. In other cases, such uses are considered to be very rapid means of communication among employees (Garrett & Danziger, 2008).

The move suggested by many is the need for companies or employers to monitor the use of social media at work. However, the extent to which this monitoring should be done remains unclear. Furthermore, monitoring social media hits a snag when various issues are taken into account. These issues include ethical considerations (e.g., privacy laws and data-protection laws), among others. Some people argue that social media monitoring at work should be conducted both on organizational devices and employees' own devices. In the latter case, however, the employers' will to protect their business might encroach on the employees' right to privacy (Proskauer, 2013).

Privacy is arguably at the heart of the social media controversy in the workplace. Employees often fear that employers, coworkers, or even social media platform operators may intrude into their privacy and divulge information to people who should not have it (Wang & Kobsa, 2009). This privacy issue is of particular interest since the information shared by employees may occasionally be defamatory. Such a situation is also challenging since most employees have their own social media accounts and use their own mobile devices while at work; employers find it difficult to determine whether or not to regulate social media use in the workplace (Sloan et al., 2012).

The social media controversy becomes more and more convoluted as the definition of work and workplace becomes less and less clear cut. With the introduction of Internet-based technologies, the separation between work and home has become increasingly smaller (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Individuals are nowadays available for any professional emergency, whether they are at their workplace or somewhere else. It therefore becomes difficult to manage the boundaries between professional and private uses of social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For example, some employees do not hesitate to use their institutions' social media for their own publicity or to link with their families and friends (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009). In the worst cases, such action may result in conflictual situations at some institutions (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). The blurring of professional and private boundaries in the use of social media requires the members of an institution to be sufficiently technology literate to know how to filter the information they receive and share (or withhold) with others (Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2014). Hence, social media risks may include the fact that employees, by being accessible at all times, feel invaded in their free time. Since conversations in social media flow from so many channels with uncountable participants and content that changes every time, this situation may also lead employees to experience a sense of uncertainty (Bucher, Fieseler, & Suphan, 2013).

While there is a significant body of literature pertaining to social media in the workplace, little is known about how these tools are used, particularly in public/governmental institutions. Additionally, there is scarce knowledge about how the employees of public institutions disentangle themselves from their relationships and the reasons why employees indulge in social media that are unauthorized in most organizations, whether explicitly or implicitly.

The literature noted above suggests that social media, while offering plenty of opportunities, may pose a number of serious inconveniences that are not always easy to overcome or regulate. The broad challenge of this study is therefore to determine whether and to what extent Rwanda, by its increasing openness towards ICTs, can manage to derive the most gain from them and increase the productivity of its public institutions. We accordingly investigate a mix of work-related and personal uses of social media in public institutions. This study does not focus on a social media platform in particular. Rather, it examines social media in general as they are used in public institutions with a focus on private uses that employees engage in while at work. For the sake of clarification, this study

**Table 1**  
Respondents' details.

Respondent	Gender	Institution	Position held in the institution	Social media tools used		
1	M	Nyarugenge District (an administrative entity in the capital city, Kigali. A district is divided into sectors)	Public Relations Officer	WhatsApp, twitter, Instagram, Skype, Viber, Facebook, etc		
2	M		Coordinator of Cooperatives			
3	M		Counselor			
4	M		Accountant			
5	M		Chief Counselor			
6	F		ICT Officer			
7	F		Director of Finance			
8	F		In Charge of Women Affairs			
9	F		Human Resources			
10	M		Vice-Mayor in Charge of Economic Affairs			
		<b>Imvaho Nshya (Government-owned paper at the time of interviews)</b>				
11	M		Journalist	Facebook, twitter, e-mails, WhatsApp, Badoo, Flickr, YouTube, blogs		
12	M		Journalist			
13	M		Journalist			
14	F		Journalist			
15	F		Journalist			
16	M		Editor-in-chief			
		<b>Rwanda Meteorology Agency</b>				
17	F		Legal Advisor	WhatsApp, Facebook, e-mail, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr		
18	M		Accountant			
19	M		Graphic Design Officer			
20	M		Director of Administration and Finance			
21	M		Public Relations Officer			
22	M		Manager/IT Department			
			<b>Gitega Sector (one of the grassroots administrative entities)</b>			
23	F				In Charge of Education	WhatsApp, Face book, e-mail, etc
24	M				In Charge of Revenues and Taxes	
25	M				Agriculture Officer	
26	F	Agriculture Officer				
27	M	Agriculture Officer				
28	M	Executive Secretary of the Sector				
		<b>School of Journalism and Communication/University of Rwanda</b>				
29	F			Academic Secretary	Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, e-mail, blog,	
30	M		Lecturer			
31	M		Librarian			
32	F		Administrative Assistant			
33	F		Computer Lab Assistant			
34	M		Dean			

does not cover enterprise social media, but rather discusses the usage of public social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and the like in the workplace setting.

## 5. Method

We chose to use the qualitative method of in-depth interviews to explore the possible effects that private uses of social media may have on the functioning of public institutions. For instance, we investigated whether or not social media could constitute a distraction or provide a boost to productivity. We found that qualitative interviews were best suited for this exploratory study. We used semi-structured interviews because this format is based on an interview guide that enables a high content comparability and reduces the interviewer's effects (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) but still provides enough freedom for open and follow-up questions (Berg & Lune, 2011). To guide the conversation, we used open-ended responses to a series of directed questions (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005).

We analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis, which enabled us to make connections between statements of various interviews centered around the topics in the interview guide as well as unanticipated themes (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). The interview included questions like why employees use social media for private purposes while at work. Employers or anybody representing the management were approached to obtain their views about the effects of these uses on the work-related performance of their employees. Based on these questions, we examined the most robust themes, which are reported in the following section.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 34 respondents (22 men and 12 women) from five public institutions, between March and April 2016 (for details, see Table 1). This purposive sample reflects the Rwandan situation of ICTs being disproportionately used by men rather than women (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, 2015). Respondents were selected from the city of Kigali based on the fact that ICT infrastructures and users are more concentrated in the capital city than in other areas (Usengumukiza, 2009). We adopted a precautionary approach to circumvent any ethical concerns that could have hindered the data-collection process. We anticipated that some employees would resent providing information about their private uses of social media out of fear for their job security if they revealed their weaknesses to an outsider. In the same way, employers may not be willing to reveal their staff's misconduct or lack of performance to strangers. We accordingly first familiarized ourselves with respondents at each institution. Prior to the start of the interviews, we visited each institution once to introduce ourselves and seek interview appointments. These appointments were generally made for the following week. We organized the interviews in respondents' offices so as not to disrupt institutional activities for long. We used an interview guide comprising 10 questions for employees and six questions for employers. The interviews took on average between 30 and 40 min depending on the respondents' willingness to provide elaborate answers. We recorded the interviews with the consent of the respondents and later transcribed them in full. The interviewees were assured confidentiality in their interviews. We have accordingly made efforts to conceal the names of the participants in this article.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Fascination for social media

Both employees and staff in managerial positions widely use WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter; Instagram, Skype, Viber, blogs, YouTube, Google+, LinkedIn, and Flickr are other options that are used less frequently and by fewer people. The time devoted to using social media varied as a function of the respondents. Some individuals were always connected to the Internet, and consequently to social media, and some people only rarely checked their social media accounts. Most respondents noted that they were members of around four WhatsApp, Facebook or other online community groups which they checked often, since it was easy to receive and share information from a large number of other employees or people outside of the office. All the respondents also used Twitter which they joined mostly because this platform has been prioritized by the government as a tool to be used by all public civil servants to improve service delivery. On Twitter, employees are encouraged to follow authorities of the country, so as to establish a permanent dialogue not only with citizens but also with leaders.

Social media also helped them stay updated. In other words, institutions encourage employees to integrate social media into their daily activities. The task is made even easier since most institutions provide access to free Internet. The time dedicated to using social media depends on how busy employees are.

I check my social media every five minutes, especially WhatsApp, which makes it easy to share information with a lot of employees. It's easy to use, and you can get responses immediately (Male employee).

Some employees admit that they are always online so they can be available whenever they are needed by their workmates, employers or other people. Upon arriving in the office, they immediately consult their social networks to check what is going on; only then can they start their work with a settled mind. Social media therefore are part and parcel of employees' agendas.

However, the interviews were an opportunity to observe that the work context is a condition *sine qua non* for the use of social media. Some employees do not have opportunities to use new media technologies during work hours. Those employees included accountants and other very busy staff who could hardly visit their Facebook or WhatsApp accounts. A few other respondents revealed simply not having any know-how in the arena of social media.

### 6.2. Social media benefits

From respondents' perspectives, social media increasingly play a pivotal role in the functioning of public institutions. In general, social media affect institutions positively since they are used to quickly organize different activities (e.g., preparing meetings and passing on orders), tasks that have become much easier and faster than ever before. Messages are shared to many employees at the same time, and feedback is rapid. Especially WhatsApp groups are popular in all the institutions under study. These exchanges take place by using a combination of individual mobile phones, laptops or institution's desktops. However, mobile phones are more used by employees who are involved in field work. Respondents from bigger institutions tended to use a wider combination of social media than in small-scale institutions. Hence, many sustain that their institution's productivity has been impacted on to some extent by social media:

Before social media were introduced, when the manager needed to send us information, he would use files or letters, which caused information delays. But now, when he uses social media, messages reach us immediately and are shared among the entire staff (Male employee).



Yes of course, because when we are connected to another network from outside, it contributes a lot. For example, some among our employees can get involved in something wrong out of our institution. When someone from outside of our institution shares the issue with us, we check how it could be resolved in short time. It is our responsibilities to know the issue before it affects our reputation and destroy the image of our institution. (Male employer).

As such, reporting in public institutions has become much more practical than before. Some employees revealed to report on what they do on a daily basis by using short messages in social media. These messages are shared via internal groups that bring together both employees and employers. In addition, social media have helped significantly in institution management by reducing the number of official documents to be scanned and sent via different transportation means. Social media also help employees and companies have a wider network of people and institutions that share the same activities or interests, thereby enabling partnerships. Social media play a particular role in one media institution that we studied since they are used for crowdsourcing and other journalistic processes:

Social media have played a huge role in increasing productivity in different ways. Above all, it's my source of information and story ideas [for the government newspaper], my connection with well-recognized members of the media, and my way of contacting fellow journalists about ongoing events, staying updated, and getting informed (Male employee).

Some job positions, such as public relations, are directly dependent on the use of media tools, including social media platforms. Staffs in these positions posit that social media are even more practical than mainstream media when it comes to interacting with different stakeholders. Other respondents pointed out the fact that social media contribute significantly to reducing job stress, which boosts their willingness to accomplish more. Although no respondent was able to clearly rate the contribution of social media to institutions' productivity, many individuals presumed that these new digital tools allowed employees to work in environments conducive to collaboration. Social media help reduce the burden of transport and communication, particularly at institutions in far-flung locales. Social media can also render face-to-face meetings irrelevant. Many individuals who use social media do so in order to promote their own institutions. Some managers are aware of the benefits of social media and consequently encourage their employees to be connected.

### 6.3. Social media pitfalls

A small number of employees, particularly those with insufficient skills in social media, were not able to ascertain whether or not social media had any impact on their institutions. Other respondents from one institution being studied clarified that social media would not affect their company in any way since the use of social media was strictly prohibited during work hours. However, these respondents noted that employees chatted using, for example, WhatsApp, particularly when their managers were absent.

The respondents were convinced that the impacts of social media platforms may be two-fold. There may be benefits for companies. However, troubles also abound in cases in which employees are distracted by social media and fail to attend to their duties. At some of the institutions we studied, there have been complaints in the past from clients alleging having been denied quick service by employees who were distracted by Facebook or WhatsApp. Such social media use, according to respondents, tarnishes institutions' reputations and eventually may hinder productivity. Thus, some respondents opted to only use social media during break times. Institutions also tended to restrict the use of social media to information-related departments (e.g., public relations or customer care).

### 6.4. Private uses and the need to nurture ties

In addition to harnessing social media for work-related matters, respondents found it impossible to shun private use of social media. They always felt compelled to communicate with friends and relatives to plan off-line activities such as visiting friends, solving family problems, attending weddings or birthday parties, seeking help from friends when needed, seeking better jobs, planning support for needy people, engaging in sports activities and entertainment, and organizing meetings:

Sometimes I get involved in my private affairs. Social media are sometimes necessary to accomplish day-to-day activities. Various personal tasks can be planned on social media platforms, including those with people who live in different places and can't easily gather at the same place to share their ideas—for example, weddings, meetings, birthday parties set up by relatives or friends, sports activities, entertainment events, and things like that (Female employee).

Married respondents noted the need to keep an eye on their family members, especially their children. Women disclosed that social media helped them to stay close to their children. In fact, most parents were often doubtful about the integrity of their house-girls, who were often reported to mistreat children. Additionally, connecting with family is one important way for women to have peace of mind and remain focused on their work.

Private uses of social media are made in a one-on-one relationship between individuals or through online communities, which mostly comprise different people sharing the same interests (e.g., family members, former (or actual) class-mates, co-workers, and belief-mates). Lengthy office hours are one more motivation for most employees to keep in touch with the outside world. Surprisingly, there was no strong evidence from respondents that private uses of social media were at odds with work. Instead, respondents revealed benefiting significantly from private social media use at work. Communicating with the outside world was referred to as inevitable and vital. Chatting with friends and families is one way to relax from heavy duties and escape from the daily pressure of employers. Social media allow employees to not only stay at work but also to remain in control of their private ties. This fact is exemplified by the following two statements:

I think that social media sites help me at work and make me feel closer to my friends and family. Knowing what's going on adds to my success and productivity at work (Female employee).

The answer is clearly yes, because when I feel safe, happy, and informed about what's going on with relatives and friends, the institution also benefits (Male employee).

The time spent on these private uses of social media varied with the number and nature of activities to plan. However, in general, respondents would use social media for up to 3 h per day. Another group of employers believe that the benefits of social media supersede their shortcomings. Therefore, no risk presented by private use should warrant control of these tools. Notwithstanding a tendency for social media addiction by some users, which may disrupt work, social media play a significant role in both work-related and private activities that benefit institutions. When an employee feels informed about his/her friends and relatives and participates in organizing some activities with them, the employee may experience a boost in morale and consequently a drive to work hard.

#### 6.5. Private uses: flaws and necessity of control

Conversely, some employees were opposed to using social media for private purposes while at work. They noted their firm will to stick to their work and avoid any outside distractions for fear of getting on bad terms with their employers. These individuals only indulged in full use of social media during break hours or at home. In some companies, supervisors kept an eye on the uses—or rather misuses—of social media and would not allow any time wasting with private correspondence:

No [I don't use social media for private purposes], because I use them at work to get story ideas [for the government newspaper] and as sources of information and current news to be processed. I don't use social media for any activities other than accomplishing my day-to-day tasks, which needs real-life information to be given in a timely fashion (Male employee).

Respondents disclosed being aware of the possible downsides of the addictive use of social media, which could impair their work. They accordingly demonstrated a sense of responsibility by using these tools only when they were not too busy. Some employers knew of the private uses of social media and believed that it made sense to control them. This sentiment is clear in the following three statements by employers:

For me, it's OK if the institution limits the use of social media, because some workers can be distracted by them. For example, if there aren't any control measures, then some workers would watch YouTube videos during work hours (Male employer).

It's necessary to control social media, because they might become a problem. If an employee uses them how he or she wants, then it won't be any better because others who need help might not receive good customer service, and that can create a bad image for the institution (Male employer).

When you're an employer or employee in any position, you're supposed to deliver. So, yes, it's a good idea for the institution to control social media, because they might interrupt or distract people when they're supposed to be dealing with serious issues and can take a long time doing nothing (Female employer).

Employers are convinced that control is the best thing to do, though such control is not easy. All they do is sensitize their employees on a regular basis about the best ways to use social media while at work. Efforts to control social media use for private purposes have been identified in some companies but with no tangible effect:

Of course, there are some measures taken to manage the use of social media at work. We use a system that we call *cyber roll*. Let's take the example of Facebook, which we use on our office computers; we control it with *cyber roll*. It's a way of managing a network in order to know who's connected to social media on the computers. With everything that they do, if they're using Facebook, then you simply know it, and you also know what bundle kicks that they're using (Male employer).

Both employees and their managers believe that social media at work should be controlled, blocked where possible, and punishments should be given out to those individuals who spend too much time on social media. A clear social media strategy is needed. However, the primary challenge remains that most employees do not depend solely on their companies' network; they can also use Internet from their own devices and accordingly dodge any control from their managers.

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

The present study has revealed that social media are increasingly playing a central role in the functioning of public institutions where they are used to coordinate meetings and share information and orders. Both employees and employers enjoy these new tools that take institutional communication to another level by simplifying the instantaneous transmission of messages to many staff and getting quick and unfettered feedback. Knowledge sharing is central to this process. Not only employees engage in exchange of information with their colleagues at work, but also they share diverse sorts of knowledge with the outside world. By engaging in interactions, employees have chances to meet new people, acquire more knowledge, and develop new ways of knowing and contacting each other within and beyond the organization (DiMicco, Geyer, Millen, Dugan, & Brownholtz, 2009). Employees may have different motives to conceal the information they possess (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994), and social media offers them avenues to share or else constrain such knowledge depending on their personal goals (Gibbs et al., 2013). Social media help employees manage their current connections and easily find

new friends. During these interactions, information is visible and feedback flows through users who, in so doing, are able to create a common identity (Fulk & Yuan, 2013). Facebook and WhatsApp dominate the social media landscape in public institutions, and these applications are used both for work-related communication and private communication.

Regarding the uses of social media for private purposes, our findings offer a two-fold perspective. On the one hand, the dominant trend from our data illustrates a situation in which employees strongly depend on social media to remain connected to their environment beyond work. They use social media mostly to communicate with friends and family members in order to fix social problems or to plan activities occurring beyond work. Understood this way, private uses of social media become unavoidable, and neither employers nor staffs in managerial positions are willing to restrict these uses, even if they are aware of the potential of social media to distract employees. These findings illustrate the fact that the distance between professional and private life has been blurred with the Internet in general and social media in particular.

We found no tangible evidence that the private use of social media is harming productivity in public institutions. On the contrary, private use of social media is pivotal to the well-being of employees. Talking to friends and families, solving daily problems, and participating in society's activities are energizers. Consequently, these uses of social media are seen as adding value to employees' productivity. Our findings concur with the existing literature on the benefits of social media. For instance, research has shown that the use of Facebook at work affects positively the mood of employees, making them feel good and more committed to their work. Employees socializing with friends, coworkers, or family members through social media feel satisfied with their job and consequently tend to work harder (Mark, Iqbal, Czerwinski, & Johns, 2014). On the other hand, some other respondents saw no proof that private use of social media had any positive impact. Employers tend to resent social media and have a penchant to controlling or blocking them. However, most managers still believe that their staffs are reasonable enough not to overuse social media. Some institutions do not pay any particular attention to private use of social media since employees are supposed to know why they were hired and accordingly not allow themselves to become distracted.

All in all, the findings of this research perpetuate the controversy that surrounds the use of social media whereby most employers laud their benefits and others tend to hold a negative viewpoint. This study has a particular merit of demonstrating that although social media are often feared for their potential to distract employees from work—at least in theory—the reality in practice may be different. Private uses of social media were seen as compatible with work in most institutions. Managers were aware of those practices and did not take any significant measure to counter them. Instead, the general move was to tolerate private uses of social media in an effort to obtain more composed and hardworking employees. Even where shortcomings were noted, they were too minimal to constitute a real threat to public institutions' productivity. Related research has demonstrated that the relation between social media platform use and positive job performance is not direct since social media operate via mediating factors such as family and friend relationships (Moqbel, 2012). Similarly, one would assume that the same factors should be considered when assessing the relation between private uses of social media and poor performance. Furthermore, issues of access to new technologies and the general climate within an institution should be taken into account. We believe that additional research is necessary to expand the debate about private uses of social media at work by contrasting our findings with those from larger corporations that, in general, are busier than the institutions studied here. In so doing, such research would help to establish a better understanding of the compatibility or incompatibility of work and private uses of social media.

It is important to highlight that the present study did not aim to generate generalizable findings although similarities with other African countries might be noted. Research shows that the performance of public institutions varies due to countries' differences on social, economic, cultural and political levels (Van de Walle, 2008). Nonetheless, the findings constitute a lens through which implementation of ICT policies and regulations in Rwanda can be assessed. Existing ICT regulatory framework aim to turn the country into a telecommunication hub and an information-based society. Further emphasis is put on improving ICT infrastructure countrywide, using ICT to enhance quality of life and work, and protecting the user, among other things (RURA, 2016). However, regulations do not state clearly what technologies should be allowed at the workplace and how control should be conducted. In fact, as this study shows, social media encourages collaboration and information sharing among employees and their surroundings. It is recommended that social media be controlled in order to get the best out of it. While it is argued that controlling the use of social media would generate positive results, failure to do so would result in chaotic situations (Broughton et al., 2009). Although the results of this study are not so alarmist, it would be wise to set up regulatory measures in a bid to avoid inconveniences.

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