Australian employer perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviour and its impact on graduate employability

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Abstract

Social media has become a tool used for the process of employee recruitment in a range of industries. The technology is utilised by job candidates and by employers and job-recruiters to screen and source suitable staff for their organisations. Research has investigated issues relating to ethics, privacy and accuracy regarding employers' use of social media to screen prospective employees. Yet, limited research has been conducted to investigate employer perceptions of prospective/current employees' unprofessional social media behavior. Our study involved a survey of 396 Australian employers from a range of industries to explore the influence of job-candidates' social media presence on employer decision-making and the most unprofessional social media behaviors according to employers. Our investigation found 82% of employers are influenced by a job candidate's social media presence and using social media to intentionally cause harm to others was perceived by employers as the most unprofessional social media behavior. The findings from this study will assist educators in guiding university students and graduates to meet industry expectations as professionals and provide scholars with new knowledge as to what is deemed to be unacceptable behavior in a professional context at this point in the evolution of social media.

Keywords

social media, job-recruitment, employability, professional behaviour, employment, personal branding

Introduction

With social media user numbers predicted to reach 2.77 billion in 2019, the widespread use of social media has impacted some of the key business functions and processes within a range of industries (Statista 2019; Baptista et al., 2017). The employee recruitment process is a core business function that has been influenced by the pervasive use of social media (Aggerholm & Andersen, 2018; Koch, Gerber, & de Klerk, 2018; Offong & Costello, 2017). Job candidates have also embraced the use of social media as a tool to

find employment using social networking sites such as LinkedIn to network with prospective employers, host their Curriculum Vitae and to search and apply for the employment opportunities being advertised on the sites (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Sivertzen). Alternatively, social media has also been embraced by human resources professionals, job recruitment specialists and employers as a tool that not only facilitates the advertising of employment opportunities, but technology that also enables the screening of prospective employees and monitoring of current staff and their social media behaviour (Jeske & Shultz, 2016; Madera, 2012). As never before, social media has provided employers with a glimpse into the online personality of a prospective employee before an offer of employment is made (Slovensky & Ross, 2012). An employer can assess the digital footprint of a prospective employee to determine their suitability for a role and their organisation (also known as person–organisation fit, the extent to which an individual's values match those of the organisation) to decide if an offer of employment will be made (Baert, 2018; Kooij & Boon, 2018). Furthermore, social media technology can support employers in monitoring current staff and their online activities to ascertain whether an employee is behaving in a way that contradicts company values or jeopardizes organisational reputation (McDonald & Thompson, 2016; El Ouirdi, El Ouirdi, Segers, & Henderickx, 2015). Research to date has focused on issues relating to the ethics, law, privacy and accuracy of using social media to screen the suitability of job candidates (Slovensky & Ross, 2012; Sutherland, 2013; Van de Ven, Bogaert, Serlie, Brandt, & Denissen, 2017; Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2016). Other studies have explored employee use of social media in relation to the use of personal social media for work purposes, boundary-spanning and story-sharing (Van Zoonen & Rice, 2017; Archer-Brown, Marder, Calvard, & Kowalski, 2018; Sayers & Fachira, 2015). However, less focus has been placed on the exploration of employee unprofessional social media behaviours as perceived by employers, and the research conducted on this specific issue is predominantly centered on students and professionals from the health industry sector such as nursing and medical students with few studies conducted within an Australian context (De Gagne, Yamane, Conklin, Chang, & Kang, 2018; Pereira, Cunningham, Moreau, Sherbino, & Jalali, 2015; Langenfeld, Cook, Sudbeck, Luers, & Schenarts, 2014). Our study focuses specifically on employers within the Australian job market and provides current data on an issue that must be explored every few years to keep pace with the rapid evolution of social media technology.

Our study has two aims. The first is to better understand the influence that a job candidate's social media presence may have on employers of university graduates during the recruitment decision-making process to gauge its potential impact on graduate employability. Secondly, the purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes of employers of university graduates, from a wide range of industries, in relation to their perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviours by prospective and current employees. This knowledge will inform university graduates, job candidates and employees as to the types of social media conduct that is deemed to be inappropriate by prospective employers. The findings from this study will also assist university educators in guiding their students and graduates to increase their employability by meeting industry expectations as professionals and provide scholars with new knowledge as to what is deemed to be unacceptable behaviour in a professional context at this point in the evolution of social media.

Literature review

To date, the majority of literature exploring social media use by employers, employees and job seekers has fallen within two broad categories: social media's influence on employers' recruitment decisions and the professional social media behaviours of job seekers and employees (Melanthiou, Pavlou & Constantinou, 2015; Slovensky & Ross, 2012; Brouer, Stefanone, Badawy, & Egnoto, 2017; Baert, 2018; De Gagne et al., 2018; Pereira et al., 2015; Langenfeld, et al., 2014). The literature has explored how social media is being used by employers and recruiters as a tool to source suitable job candidates for specific

roles and to assess the suitability of candidates based on an audit of their digital footprints or social media profiles (Nikolaou, 2014; Aggerholm & Andersen, 2018; Saros-Rogobete & Sav, 2016). Alternatively, the literature has also focused on the social media activities of job candidates and existing employees through the lens of what may be deemed as professional or unprofessional social media behaviours (Davis et al., 2017; Ramsay, 2010; Valdez, Schaar, & Ziefle, 2015; Valdez et al., 2015; Kinsky, Freberg, Kim, Kushin, & Ward, 2016; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Both perspectives in the literature have raised issues surrounding ethics (non-harmful conduct), privacy and the accuracy of judgements made by employers based on their perceptions of prospective and current employer social media activity.

Social media's influence on employers' recruitment decisions

Results are mixed in the literature exploring social media's influence on employers' recruitment decisions. However, there has been consensus in the literature indicating that Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are the social media platforms most used by employers to source candidates (Koch, Gerber, & de Klerk, 2018; Caers & Castelyns, 2011; Doherty 2010; Dutta, 2014; Singh & Sharma, 2014). While employer use of social media to screen job candidates has been reported as being widespread (Nikolaou 2014; Aggerholm & Andersen, 2018; Saros-Rogobete & Sav, 2016) other studies have suggested that the practice is uncommon (Jindal & Shaikh, 2014). Findings in the literature are also contradictory in relation to how much social media screening influences hiring decisions and employer perceptions of the ethical (morally just) and legal issues surrounding the practice. For example, in a study by Melanthiou, Pavlou and Constantinou (2015), 94% of the sample answered that they did not let social media screening influence their hiring decisions and 86% considered the social media screening on applicants to be legal and ethical. However, a study by Slovensky and Ross (2012) found that 70% of hiring managers have rejected a job candidate based on the information that they had found about them on social media. The influence of a job candidate's social media presence on a prospective employer has also been confirmed in studies by Brouer et al. (2017) and Baert (2018). The Baert (2018) study found that a job candidate's Facebook profile photo can increase job interview invitations by 38% and can positively impact hiring chances when the candidate is highly educated, and the recruiters are female. Also, Brouer et al. (2017) found that the way that job candidates present themselves on social media in relation to their gender, can directly influence a hiring manager's decision to appoint them. Male candidates representing themselves with 'feminine' traits on social media by demonstrating communal, caring and empathetic behaviours received negative responses from hiring managers. The Brouer et al. (2017)study also found that hiring managers did not use social media to assess a candidate's professional competence, instead used the technology for...*making inferences about the candidates' personality*...(p.2229).

Using social media to make assumptions about a job candidate has led to the issues of privacy, ethics and the legalities surrounding the practice being prevalent in the literature. This is largely due to social media blurring the boundaries between public and private life (Melanthiou, Pavlou, & Constantinou, 2015; Larkin & Buhalis, 2016). It is this narrow segregation between public and private that has raised many ethical questions around the practice as well as highlighting the possibility of litigation as a result. Furthermore, employers have been cautioned not to base their hiring decisions on what they find when searching for a candidate on social media as they may find information that would be illegal to request in an interview (regarding age, marital or parental status, religious beliefs or sexual orientation etc.) and use it to discriminate against the candidate (Karl, Peluchette & Schlaegel, 2010; Melanthiou, Pavlou, & Constantinou, 2015). While a study by Van de Ven et al. (2017) found inferences made from LinkedIn profiles regarding traits such as extraversion and self-presentation correlated with candidates' self-rated scores, employers have been advised against judging a job candidate based on their social media persona and activities because this does not always reflect a candidate's behaviour in the workplace (Slovensky &

Ross, 2012; Jeske & Shultz, 2016). In fact, Slovensky and Ross (2012) suggest that social media content may not be a current reflection of a candidate's behaviour, rather a snapshot of a moment in time and one that would be both unfair and inaccurate for an employer to base their hiring decisions. Yet, other scholars argue that an employee is a representative of their employer 24 hours a day whether or not they are in the workplace and any content perceived as 'unprofessional' may reflect negatively on an employer (Demek, Raschke, Janvrin, & Dilla, 2018). With these findings in mind, our study will explore whether an employer's hiring decision can be directly affected by a job seeker's social media presence.

Professional social media behaviours of job seekers and employees

The majority of the research conducted thus far in relation to the social media behaviours of job seekers and employees has largely focused on the health industry sector and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (De Gagne et al., 2018; Pereira et al., 2015; Langenfeld, et al., 2014). This may be due to the strong necessity for public trust in health professionals' abilities to administer medical treatment. As such, there have been consistent themes present in the current literature available on the topic of professional social media behaviour. Firstly, there is consensus in the literature regarding what constitutes unprofessional behaviour on social media. These behaviours tend to fit into three broad categories: behaviours harmful to others (bullying, intimidation, and discrimination), anti-social behaviours (drugs, alcohol and sexually explicit content), and direct threats to employer and organisational reputation (negative posts about employers, workmates and workplaces, breaching confidentiality etc.) (Koo, Bowman, Ficko, & Gormley, 2018; Kenny & Johnson, 2016; Langenfeld et al., 2014; Barlow et al., 2015).

Other research has approached the issue of unprofessional social media behaviour in the context of online etiquette (Davis et al., 2017; Ramsay, 2010; Valdez, Schaar & Ziefle, 2015; Valdez et al., 2015; Kinsky et al., 2016; Kietzmann et al. 2011). These studies have taken two different approaches when investigating the issue of online etiquette. The first explores etiquette through the lens of organisational communication with stakeholders; providing advice on how brands can interact positively with social media users (Ramsay, 2010). Secondly, the issue of online etiquette has been approached in the literature from the perspective of how employees, particularly students and recent grads, should behave in a professionally acceptable way online (Davis et al. 2017; Valdez, Schaar & Ziefle, 2015; Valdez et al., 2015; Kinsky et al., 2016). In a study of 99 social media users aged between 20 and 25 years, etiquette was defined in the context of online professional behaviours such as: *formal addressing, correct spelling, acronym and emoticon usage, work disruption and perceived urgency* (Valdez, Schaar, & Ziefle, 2015, p.427). A further study of 167 people and the use of 'text-speak' ('non-standard, condensed and primarily text-based communication') and found participants were perceived to be *less conscientious and less open but more emotionally stable when textspeak was used*, a finding that could result in wider implications within the employee recruitment process (Fullwood, Quinn, Chen-Wilson, Chadwick, & Reynolds, 2015, p. 147).

Our study differs from the Valdez, Schaar and Ziefle (2015) and Fullwood, et al. (2015) studies because it focuses on employer perceptions and explores a wider spectrum of behaviours. The Kinsky et al. (2016) research included a survey of 129 social media students as part of a mixed-methods study that also included employers. A significant finding from this study was that almost half of student participants (n=47%) responded that social media etiquette and responsibility was an area in which they desired further training. Our study aims to clearly define what employers perceive to be as the most unprofessional social media behaviours so that this knowledge can be used to inform students, graduates and job seekers such as those in the Kinsky et al. (2016) research sample.

A range of studies have found that even though educational institutions and workplaces have policies regarding online conduct of students and staff, content identified as unprofessional under the three broad categories mentioned could still be identified on staff and student profiles (Barlow et al., 2015). The Barlow et al. (2015) study explored the topic of unprofessional social media behaviour in a survey of 880 medical students. Nearly 35% of the sample self-reported unprofessional social media behaviour, mainly images posted of participants while intoxicated, despite there being an organisational social media policy prohibiting such behaviour. The findings were similar in a Langenfeld et al. (2014) study, where excessive alcohol consumption was the most prominent unprofessional social media behaviour demonstrated by the sample contradicting professional guidelines set by the organisation. This study highlights that policies are not enough to curb unprofessional behavior on social media by university students and may negatively impact graduate employability as a result.

Misguided reliance on privacy settings impacting employability

This discrepancy between perceived organisational governance and the deficiencies in its application may be explained by another key finding in the literature; students and staff relied heavily on privacy settings much to their own detriment (Langenfeld et al., 2014; Kitsis et al., 2016). In a study conducted by Kitsis et al. (2016) of 496 medical students and 614 faculty members, 21.8% of students were more likely to describe their online presence as unprofessional compared with faculty members. Yet, students were more likely to act than faculty members if they found publicly available information about themselves that they thought to be private. However, a study by Ponce et al. (2013) explored the Facebook content of medical professionals and found that 85% of the sample with a Facebook profile had it set to 'public' rather than 'private' and unprofessional social media content was detected on 16% of public profiles. A later study of 152 medical students by Walton, White and Ross (2015) found that 25% had personal information on Facebook that was publicly accessible. The Ponce et al., (2013) and Walton, White and Ross (2015) studies were undertaken a few years ago and the landscape of social media and its use has changed since then with the emergence of Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and messaging services such as WhatsApp, resulting in the necessity for current data in relation to this issue.

The studies mentioned have demonstrated a clear disparity between employer expectations in relation to current and prospective employee conduct on social media and the actual behaviour of some staff and job candidates using the technology. This has led to employers monitoring the social media activities of current and prospective employees to ensure that professional codes of conduct and social media policies are being adhered to (O'Connor & Schmidt, 2018; Francis & Wagner, 2018). However, this once again raises the issue of the blurred boundaries that social media creates between personal and professional life and the public and the private (McDonald & Thompson, 2016; Lam, 2016; Sanchez, Levin, & Del Reigo, 2012). Some employers believe that an employee is an organisational representative at all times throughout their employment, yet some employees expect that this only occurs during working hours. This difference in opinion between employer and current and prospective employee can result in unprofessional social media behaviours despite organisational social media policies as the literature has been demonstrated in the literature. What is essential is exploring these issues with students while at university to ensure they are aware that their behaviour on social media can directly impact their chances of not only securing employment but also maintaining it.

The research currently undertaken on the topic of employer perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviours and their influence on employers throughout the job recruitment process has largely focused on the healthcare sector in countries other than Australia. Our study differs because it explores Australian employer perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviours from a wide range of industry sectors rather than focusing on one. The scarcity of research undertaken regarding Australian employer

perceptions of professional social media behaviour from a range of industry sectors has led to the following research questions:

Research Question 1. *Can a prospective employee's online presence directly influence an employer's decision to offer them a job?*

Research Question 2. *What do employers perceive to be the most unprofessional social media behaviours of current/prospective employees?*

Methods

Participants

This study was part of a wider series of investigations, which employed a cross-sectional survey targeting employers of university graduates throughout Australia. Participants were recruited via a third-party database containing Australian employers of university graduates who had provided permission to receive communication such as online surveys. Four hundred and fifty participants commenced the survey, of which 29 respondents specified that their industry was located outside of Australia, and were subsequently removed. Of the 421 responses contained within the Australian sample, 25 responses were removed due to incomplete surveys, and further data cleaning was conducted to assess and remove corrupt and/or irrelevant responses. In total, 396 respondents of the Australian sample provided meaningful responses and were included in the analyses, resulting in a completion rate of 94.1%. Respondents' age ranged from 20-65 years (M = 42.78, SD = 11.90), with gender the distribution of males = 46.5% and females = 53.5%. The most represented industry/sector with nearly a quarter of respondents was retail and consumer, and middle management was the most represented professional position level with nearly a third of respondents. Further demographic data are presented in Table 1. In Australia, the retail sector is the second largest employer after the healthcare industry (Vandenbroek, 2018) suggesting that our sample provides a reasonable representation of the Australian workforce.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

		%
Industry/sector	Retail and Consumer	23.2
N = 396	Education	11.9
	Healthcare	10.4
	Construction and Transportation	9.3
	Technology	8.1
	Government	6.6
	Entertainment and Media	6.1
	Non-Profit	3.5
	Agriculture	3.0
	Financial Services	2.5
	Real Estate	2.5
	Banking and Finance	2.3
	Manufacturing	2.3
	Mining	1.5

	Wholesale trade	1.5
	Power and Utilities	1.5
	Legal Services	1.0
	Infrastructure	.8
	Defence	.8
	Other	.8
	Energy and Gas	.5
Professional position level	Middle Management (Director/Divisional/Department Head)	31.3
N = 380	Owner/Partner	26.6
	Front Line Management	26.1
	Senior Management (CEO/VP/Managing Director)	16.1

Procedure

An online survey was developed specifically for this study using Survey Monkey (2019) as surveys employed in previous similar research did not individually address all specific areas under study. The design was firstly informed by a literature search that identified key areas of interest and was further developed based on the strengths and limitations of previous research (Koo et al., 2018; Kenny & Johnson, 2016; Langenfeld et al., 2014; Barlow et al., 2015). Next, the 17 individual questions used with the 7 point Likert scale (1 = extremely professional to 7 = extremely unprofessional) was reviewed by a Research Advisory Group with membership from industry representatives, employment development professionals, senior researchers and social media educators to ensure that the questions posed would be meaningful to the sample and effective in returning the data being sought. Responses from the survey questions have been divided up into subscales (Anti-Social Behaviours, Posts about Employers/Workmates, Damaging/Harmful Behaviours, and General Social Media Behaviours) representing different categories of social media behaviours present in the literature.

The content validity in relation to the sample is relatively sound and representative of the employers within Australian industry sectors. This can be evidenced by the outcome of a reliability analysis of the 17 items which resulted in Cronbach's α = .97.

Materials

The survey questions from this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Survey Questions and Answer Options

Question	Options
In what industry sector/s does your organisation operate?	(See Table 1.)
What is your professional position level?	(See Table 1.)

Sutherland, K., Freberg, K., & Driver, C. (2019). Australian employer perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviour and its impact on graduate employability. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 10*(2), 104-121.

In what region of the world is your organisation based?	Africa Asia/Pacific Europe Latin America Middle East North America
In what country is your organisation based?	Open Text Field
The way that a prospective employee presents themselves online would directly influence my decision to offer them a job at my business/organisation.	7-Point Likert Scale (see Table 3).
Using the scale below; please indicate your feelings about the following social media-related behaviours.	7-Point Likert Scale (see Table 4 for categories of social media behaviours).

Data analyses

Data were initially analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequency distribution and percentages provided an overall description of the data. A chi-square test for goodness of fit was used to assess the distribution of all responses. To test for homogeneity of responses across industry/sector, professional position level and gender, tests of differences using crosstabs with chi-squared tests of contingencies were conducted. Nonparametric tests were employed due to the ordinal nature of the data and the non-normal distribution. For all analyses, significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results

The results in Table 3 clearly indicate that an unprofessional online presence can directly impact employability.

Table 3. Responses to the Question: The way that Prospective Employees Present Themselves Online Would Directly Influence my Decision to offer them a job at my Business/Organisation

N = 396	% (n)
Strongly agree	22.2 (88)
Agree	38.6 (153)
Slightly agree	21.5 (85)
Slightly disagree	8.1 (32)
Disagree	2.0 (8)

Strongly disagree	4.5 (18)
Don't know	3.0 (12)

As demonstrated in Table 3 most participants (82.3%, 326) agreed to some extent that the way prospective employees present themselves online would directly influence their decision to offer employment.

The most frequent response for all items except posting political content was 7; extremely unprofessional. The overall single most unprofessional behaviour as rated by respondents, was using social media to intentionally cause harm to others. Likewise, damaging and harmful behaviour was rated the most unprofessional subscale of social media behaviours.

Table 4. Percent (Frequency), Mode and Chi-Squared Tests of Respondents' Opinions about Social Media Behaviours

	Response							Mode	Chi squared p
	1 extremely professional	2	3	4	5	6	7 extremely unprofessional		
Social media behaviour									
Antisocial behaviours									
Posting sexually suggestive photos or videos	2 (8)	2.5 (10)	3.3 (13)	7.3 (29)	5.6 (22)	11.4 (45)	67.9 (269)	7	.001
Posting content about taking drugs	1.5 (6)	2.5 (10)	3.8 (15)	5.8 (23)	7.1 (28)	11.1 (44)	68.2 (270)	7	.002
Posts containing swearing	1.3 (5)	2.5 (10)	4.5 (18)	13.1 (52)	13.4 (53)	15.4 (61)	49.7 (197)	7	.003
Posting content (text, video, images etc.)about drinking alcohol	.5(2)	3.0 (12)	7.3 (29)	17.4 (69)	15.2 (60)	17.2 (68)	39.4 (156)	7	

Posts about employers/work mates.

Sharing confidential information about a current or former employer	2.0 (8)	2.3 (9)	3.0 (12)	5.3 (21)	6.1 (24)	8.1 (32)	73.2 (290)	7	.001
Posting negative comments about a current or former workmate	2.3 (9)	1.8 (7)	3.3 (13)	7.8 (31)	6.1 (24)	14.4 (57)	64.4 (255)	7	
Posting negative comments about a current or former employer	1.5 (6)	2.8 (11)	3.8 (15)	7.8 (31)	7.3 (29)	10.4 (41)	66.6 (263)	7	.005
Posting content featuring a current employer and/or workmates without their permission	2.0 (8)	2.0 (8)	3.3 (13)	6.6 (26)	10.9 (43)	17.4 (69)	57.8 (229)	7	.001
Using copyrighted material without the owner's permission	1.8 (7)	3.3 (13)	2.3 (9)	9.3 (37)	8.1 (32)	12.9 (51)	62.4 (247)	7	

Damaging/harmful behaviours.

Using social media to intentionally cause harm to others	1.8 (7)	1.8 (7)	3.5 (15)	5.6 (22)	4.3 (17)	7.1 (28)	76.0 (301)	7	.008
Using social media to bully or intimidate others	1.5 (6)	2.3 (9)	3.0 (12)	7.3 (29)	3.3 (13)	8.6 (34)	74.0 (293)	7	.024
Posts with discriminatory comments (racist, sexist, homophobic etc.)	1.5 (6)	2.3 (9)	4.3 (17)	6.6 (26)	4.8 (19)	8.3 (33)	72.2 (286)	7	.042

General social media behaviours								
Checking personal social media profiles during work meetings	1.0 (4)	2.5 (10)	3.5 (14)	10.9 (43)	10.4 (41)	17.2 (68)	54.5 (216)	7
Checking personal social media profiles more than three times during a working day	1.0 (4)	4.0 (16)	7.6 (30)	21.5 (85)	18.7 (74)	16.4 (65)	30.8 (122)	7
Using social media to communicate with an employer and/or workmates instead of calling or speaking to them in person	1.0 (4)	4.8 (19)	8.8 (35)	20.7 (82)	18.7 (74)	17.4 (69)	28.5 (113)	7
Posts with poor grammar, spelling and punctuation	1.0 (4)	3.0 (12)	4.5 (18)	21.0 (83)	22.5 (89)	20.2 (80)	27.8 (110)	7
Posting political content	2.0 (8)	3.3 (13)	7.3 (29)	28.5 (113)	17.9 (71)	15.7 (62)	25.3 (100)	4

Note: Chi squared tests were carried out on responses comparing professional position level, gender and industry. This table only shows those comparisons that were significantly different. The only significant differences were found in professional position level. No significant differences were found between gender and industry.

Chi squared tests of differences on industry/sector and gender revealed no significant differences in responses. However, significant differences were found between professional position level and the following items: posting sexually suggestive photos or videos, posting content about taking drugs, posts containing swearing, sharing confidential information about a current or former employer, posting negative comments about a current or former employer, posting content featuring a current employer and/or workmates without their permission, using social media to intentionally cause harm to others, using social media to bully or intimidate others, posts with discriminatory comments (Table 4).

Discussion

The results in this study demonstrate the impact that social media can have on employers and graduate employability. More than 80% of employers stated that a prospective employee's social media presence can directly influence their decision whether or not to offer them a job. This finding reinforces outcomes from studies conducted by Slovensky and Ross (2012), Brouer et al. (2017) and Baert (2018), who also found that employers' hiring decisions were influenced by a candidate's social media presence. This result suggests to job seekers that it is now more important than ever before for university graduates to

proactively cultivate a positive, professional and personal online brand. The influence of an online brand can have negative or positive effects on the career outcomes of a university graduate as a prospective or current employee. The notion of influence presented in this study can work either for or against a university graduate seeking employment. In fact, the literature suggests that cultivating a positive and professional personal brand can have a direct impact on an individual's level of social, human and economic capital (Khedher, 2014; Arruda & Dixson, 2007; Gehl, 2011; McNally & Speak, 2002). More specifically, it has been suggested that individuals who develop their personal brand experience an increase in worth, value, employability and lifetime earnings (Khedher, 2014; Peters, 1997; Montoya & Vandehey, 2002; McNally & Speak, 2002; Arruda & Dixson, 2007). Therefore, building an online presence that promotes the positive aspects of and personal and professional successes, a university graduate seeking employment can leverage social media technology to assist them in their search for work by demonstrating their skills and achievements to prospective employers. Furthermore, after securing employment, a university graduate may also increase their opportunities for career advancement if they continue to strengthen a positive professional and personal online presence.

However, this finding raises many of the issues relating to the blurring of boundaries between public and private life raised in the literature in relation to employers using social media to screen job candidates and to monitor employees (Melanthiou, Pavlou, & Constantinou, 2015; Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016). Without ethical processes, policies and procedures to underpin the practice of using social media as a tool to screen and monitor, the influence that it has on employee hiring decisions may be largely subjective resulting in an uneven playing field among all job applicants. Employers may form their decisions from their own unconscious biases relating to what they deem to be positive or negative about a candidate's online presence rather than assessing each candidate in a systematic way. This inability to secure employment as a result of employers being influenced by candidates' social media presence is a stark reality. An incident of such an occurrence was recently covered in the Australian media where an employer refused to offer a candidate employment after searching through the candidate's Facebook profile and perceiving them as unsuitable for the role based on their personal aversion to their selfies and tattoos (Withers, 2019). This judgement was exposed when the employer was accidentally recorded on a voicemail message to the candidate after they mistakenly believed that they had ended the call (Chung, 2019). This case supports our findings from this study suggesting that an employer's decision regarding the suitability of a job candidate for a role maybe be influenced by much more than their qualifications, employers' personal biases can also play a part. Having access to online information about job seekers via social media provides greater ammunition for these biases to be supported. While it must be acknowledged that this is only one case and cannot be emblematic of the current climate of employment, it definitely adds to the notion that employers *are* conducting social media searches of job candidates without their knowledge and judging their suitability for employment based on their findings of these searches. Yet, these social media searches tend to be completely non-transparent, largely unregulated and neglect to not follow any set process or procedure which then raises questions of unethical practices and discrimination on behalf on employers. Therefore, it is essential to educate university students regarding these issues and to be proactive in cultivating a positive online brand.

Next, the results from this study indicated that most behaviours that were presented to employers were deemed as unprofessional across all industry sectors. There was not one industry in particular that was more accepting of the behaviours presented. This result implies that there are a distinct set of social media behaviours that are perceived by most employers as unacceptable. There is not any industry that is more lenient than other in this respect. This is extremely important for job seekers to understand in order to use this knowledge to make choices online that will not impede their employability in the longer term. It must be stressed to job seekers, employee, and university students that behaving negatively online can directly influence their employability regardless of the industry or profession that they wish to enter and

maintain employment. Incidents are regularly reported in the media where job candidates, even prospective interns, miss out on opportunities because of their online misconduct. A high-profile example occurred when a woman lost an internship with NASA for swearing on Twitter at a National Space Council Member (Weiss, 2018). Educating job seekers, employees and students about the influence that their social media presence can have on their career outcomes is extremely important and necessary in the current digital climate and a key purpose of this study.

Furthermore, our findings in relation to the behaviours categorized as the most unprofessional were also supported by the literature. Damaging/Harmful behaviours were ranked as the most unprofessional, which is also in line with other studies on this topic (Koo et al., 2018; Kenny & Johnson, 2016; Langenfeld et al., 2014; Barlow et al., 2015). The social media behaviour considered as the least unprofessional was the posting of political content. This may be an indication of the current political climate where more and more content of this nature is shared on social media platforms. For example, it has been reported that Trump's team generated more than 100,000 pieces of social media content during his presidential campaign (Beckett, 2017), therefore, as political social media content becomes more normalized, this may logically impact its level of acceptance by employers.

The results were similar in relation to gender as well as with the position level of the sample and its perception of unprofessional social media behaviours. However, there was a slight difference recorded with participants who identified their position as senior management level. This segment of the sample ranked many of the social media behaviours as slightly less unprofessional as the participants from other position levels. This may be due to unfamiliarity of social media technology. Various industry research reports have indicated that more than 60% of Fortune 500 CEOs do not have a social media presence and that not one CEO from a Fortune 500 company has a presence across all six major social media platforms (CEO.com, 2015). A further explanation may be that senior management may not be directly involved at the coalface with the management of social media-related issues and crises and are therefore unaware of the deeper negative implications and impacts that unprofessional social media behaviours can have on organisational reputation.

As reinforced by Kinsky et al., (2016) university students, graduates, job seekers and current employees must be trained in the professional use of social media to ensure that their online activities assist them in building a positive personal brand rather than resulting in them missing out on internship and employment opportunities from unwittingly engaging in the unprofessional behaviours explored in this study. However, communicating to university students the influence that social media activity can have on graduate employability must be approached with care. It is important to communicate facts using methods that both attract attention and can be logically understood so that they can be practically applied. As one way to address this, the authors have collaborated with university students to develop an infographic (see Figure 1) and a video to convey the key findings from this study to university students and graduates within classroom environments, on campus noticeboards, before beginning internships and placements and when engaging with internal career development advisors.
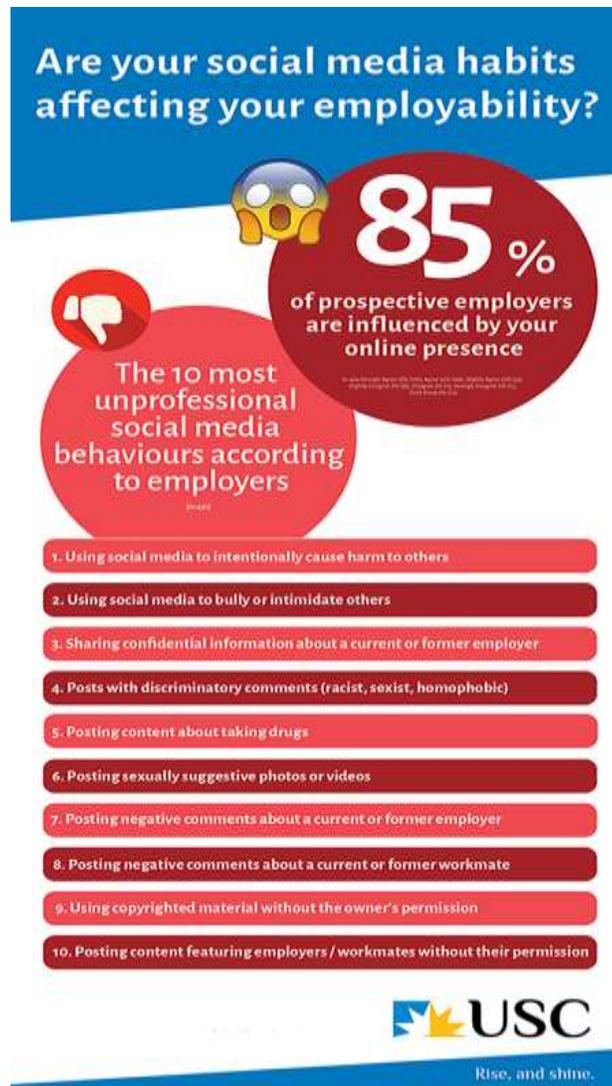
Are your social media habits affecting your employability?

85% of prospective employers are influenced by your online presence

The 10 most unprofessional social media behaviours according to employers

1. Using social media to intentionally cause harm to others
2. Using social media to bully or intimidate others
3. Sharing confidential information about a current or former employer
4. Posts with discriminatory comments (racist, sexist, homophobic)
5. Posting content about taking drugs
6. Posting sexually suggestive photos or videos
7. Posting negative comments about a current or former employer
8. Posting negative comments about a current or former workmate
9. Using copyrighted material without the owner's permission
10. Posting content featuring employers / workmates without their permission

USC

Rise, and shine.

Figure 1. Infographic developed in collaboration with university students to convey key findings from this study. Please note that the full sample were used in these results.

The two communication tools of an infographic and video have been selected to convey the main findings from this study because research has indicated that using infographics within a Higher Education context can communicate information in a *clear, concise and persuasive way* (Taguchi & Ackerman, 2014, p. 1901). Furthermore, video has also been identified as an effective educational tool in Higher Education (Brame, 2016; Allen & Smith, 2012; Kay, 2012; Lloyd & Robertson, 2012; Rackaway, 2012; Hsin & Cigas, 2013). However, measuring the impact of communicating our findings to university students and graduates using these methods requires further research.

Conclusion

This study provided a brief insight into the perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviours according to the employers of one country in 2018. Extensive research using a range of approaches is recommended to provide a much more comprehensive view of this topic, including an analysis of industry

roles and their impact on employer perceptions, which was not explored in this study. Further research could involve an international comparative analysis of employer perceptions of unprofessional social media behaviours with samples located in different global regions. Similarly, undertaking this study longitudinally may provide an insight on what social media behaviours are gaining or losing acceptance with employers over time, providing a glimpse of the evolution of cultural norms with society and measuring the differences across industries over time as more people are trained in social media. An additional area of further research could focus on the impact of methods used to communicate employability information to university students and graduates to determine the most effective channels to promote sense-making and behaviour change.

Knowledge is power for all parties involved in the recruitment process and this study aimed to empower educators, employers, university students, graduates and job seekers with the information about the strong influence that social media can have on employer decision making and what employers perceive as unprofessional social media behaviour. The authors hope that this knowledge will be used to educate university students, graduates, employees and job seekers to use social media as a tool to increase employability and promote themselves in a positive way online.

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