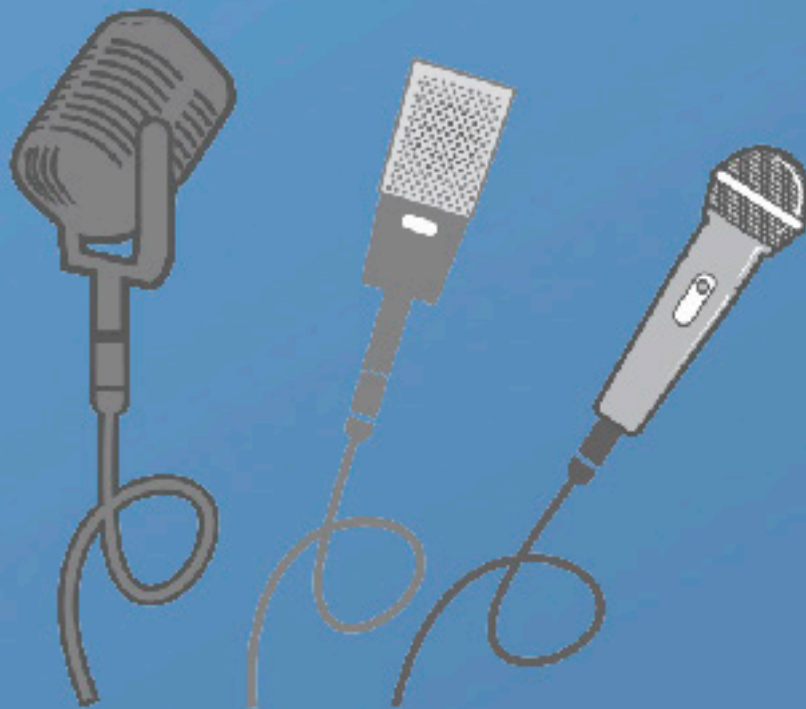




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Impact of Social Media Guidelines on Government Communication Effectiveness in Tanzania's Tourism Sector

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ABSTRACT

Effective digital communication is critical for transparency and public trust in government, particularly in sectors like tourism and natural resource management. This study investigates the impact of the Social Media Guidelines on communication practices within Tanzania's Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT), underpinned by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM provides a framework to examine how perceived usefulness and ease of use influence staff adoption and adherence to the guidelines. Using a descriptive case study design with a Concurrent Triangulation Mixed-Methods Approach, data were collected from 70 MNRT staff via structured questionnaires and 10 key informants through semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that the guidelines moderately improved consistency, transparency, and accuracy of social media communications. However, challenges such as limited technical capacity, uneven interpretation, and resource constraints hinder full implementation. The study recommends mandatory continuous training and formal enforcement mechanisms to ensure uniform adherence, thereby enhancing communication efficiency, public trust, and organizational credibility.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally transformed public sector communication worldwide, shifting from traditional, one-way government announcements to interactive, two-way engagement with citizens. Platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram are now integral tools for information dissemination, service delivery, crisis management, and promoting civic participation in governance. Conceptually, effective social media use in government is closely linked to transparency, responsiveness, and citizen trust (Lovari & Materassi, 2020; Chen, Can, & Stone, 2020). However, the rapid digital transformation has also introduced significant challenges, including the management of misinformation, protection of user data, and maintenance of professional communication standards, highlighting the need for comprehensive and enforceable social media guidelines (UNESCO, 2024; Prasetya, Wibowo, & Budi, 2019).

Historically, developed countries have led the way in formalizing social media governance within the public sector. In the United States, federal agencies are required to adhere to regulatory frameworks governing transparency, record-keeping, and freedom of information, while recent advisories also emphasize safeguarding youth mental health in digital spaces (HHS, 2024). Similarly, European Union member states operate under the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA), ensuring that governments and platforms combat disinformation and protect users, while Nordic countries exemplify

high levels of transparency and public trust in digital governance (Stone & Can, 2020; Starke, Tufte, & O'Hara, 2020). Conversely, governance approaches in China and India reflect distinct socio-political contexts, prioritizing narrative management, stability, and moderation across diverse linguistic and political populations, demonstrating that social media guidelines must align with contextual realities to be effective.

In the African context, social media represents a vital, cost-effective channel for public engagement and e-governance, yet low digital literacy, political manipulation, and infrastructural limitations pose significant obstacles (Freedom House, 2025). Countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, and Uganda are increasingly developing formal guidelines to combat misinformation, foster accountability, and promote peace-positive narratives, with Zambia and Eswatini establishing specific protocols for public-sector social media use (Zambia e-Government Division, 2023). In Tanzania, the adoption of the National ICT Policy 2023 reflects a national commitment to leveraging ICT for socioeconomic development, including tourism promotion and natural resource conservation through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (URT, 2023). Despite widespread adoption, the practical implementation and measurable impact of these guidelines on communication efficiency and public trust remain largely unexplored (Nungu & Bansil, 2022).

Theoretically, this study is anchored in the Technology

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Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use influence the adoption of digital tools (Davis, 1986; Salama & Farag, 2025). Applying TAM in the Tanzanian tourism sector allows for an examination of whether the MNRT's social media guidelines enhance communication effectiveness by shaping staff behavior, improving responsiveness, and fostering citizen trust. Conceptually and empirically, this research fills a critical gap by moving beyond adoption studies to assess the ex-post impact of formalized social media policies within a specialized, economically significant government ministry. By doing so, it provides actionable insights for improving digital governance, aligning with Tanzania's long-term development objectives under Vision 2050.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), initially proposed by Davis (1986), which remains one of the most widely applied frameworks for predicting technology adoption and use. TAM posits that an individual's intention to use a technological system is primarily influenced by two central beliefs: Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. Perceived Usefulness refers to the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular technology will enhance job performance, while Perceived Ease of Use reflects the extent to which the technology is perceived as effortless and free from undue cognitive burden. In the context of government communication, these constructs are adapted to conceptualize formal Social Media Guidelines as a form of procedural "technology." Specifically, guidelines serve as a tool to structure staff behavior, standardize messaging, and improve the effectiveness of public engagement. The application of TAM in this manner allows researchers to assess how staff perceptions of the guidelines influence their actual implementation and, consequently, the overall communication outcomes of government agencies (Salama & Farag, 2025).

Recent applications of TAM in digital government studies underscore its relevance while highlighting the need for contextual adaptation. Beyond traditional factors, variables such as public engagement, transparency, and trust are increasingly recognized as critical for understanding technology adoption in public sector settings. Salama and Farag (2025) argue that perceiving guidelines as a "technology" enables the analysis of staff attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, which collectively determine the effectiveness of public service communication. This theoretical framing aligns with the notion that policy instruments, much like technological tools, require user acceptance to achieve intended outcomes. By extending TAM to include organizational and citizen-oriented outcomes, the model provides a comprehensive lens through which to evaluate the internal mechanisms such as staff perceptions and procedural adherence that mediate the external impact of social media guidelines on communication efficiency and trust-building.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on the effects of social media policies in government settings have increasingly emphasized two primary outcomes: consistency in messaging and improved responsiveness to citizens. Evidence from global research indicates that agencies with formalized social media policies are more likely to engage actively and positively with their audiences, thereby enhancing public perception and trust (Chen, Can, & Stone, 2020; Lovari & Materassi, 2020). Between 2015 and 2023, studies have shown that clear internal guidelines are significant predictors of both the frequency and quality of government-to-citizen interactions. These guidelines help staff respond more promptly to inquiries, maintain a unified organizational voice, and align social media communication with broader institutional objectives, particularly during crises or periods of high public scrutiny (Prasetya, Wibowo, & Budi, 2019).

African contexts further illustrate the importance of structured social media governance for public sector effectiveness. For example, Zambia's Public Service Social Media Guidelines emphasize planning, clarity, and procedural consistency as prerequisites for enhancing service delivery, transparency, and citizen responsiveness, especially in geographically remote areas (Zambia e-Government Division, 2023). Similarly, research on government communication during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that social media could improve the speed and reach of information dissemination, provided that agencies had formalized policies for two-way communication (Stone & Can, 2020). Guidelines in Eswatini, focusing on mitigating hate speech, cyberbullying, and misinformation, illustrate how structured policies reduce risk, increase perceived trustworthiness, and enhance overall communication effectiveness. Despite these advances, there remains limited empirical investigation into how such guidelines operate within ministries tasked with technically complex and globally sensitive domains, such as conservation and tourism in Tanzania (Nungu & Bansil, 2022), indicating a clear gap that the present study seeks to address.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive case study design, focusing on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT) in Tanzania to allow an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context. A Concurrent Triangulation Mixed-Methods Approach was employed, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of the Ministry's social media guidelines.

The target population included personnel from various MNRT departments, such as Public Relations, Information Technology, and divisional heads in areas like Wildlife and Forestry. A sample of 70 respondents was used for the quantitative strand, comprising all

personnel directly involved in managing or contributing to the Ministry's social media presence. For the qualitative strand, 10 key informants were purposively selected, including senior Ministry officials and communication experts, to provide detailed insights into guideline implementation and its outcomes. Data collection involved structured questionnaires for quantitative data, with a five-point Likert scale to assess perceptions of impact and effectiveness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for qualitative data, exploring the mechanisms of guideline implementation and challenges faced. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to determine the perceived levels of impact, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to complement and provide depth to the numerical findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the effect of Social Media Guidelines on the effectiveness of communication between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT) and the public. The analysis of responses from 70 MNRT staff revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions across multiple indicators. Specifically, 83% of respondents agreed that the guidelines enhanced the timeliness of responses to public inquiries, indicating that internal procedures and standardized protocols had accelerated the handling of citizen questions and concerns. Transparency was perceived to have improved by 91% of respondents, suggesting that staff felt the guidelines created a more open and accountable communication environment. Approximately 89% of participants noted that messaging across all social media platforms had become consistent, demonstrating that the guidelines successfully minimized contradictory or informal posts that previously characterized the Ministry's online communication. Furthermore, 87% of respondents indicated a reduction in misinformation shared by staff, highlighting the role of the guidelines in promoting verified, accurate information dissemination. Even the indicator related to public trust, though slightly lower at 79%, shows that the guidelines contributed positively, signaling that while internal improvements are evident, the perception of trust by the public develops more gradually. Across all measured indicators, mean scores exceeded 3.5 on a five-point scale, confirming that staff recognized the guidelines as effective in enhancing organizational communication performance.

These findings are consistent with prior studies on social media governance and organizational communication. Research by Chen, Can, and Stone (2020) and Stone and Can (2020) emphasizes that formalized procedures and structured guidelines increase the reliability and efficiency of government communication, reducing errors and streamlining internal decision-making processes. Similarly, Lovari and Materassi (2020) highlight that structured social media policies mitigate risks of miscommunication, enhance professional conduct online,

and promote transparency especially in public-facing agencies. The lower score for public trust aligns with global observations that trust is not solely an outcome of internal operational improvements but is also shaped by historical institutional performance, political environment, and prior experiences with government communication (Freedom House, 2025). These findings underscore the importance of continuous adherence to guidelines and the need for supplementary public engagement strategies to reinforce citizen confidence over time.

The findings strongly reinforce the theoretical framework underpinning this study, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1986). TAM posits that individuals' behavioral intention to adopt a technology or in this case, a procedural "technology" like social media guidelines is influenced primarily by Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). High agreement among MNRT staff regarding improved transparency, messaging consistency, and misinformation reduction clearly maps onto PU: the guidelines are perceived as tools that significantly enhance staff capacity to perform their roles effectively. By instituting clear workflows, content verification steps, and defined roles for social media posting, the guidelines provide tangible benefits in staff performance and the predictability of outcomes. This is consistent with Salama and Farag (2025), who argue that TAM can extend beyond traditional IT tools to procedural frameworks in organizations, allowing employees to perceive structured policy as an "enabling technology" that improves work effectiveness.

Additionally, the study demonstrates PEOU in practice, as staff reported that the guidelines simplified decision-making and reduced cognitive and operational burdens associated with managing social media accounts. One key informant stated, "Before the guidelines, everyone felt empowered to post individually, often creating conflicting messages. Now, there is a clear chain of command and verification process, which makes our communication professional and effective." This indicates that the guidelines reduce uncertainty, make tasks easier to execute, and increase staff confidence in following standardized procedures. The structured approach transforms social media management from an ad hoc, individual-driven activity to a coordinated institutional function, reinforcing the TAM principle that the easier a process is perceived, the more likely it is to be embraced and used consistently. From a policy perspective, these findings have significant implications for digital governance in Tanzania. First, they highlight the critical role of formalized social media guidelines in professionalizing government communication, reducing reputational risk, and enhancing organizational credibility. By providing clear directives for posting, verification, and content management, such guidelines help minimize misinformation and inconsistencies issues that can be particularly damaging in sectors like tourism that are heavily reliant on national image and international perception (Freedom House, 2025; Nungu & Bansil, 2022). Second, while

internal improvements are evident, the moderate gains in public trust suggest that guidelines alone are insufficient; they must be complemented by consistent public engagement, citizen feedback mechanisms, and transparent performance reporting. This aligns with the National ICT Policy 2023's emphasis on building a digitally literate, accountable, and citizen-responsive government, demonstrating that guidelines are necessary but not sufficient for achieving holistic communication effectiveness.

The results affirm that institutionalizing social media governance through clear policies, staff training, and structured operational procedures is essential for improving communication outcomes. The study illustrates that the adoption of Social Media Guidelines serves as both an internal organizational tool and an instrument for broader digital governance objectives, enhancing responsiveness, transparency, and consistency. For Tanzania, this suggests that similar interventions could be scaled to other ministries and public agencies, reinforcing a culture of professional digital engagement while contributing to the achievement of national objectives in tourism promotion, public service delivery, and citizen trust-building.

Policy Implication

The findings of this study have significant implications for digital governance policy in Tanzania, particularly in the context of implementing the National ICT Policy 2023. First, the demonstrated improvements in transparency, consistency, and timeliness of communication highlight the value of formalized social media guidelines as a core component of digital public service delivery. Policymakers can leverage these results to advocate for mandatory adoption of similar frameworks across all government ministries and agencies, ensuring a uniform standard for professional digital engagement. By codifying clear workflows, verification procedures, and responsibility hierarchies, guidelines transform ad hoc social media use into a coordinated institutional function, thereby reducing reputational risk and enhancing organizational credibility in the eyes of both domestic and international stakeholders.

Second, the findings suggest that policy design should integrate both internal and external dimensions of digital governance. While internal staff compliance ensures operational effectiveness, the moderate gains in public trust indicate the necessity for complementary strategies, including citizen feedback mechanisms, proactive engagement campaigns, and transparent reporting of performance metrics. These measures align with broader East African Community (EAC) regional priorities, which emphasize harmonized standards for e-governance, citizen-centered digital services, and accountability in government communication. Moreover, the demonstrated applicability of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) reinforces that procedural policies, when perceived as both useful and easy to implement, can serve

as “enabling technologies” for improving public sector performance. Consequently, Tanzanian policymakers should view social media guidelines not merely as administrative tools but as strategic instruments for advancing national ICT objectives, strengthening digital literacy among government personnel, and fostering trust and engagement with the public in a digitally connected environment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the adoption and operationalization of Social Media Guidelines within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT) have significantly enhanced the effectiveness of communication between the Ministry and the public. The guidelines have established clear procedures for content verification, posting, and engagement, which have translated into improved timeliness of responses, greater transparency, consistent messaging, and a reduction in misinformation, as reported by the majority of staff. These outcomes underscore the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in explaining the observed impact, with high perceived usefulness motivating staff to comply with and effectively implement the guidelines, while the structured nature of the procedures enhances perceived ease of use, thereby fostering consistent adoption. Although the gains in public trust were somewhat lower, this finding reflects the complex, long-term nature of trust-building in digital government, which requires both internal operational excellence and sustained, visible engagement with citizens. Collectively, the findings indicate that the MNRT has successfully leveraged social media guidelines as a strategic tool for digital governance, positioning itself as a more professional, transparent, and accountable institution in line with the objectives of the National ICT Policy 2023 and broader national development priorities.

Based on these findings, several actionable recommendations emerge for MNRT and other government institutions in Tanzania. First, the Ministry should implement compulsory biannual refresher training on the Social Media Guidelines for all staff, emphasizing areas such as transparency, consistency, and misinformation management, while incorporating updates on emerging digital technologies like generative AI to ensure continued relevance. Second, to accelerate public trust, the Ministry should adopt a strategic communication and feedback campaign that actively showcases compliance with the guidelines and highlights improvements in responsiveness and transparency, thereby bridging the gap between internal adherence and external perceptions. Third, other Ministries and government agencies, particularly those with high public interaction and economic visibility, should consider adopting similar formalized social media governance frameworks, using the MNRT model as a practical and contextually appropriate reference for enhancing digital communication effectiveness. Finally, the MNRT

should establish a mechanism for periodic review and updating of the guidelines, ideally every three years, incorporating staff feedback on usability and public metrics on communication effectiveness, to ensure that the policy remains aligned with evolving ICT standards and continues to strengthen the Ministry's digital governance capacity. These measures collectively provide a sustainable pathway for maximizing the benefits of social media in public administration and reinforcing a culture of professional, accountable, and citizen-centered communication in Tanzania.

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