GovComms Social



# South African Government Leaders on Twitter 2020

# THE **SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT LEADERS** ON TWITTER 2020 REPORT IS COMPILED BY **#GovCommsSocial**

**#GovCommsSocial** is a knowledge sharing platform aimed at guiding government and public sector communicators and social media professionals through the complexity and opportunities that come with using social media for citizen engagement. #GovCommsSocial is an initiative of Decode Communications supported by Brand South Africa.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to put a spotlight on the presence and activity of South African government leaders in the Cabinet and provincial Executive Councils on Twitter.

## DATA GATHERING

- The report is quantitative, it does not look at any qualitative elements such as engagement, professional look and feel, tone, topics of interest, active campaigns, share of voice etc.
- All the information or data (on the presence or lack thereof of the respective government learders and their spokespeople) used in this report regarding the use of the social platform Twitter, was mainly gathered through monitoring Twitter itself.
- The Twitter data collated and analysed was as of 21 December 2020.

# WHY **#GovCommsSocial?**

**I believe that if South Africa is to achieve most of its Vision 2030 goals – in particular 'building a capable state' – communication should be a priority. Undoubtedly, technology influences how we live, work and play. This reality demands on public sector communicators to adapt quickly by being on top of trends and best practice of communicating in the digital age.**

In my many years of working with government communicators and conducting social media training, I have a good comprehension of their many challenges, including a skills and capacity gap. With #GovCommsSocial – we hope to augment the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of public sector communicators because we know how important sharp digital skills are in the knowledge economy.

~ Lorato Tshenkeng.



**Lorato Tshenkeng**
Founder & CEO of Decode Communications
Mail & Guardian Top 200 recognised
Communication Strategist

The Covid-19 pandemic exploded internet and social media use across the world, and South Africa is no exception.

**Did you know?**

*More than

# 50%

of the country's 59,6 million people have access to the internet with 22 million reported active social media users?



*** GLOBAL DIGITAL REPORT 2020**

# Despite a number of **challenges and risks that social media presents** – it has many benefits.

## SOME OF THE BENEFITS TO GOVERNMENTS INCLUDE:

- Saving public money through highly targeted information campaigns;
- Unmediated engagement with the citizens and the public;
- Educating the public on a variety of subjects;
- Building public trust through open, humanised and responsive communication that encourages two-way conversations;
- Setting the record straight; and
- Dispelling misinformation and disinformation.



# WHY TWITTER?

**Although Facebook has the most number of users in South Africa, like in many other countries – Twitter is the most news-friendly social media platforms. It is by far the place that journalists are most likely to spend their social media energies.**

Twitter remains the most influential platform used as a channel for news and prompt information sharing by politicians, government leaders, public representatives, media and communication professionals, journalists and newsrooms.

Twitter's influence has been elevated by its ability to provide a platform for real-time outrage, consumer activism, social mobilization by brands and governments.

With these considerations and observations, the biggest question is: **are South African members of the cabinet, their departments and ministers' spokespeople on Twitter?**

*** 4 million** people in South Africa are **active tweeters**.

**** 20 million** South Africans can be **reached via ads** on Facebook.

*** SOUTH AFRICA SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE 2020**

****FACEBOOK INSIGHTS**

# MYTHS ABOUT TWITTER

Some myths about Twitter that apparently lead to disinterest and less engagement by South African Government Leaders include:

- Followers are not real and do not represent real people on the ground;
- Twitter does not talk to the real people on the ground;
- Twitter community is only interested in conflict and Twars (Twitter Wars); and
- Twitter will only give you likes and retweets not real data.

# **THE TRUTH ABOUT TWITTER IS –** MOST USERS USE IT WRONGLY (NOT ONLY GOVERNMENT LEADERS).

What if it was used this way:

- If a minister posted a poll about a Bill that is before parliament the impact of engagement would most probably be higher;
- If the minister of police posted a picture of the most wanted serial rapist, the arrests would be sooner;
- If government communicators and spokespeople live tweeted the media conferences with pictures there would be more engagement; and
- If all government leaders used some creativity to increase engagement with users instead of just broadcasting messages - they would realise the real value of Twitter.



# A few faces of South African Government Leaders



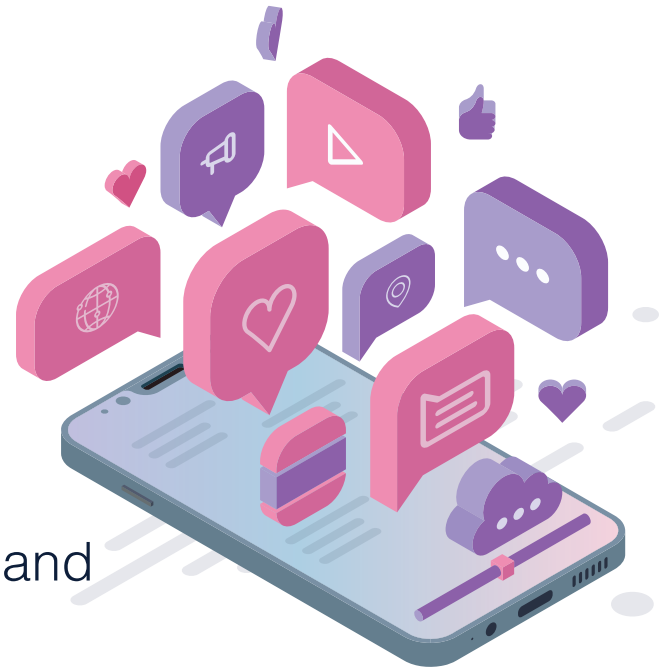
# 10 KEY FACTS ABOUT THE CABINET OF SOUTH AFRICA

1. It is the most senior level of the executive branch of government;
2. It is led by president Cyril Ramaphosa and deputy president David Mabuza;
3. It is made up of 30 members – the president, deputy president and 28 ministers;
4. The national government has 28 departments which are led by 28 ministers;
5. The national ministries are divided into 7 clusters;
6. The provincial Executive Councils have a total of 99 members;
7. Each of the 9 provinces are led by a premier and 10 Members of the Executive Councils (MEC);
8. The president, deputy president, premiers, and all ministers and MECs are supported by spokespeople also known as ministerial liaison officers (MLO), advisors and other personnel;
9. The spokespeople are based in the offices of the cabinet members, premiers and MECs, and although they are not heads of communication in the respective departments – both national and provincial – they also speak on behalf of the departments; and
10. The Chief Executive Officer of the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) is the spokesperson of Cabinet.



# **KEY FINDINGS:** CABINET MEMBERS ON TWITTER

- 7 out of 30 are not on Twitter;
- 2 out of 23 have inactive accounts;
- 10 out of 23 have more than 100K followers;
- 6 out of 23 have less than 5K followers;
- 3 out of 23 joined after the 6th administration; and
- 16 out of 23 accounts are Verified.



# CABINET MEMBERS NOT ON TWITTER



**Aaron Motsaoledi**
Home Affairs



**Pravin Gordhan**
Public Enterprise



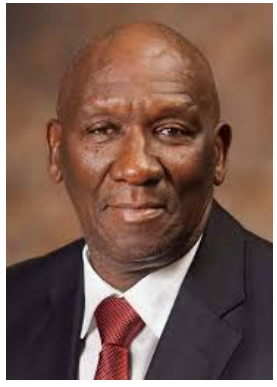
**Angie Motshekga**
Basic Education



**Senzo Mchunu**
Public Service Administration



**Naledi Pandor**
International Relations and Cooperation



**Bheki Cele**
Police



**Ibrahim Patel**
Trade, Industry and Competition

# TOP 5 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS - CABINET

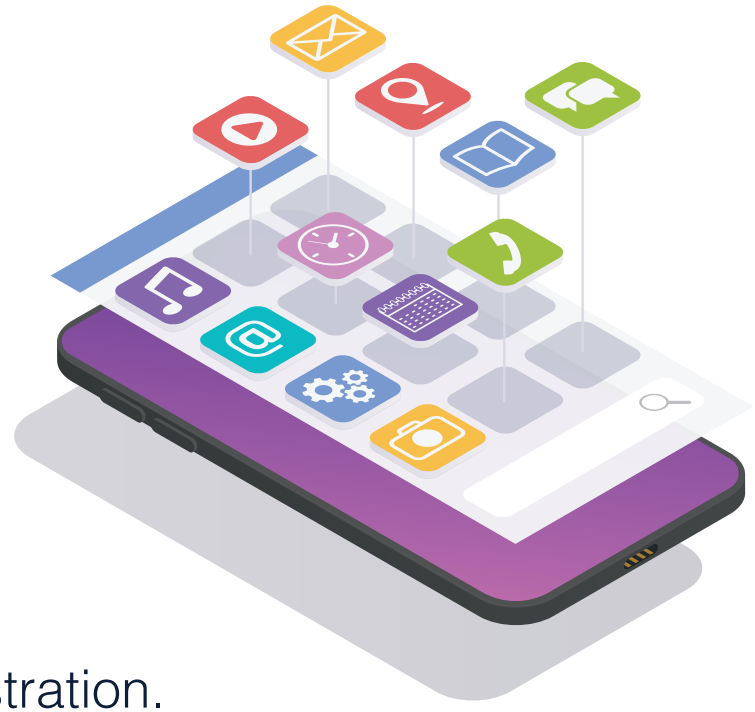
| | NAME | PORTFOLIO | TWITTER HANDLE | FOLLOWERS | VERIFIED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Mbalula Fikile | transport<br>Department:<br>Transport<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @MbalulaFikile | 2,3M | ✓ |
|  | Cyril Ramaphosa | THE PRESIDENT<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @CyrilRamaphosa | 1,7M | ✓ |
|  | Tito Mboweni | national treasury<br>Department:<br>National Treasury<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @tito_mboweni | 961K | ✓ |
|  | Zweli Mkhize | health<br>Department:<br>Health<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @DrZweliMkhize | 50K | ✓ |
|  | Gwede Mantashe | mineral resources<br>Department:<br>Mineral Resources<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @GwedeMantashe1 | 437K | ✓ |

# TOP 5 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – NATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

| PORTFOLIO | TWITTER HANDLE | FOLLOWERS | VERIFIED |
|---|---|---|---|
| | @PresidencyZA | 1,7M | ✓ |
| | @SAPoliceService | 707K | ✓ |
| health<br>Department:<br>Health<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @HealthZA | 268K | ✓ |
| basic education<br>Department:<br>Basic Education<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @DBE_SA | 220K | ✓ |
| home affairs<br>Department:<br>Home affairs<br>REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA | @HomeAffairsSA | 119K | X |

# **KEY FINDINGS:** MINISTERS' SPOKESPEOPLE ON TWITTER

- 5 out of 30 are not on Twitter;
- 8 out of 25 have inactive accounts;
- 1 out of 25 have more than 100k followers;
- 15 out of 25 have less than 5K followers;
- No accounts have been verified; and
- Only 1 out of 25 joined after the 6th administration.



# TOP 5 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – MINISTERS' SPOKESPEOPLE

| | NAME | PORTFOLIO | TWITTER HANDLE | FOLLOWERS | VERIFIED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Masechaba Khumalo | **sport, arts and culture**<br>Department:<br>Sport, Arts and Culture<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @MasechabaNdlovu | 473,6K | X |
|  | Ayanda Allie-Paine | **transport**<br>Department:<br>transport<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @AyandaAllieP | 77,8K | X |
|  | Lirandzu Themba | | @LirandzuThemba | 52K | X |
|  | Hlengiwe Nhlabathi-Mokota | **tourism**<br>Department:<br>tourism<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @Hlengi | 5K | X |
|  | Crispin Phiri | **the doj & cd**<br>Department:<br>Justice and Constitutional Develooment<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @Chrispin_JPhiri | 3,7K | X |

# **KEY FINDINGS:** MEMBERS OF PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ON TWITTER

- 52 out of 99 provincial cabinet members are not on Twitter;
- 2 out of 47 provincial cabinet members have more 100K Twitter followers;
- 2 out of 9 premiers are not on Twitter;
- 2 out of 7 Twitter accounts of premiers are Verified;
- 50 out of 90 MECs are not on Twitter; and
- None of the 40 MECs on Twitter have their accounts Verified.



# TOP 5 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – PROVINCIAL CABINETS

| | NAME | PORTFOLIO | TWITTER HANDLE | FOLLOWERS | VERIFIED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Panyaza Lesufi | **GAUTENG PROVINCE**<br>EDUCATION<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @Lesufi | 281,4K | X |
|  | David Makhura | **GAUTENG PROVINCE**<br>OFFICE OF THE PREMIER<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @David_Makhura | 192,3K | ✓ |
|  | Sihle Zikala | **premier**<br>Department:<br>Office of The Premier<br>**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL** | @sziks | 62,7K | X |
|  | Faith Mazibuko | **GAUTENG PROVINCE**<br>COMMUNITY SAFETY<br>**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA** | @FaithMazibukoSA | 40,9K | X |
|  | Alan Winde | **Western Cape Government**<br>**Department of the Premier** | @alanwinde | 40,4K | ✓ |

# NOTEWORTHY OBSERVATIONS

- The spokesperson of Cabinet, Phumla Williams has less than 10K Twitter followers;
- The report excluded President Cyril Ramaphosa's spokesperson, Khusela Diko, who has been on leave of absence following allegations of her husband's involvement in an alleged PPE tender scandal. At the time of collating the data, Khusela Diko had 123,4k followers.
- The Head of Digital Communications in the Presidency, Athi Geleba has more than 35k followers on Twitter, although she is not a spokesperson for the President – she is probably among the most trusted voices among spokespersons. ***For example, when there is a story about a "family meeting" (the presidential address) people/public wait for her to confirm or dismiss it before they can retweet or share.***
- Interestingly, the majority of Twitter accounts of the South African government leaders are still not verified, thus missing the opportunity to be trusted sources even in times where misinformation and disinformation are becoming pervasive and worrying.


GOVERNMENT
Communicators
FORUM

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Covid-19 has underlined the importance of communication.** In particular, forced remote engagement has elevated the need for governments to adopt and prioritise digital communications. Generally, valuable and successful brands are those that have always prioritsed customer delight, experience and engagement.

Although the South African government is always behind the digital curve – in order to continue building trust and confidence with citizens in a post-Covid-19 world, government communication machinery has to prioritise **digital agility** with a focus on the following 5 areas:

1. Leadership
2. Skills and Capacity
3. Digital Strategy and Culture
4. Collaboration, Experimentation and Innovation
5. Budget

# RECOMMENDATION 1 - LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Leadership buy-in into the strategic and tactical use of social media as part of the communication mix is no longer a nice-to-have because **digital is no longer a medium, it is a method.** The GCIS senior managers and government leaders have to consider key decisions including:

- Budget allocation for creative campaigns, human resources, infrastructure and and equipment;
- Elevating and centralizing the role of social media in planning and execution of service delivery;
- Institutionalise social media use by government leaders and MLOs instead of leaving it to individual preference;
- Priotitising governance, socialising the social media policies and standardising their application; and
- Understanding the legal aspects of social media and how it affects the work of professionals.

**May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears**

~ Nelson Mandela



# RECOMMENDATION 2: SKILLS AND CAPACITY

While social media may be a mine field, the confidence to navigate and manage it professionally comes from hands on experience and knowledge gained from continuous learning and experimentation.

Empowering communicators with skills on how to humanize content to connect better with citizens through creative copy writing for social media, and producing visual creative that promotes engagement and is relatable; and

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Google Digital Skills for Africa

Unlike commercial brands and some well-funded non-profit organisations, government departments in South Africa do not have dedicated social media community managers with skills and knowledge to develop strategies, execute and read the data to evolve campaigns to ensure they are highly targeted and effectively increase citizen engagement.

# **RECOMMENDATION:** SKILLS AND CAPACITY CONTINUED

Furthermore, the 2020 Digital Marketing Skills in Africa Audit by eNitiate shows that the continent's digital marketing professionals do not know half of the required knowledge that is related to their competencies therefore, GCIS needs focus on the following:

- Building dedicated community management, data analysis and social Citizen Relationship Management teams to support the leaders;
- Empowering communicators with skills on how to humanize content to connect better with citizens through creative copy writing for social and producing visual creative that promotes engagement; and
- Empowering communicators with skills on how to read and understand data in order to generate and maintain high user engagement with citizens.

eNitiate

DIGITAL MARKETING SKILLS IN AFRICA AUDIT 2020

# Culture eats strategy for breakfast and technology for lunch.



Culture

Strategy

# RECOMMENDATION 3 - STRATEGY AND CULTURE

Many political leaders appreciate the 2008-Obama moment where he used social media savviness to effectively campaign his way into the United States presidency, however, South African leaders in government seem more apprehensive and fearful.

The dynamic nature of the relations between the political principals and MLOs does not make things easy either. This fear and apprehension on both sides unfortunately disadvantages the citizens and negatively affects the departmental communications value chain.

**May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears**

~ Nelson Mandela

# RECOMMENDATIONS 3 - STRATEGY AND CULTURE CONTINUED

Leaders and MLOs need to be bold in how they utlise digital communication by:

- Developing effective and evidence-based content strategies and campaigns;
- Planning and preparation for crisis management and communication;
- Documenting case studies, sharing best practice and rewarding excellence among professionals; and
- Conducting and prioritising social listening so as to engage citizens in the right conversations.

# COLLABORATION, EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

Brands that receive the most love on social media including government departments are those that are authentic, relevant and reinvent themselves through collaboration, experimentation and innovation.

The #KFCProposal may have been a spontaneous moment for the couple, but the engagement followed by KFC on social media was not accidental. This was just a social moment leveraged and taken advantage of by a brand. It is possible for government communicators to achieve this level of engagement and relatability.




This will take bold, skilled and experienced communicators to achieve. Below are a few examples of Collaboration, Experimentation and Innovation.

# RECOMMENDATION 4.1 - EXPERIMENTATION

Notwithstanding the many service delivery challenges experienced by citizens of the City of Johannesburg (CoJ), the city's Twitter account stands out as the shining star in how to effectively and authentically engage with citizens through social media.

CoJ's continued success is not coincidental, it is a real-time demonstration of trust and buy-in from the city's political leadership and senior management. The dedicated digital marketing team is allowed space to operate as experts, and the experiment is paying off handsomely.



# RECOMMENDATION 4.1 - EXPERIMENTATION

The rise of podcast and video content require GCIS, departments and private offices of government leaders to prioritise investment in skills and capacity that will allow for multiple use of content to reach citizens in simplest and most accessible ways.



# RECOMMENDATION 4.2 - COLLABORATION

Government communicators have a unique advantage because most if not all departments have agencies and State Owned Companies can that enable them to amplify messages to reach more citizens from different points.

Social listening will enable communicators to join relevant conversions and leverage authentic influencers to connect with more users. Collaboration done the right way can explode government messages to reach more citizens.



# RECOMMENDATION 4.3 - INNOVATION

While Ayanda Allie-Paine's "Spokes Reporting" stands out as one of the innovations that must be replicated, the unseen power of the biggest social media platform, WhatsApp must never be underestimated.

WhatsApp continues to serve as a multiple communities of trust among friends, colleagues and families thus government communicators have to always prioritise audio-visual content that can go viral on instant messaging platforms.



# **RECOMMENDATION 5 –** BUDGET

Social Media Manager, SEO Specialist, App Developer, Podcast Producer – these are some of the jobs that did not exist 12 years ago.

Thanks to technology, these jobs and many others exist as specialisations and they are not the preserve of the private sector. They are also offered in the public sector, albeit adopted very slowly.

GCIS has to fundamentally change how it is organised with regards to social media and digital marketing.

New positions have to be created in the communication departments and offices of the leaders across the spheres of government to take advantage of the benefits of social media and digital transformation.

**The Presidency has taken the lead in this regard, now it is just a matter of institutionalising and standardising.**

# **RECOMMENDATION 5 –** BUDGET CONTINUED

Akin to the 30% set-aside for advertising budget to Community Media, GCIS has to start setting the minimum standards with mandatory allocations of social media budget for campaigns. This will increase the number of citizens targeted beyond users that follow the respective accounts of departments, spokespeople and government leaders.

Finally, departments must invest in video production equipment and even set-up post production facilities across the country that can also be used by citizens at a fee.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


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# QUESTIONS TO PONDER ON FOR SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT LEADERS

How many of them:

- Engage with analytical data that Twitter provides?
- Host Twitter dialogues with their followers, inviting them to ask any question and get rapid replies for an hour at least?
- Post graphics that simplify the complex work of a government after the budget speech infographics could help decode the wordy content?
- Tweet in their languages?

The real question is, **do government leaders** see Twitter as a nice to have or as an **integral part** of their outreach and rapid response mechanism?



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Joburg-based, with broader South African reach




8 years of broad PR & Comms experience in: Financial services, corporate communications, consumer, technology, non-profit, automotive & energy



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GovComms Social

AN INITIATIVE OF:

DECODE COMMUNICATIONS

You've read the report. If you need more information or you wish to inquire about the social media training for public sector communicators - contact us on:
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