South African Government Leaders on Twitter 2021

DECODE COMMUNICATIONS



In 2020, Decode Communications launched the South African Government Leaders in the Cabinet and provincial Executive Councils on Twitter Report – a benchmark tool with the purpose of reflecting on the presence and activity of leaders and their spokespeople.

The 2021 report is an update of last year's report – providing findings and making a number of recommendations on ways to improve citizen engagement and information sharing by government leaders.

Most importantly, we ask the question – do government leaders see Twitter as a nice to have or as an integral part of their outreach and rapid response mechanism?



The South African Government Leaders on Twitter Report 2021 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.

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 leaders 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 over a 1-year period (21 December 2020 to 12 December 2021).

“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.”

~ Lorato Tshenkeng,
CEO of Decode Communications



2021 was such an extraordinary year There were so many events that had a profound impact on the news cycles and got many South Africans talking for days on end.

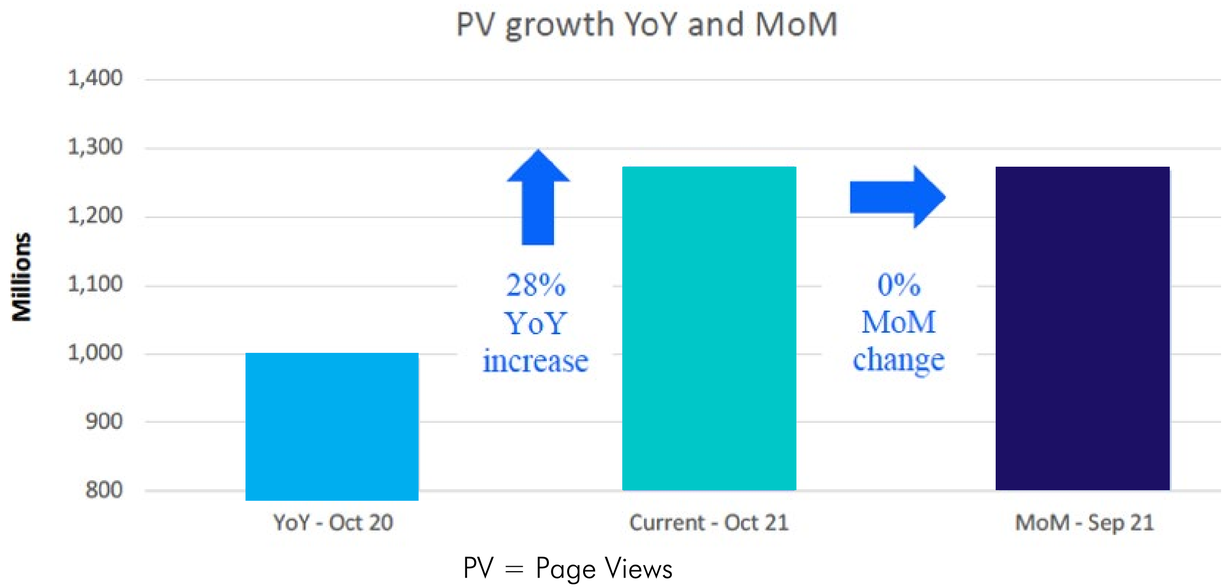
Some of the top 10 events of 2021 include:

1. (Mis)Procurement of vaccines by government.
2. The African National Congress (ANC) losing significant support during the first ever local government elections held during a pandemic.
3. Former president Jacob Zuma sent to prison for being found guilty of contempt of court.
4. The unrest in July which cost the state insurer, Sasria an estimated R30billion.
5. People massacred in Phoenix during the July unrest.
6. Unemployment rate reached the worst heights.
7. Revelations from the Zondo State Capture Commission.
8. President Ramaphosa reshuffled his cabinet, relieved Minister Zweli Mkhize of his duties.
9. Cyber-attacks of the department of Justice and Correctional Services and the state-owned logistics company, Transnet.
10. The death of De Klerk, the last apartheid president.



South Africa's Online Behaviour

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has exploded internet, and it continues to show maturing online browsing behaviours in South Africa.



PV = Page Views

– 59.45% of all browsers are 20 to 35 years

– Average visit duration: 3 min 31 sec

– 16.14 page views per unique browser

– 83.45% of traffic is from mobile phones

Source: October 2021 Report on Top Websites and Apps is by – IAB South Africa and the Narratiive code.

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has exploded the internet, and it continues to show maturing online browsing behaviours in South Africa.

Website	Unique browsers	Page views
news24.com	12,232,755	90,106,947
BusinessTech.co.za	5,906,975	20,861,199
iol.co.za	5,691,930	24,868,292
timeslive.co.za	4,914,864	21,098,812
gumtree.co.za	3,808,976	63,170,239
thesouthafrican.com	3,734,027	9,378,976
citizen.co.za	2,679,286	10,433,789
msn.com	2,399,844	23,148,012
ewn.co.za	2,355,460	11,121,202
mybroadband.co.za	2,248,506	8,322,561

Source: October 2021 Report on Top Websites and Apps is by – IAB South Africa and the Narratiive code. Due to the variable nature of Apps and the technical challenges of tag implementation that come with that, the App stats may not always closely correlate with other App analytic stats.

Top 10 Apps in South Africa

Apps	Unique browsers	Page views
Moya Messenger	16,720,693	536,395,396
News24	759,227	89,792,139
SuperSport	307,780	3,441,710
D6 School Communicator	302,147	12,488,844
Netwerk24 Mobile	174,018	34,238,956
NetNuus	104,590	13,616,104
D6 Connect	62,401	2,230,005
BusinessDay	52,417	210,565
TimesLive	52,296	174,799
eNCA News Mobile	18,016	225,626

Source: October 2021 Report on Top Websites and Apps is by – IAB South Africa and the Narratiive code. Due to the variable nature of Apps and the technical challenges of tag implementation that come with that, the App stats may not always closely correlate with other App analytic stats.

Social media

The Covid-19 pandemic has exploded the internet across the world, with a profound impact on South Africans' social media behaviour.

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SOME OF THE BENEFITS TO GOVERNMENTS INCLUDE:

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

Top Social media platforms in South Africa 2021

Platform	Users
Facebook	27 million
YouTube	24 million
Instagram	10 million
Twitter	9.3 million
TikTok	9 million
LinkedIn	8.4 million
SnapChat	7 million

Source: World Wide Worx - SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE REPORT 2021



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?

Myths about twitter

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

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



WHY LEADERS

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 Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) senior managers and government leaders are responsible for key decisions including:

1. Budget allocation for creative campaigns, human resources, infrastructure and equipment;

2. Elevating and centralizing the role of social media in planning and execution of service delivery;

3. Institutionalising social media use by government leaders and Ministerial Liaison Officers, government communicators and spokespeople instead of leaving it to individual preference;

4. Priotitising governance, socialising the social media policies and standardizing their application; and

5. Ensuring compliance to the legal aspects of social media and how it affects the work of professionals.

Cabinet factsheet



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 national cabinet

- **67%** on Twitter in 2021 vs **77%** on Twitter in 2020

- Minister Mbalula's twitter growth is as a result of his engagement in Twitter wars and not so honourable responses rather than
- communicating his department's programmes and messages

- Communications and Digital Technologies Minister, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni experienced the biggest growth with **128%** followed by Minister of Justice and Correctional Service, Ronald Lamola with **51%**

- Minister of Public Works, Patricia De Lille experienced the least growth at **3%**

- Minister Senzo Mchunu joined Twitter in February, 2021

- The department of Justice and Correctional Services experienced the biggest growth at **404%**

Ministers not on twitter



Ministers not on twitter
1.Angelina Motshekga, 2.Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, 3.Dr Naledi Pandor, 4.Bheki Cele, 5.Pravin Gordhan, 6.Ebrahim Patel, 7.Thandi Modise, 8.Mondli Gungubele, 9.Joe Phaahla, 10.Enoch Godongwana

TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS - CABINET

Name	Portfolio	Twitter Handle	Followers (2020)	Follower Increase	Verified
Fikile Mbalula	Transport	@MbalulaFikile	2,63M (2,34m)	12%	✓
Cyril Ramaphosa	President	@CyrilRamaphosa	2,1M (1,7M)	24%	✓
Gwede Mantashe	Minerals Resources and Energy	@GwedeMantashe1	480k (437k)	10%	✓
Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma	COGTA	@DlaminiZuma	396k (366k)	8%	✓
Lindiwe Sisulu	Tourism	@LindiweSisuluSA	228k (190k)	20%	✗
Patricia De Lille	Infrastructure and Public Works	@PatriciaDeLille	221k (221k)	3%	✓
David Mabuza	Deputy President	@DDMabuza	192k (140k)	37%	✓
Nathi Mthethwa	Sports, Arts and Culture	@NathiMthethwaSA	95k (90,4k)	5%	✓
Ronald Lamola	Justice and Correctional Services	@RonaldLamola	76,7k (51k)	51%	✓
Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams	Small Business Development	@StellaRated	75,2k (67,4k)	6%	✓

TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS - DEPARTMENTS

Portfolio	Twitter Handle	Followers (2020)	Follower Increase	Verified
Presidency	@PresidencyZA	2,05M (1,73M)	19%	✓
SAPS	@SAPoliceService	889K (705K)	26%	✓
Health	@HealthZA	346K (267K)	30%	✓
Basic Education	@DBE_SA	264K (220K)	20%	✓
Home Affairs	@HomeAffairsSA	140K (119K)	18%	✗
Finance	@TreasuryRSA	128K (110K)	16%	✓
Labour and Employment	@deptoflabour	88,8K (74,4K)	19%	✓
DIRCO	@DIRCO_ZA	82,5K (71,1K)	16%	✓
COGTA	@NationalCoGTA	62,5K (46,2K)	35%	✓
Transport	@Dotransport	61,2 (51,8K)	18%	✗

TOP 10 ACCOUNTS – CABINET MEMBERS' SPOKESPEOPLE

Name	Portfolio	Twitter Handle	Followers (2020)	Follower Increase	Verified
Masechaba Ndlovu	Sports, Arts and Culture	@MKhumalo_	505,7K (46,9k)	8%	✗
Lirandzu Themba	Police	@LirandzuThemba	60,9k (52,8k)	15%	✗
Nonceba Mhlauli	Presidency	@NoncebaMhlauli	42,3 (29,7k)	42%	✗
Hlengiwe Nhlabathi-Mokota	Tourism	@Hlengi	5,185 (5,003)	4%	✗
Crispin Phiri	Justice and correctional service	@Chrispin_JPhiri	4,743 (3,677)	29%	✗
Cornelius Monama	Defence and Military Veterans	@CMonama	4,067	-	✗
Nathi Shabangu	Mineral resources and energy	@DavidNathi	2, 810 (2,685)	5%	✗
Matshepo Seedat	Deputy President	@Matshfaith	2,318 (1,848)	25%	✗
Tyrone Seale	President	@tyroneseale	1,613 (1,375)	17%	✗
Lunga Mtshali	COGTA	@LuvuyoLunga	1,391 (1,427)	-3%	✗

TOP 10 MOST FOLLOWED ACCOUNTS – PROVINCIAL CABINET

Name	Portfolio	Twitter Handle	Followers (2020)	Follower Increase	Verified
Panyaza Lesufi	Education – Gauteng	@Lesufi	329,3k (281,3K)	17%	✗
David Makhura	Premier – Gauteng	@David_Makhura	329,3k (281,3K)	16%	✓
Sihle Zikala	Premier – Kwa-Zulu Natal	@sziks	223,1K (226,6K)	50%	✗
Faith Mazibuko	Community Safety – Gateng	@FaithMazibukoSA	93,7K (62,7K)	27%	✓
Lebogang Maile	Cogsta and Human Settlements – Gauteng	@LebogangMaile1	52K (41K)	28%	✗
Alan Winde	Premier – Western Cape	@alanwinde	51,6K (40,2K)	17%	✓
Phophi Ramathuba	Health – Limpopo	@PhophiRamathuba	47,6K (40,6K)	41%	✗
Dr Zamani Saul	Premier – Northern Cape	@zsaul1	37,7K (26,7K)	23%	✗
David Maynier	Finance & Economic Opportunities – Western Cape	@DavidMaynier	33,3K (27,2K)	3%	✗
Kwazi Mshengu	Education – KZN	@MshenguKwazi	29K (28,1K)	91%	✗

Findings provincial cabinet (9 Premiers and 90 Provincial Members of the Executive Councils)

- Gauteng Education MEC, Panyaza Lesufi is the most followed provincial leader;
- Kwa-Zulu Natal Education MEC, Kwazi Mshengu experienced the biggest growth among the provincial leaders at **91%** followed by Kwa-Zulu Natal Premier, Sihle Zikalala at **50%**;
- **49%** on Twitter in 2021 vs **47%** in 2020
- **3** out of **9** premiers are not on Twitter.



Noteworthy observations

1. Minister Mbalula's twitter growth is as a result of his engagement in Twitter wars and not so honourable responses rather than communicating his department's programmes and messages;

2. Majority of the spokespeople of ministers do not use their twitter presence to promote the work and messages of their departments and principals.

3. The spokesperson of Cabinet, Phumla Williams' following has increased by almost 50%;

4. Although the Head of Digital Communications in the Presidency, Athi Geleba's is not a spokesperson for the President – she is probably among the most trusted voices among spokespersons – her following has increased by 56%,

5. 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.



Conclusion

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. **Investment required to shift the dial in government Twitter engagement**

About GovComms Social

#GovCommsSocial – an initiative of Decode Communications – is a platform that supports public sector social media professionals and government communicators by facilitating TRAINING, hosting EVENTS and organising a COMMUNITY of digital marketers across Africa.

Our mission is to connect government communicators, public sector digital marketers and social media professionals with their peers, representatives from the major social networks for education and networking, and the private sector companies that can assist them through case studies and best practices.

We offer training using established social media and digital marketing best practices from the experts through:

- Face to face and Online workshops
- Keynote addresses
- Coaching internal teams

We also provide social media crisis management support during disasters.

About DECODE COMMUNICATIONS

Pan-African Reputation Management agency, head-quartered in Joburg

Founded by Lorato Tshenkeng – Mail & Guardian Top 200 recognised communication strategist

With our proven African experience – we help brands understand patterns of communication to tap into the psyche of their audiences by mapping ebbs and flows in trends.

Decode – We master every wave

Acknowledgements

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AN INITIATIVE OF:

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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: hello@decode.co.za or lorato@decode.co.za

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