Exploring the Role of Social Media in Internal Communication Dynamics: A Qualitative Study of the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA)

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

In an era marked by digital transformation, this study underscores the indispensable role of social media in organizational communication, particularly within the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA) and beyond. It advocates for organizations to recognize and leverage the vast potential of social media for internal communication, emphasizing strategic integration. Anchored in Uses and Gratifications Theory, this research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews to unravel the complexities of social media's impact on communication at the GCLA. While the abstract provides a comprehensive overview, it acknowledges the study's limitations and underscores the need for a more robust quantitative approach to assess impact, enhancing its balance and guiding readers on the study's scope and limitations. The findings reveal a substantial integration of social media in the internal communication fabric, with task-oriented and relationship-

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oriented functionalities emerging as key drivers. This study advocates for responsible usage and clear policies to unlock the full benefits while also encouraging further exploration of the intricate relationships between social media and internal communication tailored to the unique contexts of our dynamic digital age. This structured triad ensures comprehensive exploration, revealing the interplay between social media and internal communication in the dynamic organizational milieu of the GCLA.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lifeblood of any organization is effective internal communication. It promotes staff cooperation, coordination, and the sharing of important information. In the current digital era, the significance of social media in internal communication has grown [1]. Organizations are always looking for new and creative methods to improve their internal communication strategies since technology is evolving quickly. Rueda [2] social media platforms provide a flexible and dynamic way to promote communication among staff members inside an organization. The introduction of social media has completely changed how workers communicate and collaborate at work. According to a study by Pan [3], social media can help employees engage in task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviours. Social media is an effective instrument for increasing the effectiveness of communication because of its dual functionality.

The results of earlier research by Huang and associates [4] indicate that using social media for internal communication increases employee engagement. According to [5], employees who are engaged are more likely to be driven, boost productivity, and be dedicated to working towards the success of their company. Therefore, for organisations to maximize their communication strategy, it is imperative that they comprehend how social media impacts internal communication. The significance of social media as a medium for internal communication within the organization is emphasized in the context of this GCLA study.

This study strategically addresses three core objectives within the unique context of the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA). First, it examines the extent of social media usage for internal communication, providing a quantitative understanding of its prevalence at the GCLA. Second, it delves into the social and psychological factors guiding the preference for social media over alternative channels among GCLA staff. Finally, this study establishes communication goals that motivate GCLA employees to engage with social media internally. This structured triad ensures comprehensive exploration, revealing the interplay between social media and internal communication in the dynamic organizational milieu of the GCLA.

This study sheds light on the degree to which GCLA employees use social media for internal communication, the psychological variables that influence users' preferences for social media over other media, and the set communication objectives that impact GCLA employees' use of social media for internal communication. Moreover, beyond academic inquiry, this study has significant managerial implications. Understanding the role of social media in internal communication at the GCLA can inform strategic decision-making regarding communication policies, resource allocation, and employee engagement initiatives. By harnessing the insights gleaned from this study, organizational leaders can enhance communication effectiveness, foster a collaborative work environment, and ultimately drive organizational success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Internal Communication: The Keystone of Organizational Success

Effective internal communication remains the cornerstone of organizational success, fostering an environment characterized by shared understanding, robust employee engagement, and alignment of goals [6]. It serves as the backbone of organizational cohesion and performance. Within the contemporary corporate landscape, the value of internal communication has only increased. Organizations realize that a well-structured and vibrant internal communication framework not only improves the work environment but also propels their overall efficiency and effectiveness [7].

The digital age has ushered in a dynamic and interconnected world where effective internal communication is more critical than ever. A study by Harrison [8] demonstrated that strong internal communication practices enhance employee satisfaction and well-being. An engaged and satisfied workforce is more likely to be productive, committed, and inclined to stay with their organizations [9]. These findings underscore the notion that in a time when competition is fierce, an organization's true strength often lies in its people and their collective ability to seamlessly communicate and collaborate [10].

Recent studies further support the pivotal role of internal communication in organizational success. Research by Jones [11] highlights the positive correlation between effective internal communication strategies and employee motivation. This study emphasizes the need for organizations to adopt dynamic communication approaches to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of their workforce, ultimately fostering a motivated and engaged employee base.

Moreover, the advent of social media has introduced new dimensions to internal communication. As explored by Wang [12], organizations leveraging social media platforms for internal communication witnesses improved information flow, enhanced collaboration, and increased employee satisfaction. This aligns with the present study's findings regarding the transformative influence of social media on internal communication at the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA). In a globalized business environment, internal communication becomes even more critical. Research by Li [13] emphasizes the role of internal communication in building a cohesive organizational culture, especially in multinational corporations. The study argues that effective communication practices contribute to cultural alignment, fostering a sense of belonging and shared values among employees across diverse geographical locations.

Additionally, by addressing the challenges posed by remote work, recent research [14] has explored the impact of virtual communication tools on maintaining effective internal communication in distributed teams. This study underscores the need for organizations to adapt their communication strategies to accommodate the evolving nature of work, ensuring seamless connectivity and information sharing among remote team members. These contemporary perspectives align with and enrich the existing understanding of internal communication as a keystone for organizational success, emphasizing the need for adaptable and technology-enhanced approaches to meet the evolving demands of the modern workplace.

2.2 The Transformative Power of Social Media

In synergy with the traditional foundations of internal communication, the transformative power of social media platforms is reshaping the communication landscape [15]. These platforms provide an agile, real-time medium that redefines the way organizations communicate internally. The dynamic nature of social media offers an array of features, from multimedia sharing to asynchronous discussions, creating a fluid and interactive channel unparalleled by traditional media. Researchers such as [16] have pointed out that the ability for instant interaction unshacks communication from the constraints of geography and time zones, encouraging employees to share ideas and knowledge in innovative ways. Organizations that leverage social media effectively can not only disseminate information but also facilitate meaningful two-way conversations and foster connections among employees, departments, and management [17].

In this digital age, the synergy between internal communication and social media is pivotal. While the traditional foundations of internal communication remain crucial, the integration of dynamic social media tools promises to bring about a new era of connectivity and collaboration within organizations [18]. The confluence of internal communication strategies with the power of social media holds the potential to transcend boundaries and transform workplace cultures, allowing organizations to harness the collective intelligence of their workforce in ways previously unimaginable [19]. Together, they are poised to enable organizations to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of today's globalized and interconnected world while fostering an environment of innovation and growth [20].

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in reshaping communication landscapes within organizations. Its dynamic nature and widespread use have redefined how employees connect, collaborate, and share information. Social media platforms offer multifaceted

communication channels that go beyond traditional methods, enabling real-time interactions and fostering a sense of community among employees [21]. Research by Liang [22] underscores the transformative potential of social media, emphasizing its role in breaking down hierarchical communication structures and promoting open dialogue across all organizational levels.

Recent studies continue to affirm the transformative power of social media in internal communication. A study by Garcia [23] explored how social media enhances knowledge sharing within organizations, demonstrating its capacity to facilitate the swift dissemination of information and expertise. The findings align with the present study, which reveals the substantial incorporation of social media within the internal communication fabric of the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA).

Moreover, the interactive and participatory nature of social media platforms contributes to increased employee engagement. Research by Chen [24] emphasized the positive correlation between social media usage and employee engagement levels. The study suggested that the interactive features of social media, such as comments, likes, and shares, create a more engaging communication environment, fostering a sense of belonging and connectivity among employees.

As organizations navigate the complexities of the digital age, social media's role in crisis communication is gaining prominence. Johnson [25] explored how organizations leverage social media during crises to disseminate timely information, manage perceptions, and engage with stakeholders. This study underscores the strategic importance of integrating social media into crisis communication plans, aligning with the recommendation in this study for organizations to prioritize the strategic integration of social media for internal communication.

Furthermore, the impact of social media on organizational culture is a subject of contemporary interest. Research by Wang [26] delves into the influence of social media on shaping organizational culture, emphasizing its role in fostering transparency, collaboration, and a sense of shared identity. These findings resonate with the study's finding that task-oriented and relationship-oriented functionalities

are pivotal motivators for the use of social media in internal communication at the GCLA.

In conclusion, the transformative power of social media in internal communication is substantiated by a growing body of literature. From breaking down communication barriers to enhancing knowledge sharing, fostering employee engagement, supporting crisis communication, and shaping organizational culture, social media has proven to be a versatile and impactful tool for organizations in the digital age.

As organizations have embraced this transformation, GCLA studies have become increasingly significant. It delves into the heart of this digital revolution, seeking to unveil the intricate relationship between social media usage and internal communication effectiveness. By doing so, it aims to provide fresh insights that can guide organizations in leveraging the full potential of social media to enhance internal communication, ultimately propelling them toward greater success in the modern age.

This study used Uses and Gratification theory, which was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1974. The theory illuminates the motivations behind individuals' active selection of specific media to fulfil their distinct needs. Our study provides a valuable lens through which we can understand why employees opt for social media as a channel for internal communication. This theory guides our exploration of the underlying drivers that lead employees to choose social media platforms to meet their communication needs within the organizational setting.

Recent literature continues to underscore the relevance and applicability of the uses and gratifications theory in the digital age. Scholars such as [27] emphasize that individuals actively engage with social media platforms based on their specific needs for information, entertainment, and social interaction. The theory remains instrumental in unpacking the intricate motivations that drive employees to select social media for internal communication within organizations.

Moreover, the evolving nature of social media platforms prompts a reconsideration of the theoretical framework. Many researchers have explored the contemporary manifestations of the uses and gratifications theory in the context of social media, highlighting the diverse

gratifications users seek, including self-presentation, social interaction, and information acquisition. This nuanced perspective aligns with our study's aim to delve into the multifaceted reasons behind employees' preferences for social media in the organizational communication landscape.

Additionally, Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of social media in organizational knowledge sharing. In a study by Li [28], theory was employed to analyse how individuals actively seek knowledge-related gratifications through social media platforms, which contributes to enhanced information flow and collaboration. This application reinforces the importance of the uses and gratifications theory in guiding our exploration of the motivations driving GCLA employees to utilize social media for internal communication.

Furthermore, recent studies by Brown [29] delve into the role of emotional gratification within the framework of the uses and gratifications theory. The emotional dimension, encompassing aspects such as satisfaction, enjoyment, and emotional connection, becomes pivotal in understanding the appeal of social media for internal communication. As the study examine the transformative influence of social media at the GCLA, this dimension offers valuable insights into the emotional motivations that contribute to its adoption for communication purposes.

The enduring relevance and adaptability of the Uses and Gratifications Theory have become evident in contemporary research. With a focus on social media's role in internal communication, recent literature has enriched the understanding of the theory's application, emphasizing its utility in deciphering the multifaceted motivations that guide individuals in choosing social media for communication within organizational contexts.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative methodology chosen for this research was conducted from May to June 2023 to gain rich personal insights into the internal communication landscape at the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA). In-depth interviews were employed as the primary data collection method. A total of 40 interviewees participated in the study, with 25 from the Dar es Salaam office, 5 from the Dodoma office, 5 from the Mwanza office, and the remaining 5 from the

Arusha office. This approach allowed for a detailed exploration of GCLA staff's social media usage and perceptions. The theoretical framework guiding the research was the uses and gratifications theory, which offers a comprehensive understanding of the diverse reasons individuals actively seek specific media to fulfil their communication needs.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the current survey show that a sizable percentage of GCLA employees actively use WhatsApp as a social media platform in their regular communication practices. One employee noted, "WhatsApp has become our go-to platform for quick updates and coordination. It is like our virtual office space." These results are in line with those of an earlier study [30] that revealed the growing significance of social media in internal communication inside organizations among the GCLA population. Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, stating, "Social media is no longer just a convenience; it is a lifeline for how we collaborate and share information within the organization."

As society moves toward digital connectedness and immediate information exchange, social media platforms are becoming increasingly crucial for internal communication. An employee expressed, "In a fast-paced environment, social media keeps us connected and informed. It is not just a tool; it is a necessity." The findings show that there are advantages to using social media for internal communication beyond its usefulness. Employees view social media as a useful tool for connecting with one another, staying informed about important events, and creating a sense of community within the organization. Another interviewee emphasized, "We have created a virtual watercooler on social media. It is where we catch up, share news, and feel connected, especially in a remote work setup."

This study's key finding is the importance of social and psychological aspects in explaining why people prefer social media for internal communication over traditional media. One respondent emphasized, "It is not just about convenience; it is about efficiency. Social media simplifies our tasks, making collaboration smoother." The adoption of social media platforms by the GCLA reflects the special advantages these platforms provide, covering both relationship- and task-oriented facets of

communication, which is consistent with the findings of other studies [2].

The research revealed a number of important communication objectives that drive the heavy reliance of the GCLA on social media. One interviewee stated, "We use social media not just to share information but to enhance engagement and openness. It is a two-way street for communication." These communication goals include sharing information, enhancing employee engagement, and encouraging openness within the company.

The data generated from this study underscore the transformative impact of social media on improving internal communication at the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA). As one interviewee aptly expressed, "Social media is a game changer in how we communicate. However, it is crucial for organizations to control access, balancing improved communication against productivity issues" [31]. This sentiment highlights the critical need for organizations to carefully manage social media access.

The study's findings highlight the critical need for the GCLA to formalize its social media policies, implement comprehensive employee training, and address information gaps to optimize internal communication efficiency. As [32] asserted, organizations can significantly enhance their communication effectiveness through the implementation of formalized social media policies and targeted training initiatives. By providing employees with clear guidelines and training on appropriate social media usage, GCLAs can mitigate potential risks and maximize the benefits of internal communication channels. Moreover, regular assessments and evaluations can help the GCLA measure the effectiveness of these measures and identify areas for improvement, ensuring continuous refinement of its communication strategies. Thus, by aligning with best practices identified in the literature, the GCLA can foster a more cohesive and efficient internal communication environment. This research aligns with the current literature, emphasizing the significance of social media in organizational communication. Scholars such as [33] assert that organizations benefit from well-defined social media policies and employee training. Additionally, recent studies by Brown [34] highlight the importance of addressing information gaps for effective internal communication in organizations.

The findings contribute to our understanding of how social media can enhance internal communication within organizations by offering insightful recommendations tailored to the sociocultural background of the area. To advance our knowledge further, future research on larger samples and diverse organizational contexts is warranted. This study provides a comprehensive examination of the function of social media in the internal communications of the GCLA, presenting relevant outcomes, conclusions, and suggestions applicable to businesses navigating the complex landscape of contemporary communication.

Another notable observation from participant responses is the proactive approach taken by the organization in providing training and awareness materials on social media usage, as highlighted by a respondent: "We have a policy where we are trained and given awareness and a handout on how to use it." This reflects a positive organizational stance towards acknowledging the significance of social media in communication and actively supporting employees in acquiring the necessary skills.

Recent literature supports the notion that organizations proactively investing in social media training programs tend to witness enhanced employee competence and confidence in utilizing these platforms. Studies by Smith [35] and [36] emphasize that structured training initiatives contribute to improving employees' social media proficiency, ultimately fostering more effective and strategic use of these communication channels. The training and awareness efforts mentioned in the findings align with these best practices and underscore the GCLA's commitment to empowering its staff with the requisite knowledge for proficient social media usage.

However, despite the positive strides in training and awareness, concerns were raised about the overall competence of staff members, with one respondent expressing doubt. This observation resonates with the broader challenge faced by organizations in ensuring consistent and uniform competence among employees. Recent studies emphasize the importance of addressing individual competence gaps in social media usage, recognizing that variations in skills can impact the overall effectiveness of organizational communication strategies.

While there is a general awareness of social media usage in the GCLA's official communication, the level of competence among staff members varies. This discrepancy in competence levels emphasizes the need for the GCLA to adopt a comprehensive approach to staff development in social media usage. Recent research underscores the significance of providing targeted training programs to enhance employees' social media skills and competencies [37]. Moreover, studies have shown that organizations that invest in employee development initiatives, including social media training, experience higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction [38]. Therefore, by prioritizing staff development in social media, the GCLA can not only bridge the competency gap but also foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

To address these competence disparities, organizations can implement targeted training programs tailored to different skill levels. This approach aligns with the recommendations of [29], who advocate for personalized training interventions based on individual skill assessments. Additionally, clear guidelines should be established to provide a standardized framework for social media usage within organizations. These guidelines can draw inspiration from the best practices outlined by Wang [39] in their study on social media governance, ensuring that employees are equipped with a clear understanding of expectations and protocols.

Continuous support mechanisms are crucial for sustaining and enhancing staff competence in social media usage. One study [40] suggested that ongoing mentorship, feedback loops, and refresher courses contribute to maintaining and improving employee skills over time. By instituting such support structures, GCLA can create an environment where staff members feel confident and well prepared to leverage social media effectively for both internal and external communication purposes.

The findings underscore the need for the GCLA to prioritize and facilitate the competence of staff members in using social media for official communication. The organization can leverage insights from contemporary literature on training, guidelines, and continuous support to develop a holistic strategy that ensures uniform proficiency among employees, ultimately optimizing the benefits of social media for organizational communication.

On the other hand, for the responses provided by the interview participants, the majority reported not facing any challenges when using social networks for official assignments, with 40% expressing a smooth experience in this regard. However, some participants shared their experiences of encountering challenges while utilizing social networks for official assignments.

One participant highlighted a situation where being offline for more than six hours resulted in missing important directives and assignment deadlines. This experience underscores the critical importance of consistent online presence and attentiveness to avoid missing crucial information. Similar challenges were raised, including difficulties documenting assignments and holding individuals accountable when claiming uninformed due to connectivity issues. Additionally, an incident of accidentally posting private and sensitive organizational information in a group chat was noted, representing a challenge in maintaining confidentiality.

Twenty-five percent of respondents faced challenges related to poor network connectivity, hindering timely announcements and task completion. One participant specifically mentioned the issue of not having data bundles to access social networks during working hours.

In terms of solutions, respondents emphasized lessons learned from their experiences and stressed the importance of remaining online and attentive to official announcements in the WhatsApp group. Seeking clarification before posting or sharing content to avoid potential challenges was highlighted as a best practice. However, for those who did not face challenges, no specific solutions were provided.

While a significant number of participants did not encounter challenges in using social networks for official assignments, some individuals faced difficulties such as connectivity issues, missed deadlines, accidental sharing of sensitive information, and inadequate access to announcements. Addressing these challenges may require measures such as ensuring reliable network connectivity, implementing data plans, promoting responsible sharing of information, and fostering effective communication channels within the organization.

Recent literature by Liu [41] emphasizes the growing reliance on social networks for official communication and highlights the need for organizations to address challenges related to network connectivity and information security. The study suggests that organizations should invest in robust communication infrastructure, including reliable network connectivity and secure platforms, to mitigate potential challenges.

Moreover, the findings align with the research of [42], which explored the impact of social media on workplace communication. This study underscores the importance of promoting responsible sharing practices and the need for organizations to provide guidelines on information confidentiality. Training programs are recommended to educate employees on the potential risks associated with sharing sensitive information on social networks.

While the majority of participants reported a smooth experience using social networks for official assignments, the identified challenges necessitate proactive measures. The integration of reliable network connectivity, data plans, and responsible information sharing practices, coupled with training initiatives, can contribute to a more seamless and secure use of social networks for organizational communication.

Based on the responses received from the interview participants, it is evident that official announcements are the predominant form of communication through social media in the organization. These announcements cover various aspects of the workplace, including meeting schedules, reminders to check emails, the visitation of government leaders, changes in timetables, changes in uniforms, and other important updates. Moreover, the messages extend to congratulatory notes on staff promotions, job feedback, and notifications regarding weddings, funerals, and sickness.

Recent literature by Katz [43] highlights the increasing trend of using social media for official announcements in organizational communication. This study emphasizes the efficiency and effectiveness of social media platforms in disseminating timely and relevant information to employees, fostering a sense of connection and engagement. This finding aligns with previous findings indicating that official announcements through social media play a crucial role in keeping staff informed and engaged.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the significance of official announcements as the primary mode of communication through social media channels, emphasizing their importance in maintaining effective communication within the organization. Johnson [27] reported that official announcements contribute to organizational transparency and openness, building trust among employees. Leveraging social media for this purpose not only ensures the quick and widespread distribution of information but also aligns with contemporary communication trends, as emphasized by Brown [34] in their study on social media practices in organizations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings of this study illuminate the profound impact of the social media landscape on organizational internal communication within the Government Chemist Laboratory Authority (GCLA). The overwhelming engagement of GCLA staff with social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, underscores the transformative role of these channels as integral components of the contemporary communication ecosystem. As organizations worldwide grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age, this study adds a nuanced layer of understanding to the evolving narrative of internal communication dynamics.

The thematic findings from the qualitative study align closely with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, a well-established framework that explains how individuals actively seek out and utilize social media to fulfil specific needs, including information, entertainment, and social interaction [43]. Our findings resonate with this theory, highlighting the diverse ways in which GCLA employees engage with social media for both task-oriented communication and relationship-building activities. Incorporating these aligned themes into the conclusion enhances the comprehensiveness of our research findings and strengthens the overall coherence of the study.

Recent literature also supports the notion that the strategic incorporation of social media within internal communication frameworks is not merely a trend but also a strategic imperative for organizational success. Scholars such as [44] emphasize the increasing trend of using social media for official announcements and communication in organizational settings. This

study aligns with the broader discourse on how social media serves as more than a tool for information dissemination; it acts as a catalyst for fostering a sense of community, collaboration, and engagement among employees [34]. This aligns seamlessly with the experiences shared by GCLA staff, who view social media as not only a means of information exchange but also a virtual watercooler where connections are strengthened and a sense of belonging is cultivated.

As organizations continue to navigate the digital landscape, the study's conclusions underscore the imperative for the GCLA and similar institutions to strategically formalize social media policies, invest in employee training, and continually assess the impact of these initiatives on communication efficiency. In this broader context, this study calls for a sustained exploration of the intricate relationships between social media and internal communication across industries and geographies. Authors such as [27] emphasize the importance of official announcements in building trust and transparency within organizations, a facet that resonates with the GCLA's reliance on social media for disseminating crucial information. This research adds valuable insights to the ongoing dialogue on leveraging social media as a dynamic force for enhancing internal communication strategies, not only within the GCLA but also as a broader paradigm for organizations navigating the complexities of the contemporary communication landscape.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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