MEET THE SOCIAL MEDIA REPORTERS

A Focus on Malawi

Patricia Nkhoma Ngwale: a media specialist at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), a seasoned journalist and a youth activist. Being a communications person at my University, the Social Media Training organized by RUFORUM has enhanced my skills in the dissemination of information using various platforms of social media. Both the University and my personal twitter accounts which were for some time docile are now active since I know how best I can run them. I now appreciate the benefits of live reporting using the social media platforms; we don’t have to wait for television and radio to publicize our events, we are able to tell our own story instantly. I believe that the skills gained from the training, will enable me to contribute towards the visibility of LUANAR and my approach to information dissemination will be more effective.

I am passionate about media and communication therefore I would like to go further with my career by pursuing a Master’s degree specializing in Media, Communications and Public Relations and later on attain a doctorate degree in the same area. I strongly believe that communication is a powerful tool to bring positive change in our institutions, communities and countries in general. Ten years from now I see myself being a lecturer in the field of communication and a media consultant.

As a young lady, I would also like to use my knowledge of media and communication to advocate for the girl child education. In my country there are more cases of girls’ school dropout and this pains me. I would like to see Malawi and Africa where more girls are educated and not forced into early marriages. I strongly believe that this is possible through communication which will initiate and influence a positive behavioral change among the girls, parents and the societies.

Furthermore I have plans of establishing an initiative where young girls especially from the rural areas will be motivated. This initiative will mainly focus on creating forums for girls to interact with professionals for mentorship. I will soon be blogging on the girl child education and my blog will be ‘Girl Child First’. You can follow me at @Nadirahnkhoma on twitter.
Christian Vathlu Matiti: an undergraduate student at Bunda College of Agriculture (LUANAR), Department of Agriculture Education & Development Communication. I am also Graphic Artist and Designer. The RUFORUM Social Media Training has boosted my confidence and improved my skills to actively participate in live reporting. It will also be a powerful tool for my networking, sharing of important information, self-marketing as a Graphic Designer and student. As of my future plans - I would like to pursue a PhD in Education so that I can contribute to capacity building initiatives in Africa. As part of my personal project, I intend to establish a multimedia consultancy film. You can follow me at @VathLuM on twitter.

Gracious Chimbalanga: an undergraduate student at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources: Bunda College, Faculty of Development studies. I joined twitter in 2012 and could only use it for personal chats with friends. Before the RUFORUM training, I did not know the low hanging fruits twitter has install. The Social media training was enlightening as such I realized that twitter is a powerful tool for social development. Currently I am an Agriculture development communication student, and I am confident that I will use twitter as one channel to communicate agriculture related issues. The training also revealed the value of Twitter for instant reporting while the event or a story is taking place. I found the training very hands-on. Immediately after the training, I was part of the team that covered an important meeting on STISA which was hosted by RUFORUM in Malawi. In the near future, I plan to own my own media house which will focus on agriculture for development. I will use social media because it has a greater outreach and portability. In additional to that, social media is also cheap at the same time affordable. You can follow me at @graxix on twitter.

Ecklina Makobidi: an undergraduate student at the Lilongwe university of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), faculty of Development Studies. The RUFORUM training workshop has taught me “a lot”. I have learnt some important aspects of communication, its mode of delivery (writing and speaking) and of course the channels used to deliver messages to various people which includes “social media”. I now know that media is an effective, essential and productive tool which can be used to improve the visibility of my country- Malawi, My University,
promote agriculture and also reaching out to various people and organizations globally. Despite hearing and knowing about twitter, I had no interest of using it, but after the training was conducted, I found it really interesting. I look at it as a platform where I can find opportunities, share my ideas, hear people’s views on different topics and stay connected to people. In addition to this, I am an agricultural development and communication student majoring in communication with people in agricultural based issues while enhancing and developing agriculture. Therefore social media is just the way to go for my career and field of study.

I have always wanted to market agriculture and prove to the world that it’s not meant for less privileged people or people in the village as people assume. Thanks to RUFORUM for the opportunity and what I would call a breakthrough, Social media is the opportunity that I am going to use. In 10 years’ time I would love to be a successful farmer, talking and practicing agriculture. You can follow me at @EcklinaM on twitter.

**Dennis Chinkhata:** an aluminums of the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural resources. The social media training was a wonderful opportunity and eye opener. I have realized that social media is more powerful outreach tool than I had previously thought. The skills I gained from a two days training - will enable me to harness this wild energy of the social media especially twitter and to effectively utilize it to promote not only my university but also the opportunities available in my beautiful Africa. The training helped me realise that it’s not just about making noise on social platforms but standing out in the crowd and provide exciting opinions and quality messages.

As for my Future endeavors - I see a well-connected Africa, where vast opportunities are just a click away, where the youth are properly incentivized and geared to become successful agri-entrepreneurs who assist their countries to attain sustainable development. I have a passion for integrated agriculture aquaculture and business and I intend to combine the two to create jobs opportunities in Africa while at the same time ensuring food security for the masses through climate smart initiatives. You can follow me at @goodson_dennis on twitter.

**Misheck Banda:** a coordinator of communication and marketing at Mzuzu University. I benefitted from attending the workshop on Social Media training, organized by RUFORUM, as a representative of Mzuzu University. The training has re-energized the efforts being made by the University in enhancing its visibility. Mzuzu University has a lot of academic and social activities taking place however several of these are
still not known to certain groups of audiences outside Mzuzu University simply because as a University we have not fully utilized the social media platform as a tool for increasing our visibility.

While the University already has a Website and a Tweeter handle, the workshop has enabled us to realize that these platforms, have not been utilized to the fullest extent possible. We had not been as vibrant as is required in updating our University website and tweeting about relevant events and activities as they happen instantly for the outside world to be aware. For instance, there are a lot of research projects currently running at the University that may well attract partnerships with other institutions elsewhere or indeed other interested organizations to support research findings and upscaling of innovations. However, because the University Website is not frequently updated as to reflect any such developments as they occur, the University ends up losing out on such opportunities.

Whereas Mzuzu University has a number of Facebook pages created by members of the Mzuzu University community, there was no official Facebook Page for solely for the University. Through this social media training, an official page has been created to increase our visibility using this popular platform and ease communication both within the University and with other stakeholders outside the University.

Lastly, and most importantly, the workshop identified the need for a Communication Strategy as a key requirement to guide all university communication or marketing campaigns. The group work during the training enabled the participants from Mzuzu University to prepare a draft Communication Strategy for presentation to our Vice Chancellor, before the next RUFORUM Vice Chancellors’ meeting.

The RUFORUM training that focused on increasing the visibility of Universities through social media use was a very important step towards achieving the goal of effectively and timely communicating to the world, the true picture of Mzuzu University as a premier provider of tertiary education, adaptive research and outreach activities in Malawi. You can follow me at @Kbmisheq and the university @mzuni1 on twitter.

ALFRED NJIKHO: an undergraduate student at Mzuzu University (MZUNI), Faculty of Education (Bachelor of Arts in Education). The website review and social training workshop held at Golden Peacock Hotel-Lilongwe, Malawi on Building Capacity for Increased Visibility and Communication for RUFORUM Member Universities in Malawi was an eye opener to discover the most effective and timely ways. Through these platforms, I can market myself, My tonga Culture, my university
(Mzuzu University-Mzuni), and also to make my country Malawi more visible by using social media as a communication channel.

From the training, I learnt of the need to improve my University’s website especially on information needs to the various target groups such as the students and the prospective employers. Together with my fellow training participants from Mzuzu University, we were able to create a communication strategy to enhance the visibility of Mzuzu University to various target groups. Additionally, I learnt that I can use the social media such as twitter to market myself and my University. I am a budding actor, for both stage and movies. What I have learnt through the training is that using my twitter account, I can network with people in my profession and get mentorship in my acting career based on the tweet feeds profiling my achievements. You can follow me at @Alfienyoli on twitter.

**Emmanuel E.A. Limbani:** an undergraduate student at Mzuzu University, Malawi, Faculty of Education (Bachelor of Arts in Education). The Website Review and Social Media Training Program that was organized by RUFORUM was so important to me in so many ways especially in my academic life. At this training through the presentation of Joan Apio, I was able to know the importance of social media and how I can use it to market myself, my University (Mzuzu University) as well as my country Malawi to the entire world. At first I took social media, for example Facebook and twitter as basic forums to chat and write funny things on, but now I have learnt that these are important platforms to brand and promote myself as a university student. At first I did not have any twitter account, but through this training I was able to create one which I am using to link up with my fellow students worldwide and learn more on what is happening in their universities. Through this training, I have also learnt how to market my school to the world and let others know the activities happening at my university through a Facebook page. Through this my university will be have more visibility globally through its courses and activities, hence giving information to the donors, prospective students, general public, employers and other stakeholders.

It was a great opportunity for me to meet my fellow students from other Universities in Malawi and link with each other to share some ideas taking place at our respective universities. I was also able to interact with Prof. Adipala Ekwamu from Uganda who explained to us the advantages of using social media as a place to let the world know about what we are doing. Prof. Ekwamu highlighted that through social media we can let the world know about us according to who we are, what we do and what we are interested to do. Through this training I can now be able to expose myself, my university as well as my country Malawi to the world.
I am currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Education majoring in English and minoring in Geography. After my undergraduate studies I want to do a Master’s degree in any of developmental studies to enhance my level of competence in the field which I am currently studying. You can follow me at @EmmanuellLimbani on twitter.

Leah G. Mhone: Undergraduate student at Mzuzu University, Faculty of Education. (Bachelor of Arts-Education, majoring in English and Geography Minor). The social media training came right in time for me as I have now learnt to use social media much more professionally other than just socializing. I will be able to make myself and my university visible to the rest of the world on issues and events that are worth sharing. I learnt of the great opportunities available through social media networking that would sell my University to the outside world, for instance; donors, prospective students and prospective employers. From the training, I also learnt the importance of giving out clear and efficient information through social media and as a language student, I hope to use the skills gained from my studies to be able to communicate effectively on social media in consideration to the type of audience and the key messages.

I wish to learn more languages so that I can easily communicate with people from other non-English speaking countries and that I can learn from them and maybe also be able to teach them something. I was inspired by what I learnt from other students from other universities at the training within a short period of time and so I believe there is power in networking. I would like to learn more from other people through social media and hopefully that other people also learn from me through social media especially on twitter which I have been made familiar with through the training. You can follow me at @Mhone_leah on twitter.

Constance Chongwe: Second year student at Mzuzu University (MZUNI). I am studying Bachelor of Science Education Information and Communication Technology (ICT). RUFORUM’s presence has taught me a lot. I have learnt a lot from the workshop that took place at the Golden Peacock Hotel in Lilongwe from the 13th to the 14th of September, 2015. It was an honour being in the presence of Prof. Adipala Ekwamu and the amazing Joan who that took us through the workshop.

I now know how much further I can go in making sure I put myself and my University on the map through the effective of such social media forums as Facebook and Twitter. I also have learnt a lot.
about RUFORUM as an organisation and how helpful it is to all the member universities in Africa. My colleague from Mzuzu did mention that “we came as individuals but will leave as a network” and I made a lot of friends from the other universities such as LUANAR and MUST. You can follow me at @connie95970203 on twitter.

Tadala Mtimuni: an undergraduate student at Malawi University of Science and Technology, Department of Biomedical Engineering. The social media training was indeed beneficial. I was exposed to many social networks. Previously, I could find twitter very boring and thought that it is for those people who are in business. But through the social media training, I learned how to tweet, use the hashtag and retweet a friend’s message. I really had wonderful moments with my other trainees from LUANAR and Mzuzu. This training also connected me with very important members of RUFORUM of the RUFORUM Network who can link me with great opportunities.

In the years to come I see myself as one of the few Biomedical engineers in Malawi. My interest is to work and promote the usage of machines to ease labour and productivity improvement. I would like to encourage more females to venture into this exciting field. Thanks to the social media training, my dream could become true since I will be able to make myself visible worldwide and connect with like-minded through the online platforms. You can follow me at @mtimuni_tadala on twitter.

Jack V Kanchiputu: An undergraduate Student from Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST), studying chemical engineering (Bachelor in engineering in Chemical Engineering). The Social Media Training was a great encounter for me. In the past, I had a very bad attitude towards Social Media but after this training I have realised that there is more to what meets the eye. I have learnt that social media is a powerful marketing tool both to myself, my country and my University. I have also understood the role that RUFORUM plays; I believe that through this organisation I can achieve a lot.

I am very interested in Chemical Engineering. My dream is to become a recognised chemical Engineer around the world and I want to contribute to the economic development of my country. Over the years I have seen that most well to do countries, have a lot of industries that boost their economy and it really motivates me and I have faith that we could achieve the same, both to my country and Africa as a whole. Taking advantage of the broadness of chemical engineering, I also
think of food processing factories that will make use of agricultural products and process them into other useful products since agriculture is what contributes a large percentage of the economy in most African countries and that its time to industrialise Africa. You can follow me at @JackVKk on twitter.

James Mphande: a communications Manager for the Malawi University of Science and Technology. I have been in the media and communications industry since 2000 with most of the time spent in newsrooms, initially as a reporter and later as Editor of Malawi’s oldest newspaper, the Daily Times. I also edited Malawi’s first Sunday paper, The Sunday Times for two years. In addition to this, I have been a consultant for marketing and corporate communications.

With this background, my experience in the use of social media as a platform for corporate communication was mostly recommending it to clients by incorporating it in their communications strategies. I personally never had the opportunity to extensively use them. Although I have had personal facebook and twitter accounts for some years, I never used them for professional purposes, so my understanding, skills and their usage was limited.

Prior to the social media training by RUFORUM, I had opened both facebook and twitter accounts for our university but were rarely up to date. The belief was that most of our stakeholders are on facebook hence our concentration on that platform. However, the training opened up my eyes, more especially on issues relating to twitter. I realised it is more professional and ideal for covering functions live as it is in real time. As a reporter, it also helps me develop listening and summary writing skills because twitter restricts you to just 140 characters per tweet. This means you need to listen to what is being said, get the gist of it and summarise it before tweeting. Another challenge is that once you tweet, there is no room for editing so it helps you to get things right, first time.

Now I can tweet, attach photos, create hashtags, retweet etc, all courtesy of the RUFORUM training. I am still learning through practice but I know I will soon perfect my act in the use of twitter as a communication platform for my university. In the next three years, the MUST will have one of the most reliable and well updated twitter accounts among universities in the region. I appeal to RUFORUM for exchange programme opportunities to allow me appreciate how other member universities are managing their communications function so that I advance my skills beyond social media. You can follow me at @mwaiwajames on twitter.
Jacqueline Dzidzi: an undergraduate student at the Malawi University of Science and Technology, Department of Biomedical Engineering.

The social media training was such a blessing for me, so fascinating and amazing in all ways. I have never been a big fan of social networks until I participated in the social media training by RUFORUM. I realize that I was missing a lot from social networks but thanks to RUFORUM team for the social media training. I have re-connect with family and friends all over the world, I am following important contacts who have great prospects through Twitter and Facebook. All in all, the social media training was a great opportunity for me as a student because I am now much exposed to the outside world than before. It was a great experience sharing experience with Prof. Adipala Ekwamu and the other members of RUFORUM at the training.

I am a Biomedical Engineering student who believes in her dreams. I have a passion for science and technology through which I see a better Africa tomorrow than is today. I will use social media to share my ideas about my field of study and more importantly, to learn about what others are doing in the same field across the continent.

Mavis Chigwede: a Chartered Marketer, MSc. Strategic Management (Derby) Business Officer – PR & Marketing at NRC, LUANAR. Social Media training organized by ‘RUFORUM’ gave me insights on how to disseminate relevant information about LUANAR-NRC Campus to its diverse stakeholders with the right channels of communication. The training provided an opportunity for me to actively cover and report live events through twitter. I have learnt that through twitter we will be able to connect with a lot of people with similar interests as those of LUANAR and the agricultural sector. Further, the Social Media training has helped me to personally interact and network with the right people and organizations with which I share common interest.

Through this training, a Communications Strategy for LUANAR-NRC Campus has been developed, thanks to Joan Apio at RUFORUM for the guidance. Come 2 to 3 years from now, I guarantee total transformation for LUANAR – NRC Campus in terms of visibility. You can follow me at @MavisChigwede on twitter.
Onani Shaba: a Diploma student at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, NRC Campus, Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The social media training was successful because I obtained knowledge on how social media can positively contribute to important aspects of life. The training gave clear insights on how required and relevant information can be provided to the general public through efficient and effective communication channels in relation to the targeted audience.

As a student, I feel that social media could be used in conducting researches in Agriculture. The media platforms can also be used to share ideas of new technologies in order to improve farming activities and increase the yields. I plan to pursue a Bachelor’s Degree in Climate Change as this is the common problem affecting all aspects of economy worldwide therefore I look forward to creating a sustainably managed environmental society. You can follow me at @OnzieJr on twitter.

Charles Gama A.K: an Undergraduate student at Malawi University of Science and Technology, Malawi Institute of Technology (BSc (Hon) in Metallurgy and Materials Engineering).

The RUFORUM training on the use of social media and website to improve the visibility of our universities was so wonderful and helpful that it gave me an insight on how I can use these social media platforms (Facebook and twitter) and website to publicize my university. It gave me that strong feeling that this achievable based on the experiences from other universities. Since my university is a new in Malawi, the training will help my university improve its visibility globally. This will help attract scholarships, partnerships for collaboration and donors that can support my university to develop.

My academic interest is in engineering specifically in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering. I will pursue a masters in either Metallurgy or Materials Engineering. When I complete my studies, I hope be beneficial to my country and globally through contributions in the engineering and mathematical sector.