

# When "tweets are my own" disclaimer becomes a company's affiliation

By Cecilia Mohlala

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## Happy New Commentary Year

A new year has started, and social media is abuzz with comment and views dealing with racism, as well as companies calling their employees to order.

First of all, Happy 2016, and seemingly, a not so happy first week of the year as we comment on personal expressions from Penny Sparrow, Justin van Vuuren and Chris Hart.

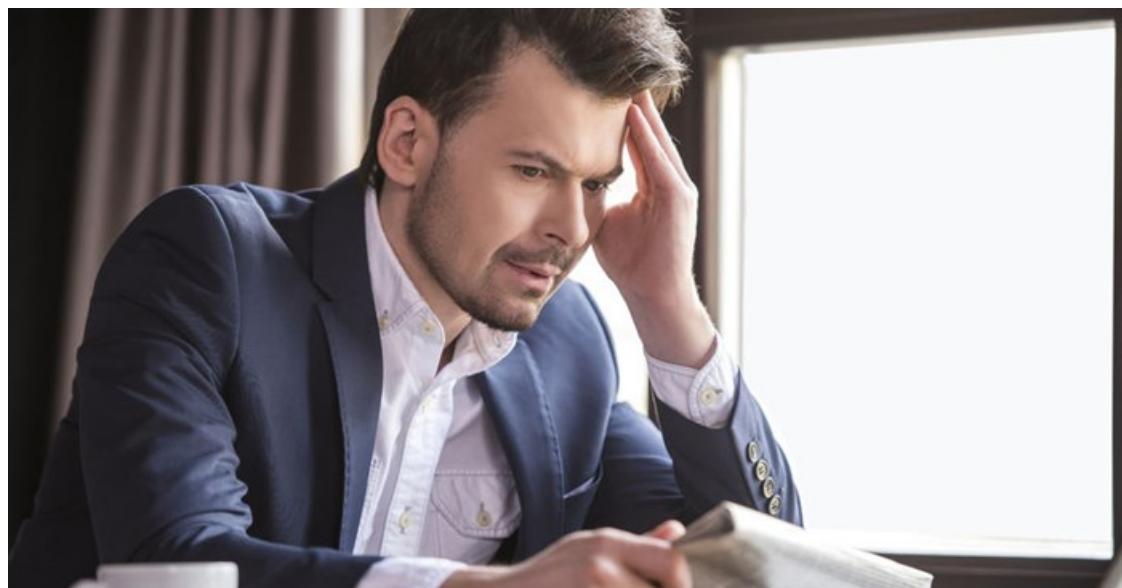


Image via [123RF](#)

Sparrow expressed herself on Facebook by calling black people 'monkeys' and saying the 'monkeys' on public beaches are "inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to others." She later wrote an apology stating her update should not be taken personally.

## Dismissal views on personal social media accounts

It seems having the "tweets expressed are my own" disclaimer can work against you, especially if you work in a reputable organisation. Social media has become more of a screening 'interview' prior to employment, and once affiliated with a company, it's clear to become the principal of your own posts, and ensure they do not get you in the senior principal's office, as the real investigators will find out more information about the one who made offensive remarks and ask what actions will be taken from the company one works for.

## Coming under fire for personal opinions

We have recently seen Standard Bank suspending its economist, Chris Hart, over racist tweet that was posted on 3 January. The tweet read, "More than 25 years after apartheid ended, the victims are increasing, along with a sense of entitlement and hatred towards minorities."

As well as seeing Jawitz Properties, from which Sparrow was affiliated, distancing themselves from the racial updates and saying she has not been with them for the past two months, however are willing to take action against her as she had damaged their reputation as a reputable institution.

Adding on, media law expert, Emma Sadleir, said Sparrow had destroyed her reputation and severely damaged that of her former employer, Jawitz Properties. "People have started to work out that there can be huge employment consequences for people who get it wrong on social media," Sadleir said.

## **Freedom of expression and companies**

Social media is a platform to express views and opinions, and engage with those who agree to disagree with the points made on an update on a social debate level. However, it becomes a challenge when there isn't a line drawn on what social media's freedom of expression is.

Perhaps that should be a strategy for companies to table out when and how they would distance themselves from an employee on media platforms, and when they would feel the need to terminate an employee from employment.

## **ABOUT CECILIA MOHLALA**

Cecilia Mohlala is a practicing Social Media Community Manager and writer who started out as a journalist and columnist for a community newspaper for two years. She studied Digital Marketing through DigifyZA from Livity Africa. I love writing, content, and thinking. Since giving birth to Digital, I have the curiosity to feed it!

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