

# Ethics Monitoring Guidelines for Sustainable Use of Social Media by Thai Organizations

Pimyada Chatsathienpong

*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand*

*Email: pimiyadapim.c@gmail.com*

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## Abstract

This article aimed to develop guidelines for applying ethics to the sustainable monitoring of the use of social media in Thai organizations. The study focused on the main problems and effects of the use of social media in relation to organizational development in Thailand, selecting outstanding samples that represented policies for using social media in organizational development. The research tools were the following: 1) a questionnaire collecting data from personnel who worked with social media, and 2) in-depth interview questions collecting data from 30 organizational administrators and those who understood organizational policies on the use of social media. The data were analyzed by statistical and content analysis. The findings were twofold. First, there were problems with the lack of knowledge and understanding of usage, the dissemination of inappropriate and unethical information, and inappropriate social media systems. Second, guidelines were identified for applying ethics to the use of social media. They were the following: 1) to set social media goals and objectives by target assessment, main goal of the organization setting, organizational level specification, team level setting, and personal level setting; 2) to initiate the social media strategy decision-making process by external environment evaluation, internal organizational factor evaluation, social media strategy evaluation and strategy selection; and 3) to implement and monitor social media operations with ethics, management, control, development, and updating.

**Keywords:** ethics, ethical monitoring guidelines, use of social media, organizational social media, social media at work

## Introduction

The use of social media in Thailand has seen significant growth, with Thai internet users spending an average of nine hours online daily, three of which are on social media (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2022). Popular platforms like Facebook (93.3 percent), LINE (92.8 percent), and TikTok (79.6 percent) dominate usage. Social media serve diverse purposes, allowing users to express their identity, interact, and share information (Page et al., 2022). For organizations, it has become a vital tool for marketing, public relations, and operational efficiency. It connects businesses with stakeholders and facilitates faster decision making (Mintz, 2019). However, social media poses challenges due to ethical issues, misuse, and potential conflicts of interest. Organizations must actively manage these risks to prevent damage.

While non-work-related social media activities can enhance employee commitment (Luo et al., 2018), misuse may lead to conflicts of interest or harm the organization. Past incidents, such as the dissemination of false information during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate the potential for reputational damage and public confusion (Venegas-Vera et al., 2020). Rapid information sharing can

amplify issues, including the spread of rumors, defamatory content, and unauthorized disclosure of confidential data. Such unethical behavior can harm individuals and compromise organizational trust, with broader implications for social and national security.

Thailand has introduced legislation to regulate social media use, such as the Cyber Security Act, enacted in 2019. Its purpose is to ensure cybersecurity and mitigate risks from cyber threats, as outlined in Article 26 of the 2017 Constitution (Suwanprateep and Paiboon, 2019). While the Act aims to maintain national security and public order, it has been criticized for infringing on individual rights. Moreover, it is ineffective in fully governing organizational social media strategies or addressing ethical concerns, which are often nuanced and situation-specific.

Ethical issues arise when employees use social media in ways misaligned with organizational goals. Policies may be unclear or ineffective, leading to conflicts between personal and professional use. For example, some employees may prioritize personal engagement over organizational objectives, causing friction or inefficiencies. Additionally, inappropriate use of social media, such as sharing unverified or offensive content, can damage an organization's reputation and trustworthiness (O'Connor et al., 2016; Vaast and Kaganer, 2013). Given these challenges, organizations must implement robust social media governance strategies emphasizing ethical use. Ethical frameworks can address gaps in laws and policies, guiding individual behavior and fostering alignment with organizational objectives (DeCamp, 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This is crucial for both public and private sectors, as ethical lapses can hinder development and harm stakeholders. Applying ethics in social media usage is crucial for ensuring that organizations harness digital communication's benefits while mitigating its risks. Social media ethics—the proper perspective and right thinking about optimizing its use—can significantly contribute to sustainable organizational development by promoting responsible behavior, aligning practices with organizational goals, and safeguarding stakeholders' rights (Bennett, 2020). Ethical guidelines help bridge the gap between the organization's goals and employees' personal use of social media. Conflicts often arise when employees deviate from organizational objectives, whether through personal posts that conflict with company values or through inappropriate use of organizational platforms. Applying ethical principles ensures that employees understand their responsibilities when representing the organization online; that organizational policies clearly outline acceptable use, reducing ambiguity and potential misuse; and that the organization fosters a culture where employees can balance personal expression with professional accountability (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Next, ethics-based policies emphasize the importance of internal and external responsible communication. This includes ensuring accuracy in disseminating information, avoiding harmful content, and respecting privacy and confidentiality. Organizations can build and maintain trust with stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the public; misinformation or inappropriate content that could harm the organization's reputation is minimized, and employees are encouraged to act as ethical ambassadors of the organization, further enhancing its image (Bussie et al., 2020). Moreover, an ethical framework safeguards the rights of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the organization itself, respecting employees' freedom of expression while setting boundaries to prevent harmful behavior, ensuring customer data is protected and used ethically in social media interactions, and promoting fairness and transparency in social media campaigns and communications. Finally, ethical practices help organizations proactively address risks such as legal violations, reputational damage, and internal conflicts. By embedding ethics into social media policies and training, organizations can reduce the likelihood of

incidents that lead to public backlash or legal consequences, build resilience by preparing employees to navigate complex ethical dilemmas in a digital environment, and develop trust and loyalty among customers and partners, which is essential for long-term sustainability (Kapoor et al., 2018). Ethics in social media use directly supports the principles of sustainable development by ensuring that organizational practices are socially responsible, economically viable, and environmentally conscious.

Given the rapid rise of social media usage and its growing importance for organizational development in Thailand, addressing the ethical challenges surrounding its use becomes critical. Unethical behaviors, if left unchecked, can undermine an organization's trust, reputation, and long-term sustainability. Although current legislation such as the Cyber Security Act offer some regulation, it falls short in addressing the nuanced ethical concerns that arise within organizations. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the specific problems and effects of social media on organizational development while providing practical, ethics-based guidelines to ensure its sustainable use in Thailand.

### **Objectives of the Research**

The study has the following research objectives: 1) to examine the problems and effects of using social media for organizational development, and 2) to formulate guidelines for applying ethics to the use of social media for organizational development in Thailand in a sustainable manner.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology consisted of three parts: 1) Documentary research was conducted to study problems and impacts of using social media for organizational development in Thailand; various problems were analyzed and grouped to discover ways to reduce the problems and risks that arise from the use of such social media; 2) Qualitative research was conducted to analyze the best governance practices of the use of social media in Thai organizations and learn about the perspectives of the social media users of the organization; 3) Data obtained from the analyses of problems and impacts of using social media for organizational development in Thailand were used to develop guidelines and recommendations for supervising the use of social media by organizations in Thailand.

### **Documentary Research**

The first part of the research involved conducting comprehensive documentary research to explore the problems and impacts associated with the use of social media in organizational development in Thailand. This stage entailed the systematic review and analysis of relevant literature, reports, policies, and case studies in order to understand organizations' challenges when integrating social media into their operations. Key activities are listed below. 1) Identifying common problems: Various issues were identified, such as the need for more understanding among employees about ethical social media usage, the spread of inappropriate or unverified information, and insufficient organizational structures to support effective social media governance. 2) Analyzing impacts: The research examined the potential risks and consequences of these problems, including reputational damage, decreased employee productivity, legal and ethical violations, and a misalignment between social media use and organizational objectives. 3) Grouping

problems: To provide a more straightforward framework for addressing the identified issues, they were categorized into specific areas, such as technological limitations, policy shortcomings, and behavioral challenges. 4) Proposing initial solutions: Based on the analysis, preliminary solutions were explored to minimize risks, mitigate adverse effects, and enhance the alignment of social media practices with ethical and organizational goals.

### **Qualitative Research**

For this study, the key informants were divided into three distinct groups, executives, practitioners, and experts, each selected on the basis of specific inclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of qualitative data. The inclusion criteria for each group are described below.

1) The executives group: individuals in management positions responsible for overseeing social media-related strategies and operations within their organizations. They must hold a management-level position related to the organization's social media operations or be a higher-level executive. They must work in organizations that actively use social media to enhance performance and organizational development and know and understand the organization's social media policies. Moreover, the organization must meet these conditions: they must be a well-known public or private organization in Thailand, use social media to improve organizational performance, and have a dedicated workgroup for social media-related tasks, with a minimum of five team members. Selected informants in this case were executives of the following organizations: the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, a social media-related group at the Government House, the social media team at the Advanced Info Service Public Company Limited; and the social media group at the Bank of Ayudhya Public Company Limited.

2) The practitioners group: social media practitioners working directly in organizations to manage, operate, or contribute to social media activities. The inclusion criteria are that they must have at least one year of experience in social media operations, and must work in either public or private organizations in Thailand. The organization must be large and well-known, with significant traction and engagement on its social media platforms, have a structured team specifically tasked with social media operations, comprising at least five members. Moreover, practitioners should be actively involved in using social media to achieve organizational goals and improve performance. Practitioners were selected through snowball sampling, a purposive sampling method where initial participants identified others who met the criteria. This approach ensured access to experienced and knowledgeable practitioners from relevant organizations.

3) Experts group: individuals with academic, research, or professional expertise in ethics and their application to social media usage. Inclusion criteria are that they must be recognized as independent scholars, instructors, researchers, or professionals at an executive level; have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of ethics, organizational development, or related fields; and have significant experience in providing ethical guidance or policies for social media usage. Selected informants in the study were three experts selected purposively based on their qualifications and professional recognition.

### **Development of Guidelines and Recommendations**

The third part of the research methodology focused on utilizing the insights obtained from the earlier analyses to develop practical guidelines and recommendations for governing social media usage in Thai

organizations. This phase synthesized findings from both documentary and qualitative research to create a comprehensive framework for addressing the identified challenges and promoting sustainable and ethical use of social media. Key activities are described below.

1) Integration of findings: Data from the analysis of social media problems and impacts (Part 1) and insights into best governance practices and user perspectives (Part 2) were combined to identify patterns, recurring issues, and gaps in current practices. This integration ensured that the guidelines were rooted in real-world challenges, while being informed by successful practices from leading organizations.

2) Framework development: A structured framework was developed, focusing on three core components: a) Goal setting: Emphasizing the importance of defining clear objectives for social media use at organizational, team, and individual levels; b) Strategic decision-making: Proposing a process for evaluating internal and external factors, selecting appropriate strategies, and ensuring alignment with organizational goals; and c) Ethical implementation and monitoring: Outlining practices for ongoing management, ethical oversight, and adaptation to emerging challenges and technologies.

3) Guideline formulation: Practical recommendations were created to address specific issues, such as improving employees' knowledge and awareness of ethical social media use, implementing policies to prevent the spread of inappropriate content, and developing robust organizational social media systems. Guidelines were tailored to suit diverse organizational contexts, ensuring applicability across various industries and scales of operation.

4) Final recommendations: A set of actionable steps was presented to help organizations establish sustainable governance mechanisms. These included policies for ethical use, employee training programs, and monitoring systems to track compliance and promptly address potential issues.

The instruments used in the research consisted of the following: open-ended semi-structured questions to collect qualitative data from online interviews with social media practitioners of the key organizations; and in-depth interviews to collect data from social media executives of key organizations using good practice guidelines.

This research was qualitative in nature. Data analysis can be divided into two parts. 1) Content analysis using an analytic induction method in which the data were compiled and classified systematically. The relationship was then interpreted, and a summary of various data was prepared to analyze the guidelines and recommendations for the supervision of the use of social media by the organization of Thailand. 2) Analysis of the guidelines to discover problems and impacts of using social media for organization development and from the analysis of guidelines and recommendations for governing the use of social media by organizations by both executive and operator levels in Thailand. It can be synthesized with the strategic management process according to the Jarrod Grainger-Brown and Shirin Malekpour model to get guidelines for applying ethics in governing the use of social media.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Problems from Lack of Knowledge and Understanding of Usage**

The in-depth interviews with key informants revealed significant challenges stemming from a lack of knowledge and understanding of social media usage in organizations. The following observations and direct quotations from participants support the findings.

1. Ignorance of applicable laws and regulations. Many users were unaware of social media usage laws and regulations, leading to violations that could result in social turmoil. For example, one executive noted,

There were cases where employees shared sensitive information without realizing it was restricted by law, which led to public backlash and scrutiny of our organization (Interviewee 1 [Pseudonym], 2024).

2. Threats to national security due to lack of knowledge about information security. A lack of awareness regarding information security was identified as a critical issue. An informant emphasized the following,

Some employees were unaware of the potential risks of sharing confidential information on public platforms, which could lead to cyberattacks or breaches compromising national security (Interviewee 2 [Pseudonym], 2024).

3. There must be clear objectives and strategies for social media usage. Without clear goals, users often fail to contribute effectively to organizational development. One practitioner explained,

Most of my colleagues use social media without understanding how it aligns with the organization's objectives. They just follow trends without any strategic purpose, which diminishes the value of our efforts (Interviewee 3 [Pseudonym], 2024).

4. Mistakes in content selection and dissemination. Key informants reported that mismatched content and platform usage often led to ineffective communication, and errors such as spelling mistakes or incomplete information damaged the organization's reputation. A participant noted,

One post had a spelling error that changed the entire meaning of the message. It became a point of ridicule online, and we had to issue a formal apology to mitigate the backlash (Interviewee 4 [Pseudonym], 2024).

5. Inability to handle crises effectively. The lack of training on how to respond during crises exacerbated challenges. As an executive described recounted,

During a public relations crisis, many team members were unsure of how to manage the situation on social media, which escalated the issue further before we could intervene (Interviewee 5 [Pseudonym], 2024).

6. Wide dissemination of false information. Informants noted that false information spreads rapidly on social media, and corrective actions often failed to reach the same audience. For instance:

A minor error in a shared post went viral, and despite issuing corrections, the false information had already been shared thousands of times (Interviewee 8 [Pseudonym], 2024).

### **Problems with the Dissemination of Inappropriate and Unethical Information**

The in-depth interviews revealed multiple challenges stemming from the dissemination of inappropriate and unethical information on social media.

1. Inappropriate personal posts affecting the organization. Employees' personal use of social media sometimes conflicts with the organization's reputation, especially when they express controversial opinions or post inappropriate content. One informant noted,

We had an incident where an employee posted a personal opinion about a sensitive political issue, and the public associated it with the organization, causing us significant reputational damage (Interviewee 7 [Pseudonym], 2024).

2. Use of copyrighted materials without attribution. Posting copyrighted information or images without permission was highlighted as a frequent issue, potentially exposing organizations to legal risks. An executive emphasized,

In a case, our team unknowingly used an image from the internet in a promotional post, and we received a copyright violation notice. It was an honest mistake, but it could have been avoided with better awareness (Interviewee 6 [Pseudonym], 2024).

3. Violation of privacy and personal rights. Disclosure of customer information, such as using their details without consent in social media content, was identified as a critical ethical problem. For example,

An employee shared a screenshot of a chat with a customer to highlight a positive review, but the customer's name and details were visible. It led to a complaint, and we had to apologize publicly (Interviewee 10 [Pseudonym], 2024).

4. Dissemination of false or misleading information. Informants reported that sometimes content shared by social media teams was either inaccurate or intentionally exaggerated to attract attention. One participant noted,

In one campaign, the team used overly exaggerated claims to make the content more engaging, but it backfired when customers found out the claims weren't entirely true (Interviewee 8 [Pseudonym], 2024).

5. Attacks on competitors and negative interactions. Unethical practices, such as attacking competitors or posting disparaging comments about other organizations, were also mentioned. An executive remarked,

One employee posted a meme mocking a competitor, which they shared as a joke, but it created unnecessary hostility and impacted our brand image negatively (Interviewee 9 [Pseudonym], 2024).

### **The Organization's Social Media System is Inappropriate**

The in-depth interviews identified significant issues within the organization's social media system, including a lack of structure, poor monitoring, and unclear policies.

1. Lack of scrutiny before dissemination. Many organizations lack a proper system for reviewing social media content before publication, leading to the potential dissemination of inaccurate or inappropriate information. One participant recalled,

We once posted an announcement that was later found to contain errors, and it caused confusion among employees and the public. If we had had a review system, this could have been avoided (Interviewee 3 [Pseudonym], 2024).

2. Stress caused by assigning social media tasks outside working hours. Assigning social media responsibilities to employees beyond regular hours without appropriate support was a common issue, leading to stress and burnout. One informant remarked,

I often get messages asking for urgent social media updates late at night, even during weekends. It's exhausting and creates a lot of pressure because it feels like there's no boundary between work and personal time (Interviewee 7 [Pseudonym], 2024).

3. Lack of clear policies for rights and duties. Many organizations fail to establish clear guidelines regarding employees' roles and responsibilities in managing social media. This creates confusion and inefficiencies. An executive explained:

We don't have a documented policy that defines who is responsible for what. Sometimes employees hesitate to take ownership of tasks because they fear making mistakes without clear instructions (Interviewee 2 [Pseudonym], 2024).

4. Absence of appropriate monitoring systems. Social media accounts often lack proper oversight, which can result in leaks of sensitive organizational information. A respondent noted,

There was an incident in which someone shared internal meeting notes on social media, thinking it was harmless, but it included confidential details. It was a serious breach of trust (Interviewee 5 [Pseudonym], 2024).

5. Prohibition of personal use without flexibility. Restricting employees from using social media for personal purposes without offering balanced alternatives can create dissatisfaction. As one participant explained,

Our organization doesn't allow personal social media use during work hours, and, there's no flexibility for legitimate personal tasks, which frustrates employees and impacts morale (Interviewee 1 [Pseudonym], 2024).

These insights highlight the urgent need for organizations to establish structured systems for social media management, including proper monitoring, defined responsibilities, and balanced policies that support employees while safeguarding organizational interests.

### **Guidelines or Policies Used to Supervise the Use of Social Media by Key Informant Organizations**

Through extensive interviews with the organizations' executives about the practices and recommendations for the governance of social media organizations, it was found that there were no specific policies or regulations for employees to follow using social media. However, there was a clear division of duties and parts in the operation, and there were clarifications and guidelines for practice from the operational meeting. Most organizations use social media, including Facebook, LINE Official, TikTok, and Twitter, as a strategy to publicize their presence.

The guidelines used to supervise the use of social media by key informant organizations are divided into two levels.

Level 1: Direct agencies that need to use the company's social media to communicate with the public and the official target group on behalf of the company or agencies, such as PR, Marketing Communication, Call Center, and sales department. These agencies must identify the team clearly as to who is in which organization. They should have clear guidelines for use in details such as keywords, timing, mood and tone, image layout, and security authentication. Some situations require additional communication or a communication channel suitable for the target in each situation.

Level 2: Most employees had broad a framework regarding ethics in the personal use of social media. Employees must use care and refrain from posting work-related images or company secrets, and should not post sensitive content about politics or conflicting ideas. Some official channels need to be verified by employees before they can share or reshare content. Employees need to remember that they are acting as the company's representatives.

In summary, guidelines for applying ethics to the use of social media for organizational development in Thailand in a sustainable manner were the following: 1) to set social media goals and objectives by target assessment, main goals of the organization setting, organizational level specification, team level setting, and personal level setting; 2) to initiate the social media strategy decision-making process by external environment evaluation, internal organizational factor evaluation, social media strategy evaluation, and strategy selection; and 3) to implement and monitor social media operations with ethics, management and control, development and updating.

### **Important Ethical Principles for Social Media Practitioners**

Of the 30 key informants interviewed online, all agreed that ethical principles should be applied in regulating the use of social media. The responses can be summarized as the following key aspects. 1) Users' internal ethical principles and attitudes; rationality, and non-emotional behavior that enables others and the organization to gain exposure. 2) Openness and impartiality in listening to the opinions of different audiences. 3) Respect for the rights of others or external ethical principles, expressed through behavior toward good deeds. 4) Communication that is beneficial to the audience and treats everyone with dignity and equality. 6) Use of polite words and refraining from slander. Taking care not to incite confusion or division; use of content for appropriate communication with the goals and roles of the organization. The organization should uphold the accuracy of the information with an emphasis on credible sources to build trust, giving credit to the owner of the information. This is a matter of honesty; thus, everyone in the organization should publish only truthful and transparent information and not copy other people's messages to present them as their own. Safe use of media should be reassured.

### **Ethical Issues Encountered or Possible Risks in an Organization's Social Media Operations**

To avoid the infringement of others' rights, organizations should emphasize respecting individual rights and correcting misunderstandings promptly. Fake news must be countered by verifying sources and referencing credible authorities. Privacy violations, such as posting others' photos, can be mitigated by blurring faces or using copyright-compliant images. Employees should be trained to handle social media responsibly, ensuring information accuracy before publishing. Misrepresentation and exaggerated advertising require careful review and supporting documentation. Accidental disclosure of internal information must be minimized through continuous training and awareness programs. Lessons from past mistakes should guide proactive measures to prevent future issues.

### **Additional Recommendations for Preparing Ethical Guidelines to Regulate the Use of Social Media**

Online interviews with 30 key informants yielded recommendations for creating guidelines on the governance of organizational social media use. The guidelines should emphasize appropriate use, suitable channels, and platform-specific practices. They must be practical, easy to understand, and awareness-driven rather than mandatory. Clear, actionable guidance is vital for employees to mitigate potential issues.

Importantly, real users should play a central role in developing these guidelines, as they understand actual challenges. Input from academics and professionals across various fields should be incorporated to address specific media characteristics. Guidelines should align with each organization's unique context and objectives. Different organizations may prioritize social media use differently; for example, one might use it for active engagement, while another may not find it necessary. Tailoring the guidelines to the organization's needs ensures relevance and effectiveness. Lessons from annual work experiences should inform updates, enhancing skills for online interaction and improving employees' social media competency. Ethical principles should govern the guidelines, addressing internal ethics, such as user attitudes, and external ethics like behavior and actions. These principles must align with legal requirements while promoting good principles and organizational benefits. Crisis communication preparedness should be included, alongside legal considerations to avoid unintentional violations. Transparency and creativity should be central, ensuring that social media fosters positive outcomes rather than amplifying negative content.

Social media's influence on mental health, especially among children and youth, highlights the need for responsible use. The guidelines should promote broader societal benefits, extending beyond organizational boundaries. Teaching safe and constructive online behavior should become part of the educational system, integrated from kindergarten to university. By addressing legal, ethical, and educational aspects, the guidelines can drive meaningful, sustainable use of social media across all sectors.

Next, guidelines should be evaluated to review and improve for a specified period of time. Because social media is constantly changing, there should be an online manual that can be kept up to date with new approaches. These changes include the tools used in social media and the frequent appearance of new online channels. There must be a section to clarify the guidelines in every process, such as training in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

An analysis of online interviews with social media practitioners showed that guidelines and recommendations were consistent with key informant groups at the executive level. This is useful information and is consistent with relevant literature reviews. The research findings will be synthesized for establishing a strategic management process in using social media for sustainable organizational development and summarizing recommendations that accompany the guidelines derived from the analysis.

## **Conclusion**

This study developed guidelines for applying ethics to the sustainable monitoring of social media use in Thai organizations. By examining the main problems and effects of social media on organizational development, the research highlighted critical challenges, such as the lack of knowledge and understanding of social media usage, dissemination of unethical or inappropriate content, and inadequacies in organizing social media systems. The findings provide actionable guidelines that include setting clear goals at various organizational levels, adopting a strategic decision-making process informed by internal and external evaluations, and implementing ethical monitoring and control mechanisms. These guidelines emphasize the importance of aligning social media policies with organizational goals while promoting ethical practices. They serve as a valuable tool for mitigating the adverse effects of social media misuse and fostering sustainable organizational development. By integrating ethical considerations into social media management, organizations can enhance their resilience, accountability, and capacity for long-term growth in the digital age.

Figure 1 presents the guidelines for applying ethics in regulating the use of social media for sustainable organizational development in Thailand. It is an inventory for the organization to consider in preparing its guidelines by adapting its context and answering the questions. The details should come from brainstorming the ideas of all parties involved, mainly social media users, for the organization to prepare its guidelines.



Figure 1 Ethical monitoring guidelines for supervising the use of social media (synthesized from research operations)

Key emphasis should be placed on compiling issues of social media use that lack ethical oversight in the organization. The study included some improvement issues in the organization's guidelines for using social media. There is a need to make organizations realize the importance of applying ethics thoroughly and earnestly in the use of social media in order to achieve sustainable goals, in both current and future situations. Since changes in information technology are rapidly advancing, ethical oversight will be the main factor in every organization's future performance.

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