

Exploring Social Media Initiatives to Increase Public Value in Public Administration

The Case of the Department of Communication and Information System (GCIS)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the utilisation of social media to increase public value. It focuses on the Department of Communication and Information System (GCIS) and its utilisation of Twitter, particularly the South African Government Twitter account – @GovernmentZA. Social media is discussed within the context of public administration, highlighting its use as part of Government 2.0 and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Within the statutory and regulatory frameworks, public servants are expected to place the needs of the citizenry first. Furthermore, citizens are entitled to access information, participate in democratic processes and express their views. Social media provides a platform through which all of these expectations can be realised.

The study relied on qualitative research methods, which included semi-structured interviews with GCIS employees, the tweets collected from @GovernmentZA and citizens' responses. Secondary data was gathered from books, journals, Twitter, policy documents, relevant legislation, published articles, the internet and annual reports to acquire knowledge and insight to respond to the study's objectives. The study utilised a thematic analysis to identify themes in the data related to public value. The data was analysed through ATLAS.ti.

The study found that GCIS endeavours to produce public value and acknowledges Twitter as a means through which public value can be created and increased. Furthermore, the tweets posted on @GovernmentZA reflect the themes necessary to increase public value. The study revealed that the GCIS can enhance its utilisation of Twitter by listening and responding to citizens on a more regular basis, particularly when they are dissatisfied with government. Recommendations of how the GCIS can enhance the utilisation of Twitter to increase public value are finally provided.

INTRODUCTION

The creation of public value should be a priority for all governments as one of the key responsibilities of public managers is to ensure that their work produces value for citizens. Social media provides new opportunities for governments to communicate and engage with the public and in so doing, expands avenues for the co-production, creation and increase of public value.

Social media is a relatively new phenomenon, but its impact is far-reaching and provides many opportunities for governments globally. Social media platforms offer governments the prospect of redefining their relationship with the citizenry through improved communication, enhanced public participation mechanisms, providing citizens a platform to air their views and improving service delivery. These are significant matters that are highlighted in South Africa's Constitution and are further cemented through legislation and government policies. Within this framework, government utilises social media to deliver services and communicate with citizens.

Government's utilisation of social media has evolved in line with e-government initiatives and Government 2.0 (Gov 2.0). As the 4IR unfolds further, governments will have to once again adapt their utilisation of social media to remain relevant.

South African government departments utilise social media platforms aggressively, with the GCIS in particular, driving the utilisation thereof. Government's utilisation of social media takes place in the context of the significant contribution these platforms facilitate in the creation of public value, which is also explored in this article.

SOCIAL MEDIA: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CONTEXT

Social media is gaining popularity in public administration globally, particularly because of its reputation as an instrument to engage with citizens. In an age

where government focuses increasingly on citizens' needs and wants, social media can be viewed as a formidable instrument to improve interaction with citizens (Zavattaro 2013:244; Kutsikos 2007 in Karakiza 2015:385). Gruber (2017:91) asserts that, "The opportunities presented by social media have changed the public administration playing field". Social media has evolved from its original intention of merely linking users to their off-line contacts on an online platform. Social media provides government with opportunities to bolster its traditional communication channels, public participation and networking goals (Mergel 2012:470). Government already utilises social media through Gov 2.0, which builds on electronic government (e-government) initiatives. Furthermore, the 4IR also offers opportunities to further maximise the utilisation of social media.

Governments' utilisation of social media also aligns with public officials' efforts to create public value. Gruber (2017:94) suggests that guidelines on social media conform to the elements of Moore's strategic triangle which impacts on the quest for public value. The author points to the authorising environment which promotes government's interaction on social media platforms to engage unreservedly with the public. The state's increasing utilisation of social media to interact with the public also implies increased operational funding, especially when considering the amount of capital invested in it and the new developments it yields. Concerning the value circle, it has become evident that government clearly anticipates the type of messaging it allows in terms of the provision of services (Gruber 2017:94). Furthermore, Moore underscores the significant role public managers have to play in relation to public value, which places them at the centre of creating public value. Concerning government's utilisation of social media, public managers are responsible for the content that is disseminated through a particular entity's social media platform and are guided by its policy.

e-Government

e-Government refers to government entities' utilisation of information technologies which possess the potential to change the way it interacts with the public, other forms of government and the private sector (World Bank 2011 in Karakiza 2015:385). Gil-Garcia et al. (2016:525) note that e-government promotes engagement with stakeholders and the public through mobile gadgets, websites and other digital avenues.

The utilisation of these technologies can result in a number of benefits, including the improved provision of services, galvanising citizens by sharing information, and ensuring improved governance by public managers. Marufu (2014:19), who expounds on these benefits, argues that the reporting mechanisms available through e-government ensure openness and accountability. Higher productivity is also achieved through a standardised interface which offers regular services with

limited interference from humans. These e-government tools, which also take the form of websites, electronic mails and transaction applications, have the potential to result in standardised and improved services (Marufu 2014:19). e-Government also has the potential to ensure that government services reach more people, since geographical boundaries are no longer an impediment if the citizen has access to the internet (Marufu 2014:19). e-Government provides an opportunity to interact with citizens in a way that focuses on the needs and desires of citizens. This user-centred approach implies that government will have at its disposal the necessary information to provide goods and services which meet the needs of citizens (Gil-Garcia *et al.* 2016:527).

The South African government has also embraced the benefits of e-government. The Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS) resolved to make e-government the central portal, as well as avail information and services to citizens through various e-government channels (DTPS 2017:18–19). The latter channels are aimed at improving service delivery and ensuring that all citizens can access government services whenever they choose to, regardless of where they are situated. These channels include:

- Digital TV. With the move from analogue to digital broadcasting, digital set-top boxes are required to decode the digital signal to ensure that TV channels can be viewed on analogue TV sets (Department of Communication 2018). Government intends assessing what information can be shared through set-top boxes.
- Internet. Government's services are offered to the public through the central e-government portal on the Internet at www.eservices.gov.za. Furthermore, all government departments are expected to have standardised websites and services accessible on the Internet throughout the year.
- Common service centre. Government avails services to citizens in rural areas through its Thusong Service Centres. At these centres, public officials are also expected to assist citizens through online channels.
- Mobile. A large number of South Africans have access to a mobile phone with an Internet connection. In efforts to provide additional channels to access government services, these are also available through unstructured supplementary service data, mobi sites and mobile apps.
- Phone (call centre). The e-government call centre provides technical support for business and citizens who access services through the e-government portal, provides information on e-government services, and allows for citizens to undertake certain transactions (DTPS 2017:18–19).

Despite its many benefits, Khan (2017:14) is critical of e-government. The author argues that it is founded on an inside-out approach, that is, the focus is on optimising and utilising internal public resources to deliver services to the citizenry. Khan underscores that e-government services are one-directional, emanating

from government and flowing to citizens, whose only role is as that of consumers. Gov 2.0 endeavours to address these shortcomings.

Gov 2.0

Gov 2.0 refers to government's utilisation of interactive communication technologies to re-engineer its relationship with the public into one that considers citizens. It can be described as a form of e-government that is more accessible, collaborative and social (Meijer, Koops, Pieterse, Overman & ten Tije 2012:59–60). Gov 2.0 endorses data integration on the internet partnerships and communication. Citizens have taken to Gov 2.0 applications and are active on platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. Gov 2.0 goes beyond the utilisation of technologies and also marks a culture change, that is, the internet is considered a means for service delivery (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval & Hovy 2010:5). Gov 2.0 has its origins in the notion that the public should participate creatively in public administration through social media and the opportunities it offers to generate and disseminate content (Osimo 2008 in Omar 2015:25). e-Government applications were originally intended to deliver information to citizens on behalf of government. This is a one-way flow of information, without any provision for responses from citizens. Gov 2.0, on the other hand, is concerned with incorporating innovative technologies with a transformation in organisational culture to improve transparency, interaction and partnerships with government.

Gov 2.0 also offers a means for better collaboration and engagement between the public and government (Karakiza 2015:386). This outside-in approach allows the public official to exploit external resources, such as social media and collective technologies, in the delivery of services to the public (Khan 2017:14). Various authors suggest that the utilisation of social media tools by governments marks the shift from e-government to Gov 2.0, which results in services being co-produced and decision-making incorporating the views of citizens (Chun *et al.* 2010; Nam 2012 in Criado *et al.* 2016:32; Khan 2017:14).

Meijer *et al.* (2012:59) highlight the potential of Gov 2.0 and in particular, its ability to redefine how government and the citizenry engage with each other. The authors note that Gov 2.0 provides opportunities for service delivery and policy design through structured collaboration with government, the public and other relevant stakeholders. This novel means to engage offered by Gov 2.0, has the ability to boost the public's trust in government (Meijer *et al.* 2012:59). Chun *et al.* (2010:5) argue that the utilisation of social media makes government more dependable, responsible and open because public officials, citizens and other role players are actively involved in content production, information sharing, mutual decision-making and gathering data. Sadeghi, Ressler and Krzmarzick (2012 in Omar 2015:1) concur, and reiterate that this new focus of government – Gov

2.0 – seeks to build on the principles of fairness, cooperation, transparency and the idea that the opinions of many carry more weight than that of one.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S UTILISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the South African public administration context, the utilisation of social media is encouraged due to the many benefits it offers as well as the growing percentage of citizens who access the platform. Government also acknowledges that social media provides an opportunity for public servants to become active participants in the digital revolution and engage in discussions with citizens, instead of merely disseminating information (GCIS 2011:4). As an indication that public institutions are aware of the need to utilise these platforms, many national and provincial government departments, and municipalities are active on social media platforms, for example, Facebook and Twitter (Government of South Africa 2018).

Various benefits arise as a result of government's utilisation of social media. These include:

- Improving government's ability to reach its citizens.
- Broadening the public's access to government communication.
- Providing a means for government to swiftly adapt and redirect communication when it is required to.
- Reducing the costs associated with government communication over an extended period.
- Improving the pace at which citizens are able to respond and contribute.
- Communicating with targeted audiences on matters relevant to them.
- Decreasing government's reliance on conventional media tools to engage with citizens (GCIS 2011:7).

Government also highlights the significance of ensuring that the abovementioned benefits are realised. Public managers can determine the effectiveness of a social media tool by assessing whether it enables interaction with both "internal and external stakeholders by facilitating one or more of the following: communication, disseminating information; interaction; and/or education" (GCIS 2011:7).

THE GCIS' UTILISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Currently, no research has been conducted on GCIS' utilisation of social media. However, Ramodibe makes brief reference to GCIS' utilisation of social media

when evaluating its success in disseminating information to the public. The author recommends that GCIS maximises social media and communicates with citizens through this platform (2014:124). Furthermore, Ramodibe (2014:176) suggests that the government communication policy incorporates social media as one of the tools through which it shares information with the citizenry. The GCIS has a number of Twitter and Facebook accounts which it manages for its various products and services (GCIS 2017c:39). The Government Communication Policy (GCIS 2017a:57), which was formulated by GCIS, sets out guidelines for the utilisation of social media. It also prescribes certain essential values that must be observed when public servants are active on social media (GCIS 2017a:60). These include:

- Social media activity should not be viewed primarily as a means to influence the environment and must always bear in mind the requirements of the public.
- The content provided on the relevant platforms should be beneficial, pertinent and timely.
- Social media activity should understand the obligations of the Public Service to be considerate and attentive to citizens' request for discussions.
- To encourage openness of state processes and choices, there should be no delay in providing information on social media platforms, when such a request is made.

The GCIS is keen to embrace social media, particularly the opportunities it provides to converse with citizens instead of a one-direction flow of information. The benefits of social media are only likely to increase as the digital divide decreases (GCIS 2011:4).

GCIS' use of Twitter

The choice of Twitter as a communication tool was explored by asking those responsible for the social media account why GCIS utilises Twitter to communicate with citizens on behalf of government. The participants highlighted that Twitter has the ability to reach a large number of people in a very short space of time. Twitter emerges as an obvious choice because "on Twitter every two minutes, like 50 000 people are logged in" (P 2 2019). "So why not use that platform because it has so many views" (P2 2019). The immediacy of Twitter was further highlighted by P 3 (2019), who said, "We use Twitter because it reaches a number of people. It's easier to engage and it's very fast, whatever you posted at that time goes".

Another feature of Twitter that the participants accentuated is that many users turn to this social media platform for news updates. The participants argued that for government to be relevant and have its message on a particular issue disseminated promptly, it needs to have a presence on Twitter.

Based on the responses from the participants it is clear that Twitter is a valuable and effective tool through which GCIS communicates with the public. Twitter enables GCIS to rapidly disseminate information and immediately respond to a topical issue, thereby clarifying government's stance on that issue. Furthermore, given that large segments of the population are active on Twitter, the social media platform allows GCIS to reach a large portion of the public in a matter of seconds.

Understanding public value

When offering their views of what public value entails, certain participants acknowledged they were unfamiliar with the concept, while P 2 avoided the question altogether. Those who elaborated on their understanding of public value alluded to the significance of the public and providing them with information and services that they would find beneficial. P 5 (2019) argued that public value is "being informed about what this government is doing and also the truth maybe, from government's perspective".

All participants agreed that creating public value was vital to their work. P 1 (2019) stressed the importance of serving citizens and stated: "It's about uplifting people, telling them about jobs, telling them how to get government services, so that's us also putting value to their lives".

Despite participants suggesting they were unfamiliar with public value, the participants identified the key elements of public value, which included creating something which citizens consider to be of value to them and public managers are expected to create this value. All the participants articulated that the needs and interests of the public were vital to creating public value, reflecting on the views held by Stoker (2006:47). The participants underscored that providing value to the public translated into disseminating information to the citizenry including services which are beneficial to them. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the central role they play, as public servants, in the creation of public value and their responsibility towards those they serve. This is aligned to Moore's (1995:28) assertion that the work of public servants is intended to produce public value.

Twitter's role in creating public value

The participants believe that Twitter has a role to play in creating public value. They noted that through Twitter, a large number of citizens are informed about government services in a very short space of time. Furthermore, Twitter also provides the means for citizens to directly and quickly, interact with government. Twitter is a platform through which citizens can voice their comments and concerns or pose questions directly to GCIS. Public servants can then utilise the same platform to respond immediately.

According to P 5 (2019), “The way that government is currently using the platform, we are literally just broadcasting news so it’s almost like a one-way type of communication. We haven’t got to a point where we make it a two-way type of communication platform where citizens are able to communicate with us”.

The participants’ responses suggest that due to the communication channels it opens, its speed, responsiveness and ability to connect people, Twitter has a role to play in creating public value. However, to get the most out of Twitter, it must be utilised effectively by listening and responding to the public, instead of being viewed solely as a means to broadcast government information.

Table 1: Adherence to Moore’s elements of the strategic triangle

Elements of Moore’s strategic triangle	Participants’ responses
<i>Public value</i>	<p>“You want someone who’s going come and ask: ‘How do I apply for an ID’, and you tell that person, how they can apply for an ID. The next thing, the person is getting a grant from SASSA because now they’ve got this” (P 2 2019).</p> <p>“Whatever you post you must make sure that the person that is going to look at that content will say this has value” (P 3 2019).</p>
<i>Operational capabilities</i>	<p>“Every day someone comes up with a new idea of how we can improve” (P 2 2019).</p> <p>“We will actually monitor what is trending on Twitter. The Rapid Response meetings in the morning, they don’t check other social media accounts, but they do check Twitter” (P 4 2019).</p> <p>“Every week we monitor the people that follow us” (P 3 2019).</p>
<i>Legitimacy and support</i>	<p>“Our content comes from either statements from government or from key messages being compiled by other sections” (P 4 2019).</p> <p>Mostly tweet about “what’s happening in the news, also monitoring what’s trending, if there’s anything we need to comment on or write about we do that” (P 1 2019).</p> <p>“The account is supposed to be as informative as it can be ... it’s actually seen as an advocate for government” (P 5 2019).</p>

Source: (Author’s own illustration)

GCIS creating public value on Twitter

All the participants agreed that they considered public value when crafting the content and deciding what to post on @GovernmentZA. They consider the value the tweet would add to citizens’ lives, in terms of providing them access to services and informing them of government activities. This alludes to the public value

or the benefit that GCIS wants to create. One of the elements in Moore's strategic triangle is significant public value or benefit the entity wants to create through its targets and goals (Moore 1995:71; Omar 2015:29).

The participants described @GovernmentZA as an advocate of government, noting that most of the content posted originates from government statements, key messages and issues which need to be responded to. This suggests that legitimacy and support are provided by GCIS for the Twitter account. The participants held that followers have a significant role to play and should not merely be passive recipients of the tweets.

It is evident that the participants encourage collaboration and engagement with those who view the tweets. The respondents are eager to see followers retweet the posts on @GovernmentZA because this engagement results in the information contained in the tweet being widely disseminated. Furthermore, the participants actively encourage questions from followers and are open to engaging in discussions to ensure a positive outcome for citizens. However, when the comments from the public are negative, the respondents do not engage with the public. When citizens ask GCIS questions based on a tweet, the officials provide further information which results in a positive outcome, and co-production takes place.

Increasing public value

The four themes central to the measurement and increase of public value are: efficiency, outcome achievement, trust and legitimacy, and service delivery quality. The participants were asked how the tweets posted on @GovernmentZA contributed towards each of these themes.

Helping government become more efficient

Efficiency is described as the degree to which the public organisation achieves the best results for citizens with limited resources (Faulkner & Kaufman 2017:79). Stakeholder or shareholder value, innovation, productivity, effectiveness and parsimony are all values that have an effect on efficiency. The respondents were divided on whether the tweets they post help government become efficient.

Despite the mixed responses, it is clear that the tweets contribute towards government becoming more efficient. The tweets achieve this in two ways: first, by allowing citizens to voice their concerns and thereby providing government departments an opportunity to address these issues, and thereby making the department more productive. Second, posting tweets saves government resources such as time and money but still gives it the opportunity to reach and engage with thousands of people.

Achieving specific outcomes

Outcome achievement is the degree to which the public sector develops results which are valued by the public in a number of sectors, including social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes (Faulkner & Kaufman 2017:77). Factors that relate to outcome achievement include common good, social cohesion, public interest, fairness and equity, access to knowledge, employment and benefits of economic endeavours and social capital.

Most participants highlighted that the tweets achieved specific outcomes. Concerning social cohesion, the respondents cited the tweets acknowledging achievements, such as a victory by the one country's national sports team or an accomplishment by a singer. These posts solicit many positive responses and are regularly retweeted by the public. These 'feel good' tweets spark much positive reaction and rallies the country behind an achievement, thereby contributing towards social cohesion.

In terms of employment, the participants held that they regularly tweeted job opportunities in government and its programmes. Furthermore, the tweets encouraged citizens to apply for these and provided information on how to do so.

Explaining how the tweets help achieve environmental outcomes, P 5 (2019) highlighted Good Green Deeds Campaign – a government campaign aimed at caring for the environment – noting that when tweets related to the campaign were posted, it was not merely to inform the public about the campaign but to also inspire them into action. P 5 (2019) argued that the intention of posting such information was so that “people would actually turn it into an action-oriented type of thing, where instead of throwing paper or you see somebody throwing papers, you pick it up yourself. Then they create clubs and all that stuff on maybe every Saturday, they'll have a community outreach, but that's coming from a tweet or update that was done”.

P 4 (2019) held that while the tweets do contribute towards specific outcomes, achieving these were also largely dependent on other factors. Citing an outcome such as improved health care, P 4 (2019) stated that while the tweets will have some impact, for example, inform the public what they can do to ensure they do not contract Listeriosis; improved health care is largely dependent on the services delivered by the country's clinics and hospitals. It is clear from the responses that the tweets posted by the participants do have a role to play in helping achieve a number of outcomes. The GCIS tweets address a range of outcomes including economic, environmental, health, and social. When the content of the tweet is educational and raises awareness, and citizens choose to act on that information, outcomes can be improved and achieved.

Satisfaction with services

The respondents were asked whether the tweets they posted helped ensure that citizens are satisfied with the services provided by government. Certain participants pointed out that they could not establish whether tweets contributed towards citizens' satisfaction with government services because the tweets merely provided information on how to go about accessing services. Furthermore, there was no assurance that citizens are acting on that information. Others noted that even when tweets relating to service delivery are posted, citizens choose to respond by highlighting the shortcomings of government.

However, several participants disagreed, noting that tweets relating to government services are well received by followers. Some of the information posted in the tweets included new innovations and services offered by government which the public would not have been aware of. The respondents highlighted that when they post such information, they help citizens access government services more efficiently, because citizens are prepared and know what to expect when accessing a particular service. Consequently, the citizenry is satisfied with the services they receive.

While there was no consensus among the participants whether their tweets left citizens satisfied with government services, their responses revealed that this is indeed the case. Citizens are empowered with information. Therefore, they can approach a government department with the correct information and have their expectations met. This would leave them satisfied with the service they receive from government.

Building trust and legitimacy

Trust and legitimacy constitutes the degree to which citizens and other stakeholders consider a public organisation and its undertakings to be legitimate and truthful (Faulkner & Kaufman 2017:79). Values that have a bearing on citizens' trust in government include: accountability, dialogue, responsiveness, listening to public opinion, user democracy, integrity, openness, citizen involvement, professionalism, honesty and self-development.

The participants noted that the tweets do build trust in government because the information shared is an indication that government cares for citizens and is working towards improving their lives. However, it was also pointed out that the content of the tweets often determined whether this trust was reinforced. Moreover, the people mentioned in the tweets also had an effect.

The respondents noted that the tweets posted highlighted the achievements of government, including statistics such as how many houses had been built or jobs created. These posts are intended to illustrate that government is at work and is delivering on its mandate, which builds public confidence.

Furthermore, tweets are often posted on current issues that dominate the news. The participants argued that by commenting on these issues immediately through Twitter, the public is assured that government is aware of the needs of the people; responds to, and cares about the day-to-day events citizens experience.

P 4 believed the extent to which a tweet helped build trust in government was largely dependent on the content of the tweet and to some degree, the context and timing of the tweet. "For instance, we are currently still posting messages on anti-corruption and we still got the Zondo Commission on. I think it's very difficult for the public to build trust if they still hear, daily, breaking stories from the Zondo Commission, and government is saying no, anti-corruption, anti-corruption" (P4 2019). The participant pointed out that in contrast, tweets about government's Youth Employment Service (YES) programme, helps build trust in government because it is evidence that the pressing issue of youth unemployment is being addressed.

Tweets posted by GCIS have the potential to build trust in government, particularly when the content of the tweets reveals to citizens that government is delivering services and is addressing significant issues of the day. However, not all citizens receive the tweets favourably. Even when a tweet is intended to highlight government's success, certain followers interpret it to highlight shortcomings, which calls into question their trust in government. Furthermore, where the credibility of the person mentioned in the tweet is called into question, the posted tweet does not necessarily build trust in government.

CONCLUSION

Globally, governments cannot ignore social media because it has the potential to enrich the relationship between the citizenry and governments as well as improve service delivery. While the Constitution and White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (DPSA 1997) were drafted at a time when social media did not exist and make no mention thereof, these platforms are important tools to achieve the aims of both. Social media provides access to services, disseminates information, encourages public participation, is a means for expression and enhances service delivery.

Governments' utilisation of information communication technologies was initially limited to e-government initiatives. e-Government offers a number of benefits, including improved service delivery, accountability and transparency (Marufu 2014:19). However, e-government also adopts an inside-out approach, that is, the services it offers are one-directional and citizens are perceived as mere consumers (Khan 2017:14).

As an evolution of e-government, Gov 2.0 has the potential to re-engineer the relationship between government and the public into one that provides more consideration to citizens (Meijer *et al.* 2012:59–60). An integral part of Gov 2.0

is social media. The South African government acknowledges that social media provides an opportunity for public servants to become active participants in the digital revolution and engage in discussions with citizens in alternative ways (GCIS 2011:4). GCIS, in particular, views social media as an important tool and its social media guidelines sets out the many benefits it hopes to achieve through the utilisation of social media.

In an era of constant change, governments must look at maximising the utilisation of social media to capitalise on the 4IR. Social data, in particular, can help ensure that governments better understand citizens and their needs and then respond to them accordingly (Yilmaz *et al.* 2017: 253).

The article analysed the data that was collected through the semi-structured interviews with those responsible for updating @GovernmentZA and the tweets posted during March 2018. The focus was on determining GCIS' understanding of public value; whether Twitter has a role to play to increase public value; whether GCIS considers public value when tweets are posted on @GovernmentZA; and whether the tweets posted on this site increase public value. It was revealed that GCIS employees have a clear grasp of public value and the pivotal role they play in its creation. They also recognise Twitter as a platform through which they can not only create but also increase public value. GCIS employees regularly tweet about the themes – outcome achievement, service delivery quality, trust and legitimacy, and efficiency – which have been identified as fundamental to increase public value. This study also revealed that these themes are evident in the tweets that were posted for the period 1 March to 31 March 2018 and, therefore, GCIS does attempt to increase public value through the tweets posted on @GovernmentZA.

One of the challenges identified in this study was that GCIS does not engage with citizens as much as it should in determining what is public value. The public value created by GCIS can be further enhanced if the department engages regularly with citizens to determine the kind of content they want to receive through Twitter. This is currently not being done. Therefore, citizens are not as involved as they should be in the co-production of public value. Furthermore, GCIS is excluding opportunities presented by citizens for this type of engagement by not responding regularly to the queries raised on Twitter by citizens.

A further challenge relates to the content of the tweets not achieving the desired outcomes. While the tweets do represent the four themes linked to an increase in public value, it is clear from the manner in which the public engages with the tweets that in certain instances these themes are rejected entirely. Citizens reacted negatively to the content of many tweets and displayed a lack of trust in government and questioned whether it has the will or capacity to deliver quality services. Through their responses to the tweets, citizens also raised concerns about government's failure to utilise state resources

optimally or in the best interests of citizens. Moreover, specific outcomes were not being achieved. GCIS has indicated a willingness to create value that is beneficial to citizens as well as to ensure that public value is increased through its utilisation of Twitter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations that will assist GCIS increase the public value it creates through @GovernmentZA.

Facilitating the co-production of public value

GCIS should undertake efforts to ensure and facilitate the co-production of public value on @GovernmentZA. This would entail the provision of opportunities to citizens to participate in the creation of public value in collaboration with GCIS. Currently, co-production is very limited because GCIS determines what it believes citizens want to know through the Rapid Response meetings and EIR employees who monitor what is trending on Twitter at that particular time. The department should embark on initiatives, such as executing research or placing a poll on Twitter to determine what content citizens want GCIS to tweet. Once citizens' views have been surveyed, GCIS can utilise the gathered information to enhance the content plans it develops for @GovernmentZA. This co-production will ensure that the tweets are more relevant and add value to the public.

Increasing interaction with citizens with dissenting views

It is important that GCIS endeavours to create value for all citizens, even those who do not agree with government or are critical of it. Therefore, GCIS should interact with citizens who respond to the tweets posted on @GovernmentZA regardless of whether the comments are positive or negative. GCIS should develop a strategy that would provide direction of how to respond to the negative comments, instead of ignoring these, which is currently the practice. Part of the strategy should include identifying those tweets that are likely to prompt negative responses from citizens before they are posted and have pre-planned messages ready to counter the comments.

Strengthening trust and legitimacy on @GovernmentZA

To facilitate an increase in public value, GCIS should focus on efforts to ensure that the tweets posted on @GovernmentZA strengthen trust and legitimacy. GCIS

should give as much consideration to the messenger who is relaying the content of the tweet, as it does to the message itself. Regardless of the content of the tweets, citizens focus on the credibility of the messenger. Values related to the theme 'trust and legitimacy' include accountability, integrity and honesty. If the person quoted in the tweet is deemed by the public to lack these values, citizens will pay little attention to the content. GCIS should therefore, give careful consideration to who is being mentioned or quoted in a tweet, particularly if the message it wants to convey is an important one. In such instances, GCIS should consider quoting a more credible messenger in the content of the tweet or remove all mention of the controversial principal from the content and instead underscore the message itself.

GCIS can further bolster trust and legitimacy by increasing its responsiveness to followers. To ensure that @GovernmentZA is more responsive to citizens, GCIS should develop a strategy to ensure that all queries raised are responded to, even if they do not relate to the work of the department. Currently, no such strategy exists. Therefore, GCIS is restricted in the queries from the public which it can respond to. The strategy would have to be an integrated one because GCIS would require the cooperation of other government departments. This integrated approach would allow GCIS to refer citizens with enquiries which fall outside its scope to a specific person at the department best placed to deal with the enquiry. This increased responsiveness on the part of GCIS will ensure that citizens' needs are addressed.

Addressing service delivery quality concerns

In a bid to further increase public value, GCIS should address concerns about the quality of the services delivered that citizens raise on @GovernmentZA. One of the themes that is linked to an increase in public value is the quality of the service delivered. One of the findings was that citizens constantly lamented the lack of quality service delivery on @GovernmentZA. This issue should be addressed by the strategy described above and further augmented by social media campaigns that should be run in conjunction with other government departments. @GovernmentZA should be monitored to identify the most pressing issues related to the quality of services delivered and social media campaigns developed to address these issues. The campaigns should highlight the progress being made in delivering services to the public and programmes that have been implemented or are being developed to improve service delivery. To ensure positive participation from citizens on these issues, the social media campaigns should also encourage them to share their suggestions of how they would go about ensuring service delivery. These campaigns should be rolled out on both @GovernmentZA and the Twitter account of the government department responsible for the particular service delivery mentioned.

Working towards efficiency

GCIS should increase the frequency of tweets related to the theme 'efficiency'. An increase in public value is linked to an increase in efficiency and one of the values related thereto is innovation. While GCIS tweets about innovations in government, these are restricted to those in the news environment at that particular time. This theme was not tweeted about as often as the other themes but when tweets about innovation were posted, they were well received by followers. The EIR unit should approach other departments regularly at both the national and provincial spheres to source content on any new innovations the departments have launched. Tweets based on the content gathered from the departments should be developed to ensure that GCIS has a steady stream of tweets related to innovations to post on @GovernmentZA, even when no new innovations are rolled out.

Focus on social outcomes

To further enhance public value, GCIS should increase the frequency of tweets related to the theme 'outcome achievement'. In particular, GCIS should post more tweets linked to the values of social outcomes such as social cohesion. Content plans for @GovernmentZA should include at least one tweet linked to social outcomes per day. Tweets that acknowledge the achievements of South Africans or milestones should become a daily occurrence whether these are related to government or not. Citizens interacted with these tweets the most and responded to them most favourably. This is an indication that citizens consider these tweets to be of value to them. Therefore, GCIS should increase the frequency of such tweets.

NOTE

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