

# SOUTH AFRICAN UNION OF STUDENTS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIC DOCUMENT

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## **Background**

The South African Union of Students (SAUS) acknowledges the media as a site of struggle. The media itself is regarded as robust platform and pillar of democracy and may at times even be hostile and reactionary to the Union.

Media however also represents opportunities for SAUS to deepen popular democracy and social cohesion as well improve coordination amongst various stakeholders and constituencies. Given the rapid growth of social media worldwide in recent years, especially among young people, SAUS should increasingly use social media as an important communications tool.

SAUS thus must use social media to communicate with its constituencies, stakeholders and society at large. The media platforms will enables SAUS to address social media audiences directly on its policies, programmes and activities. However, as the attention on social media grows, so too is the need for formal rules and guidelines on how the organisation employs social media to achieve its communication goals.

For a variety of reasons, and partly as a result of ill-discipline, it has not always been easy to project an image of an organisation that speaks with one voice. Conflicting and contradictory messages that play themselves out in the public domain give an impression of an organisation “at war with itself”. A disciplined membership and leadership remain critically important to sustain cohesion and purpose of any mass formation or organisation.

SAUS must acknowledge and recognises the right of all its members and structures to freedom of speech and expression, as guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Consistent with its culture of internal democracy and robust engagement, members must have the right and freedom to raise various issues within the internal structures of the Union while observing forms of discipline associated with that of the Union

### **Objectives of the SAUS communications protocol**

The objectives of the Communications Protocol are:

- To promote co-ordination, coherence and consistency in SAUS's approach to communications.
- To promote unity and discipline in messaging;
- To promote synergy between the work of SAUS and Student Representative Councils
- To clarify the roles and responsibilities of various structures with regard to their Communication responsibilities and obligations;
- To reposition SAUS for the digital future as a model user of communication technologies
- To empower members to engage in the battle of ideas.



### **Platforms of engagement:**

The union currently operates on three social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Notwithstanding, there is a need to expand on our methods of engagement and to improve on existing ones to be in touch with additional techno-generational means of engagement which will be listed below in order of priority:

#### **1. Organizational Website**

The Union needs to make a concerted effort to establish an official website to be listed as [www.saus.org.za](http://www.saus.org.za) which will bring a professional look to the organization as well as make the union more appealing and authentic to its constituency and broader society. Associated with the website should be formal email addresses with the suggested four emails below as priority.

[secretary@saus.org.za](mailto:secretary@saus.org.za)

[president@saus.org.za](mailto:president@saus.org.za)

[spokesperson@saus.org.za](mailto:spokesperson@saus.org.za)

[transformation@saus.org.za](mailto:transformation@saus.org.za)

[organizer@saus.org.za](mailto:organizer@saus.org.za)

A budget to maintain a domain must be set aside accordingly in order to meet the immediate imperatives stated above.

## 2. Facebook

The official Facebook page of the organization is “South African Union of Students” which currently has 2603 likes. The page is used to disseminate information, statements and programs of the Union. We need to improve on this by boosting both the page and its posts. A budget should be set aside to reach a maximum target of 5000 by the end of the academic year.

## 3. Twitter

Official twitter page of the organization is “saus\_2018” which has 193 followers. There exists other SAUS twitter pages which we cannot retrieve passwords from the previous leadership and so have chosen to create a new account to engage accordingly. All members of the organization must, upon written notification in the WhatsApp group, like and retweet in order to spread the organizations social media footprint.

## 4. Instagram

The official page of the organization is “@sa.union.students” which has 213 followers. The page is used to advertise programs of the organization and showcase the organizations activities. More content needs to be produced in order to boost the following and engagement with the platform.

## **Responding to new challenges posed by Social Media**

SAUS uses social media platforms for a number of purposes, including *inter alia*:

- Dissemination of official messaging;
- Updates on the Unions work, programmes and activities;
- Campaigning Membership outreach and audience growing;

- Seeding relevant and entertaining content on SAUS's work, programmes and activities
- Brand and Reputation Management;
- Crisis Communications.

All SAUS members are strongly encouraged to use social media and have social media account that are regularly managed and updated. This is to ensure a plurality of voices and an application of the Unions perspectives in public discourse. Notwithstanding, members have the right to a private life but must be circumspect in their personal communications and behaviour, so that they do not damage the brand of SAUS or bring the Union into disrepute by association.

SAUS members are expected to always be cautious, honest and respectful in their use of social media as they would be expected in any form of public interaction.

SAUS Members must also adhere to the overall code of conduct of SAUS. Whilst introspection and criticism of SAUS by its members and leaders is necessary and an integral part of internal democracy, a situation that becomes a "*free for all*" for SAUS members to attack their own organisation and comrades on social media platforms is untenable and must be discouraged.

Using social media as a platform for negative criticism and personal attacks harms SAUS when it comes from its own members. Moreover, it draws attention away from the key issues and messages the Union is trying to advance. Accordingly, engagement on social media should at all times seek advance the objectives of SAUS and desist from negative, harmful and malicious engagement. Social media should not be used to denigrate SAUS, its members and leaders or decisions.

### **Media Engagements**

The National Executive Committee (NEC) will appoint from within its ranks the National Spokesperson. The National Spokesperson is responsible for all official SAUS public communication through the mass media.

The National Spokesperson may designate any of the members of the NEC to speak on specific matters that relate to their area of responsibility. In this regard, the National Spokesperson, or appropriately delegated person, may make public statements on behalf of the organisation and respond to media queries about any matters concerning the organisation.

Any statements issued or made by the National Spokesperson are deemed to represent the official position of SAUS. The National Spokesperson therefore should, at all times, correctly articulate SAUS's attitude on any matter and/or adopted policies and policy positions and not their personal views.

Speeches, statements and comments made by the Officials, in particular the President or Secretary, represent the official positions of SAUS and therefore must be consistent with the policies, decisions and stated positions of the organisation and must be made known to the National Spokesperson.

No Official, leader or member may communicate the decisions or deliberations of any internal meeting without the express agreement of the structure through written consent by the Secretary General.

When commenting publicly on any matter that concern SAUS, Officials and any other leader delegated with the task, may not state their personal opinions. Personal opinions, suggestions and proposals may only be raised in relevant SAUS platforms of engagement.

SAUS must speak with one voice across all its platforms and with adherence to affiliate SRC positions. Once the Union has pronounced on an issue all members of SAUS are bound by such pronouncement and may not make statements that are contrary to such positions.

### **Participation on Social Media**

Use of social media by SAUS members should be in line with the Unions Constitution and Code of Conduct, as well as the responsibilities and obligations of a SAUS member.

SAUS will have official social media accounts of the organisation on all relevant social media platforms. All official accounts must follow similar naming convention and branding of the union

No member is allowed to set up and run an account which purports to be an official SAUS account, unless they are appropriately mandated persons with written and archived consent by the office of the Secretariat.

Officials of SAUS are also expected to have official social media accounts which must be clearly branded as a SAUS affiliated account.

Before engaging with a specific social media channel, members are expected to familiarise themselves with the relevant terms of reference, conventions and etiquette.

Postings on social media must be legal, ethical and respectful at all times.

The posting of sensitive or classified information, including but not limited to internal memos, internal documents and policies, sub-committee reports, conference reports, meeting minutes and such is strictly prohibited. Moreover, no social media user who manages a SAUS-affiliated account may repost/retweet/share such documents if they have been posted online by third parties including media leaks.

**SAUS Members are expected to:**

- (a) Refrain from inflammatory language and 'trolling'.
- (b) Avoid responding to personal insults no matter how offensive.
- (c) Avoid being drawn into matters of public controversy on social media platforms and resist temptation to respond to such by posting in personal capacity.
- (d) Be wary of 'endorsing' third party sites or pages through 'likes', 'retweets', shares, etc. which may be contrary to SAUS principles and values.

Official accounts of SAUS should refrain from promoting or endorsing any service, product or other form of advertising unless it is related to SAUS.

Official Accounts of SAUS may not be used to post content of a personal nature. This includes, but not limited to, family pictures, music sharing, etc. Misuse of Social Media brings SAUS into disrepute and should be avoided.

Members are cautioned that they may be held legally liable (in certain instances SAUS itself can be too) for all comments that they post on personal social media platforms.

### **Unauthorized disclosure of information, abuse and transgression of SAUS Communications Protocol**

Unauthorised disclosure of sensitive information causes harm to the union, undermines its effectiveness and erodes trust among members.

Experience in other contexts has demonstrated that those likely to leak confidential and sensitive information are, in the main, disgruntled insiders as well as those with a vested interest on the matter in question. ALL NEC members of the Union have a responsibility to be disciplined and to respect the confidentiality of organisational information.

In dealing with the challenge of leaks and unauthorised disclosure of information, SAUS must be proactive and prompt in communicating key decisions of the Union to avoid speculation or pre-emptive leaks.

Any conduct involving leaking of confidential information shall constitute a violation of this communications protocol and SAUS has a responsibility to deal with this act of misconduct in the same way as it would deal with any act that brings the organisation into disrepute as guided by the code of conduct and constitution of the organization.