# FOLLOW ME: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT A REGIONAL LAW SCHOOL

*Julia Day\* and Mary McMillan[†]*

ABSTRACT

Social media is increasingly becoming an integral part of people's lives. Traditionally, social media usage has been viewed as a form of entertainment. It is clear though that social media is being utilised in many divergent settings, including within universities. We know, anecdotally, that university students are using social media in an informal setting in parallel with their units of study. The question this paper explores is whether this usage could be successfully transferred to a more formal setting. To investigate the attitudes law students have towards using social media within their teaching setting, the authors distributed a survey to academic staff and students at the University of New England. This article provides a general overview of the student survey responses. For the purposes of this article, we isolate our analysis to the attitudes of law students towards using social media within their legal study units. The authors conclude that, given the current university environment, it is prudent to trial using social media platforms to incite student interest.

[*] Senior Lecturer, School of Law, University of New England.
[†] Senior Lecturer, School of Science and Technology, University of New England.

## I  INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic, higher education providers have rapidly moved to deliver education remotely, generally in an online format. This rapid online pivot has challenged academics to think about how to engage students outside of a traditional face-to-face setting.

Success in online education requires active engagement from both students and educators. In recent years social media has become an integral avenue for social interaction, peer-to-peer engagement and information sharing. Contemporary teaching methods are being adapted to include social media, with educators experimenting with incorporating social media into teaching and learning approaches. Introducing social media into legal courses may be a way to create interest and engagement, equip students with communication and collaborative skills, and build a sense of community.

This article reports preliminary findings on an investigation into the attitudes towards the use of social media as a teaching tool at the University of New England ('UNE'). Students and academic staff were surveyed about their social media habits and whether there was a perceived benefit or role for using social media in teaching. Although both staff and students expressed agreement that there is a role for the use of social media in teaching, the uptake of these tools to deliver legal education at UNE has been low. Because of this, the barriers and/or risks that might be preventing uptake, from both student and academic points of view, will be explored. It will be concluded that the survey results indicate there is interest in using social media as a teaching tool amongst law students at UNE.

The authors of this article have adopted the *Oxford Dictionary of English*'s definition of 'social media', which is 'websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking'.[1] In other words, social media encompasses a wide variety of platforms and websites with which participants can engage. Some examples of social media platforms that will be examined in this article include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn. Social media platforms and channels are ever-evolving, so the authors will focus on the platforms that are most popular with UNE Law students.

## II  SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN UNIVERSITIES

Education can't be separated from the social or technological contexts in which it exists. In this regard, it is no surprise that the higher education community is starting to discuss the use of social media, whilst adapting contemporary teaching methods to include social media. Commentators, however, have suggested higher education institutions have been slower at 'adopting or adapting to social media'.[2] Notwithstanding this, researchers have suggested that

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[1] Taken from Patrick George et al, *Social Media and the Law* (LexisNexis, 3rd ed, 2020).

[2] Azeem Amin and Jegatheesan Rajadurai, 'The Conflict between Social Media and Higher Education Institutions' (2018) 10(3) *Global Business and Management Research* 499, 502.

social media has significant pedagogical potential in the higher education context.[3] It has the capacity to widen learning settings and disrupt the traditional boundaries of teaching, making information and resources widely accessible. It may also help foster real-world communication skills, support the formation of learning networks, blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning, support social interaction, and provide peer support.

Many of our current university students are known as 'digital natives', that is, people who have never known a world without the internet.[4] Surveys indicate that people now spend more than 12 hours per day interacting digitally.[5] There is no doubt much of this interaction takes place on social media sites. As an example, Facebook now has 2.45 billion monthly active users around the world.[6] In addition, LinkedIn has 673 million registered users,[7] whilst YouTube has 2 billion visitors a month.[8] YouTube broadcasts over 1 billion hours of videos per day to its audiences.[9]

These statistics demonstrate how social media is becoming more popular as people of all ages increasingly become users. Tertiary providers have realised the potential of social media for some time. In this setting, it is well established that social media is useful in terms of marketing, brand awareness and building up communities of practice.[10] Notwithstanding this, the literature indicates that social media is being used in university settings as much more than a brand awareness and marketing tool. The literature suggests that social media is being increasingly accepted as an important conduit between an institution and its wide range of stakeholders.[11] For example, surveys have indicated academics are already using social media within their teaching activities.[12]

It is apparent though that using social media within a tertiary teaching setting has not gained the traction it has in other contexts.[13] It has been reported there is considerable tension between tertiary institutions and their students in how they expect to use social media as a teaching and learning device.[14] Arguably, there is a mismatch between the way higher education institutions

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[3] Michele Pistone, 'Law Schools and Technology: Where We Are and Where We Are Heading' (2015) 64(4) *Journal of Legal Education* 586, 594.

[4] For more information, see Murat Akçayır, Hakan Dündar and Gökçe Akçayır, 'What Makes You a Digital Native? Is It Enough to Be Born after 1980?' (2016) 60 *Computers in Human Behavior* 435.

[5] Raziye Nevzat, Yilmaz Amca, Cem Tanova and Hasan Amca, 'Role of Social Media Community in Strengthening Trust and Loyalty for a University' (2016) 65 *Computers in Human Behavior* 550, 550.

[6] George et al (n 1) 6.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid 7.

[9] 'YouTube for Press: YouTube by the Numbers', *YouTube Official Blog* (Web Page) <https://blog.youtube/press>, taken from George et al (n 1) 1.

[10] Jenna Marie Condie, Ivett Ayodele, Sabirah Chowdhury, Shelley Powe and Anna Mary Cooper, 'Personalising Twitter Communication: An Evaluation of "Rotation-Curation" for Enhancing Social Media Engagement within Higher Education' (2018) 28(2) *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 192, 193.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Min Liu, Emily McKelroy, Jina Kang, Jason Harron and Sa Liu, 'Examining the Use of Facebook and Twitter as an Additional Social Space in a MOOC' (2016) 30(1) *American Journal of Distance Education* 14, 14.

[13] Amin and Rajadurai (n 2).

[14] Ibid.

attempt to communicate with students and the ways that students want to communicate with their higher education providers. We will now explore why this may be the case by analysing the benefits and barriers of using social media in this setting.

## A  Introduction: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Social Media in a Tertiary Setting

As will become clear in the authors' survey results, the use of social media in a higher education setting creates polarising views and a wide range of perspectives. Generally, the key advantages of using these social platforms include improving student engagement and providing a substitute for the traditional 'coffee shop' interaction in the online setting.[15] The other advantages that will be considered in this article include democratising higher education and promoting the psychological needs of students. Creating a community of practice and helping students generate a positive digital footprint and ethical awareness are other advantages that have been previously explored in the literature.

In contrast, using social media within the tertiary teaching setting may cause concerns in terms of student and staff workload, as well as privacy and intellectual property issues. Mental health concerns of social media usage have also been explored in the literature, as have the adverse implications for academics, such as the loss of their intellectual property.

We will now explore these benefits and barriers in more detail, before discussing them in relation to our survey results.

## B  Advantages of Using Social Media in a Tertiary Setting

### 1  Promoting Student Engagement

The key themes surrounding the advantages of using social media in a tertiary setting generally relate to student engagement and interest. It is becoming increasingly clear, anecdotally and empirically, that student engagement is a concern in the tertiary environment.[16] One potential reason for this is the observation that traditional learning management systems largely fail to promote student engagement.[17] Social media integration may have a role to play in remedying this issue.

For example, Bhat and Gupta investigated how student engagement on social media affects the academic performance of medical students in India.[18] Their study ultimately finds that students' use of social media platforms within their medical studies promotes engagement and may

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[15] Anastasia Stathopoulou, Nikoletta-Theofania Siamagka and George Christodoulides, 'A Multi-Stakeholder View of Social Media as a Supporting Tool in Higher Education: An Educator-Student Perspective' (2019) 37(4) *European Management Journal* 421.

[16] Ibid 422.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ishfaq Hussain Bhat and Shilpi Gupta, 'Mediating Effect of Student Engagement on Social Network Sites and Academic Performance of Medical Students' (2019) 39(9/10) *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 899, 899.

positively impact their academic performance.[19] Similarly, Stathopoulou et al opine that students today 'require highly engaging experiential learning methods and respond poorly to didactic approaches'.[20] Their survey results indicate that both academics and students support using social media within their tertiary classes.[21] In particular, they conclude that the use of social media can have a 'positive impact on students' deep learning experiences and engagement, as well as their enhancement of collaborative and organisational skills'.[22] In the authors' opinion, this is one of the key reasons the integration of social media usage should be considered in the tertiary environment.

## 2    *Creating a Community of Practice*

Another compelling reason to use social media in a tertiary context relates to the ability to create a community of practice. A community of practice can have many forms, but as a general proposition it enables a community or tribe to be formed around a particular area of interest.[23] It is clear that communities of practice are increasingly becoming the cornerstone of professional endeavours.[24]

In terms of using social media to create a community of practice, one of the over-arching benefits is that a group will not falter once a unit has been completed, as happens when a traditional learning management system is used on its own. In the current disrupted environment, it has never been more important for tertiary students to feel a sense of community and belonging.[25] Recent research has shown this sense of community and belonging is crucial to both 'social structure' and 'academic output'.[26] The importance of this concept has only been heightened as many more universities are entering into the online teaching space in light of the pandemic. In parallel with the concept of creating a community of practice is the notion of democratising higher education.

## 3    *Democratising Higher Education*

Students frequently use social media, so this may be one of the best ways to reach them in an increasingly busy world outside allocated class time.[27] The use of social media within higher education teaching goes some way to democratising higher education and allowing students to

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Stathopoulou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (n 15) 423.
[21] Ibid 421.
[22] Ibid.
[23] See, eg, Tian Luo, Candice Freeman and Jill Stefaniak, '"Like, Comment, and Share": Professional Development through Social Media in Higher Education — A Systematic Review' (2020) 68(4) *Education Technology Research and Development* 1659, which discusses the evolution of a community of practice and the importance of relevance.
[24] Ward van Zoonen, Joost WM Verhoeven and Rens Vliegenthart, 'Understanding the Consequences of Public Social Media Use for Work' (2017) 35(5) *European Management Journal* 595, 596, 597.
[25] Brandon Brown and Joseph A Pederson, 'LinkedIn to Classroom Community: Assessing Classroom Community on the Basis of Social Media Usage' (2020) 44(3) *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 341, 342.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Pistone (n 3) 594.

have an equal role in their educational journey.[28] Traditionally, it has been accepted that the lecturer and the tertiary education provider are the sole sources of knowledge that needs to be imparted to students.[29] When utilising social media, student mentoring may be promoted as students can more directly help and interact with each other.[30] When social media is used, students and academics can both 'create, modif[y], transmit and share information'.[31] Autonomous learning is also promoted by utilising social media in tertiary courses.[32] Thus, social media usage in the tertiary environment helps aid the concept of education as not just a one-way interaction, and levels the playing field in terms of staff and student interaction.

In turn, 'social constructivist learning' may be promoted, where action and reaction can occur at the same time.[33] This allows lecturer and student interaction to take place consecutively and simultaneously.[34] If, for example, a university lecturer posts about a new case, current legislation, or legal concept, social media gives students the opportunity to directly interact with teaching staff in a more fun and informal way. This may help reinforce the principles and formal teaching that takes place within a tertiary unit.[35] In parallel with this concept is the possibility that social media usage within tertiary units may promote mental health benefits for students.

### 4  *Fulfilling the Psychological Needs of Students*

Interaction on social media has been reported as fulfilling the psychological needs of students.[36] In other words, social media usage within the higher education setting may promote 'relatedness and competence'.[37] This may help generate increased student enthusiasm, which provokes engagement[38] whilst building student self-confidence[39] in a less threatening environment.[40] The use of social media may also encourage independent learning, where 'learners becom[e] more autonomous and independent from their teachers by space and time'.[41] Independence is important in the modern world and may in turn help create a well-rounded professional.

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[28] Amin and Rajadurai (n 2) 506.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Abu Elnasr Sobaih et al, 'To Use or Not to Use?: Social Media in Higher Education in Developing Countries' (2016) 58 *Computers in Human Behavior* 296, 297.
[31] Amin and Rajadurai (n 2) 506.
[32] Stathopoulou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (n 15) 423.
[33] Amin and Rajadurai (n 2) 504.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Stefania Manca and Maria Ranieri, 'Facebook and the Others: Potential and Obstacles of Social Media for Teaching in Higher Education' (2016) 95 *Computers and Education* 216, 217.
[36] van Zoonen, Verhoeven and Vliegenthart (n 24) 596.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Sobaih et al (n 30) 297.
[40] Stathopoulou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (n 15) 423.
[41] Ibid.

## 5    *Creating a Digital Footprint/Ethical Practice*

In the authors' opinion, one of the most compelling reasons for integrating social media into tertiary teaching is the importance that is now attached to an individual's digital footprint.[42] This is particularly the case for students who will soon be entering professional spheres of employment. Incorporating social media platforms into teaching and learning activities may help increase 'correct etiquette and ethical behaviour for communicating on social media platforms'.[43] Furthermore, in relation to law students, the use of social media whilst at law school may help promote access to justice.[44] As Curro and Ainsworth have noted, this notion will be promoted by students' 'mastering twenty-first century/contemporary tools for enhancing communication and developing collaboration'.[45] Thus, in order to create graduates for contemporary times, legal educators need to ensure graduates are 'competent users of the technology'.[46]

A working knowledge of the ethical obligations that relate to social media usage when acting as a professional is imperative in the modern context. Curtis and Gillen discuss this issue in relation to medical students.[47] They find that there is a blurring of lines between 'the personal and professional lives of medical practitioners and students'.[48] One of the most interesting aspects of their article is the discussion relating to the ethical duties aspiring doctors need to uphold.[49] Clearly, social media use may prejudice some of these duties, such as confidentiality.[50] Similar issues arise in the legal context; thus, this is an important point to be analysed in light of social media usage in the tertiary legal education context.

In turn, it is becoming increasingly important for people to manage their own brand when acting within a professional environment. Forbes argues there is now a responsibility for educators to model 'transparency, network literacy, sharing and participation, underpinned by ethical and social responsibility'.[51] Promoting online etiquette using communications on social media within an academic setting will be advantageous to the overall development of students.[52] This discussion indicates there are many compelling reasons to use social media in the tertiary setting. However, there are also concerns and barriers to doing so, and these will be explored in the next section.

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[42] Dianne Forbes, 'Professional Online Presence and Learning Networks: Educating for Ethical Use of Social Media' (2017) 18(7) *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 175, 187.

[43] Gina Curro and Nussen Ainsworth, 'Social Media and Higher Education: Does Digitally Enabled Learning Have a Place in Law Schools?' (2018) 18(3) *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 72, 73.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid 80.

[47] Fiona Curtis and Julia Gillen, '"I Don't See Myself as a 40-Year-Old on Facebook": Medical Students' Dilemmas in Developing Professionalism with Social Media' (2019) 43(2) *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 251, 251.

[48] Ibid 252.

[49] Ibid 253.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Forbes (n 42) 178.

[52] Curro and Ainsworth (n 43) 78.

## C  *Disadvantages of Using Social Media in a Tertiary Setting*

Even though there are clear benefits of using social media within the university teaching environment, there are also clear concerns that need to be explored and understood by educators. The main themes relating to the disadvantages of social media use within universities relate to time management, privacy and increased connectivity.

### 1  *Increasing Workload*

One of the key concerns with using social media in a teaching setting relates to adding additional time pressures to student workloads that are already stretched.[53] Social media usage can be very time-consuming and cause significant interruptions through increased messages, posts and requests.[54] This is a significant concern and one that several law students posited in the survey conducted by the authors. This, in turn, may have impacts on the mental health of both tertiary students and staff.

### 2  *Negatively Impacting Mental Health*

Even though this article has previously explored some of the positive impacts of social media usage on mental health, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there may also be adverse mental health implications. For example, some of the negative impacts of social media use can include addictive behaviours, mental health issues and the fear of missing out.[55] Notwithstanding this, Alt concludes that social media use in the tertiary setting could help facilitate learning.[56] In addition, she recommends further analysis on this issue,[57] noting, for example, that 'future studies should explore how [a] technology-based constructivist learning environment can leverage the benefits of using technology to support student engagement in class and by doing so decrease destructive social media engagement during class'.[58] Essentially, however, Alt finds that the ill-effects of using social media in a tertiary setting are more likely to be found in students who already have pre-existing concerns.[59] We will now explore some of the concerns academics hold about integrating social media into their teaching practices.

### 3  *Concerns from Academics' Point of View*

From academics' point of view there are several concerns relating to incorporating social media into their teaching practices. For example, the literature documents trepidation relating to the loss of intellectual property on content,[60] and a lack of training and familiarisation with social

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[53] van Zoonen, Verhoeven and Vliegenthart (n 24) 596.
[54] Ibid 597.
[55] Dorit Alt, 'Students' Wellbeing, Fear of Missing Out, and Social Media Engagement for Leisure in Higher Education Learning Environments' (2018) 37 *Current Psychology* 128, 128.
[56] Ibid 137.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Forbes (n 42) 177.

media platforms.[61] Other commentators note the use of social media is yet another barrier to academic engagement and achievement.[62] In addition, it is argued using social media within university courses may promote a lack of credibility of the overall course.[63] Another concern that is relevant to both teaching staff and students in regard to using social media in teaching is privacy.

Privacy concerns are often noted as a rationale for why social media use should be jettisoned in the tertiary teaching environment.[64] Arguably, utilising social media in the tertiary education setting may increase the risk of exposing the private lives and information of staff and students.[65] In the authors' opinion, these are legitimate concerns that need to be addressed before there is any incorporation of social media usage into tertiary education units.

## 4 *Gaps in Literature*

After conducting a comprehensive literature review on this topic, it became clear to the authors that there is a dearth of literature on using social media in the tertiary teaching space. There is a particular lack of academic analysis of student opinions of using social media in their studies,[66] and a lack of discussion of the attitudes of tertiary educators towards using social media as an engagement tool.[67] In Stathopoulou et al, the authors also contend there is inadequate analysis — if any — of 'the benefits of using social media in both the delivery and assessment of courses in higher education'.[68] It is clear that, given the disrupted context we are living in, more research needs to be carried out in this regard.

As previously discussed, there are both benefits and barriers to incorporating social media into the tertiary teaching space. Notwithstanding this, there is little doubt the popularity of social media is rising exponentially. The dovetail to this is that student engagement in the tertiary setting appears to be decreasing. With the proliferation of online learning due to Covid 19 and student demand, it has arguably never been as important to promote student engagement. This, coupled with the increasing number of students who are first-in-family university attendees and are unfamiliar with higher education, are compelling reasons for utilising social media in the tertiary teaching setting. We will now move to the results of the survey instrument, which will build on the benefits and barriers that have been discussed in the relevant literature.

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[61] Manca and Ranieri (n 35) 217.
[62] Sobaih et al (n 30) 298.
[63] Forbes (n 42) 186.
[64] Sobaih et al (n 30) 298.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Stathopoulou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (n 15) 422.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

## III  SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

### A  *Methodology*

Between February and August 2020, the authors of this article ran an online survey for current academic staff and students at UNE.[69] It took approximately 15 minutes for participants to complete the survey. Participants were self-selecting, but needed to be either UNE staff or students aged over 18 years. They were contacted and recruited in several ways. An email from the central administrative team at UNE was sent to all current students and staff asking them to participate in the survey. The survey link was also posted on a selection of social media sites. Due to low survey participation rates and the large numbers of applicable UNE students, the researchers tried to recruit as many participants as possible.

The survey response was excellent: 106 UNE academic staff and 1,073 UNE students completed the survey. In this article, the researchers will focus on the 132 law student responses. Of the law student respondents, 37 were male, 94 female and 1 identified as non-binary. The authors acknowledge that there may be some bias with the final results as this was an online survey asking recipients about social media usage.

The survey instrument that was placed on Qualtrics comprised 17 questions. The first part consisted of six questions to collect participant demographics such as age, gender, general course of study and employment status. Academic staff were also asked the level at which they were employed. The second part of the survey asked students which social media platforms they use in their personal and professional lives. It then asked participants to document the types of social media with which they engage on a personal and professional level. Students and staff were asked for their attitudes towards the role of social media in a teaching and learning setting, and, in addition, academic staff were surveyed on how they use social media in their teaching, engagement and research activities. Academics were also asked about the main incentives and barriers in terms of using social media in their professional roles. Students were asked to document and reflect on the social media usage in their units and courses, and to make suggestions on how social media could be further utilised in their courses. Students were then asked if they would like to see social media utilised more extensively in their studies.

### 1  *Data Collection and Analysis*

Overall, the study employed a mixed-methods approach. The primary data source was survey responses to a mix of multiple-choice, yes/no, Likert-scale and open-ended questions. All responses to the survey were anonymous, with some background demographic information collected to provide a better understanding of the users of the platforms. The survey generated data for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Regression analysis was used to analyse quantitative survey data and thematic analysis used to analyse qualitative data.

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[69] Reference: HE20-011; approval date: 5 March 2020.

## B  *Survey Results*

This article will focus on the attitudes of UNE Law students towards the benefits and barriers of using social media within a teaching setting. We will now present the data and start some preliminary discussion based on the results. The percentages given reflect the responses from law students to the applicable question. When applicable, the results of the UNE student cohort as a whole will be presented in order to provide some context.

The first thing that was explored was how UNE Law students use social media in their personal lives, as shown in Table 1. Perhaps unsurprisingly all the survey participants used at least one form of social media on a regular basis. The results in terms of law students are predictable: 56% of participating law students noted they use Facebook often, whilst 26% use it sometimes. The next most popular social media platform for law students was YouTube: 39% of law students noted they use this platform often and 46% use it sometimes. Instagram and WhatsApp were the other popular social media platforms for law students: 37% of law students use Instagram often and 25% use it sometimes, whilst 25% use WhatsApp often and 26% use it sometimes. As you can see in the below dataset, the results between law students and other UNE students are fairly consistent.

Table 1: Students: What social media platforms do you use in your personal life?[70]

| Platform | Law student respondents: often | Law student respondents: sometimes | All UNE student respondents: often | All UNE student respondents: sometimes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 56% | 26% | 57% | 26% |
| YouTube | 39% | 46% | 51% | 44% |
| Instagram | 37% | 25% | 36% | 25% |
| WhatsApp | 25% | 26% | 25% | 28% |

In terms of the social media platforms UNE Law students use in their professional lives, the most popular platforms are LinkedIn and YouTube, as shown in Table 2. The results indicate 20% of UNE Law students use LinkedIn often and 36% use it sometimes. In relation to Facebook, 18% use it often and 25% use it sometimes. Aside from some anomalies with YouTube, the results are fairly consistent between UNE Law students and other UNE students.

Table 2: Students: What social media platforms do you use in your professional life?[71]

| Platform | Law student respondents: often | Law student respondents: sometimes | All UNE student respondents: often | All UNE student respondents: sometimes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 18% | 25% | 18% | 31% |
| YouTube | 8% | 23% | 15% | 33% |
| LinkedIn | 20% | 36% | 12% | 26% |

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[70] Percentages relate to all student responses. Note students could select multiply platforms they engage with.
[71] Percentages relate to all student responses. Note students could select multiply platforms they engage with.

As can be gleaned from the above data, UNE students are using social media in both their personal and professional lives. Students are familiar with the platforms and there appears to be consistency with which platforms they use. This preliminary data suggests the incorporation of social media into teaching platforms at UNE would not present barriers in terms of the ability of students to use the platforms.

The survey's next set of questions relate to whether students think social media usage could be translated into a teaching and learning context. Anecdotally, students utilise social media in an informal context outside the formal learning management systems — usually using Facebook or WhatsApp groups. Therefore, the researchers sought to ascertain two things: first, to what extent is social media already being formally incorporated into teaching and learning at UNE; and second, is there an appetite for utilising these platforms within this setting.

To get a more accurate summation of how social media is used at UNE Law we asked academic staff if they use social media platforms within their teaching. Concurrently, we asked students what they have observed being used.

Only a small majority of academics at UNE Law use any form of social media in their teaching, as shown in Table 3. According to the results of the survey, the most popular social media platform that UNE Law academics use within their teaching is YouTube: 10% of UNE Law academic respondents reported that they use YouTube often, whilst 43% use it sometimes. Furthermore, 10% of UNE Law academic respondents noted they use Facebook and Twitter sometimes. From the survey responses it appears that social media is being used in a teaching context by legal academics, albeit to a limited extent.

Table 3: Academic staff: Which social media platforms have you used as a teaching instrument/aid in your work at UNE?

| Platform | Law staff respondents: often | Law staff respondents: sometimes | All UNE staff respondents: often | All UNE staff respondents: sometimes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| YouTube | 10% | 43% | 23% | 29% |
| Facebook | 0% | 10% | 1% | 8% |
| LinkedIn | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Twitter | 0% | 10% | 0% | 18% |

The law student observations are slightly different, as shown in Table 4, but there is certainly some correlation. Law students noted that they see UNE Law academics using YouTube and Facebook within their classes: 11% observe YouTube being used often, with 36% reporting it being used sometimes. The same proportion of 11% of law student respondents observe Facebook being used often in teaching, with 23% observing occasional usage. Interestingly, from the data it appears that lecturers in other disciplines use social media more extensively than those at UNE Law.

Table 4: Students: What social media platforms have you observed being used in teaching?[72]

| Platform | Law student respondents: often | Law student respondents: sometimes | All UNE student respondents: often | All UNE student respondents: sometimes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| YouTube | 11% | 36% | 29% | 46% |
| Facebook | 11% | 23% | 7% | 26% |

The next question sought responses relating to the value perceived by UNE Law students in using social media within their classes. The responses from students, shown in Table 5, reflect that the majority think there is at least some value to using social media as a teaching tool.

Table 5: Students: Is there value for social media usage in teaching?

| Response | Law student respondents | All UNE student respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Lots | 31% | 29% |
| Some | 52% | 54% |
| None | 17% | 17% |

We next wanted to investigate why this was. In other words, what are the key benefits for using social media within a teaching and learning setting. There are four things that both law staff and students agree upon as being potential benefits, although they rank these differently. From the students' perspective, shown in Table 6, these four are: facilitating conversation between lecturers/students (48%); building a sense of community (47%); inspiring interest in subject matter (40%); and making information more accessible (42%). Interestingly only 14% of law students reported that using social media in a teaching setting has no benefits.

Comments from participants reflect the idea that using social media could help students, particularly those studying online, to feel like part of a community or cohort. One student respondent noted that 'social media replaces the physical student cafe and hangout environment'. Another student respondent noted:

> Social media has become the platform for sharing and learning in any other format. Students today are used to taking in information in these formats and skills in using social media for academic and professional reasons are becoming more necessary in the workforce. Social media also encourages creativity and individuality as you use platforms to present what you're working on. To further teach and encourage students to use these platforms for their professional development and to interact with them in the ways they most easily communicate would be a benefit.

Table 6: Students: What benefits do you think social media has in a teaching setting?[73]

| Benefit | Law student respondents | All UNE student respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Facilitate conversation between lecturers/students | 48% | 45% |

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[72] Percentages relate to all student responses. Note students could select multiply platforms they have observed being used.
[73] Note students could choose multiple responses.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Build a sense of community | 47% | 41% |
| Inspire interest in subject matter | 40% | 38% |
| Make information more accessible | 42% | 39% |
| No benefits | 14% | 12% |

One aspect of considerable importance is how both students and staff perceive the use of social media in their university courses. To some extent, our results affirm studies that have been previously undertaken. For example, in Al-Qaysi et al,[74] the authors' results show that 'information seeking, social presence, and academic and social activities are among the most positive effects of social media'. In contrast, they also show that 'negative feelings, reduction of cognitive development, social isolation, and security concerns are among the common negative effects'.[75] Of interest to the researchers of this project is the comment made by Al-Qaysi et al that there has been inadequate academic analysis of the student opinions of using social media in their studies.[76]

Alongside these benefits we also wanted to identify what barriers students could see in the use of social media in the tertiary education setting. As shown in Table 7, UNE Law students see the biggest barrier as being concerns about privacy in the online world. The other barriers identified as relevant by the UNE Law student respondents are productivity concerns (34%), interruption of work/life balance (26%) and lack of time (24%). Interestingly, lack of knowledge or lack of access are not seen as significant barriers to using social media in the teaching and learning setting.

Table 7: Students: What are the barriers to social media use in the teaching/professional setting[77]

| Barrier | Law student respondents | All UNE student respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Privacy concerns | 55% | 49% |
| Impediment to productivity | 34% | 33% |
| Interruption of work/life balance | 26% | 29% |
| Lack of time | 24% | 26% |

In relation to the possible barriers, there were several comments that reflect the privacy concerns held by individuals, and the idea that using social media just gives students one more thing that they have to check and keep up with. One student respondent noted: 'I can see how perhaps there might be benefits, but the overload would be too much. Is the info on Moodle, email, Facebook etc — what if I miss something on one platform because it's not on others. Too much.' Along the same lines, another student respondent noted that 'the increase of multiple streams of information can cause fractioning of core communication'. Missing

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[74] Noor Al-Qaysi, Norhisham Mohamad-Nordin and Mostafa Al-Emran, 'What Leads to Social Learning?: Students' Attitudes towards Using Social Media Applications in Omani Higher Education' (2020) 25(3) *Education and Information Technologies* 2157, 2159.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Note students could choose multiple responses.

essential information was a popular theme, with another respondent noting that they 'would be concerned about useless content burying essential information and becoming a long winded task to constantly monitor mostly useless chat for crumbs of crucial information'.

There are also concerns that information presented on social media is untrustworthy, and that it's difficult to verify information: 'I would never use social media for university and this is a privacy breach issue. Not interested and would not consider it.'

These are all valid points and provide guidance to how academics would need to structure any social media use within their teaching. In the authors' opinion, the use of social media within one's teaching would need to be supplementary and not central to teaching practices. Essential and core information should ideally be communicated clearly on the specific unit learning management system, and social media should not be relied upon.

To further gauge the attitudes of students, the survey asked if students would like to see teaching staff at UNE incorporate more social media into teaching practices, and how likely they were to engage with it. As shown in Table 8, law students are split on this issue, although most law students (57%) noted they would like to see social media used more at UNE.

Table 8: Students: Would you like to see social media used more at UNE?

| Response | Law student respondents | All UNE student respondents |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 57% | 51% |
| No | 43% | 49% |

Prima facie, these results indicate that the majority of students would like to see an increase in the use of social media in their teaching and learning at UNE Law.

## IV    DISCUSSION

Within this article we have provided some preliminary data and discussion about how law students from UNE perceive social media being used in a teaching and learning setting. Most law students at UNE use social media in their personal and/or professional lives. They know how to use it and they have access to the technology.

Overall, using social media in the teaching and learning setting appears to be a polarising issue. Responses were often divisive, with students falling into one of two opinions. One camp sees there could be many benefits and they are willing to embrace these technologies. The students on the other side think there is little benefit to using social media at all and are unwilling to engage. Academics need to be aware of these differing attitudes if choosing to incorporate these methods into teaching.

One thing that came through strongly in the survey was the perception of social media as a waste of time, not as an avenue to access information or learn. Perhaps this reflects broader attitudes around what education/learning is and where it takes place? Arguably, some students see learning as ticking off specific outcomes/knowledge, rather than involving broader

immersion/investigation into a topic outside of the materials specifically provided by academic staff. So, if academics want to start using social media as a part of teaching it needs to have value that is transparent to students. Students need to be able to clearly see the connection between the formal course content and 'other' content that might be provided.

While the authors are not suggesting that social media replaces the role of other online learning systems, perhaps it could be used as another teaching tool that academics can add to their toolset. This approach has several potential benefits and can be an effective way to connect with our increasingly digitally connected students.

## V  CONCLUSION

As the authors' survey results demonstrate, the use of social media in a tertiary setting incites polarising views from students. This is unsurprising given the concerns commonly cited relating to social media use, such as privacy and time management issues. Even considering these concerns, the authors still contend the use of social media platforms is a viable option in terms of increasing student engagement. This is especially the case given the current university environment. University teaching has largely gone online since the Covid 19 pandemic. This means students are not subject to the usual informal engagement opportunities with each other and their educators. Using social media as a supplementary teaching tool allows students and academics to interact in an informal setting where issues can be explored in a friendly and interactive way.

However, university educators need to manage the risks when it comes to social media usage. In the authors' opinion, it would be disastrous to run a unit purely on social media without effective safeguards and a firm understanding of the possible risks. There also needs to be awareness of the workload ramifications for students: implementation of a social media presence should not become just another thing a student has to do. Essential unit information should not be placed onto social media. Instead, the social media platforms could be used to replace the bonding activities and engagement between academics and students.