

## Academic Perspectives and Approaches to Social Media Use in Higher Education: A Pilot Study

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Previous studies have confirmed the prevalence of social media adoption by university students. However, research has focused predominantly on student perspectives of social media's impact on learning and teaching, student engagement, and recruitment. This pilot study explores the methods, attitudes, and perceptions of academics regarding social media use in their teaching while investigating strategies used to navigate perceived challenges posed by social media technology. The survey of 53 academics from an Australian university found that 49% used social media in their teaching and did so due to its speed and accessibility in communicating with students. Yet, this communication was largely to broadcast information, neglecting social media's two-way functionality. Concerns regarding privacy, bullying, and time scarcity in relation to social media were key themes present in the data. Setting rules with students at the beginning of social media use was a common strategy employed by academics to address these challenges.

Now with 3.81 billion users globally, social media has become a common topic of discussion throughout the wider community, and more specifically within higher educational contexts (Fenwick, 2016; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011; We Are Social, 2020; Willems, Chie, Bussey, Doherty, & Huijser, 2018). Thus far, the higher educational literature has predominantly focused on broad categories such as learning and teaching, student engagement, and student recruitment (Alshuaibi, Alshuaibi, Shamsudin, & Arshad, 2018; Chawinga, 2017; Vrontis, Nemar, Ouwaida, & Riad Shams, 2018). However, over the past few years, the discussion has shifted from critical debates on whether or not to use social media within higher educational institutions and instead is evolving into discourse exploring best practice methods to leverage the technology (Becker et al., 2017; Henderson, Selwyn & Ashton, 2017; Poore, 2016). With the majority of university students using some form of social media (Vorderer, Krömer & Schneider, 2016; McCoy, 2016) the discussion has positioned social networking sites as valuable tools to reach students where they are already active, rather than solely focusing on techniques to encourage students to use the learning and teaching tools preferred by academic staff (Cooke, 2017; Saha & Karpinski, 2018). While the discussion surrounding social media's place in higher education has advanced over time, the literature has principally focused on students' attitudes and experiences with little emphasis on academic perspectives (Gruzd, Haythornthwaite, Paulin, Gilbert, & del Valle, 2018; Lupton, 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2017). This imbalance in viewpoints may have resulted in an inaccurate portrayal of social media's effectiveness in higher education. While the literature has suggested that social media can be a beneficial tool for students, a scarcity of research has been conducted to explore the impact on academic staff of using social media in higher education (Fenwick,

2016; Lupton, 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2017). Our study aims to address this gap in knowledge through the exploration of academic perspectives, experiences, and strategies regarding the use of social media in a university learning and teaching context.

The few studies conducted to investigate academic use of social media in higher education have exposed a number of common themes both positive and negative (Fenwick, 2016; Lupton, 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2017). These findings suggest that the use of social media by academics is a complex area of analysis and one that requires continual investigation as the technology continues to evolve rapidly. The following review of the literature explores the perceived benefits and disadvantages for academics in using social media as part of their profession.

### **The Perceived Benefits for Academics Using Social Media in a Higher Educational Context**

An analysis of studies conducted by Willems et al. (2018), Manca and Ranieri (2017), Fenwick (2016) and Lupton, (2014) identified five key benefits perceived by academics who use social media as part of their day-to-day professional lives. Two of the key benefits were identified as: Connections and Networking and Teaching and Professional Support.

**Connections and networking.** The functionality of social media to surpass geographical boundaries to build social networks also applies to the development of academic ones. Social media was perceived by academics as facilitating the development of professional connections with industry and with other academics within their area of research interest, both locally and internationally (Bardakcı, Arslan, Unver, 2018; Van Noorden, 2014). This perceived benefit enabled academics to become aware of other academics in their research field, which traditionally only occurred at

conferences or by reading literature and reaching out via email. Facebook and LinkedIn groups were used to bring together academics of specific teaching or research interests. Furthermore, social media was also identified as building stronger connections with students by engaging with and meeting students where they are (Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010; Nelson & Clarke, 2014; Smith, 2017; Willems et al., 2018). In a study conducted by Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2010, p. 5), the social media platforms most commonly used by academic staff were Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

**Teaching and professional support.** As a further development of social media facilitating connections and networking, academics identified the technology as also providing professional and teaching support from online communities of other academics. Manca and Ranieri (2017) suggested that social media can be used to create social capital (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007), particularly within online groups with a common interest such as a Facebook Group. In a study of a Facebook group for Canadian teachers, Rutherford (2010) found that the group facilitated practical discussions relating to teaching techniques that participants then used in their classrooms. Social media communities supported academics to pose challenges relating to their professions and to seek advice from more experienced colleagues (Manca & Ranieri, 2017).

### **The Perceived Disadvantages for Academics Using Social Media in a Higher Educational Context**

The literature demonstrates that the perceived disadvantages for academics using social media far outweigh the advantages. According to studies by Willems et al. (2018), Manca and Ranieri (2017), Fenwick (2016) and Lupton, (2014) academics perceived social media use in their professions to pose issues relating to privacy, risk, credibility, copyright, plagiarism as well as highlighting a perceived lack of time, training, skills and support to use the technology effectively. Furthermore, these studies also identified that academics were unconfident about the quality of content that they were expected to post on social media and felt an obligation to use the technology whether they wanted to or not.

**Privacy, risk, copyright and plagiarism.** Breaches to the privacy of both academic staff and students were highlighted in the literature as one of the fundamental disadvantages of using social media in higher education (Fenwick, 2016; Lupton, 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Moran et al. 2010; Willems et al., 2018). Academics raised concerns that social media can blur the boundaries between their personal and professional lives while exposing students' personal lives outside of the classroom. Furthermore, participants in the Lupton (2014) study suggested that

being active on social media could pose a considerable risk to their professional reputations if they or other users posted negative information or if they were targeted by students. An example of this occurred in 2017 when a lecturer upset Chinese students by listing Hong Kong and Taiwan as separate countries in course materials; a recording of the classroom altercation was posted online, damaging the academic's reputation (Ho, 2017). Furthermore, participants in the Lupton study (2014) were concerned that the ideas that they shared on social media would be plagiarised or used without their permission as a breach of copyright.

**Intellectual property rights.** The issue of Intellectual Property (I.P) rights has also been raised in the literature in relation to who exactly owns the content that is created and posted by academics as part of their role in a higher educational context (Rodriguez, 2011). Confusion exists among academics as to whether they own the social media content that they create as part of their work, whether it is owned by their employer as per institutional I.P. policies that they must adhere to as a condition of employment, or whether the content ultimately belongs to the social media platform on which it is posted.

**Time scarcity.** Time scarcity due to existing workload has been a common theme in the literature surrounding the experiences of academic staff in higher education more generally (Brew, Boud, Crawford, & Lucas, 2017; McAvinia, Ryan & Moloney, 2018; Vostal, 2015) and in relation to social media use (Guy, 2012; Fenwick, 2016; Lupton, 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Willems et al, 2018;). Using social media was viewed an additional (and labor intensive) task required of academics who were already overloaded in terms of the responsibilities of their role. Although research has not yet been conducted into the psychological impacts for academics using social media in higher education, previous research has suggested that work pressure and workload contribute to psychological strain in academic staff (Boyd et al, 2011; Kinman, 2001; Lease, 1999; McClenehan, Giles, & Mallett, 2007).

**Lack of training, skills, support, and credibility.** A significant issue raised in the literature was the perception of a lack of support by the higher educational institutions encouraging academics to use social media for teaching, learning, and research (Fenwick, 2016; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Guy, 2012; Willems et al, 2018;). Participants felt both pressure from their home institutions and an obligation to use social media technology (whether they wanted to or not), but they felt overwhelmed, unskilled, and unsupported when attempting to do so. Academics cited a lack of training being provided to assist them in learning how to use social media (rather than assuming all academics have prior experience) and a lack of support from I.T. departments to provide day-

to-day tech support. In the Lupton (2014, p. 26) study, this perception of a lack of social media proficiency also extended to the creation of content with some participants unsure about how to create quality posts and not "...coming across as dumb". The literature also suggested that some academics perceived using social media for teaching, learning and research purposes lacked credibility among their peers (Lupton, 2014). Participants in the Lupton (2014) study explained that they had been accused by colleagues of wasting time for using social media technology as part of their working day.

Our study differs from the literature explored because it not only provides a current insight into academic perspectives of social media use in higher education, it also investigates the strategies used by academics to navigate the use of social media in their day-to-day professional roles. A most recent finding on the academic perspectives of social media use was conducted by Willems et al (2018) who recorded a live debate on the topic at an academic conference and analyzed 63 tweets from audience members, as well as comments from the floor, in response to the various issues raised. While this study provided an insight into the issues associated with academic use of social media in higher education, it did not delve into the strategies academics use to cope with using social media technology in a teaching and learning context.

The last in-depth survey of academics on this topic was Lupton (2014). Much has changed in the social media landscape in the years following, and a further analysis is required. The Fenwick (2016) study focused solely on issues surrounding professionalism of academics when using social media. Our study has a broader scope by exploring the perceptions and attitudes of academics (positive and negative) relating to social media use and methods used to manage it. Manca and Ranieri's (2017) literature review of previous research explored both student and teacher perspectives. Most of the literature reviewed in this paper investigated teachers' perspectives, not specifically those of university educators. The most recent study, of relevance to our research, and explored by Manca and Ranieri (2017), was Gregory and Lodge's (2015) study into the barriers presented by academic workload in implementing technology-enhanced learning strategies in higher education; however, this research did not specifically focus on the use of social media.

As social media is constantly changing, our study provides a contemporary insight into academic perspectives of social media use as a tool for teaching and learning in higher education and the strategies employed to use the technology. The scarcity of research in this area of scholarship has led to the development of the following research questions:

**RQ1:** *What are the perceptions and attitudes of academics regarding the use of social media in a higher educational learning and teaching context?*

**RQ2:** *How are academics using social media in a higher educational learning and teaching context?*

### Material and Methods

An online SurveyMonkey survey, with descriptive and analytic elements, was distributed via email to 472 academic staff at an Australian university. This research constituted a pilot study due to its specific scope focusing on one Higher Education institution. The learnings from this study will be used to develop a future project with wider scope (Leon, Davis & Kraemer, 2011). The rationale behind using this mixed-methods approach was to explore habits, attitudes and approaches relating to social media use by academic staff as a tool for teaching and learning. This study applied a mixed-method approach employing a survey that included a range of questions prompting quantitative and qualitative responses. A mixed-method approach was used because the strength of each method can counteract the deficiencies of the other (Denscombe, 2008). Furthermore, the survey as a research tool is a standardized method of gathering uniform empirical data that can assist in describing and contrasting variable relationships (Axinn & Pearce, 2006; Weerakkody, 2008). Three email reminders were sent to academic staff throughout the 90-day data gathering phase. The overall survey attracted a response rate of 11% or (n = 53 ), 64% (n = 34) were female, 34% (n = 18) were male and 2% (1) person identified as other. Academics over 50 years of age had the greatest representation in the sample (n= 22, 42%), and next were academics aged 41 - 45 years (n= 16, 30%), 46 - 50 years and 36 - 40 years both with (n= 6, 11%), 31- 35 years (n= 2, 4%) and one academic (2%) aged between 26 and 30 years. Academic staff were predominantly spread across two faculties with 28 (53%) working in the Faculty of Arts, Business, and Law (FABL), 22 academics (42%) working in the Faculty of Science, Health, Education, and Engineering (FoSHEE); and three academics (5%) working across both. The three academics working across both faculties have been removed from the sample for some of the analyses as their representation was too low to derive meaningful results. The majority of the sample had more than 15 years of teaching experience (n= 20, 38%), followed at the other end of the scale by academics with 0-5 years' experience (n= 15, 28%). Academic staff with 6-10 years' teaching experience had the third greatest representation in the sample with teaching staff with 11-15 years' experience having the lowest representation. The survey consisted of 24 questions using a range of multiple choice, Likert

Table 1  
*Reasons for Introducing Social Media Into Teaching Practice*

Reason for introducing social media into teaching	Percent	Frequency
Enjoy using social media.	27.08%	13
I use social media in most aspects of my life, including in my teaching practice.	33.33%	16
Quick and easy way to connect with students.	70.83%	34
I feel some pressure to keep up with other teaching staff who are using/starting to use social media in their teaching practice.	6.25%	3
Students expect to use social media as part of their higher education courses.	22.92%	11
USC expects teaching staff to incorporate social media into their teaching practice.	18.75%	9
I don't use social media in my teaching practice.	6.25%	3

scales, and qualitative response prompts that asked academic staff to address the two research questions about their perceptions and attitudes regarding social media (and its use) in a higher educational learning and teaching context. The questions developed were based on those used in a study by McCarthy (2010), who explored the use of social networking to enhance the first-year student experience. Statistical analyses were limited due to some questions allowing multiple options to be selected. Data were initially analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequency distribution and percentages provided an overall description of the data. To test for homogeneity of responses across groups—faculty, gender, years of teaching experience and employment status—tests of differences using Crosstabs with Chi-Squared were conducted (Linneman, 2014). Qualitative responses were analyzed by coding them directly against the research questions to identify emerging themes in each category.

## Results

Survey results have been structured to directly address the research questions. Almost half of the sample (n=26, 49%) indicated that they used social media in their teaching. From further Chi-squared analysis, significant differences could not be identified between an academic's faculty, gender, or years of teaching and whether or not they used social media as a teaching tool. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in attitudes and concerns about social media across all employment statuses (continuing, fixed, and sessional).

***RQ1: What are the perceptions and attitudes of academics regarding the use of social media in a higher educational learning and teaching context?***

Table 1 contains the responses to the survey question: "What are the reasons that you have introduced social media into your teaching practice?" Participants could tick more than one option.

Table 1 demonstrates that the ease and speed of use; the enjoyment of, and familiarity with, social media technology; and student expectations were the key motivations for academics to use social media as a tool for teaching and learning. Similar sentiments were apparent in the qualitative data captured from the same "Other" option offered within the same survey question: "It allows you to meet students where they already are."

The ability to stay connected with students after graduation was also highlighted.

It also allows us as lecturers to stay in touch with our students during their entire university career rather than having them in one or two classes and then not hearing from them again. Staying in touch can help us recommend jobs or post positions for recent graduates.

Results in Table 2 demonstrate the responses to the prompt: "The benefits of using social media in my teaching practice are."

Again, participants could select multiple options to capture that they may have experienced multiple benefits using social media as a teaching tool.

Table 2 demonstrates that the participants in this study perceived that social media can enhance communication between them and students and also between students in particular courses. However, there were some aspects that participants perceived to be less beneficial than others. For example, social media's ability to showcase student work was the only option that did not return a significant result for academics from either faculty. This was also reflected in the qualitative data gathered from the same survey question:

Table 2  
*Attitudes Toward the Perceived Benefits of Using Social Media in Teaching Practice*

Statement	Faculty	Strongly				Strongly Disagree	Chi Squared and P Value
		Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree		
Social media enables me to better communicate and interact with students	FABL	8	15	3	0	0	$X^2 = 9.880$ $p = .042$
	FoSHEE	3	6	7	1	2	
Social media enables me to showcase student work	FABL	8	7	7	3	0	$X^2 = 6.005$ $p = .119$
	FoSHEE	1	7	8	2	1	
Using social media enables me to better alert students to relevant course materials	FABL	10	8	4	2	1	$X^2 = 8.164$ $p = .086$
	FoSHEE	1	7	6	2	3	
Social media enables me to clarify assessment requirements	FABL	9	3	10	2	1	$X^2 = 10.892$ $p = .028$
	FoSHEE	0	3	8	5	3	
Social media enables me to send reminders to students	FABL	10	7	7	1	0	$X^2 = 12.413$ $p = .015$
	FoSHEE	0	7	7	3	2	
Social media enables me to effectively make announcements	FABL	11	7	6	1	1	$X^2 = 13.447$ $p = .009$
	FoSHEE	0	5	7	3	4	
Social media enables students to better connect with academic staff	FABL	9	7	7	0	1	$X^2 = 16.306$ $p = .003$
	FoSHEE	0	5	5	6	3	
Social media enables students to better connect with each other	FABL	17	7	2	0	0	$X^2 = 12.258$ $p = .007$
	FoSHEE	3	9	6	1	0	
Social media enables students to more easily facilitate group work	FABL	15	6	3	0	0	$X^2 = 9.516$ $p = .023$
	FoSHEE	4	6	7	2	0	
Social media enables students to better share insights, experience and understandings related to their course	FABL	14	8	3	0	0	$X^2 = 17.326$ $p = .001$
	FoSHEE	0	10	7	2	0	
Social media provides an effective forum for students to share/reflect on their work	FABL	9	11	6	0	0	$X^2 = 12.707$ $p = .013$
	FoSHEE	0	7	9	2	1	
Social media provides an effective forum for students to discuss course-related topics	FABL	12	9	3	1	0	$X^2 = 10.572$ $p = .032$
	FoSHEE	1	10	5	2	1	

...not all students want to showcase their work on Social Media, it is not a good platform to showcase design work, because likes from friends is really not desirable and students need to have professional feedback.

Instead the perceived benefits of social media most related to its functional characteristics as a communication tool:

It's possible to find on YouTube relevant, engaging, current and accessible materials that can be relevant to teaching. Different form of communication to face-to-face, e.g., interview, animation, infographics, film, etc.

**Privacy concerns.** Privacy concerns returned a significant result in relation to an academic's faculty ( $X^2 = 9.610 p = .048$ ). From the total of 19 FoSHEE academic participants, 84% (16) strongly agreed or agreed that they were concerned regarding their privacy when connecting students via social media, compared with 50% (13) of FABL academics ( $n=26$ ). Privacy concerns were also reflected in the open comments. For example, a participant who did not use social media said that this decision was, *"to maintain privacy"*.

Another academic highlighted that:

Privacy is key for students and teaching staff. Spend time trying to disconnect some students from their smartphone screen in class as it is.

Students' personal privacy concerns were also mentioned:

Those students who do have social media have also indicated that while social media can be good for communicating with other students, they too have privacy concerns about mixing their private profile with their student profile.

Furthermore, universities being ill-equipped to manage privacy issues relating to social media use by academics and students was identified by the sample:

We can talk about privacy settings, but I don't think anything is fail-safe. Do institutions need to have policies around this? It's a minefield...and I'm just glad that so far nothing seems to have blown up in my face, but I know of other instances among teaching staff where it has and has caused great stress - and the university management seems totally unequipped to deal with it.

**Time scarcity.** Time constraints relating to social media and its impact on work-life-balance returned a

significant result in relation to gender ( $X^2 = 11.991 p = .017$ ). Out of the 16 male participants, 63% (10) strongly agreed or agreed that the amount of time and energy required to keep up-to-date with teaching-related social media has a negative impact on work-life balance, compared with 17% (5) females ( $n=30$ ). Issues relating to lack of time to use social media for learning and teaching were also a dominant theme in the qualitative data. For example, when explaining why one academic did not use social media, they stated: *"They add time commitments that I don't have."*

Another participant suggested that adding further communication channels increased time commitments in using them to interact with students.

One mode of communication is enough. If I set up Discussion board on BB and we use that, I don't also want to be having to check Facebook or emails - these things become enormously time-consuming.

Similarly, the task of social media monitoring was identified as one that is too time prohibitive for academics to undertake effectively:

In many other professions the monitoring of social media is a full-time job, as the audience expects immediate responses. This is not possible for most academics who have other activities.

However, the qualitative data identified reasons that some academics planned to increase their social media use for their teaching:

I want to incorporate it more into the content and assessment side of things.

Some wanted to use social media to teach students about professional development:

Currently 0 hours. I will probably add social media to introduce students to LinkedIn for professional career and CV building activities.

Others stated that the constant evolution of social media technology increased its attractiveness for academics: *"It's valuable and its capacities and flexibility are improving."*

**Feelings of awkwardness.** Some academics answered that they felt awkward when using social media as a teaching tool. This was most significant in relation to years of teaching ( $x^2 = 18.339 p = .031$ ). Academics in their first five years of teaching reported the strongest levels of awkwardness in relation to using social media in their teaching. However, this group also had the greatest number of people disagreeing that they

Table 3  
*Percent and Frequency of Social Media Platforms Use by Academics*

	Several times each day	Once per day	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Never	Total
Facebook	12.00%	6.00%	24.00%	4.00%	10.00%	44.00%	50
	6	3	12	2	5	22	
Youtube	6.00%	8.00%	36.00%	18.00%	20.00%	12.00%	
	3	4	18	9	10	6	50
Yammer	2.17%	2.17%	0.00%	0.00%	2.17%	93.48%	
	1	1	0	0	1	43	46
Instagram	0.00%	2.13%	12.77%	2.13%	0.00%	82.98%	
	0	1	6	1	0	39	47
LinkedIn	0.00%	4.17%	10.42%	4.17%	20.83%	60.42%	
	0	2	5	2	10	29	48
Twitter	2.13%	2.13%	17.02%	4.26%	8.51%	65.96%	
	1	1	8	2	4	31	47
Snapchat	0.00%	0.00%	2.17%	0.00%	0.00%	97.83%	
	0	0	1	0	0	45	46
Flickr	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.22%	97.78%	
	0	0	0	0	1	44	45
Pinterest	2.13%	0.00%	4.26%	4.26%	8.51%	80.85%	
	1	0	2	2	4	38	47
Behance or similar portfolio platform	0.00%	0.00%	2.22%	2.22%	2.22%	93.33%	
	0	0	1	1	1	42	45

felt awkward using social media. There was also a significant relationship between feelings of awkwardness in using social media and the academics who did not use it ( $X^2 = 9.258$   $p = .026$ ). Awkwardness was not mentioned at all within the qualitative data.

**Concerns about bullying.** Participant concerns regarding social media being used by students to bully each other and academic staff were present in the qualitative data, resulting in a negative impact on mental health.

Social Media interactions such as Facebook groups allows students to form collaborations to bully and attack staff and influence other students that such behavior is socially and professionally normal. It nearly ended my teaching career. It made me see myself as students said they saw me - worthless, useless and inept.

Due to this concern, participants mentioned the necessity for academic staff to closely monitor social media interactions between students to address issues of bullying if they arise:

If Social media is not monitored by staff, it can allow for bullying among students which then has to be sorted by a staff member.

***RQ2: How are academics using social media in a higher educational learning and teaching context?***

Nearly half of the sample (24, 45%) answered that they spent less than one hour per week working on social media for their teaching practice; with a further 30% (16) academics spending between 1 - 3 hours per week. Approximately, 8% (4) academics spent between 4 - 7 hours per week using social media for their teaching.

Table 3 contains the responses to the question: How often do you use the following social media platforms. This question also allowed for participants to provide a qualitative response if a social media platform that they used was not on the list. This question contains a list of the mainstream social media platforms.

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn were the social media platforms used most frequently by academics, particularly on a weekly basis. The variance in the total number of respondents was due to some participants not responding to every platform option. Participants could also provide qualitative responses to this question. In the qualitative question field, academics responded that they perceived YouTube as a repository of valuable resources instead of a social media platform in its common definition, e.g., "I use YouTube as a resource for video teaching materials, so not is a "social" way as such." Other responses indicated that academics avoided using other social

media platforms in addition to YouTube to avoid increasing their workload:

I mostly use YouTube videos so haven't spent too much energy on trying to embed other types of social media in my course due to the fact that I'm afraid it will increase workload.

Other social media platforms used by academics identified in the qualitative data included WordPress, Slack, Periscope, Reddit, PebblePad and Flickr.

Participants in this study were also asked the question: What strategies do you use to manage social media in your teaching practice? This question also included a field for qualitative responses in participants wanted to provide further information. Table 4 and the following qualitative responses contain the answers to this question.

Participants were able to provide more than one answer to this question. As such, the majority of academics reported that they took care when constructing social media content and to protect their privacy, however, less employed time-management and stress-reduction strategies. The qualitative data highlighted a range of strategies used by academics to manage what they perceived as the more challenging aspects of using social media in their teaching. Themes that arose included applying the institution's processes and policies and employing best practices from other organizations. However, the most predominant strategy evident in the qualitative data related to setting up rules,

boundaries, and guidelines at the beginning of a social media platform being used by academic staff and student, for example, in setting the boundaries between academics and students: *"I'm clear with students about how I will interact with them on social media. IE about courses and programs and on Facebook for instance I won't friend them but rather interact in designated groups."* Another example was that of keeping their private and professional lives separate on social media platforms: *"I have set up a dedicated professional Facebook account to separate my professional and personal connections. This has been successful thus far."* Further examples related to academics setting guidelines to navigate students interacting with each other on social media: *"I put up some information about keeping posts to topic and being respectful of others."* A final example was to only respond in person to particular types of comments: *"I don't respond quickly to aspects that have an 'emotional' nature. I acknowledge that deeper discussions and arguments are better to have face-to-face."*

Participants in this study were requested to share exactly what they use social media for in a teaching context. Table 5 presents the answers to the question: How do you use social media in your teaching practice?

The three most popular uses of social media involved the broadcasting of course-related information, and the least popular related to using social media for assessments and gathering student opinions.

Table 4  
*Strategies Used to Manage Social Media in Teaching Practice*

Strategy	Percent and frequency
Monitoring my social media use, both in my personal and professional life.	40.48%
	17
Limiting the amount of time spent on social media relating to teaching practice.	40.48%
	17
Utilizing time-management strategies to manage my workload and social media use.	26.19%
	11
Utilizing positive stress reducing techniques, such as meditation, yoga, exercise, counselling etc. to manage the effects of my teaching workload and social media use.	26.19%
Researching the different forms of social media, and their uses.	38.10%
	16
Taking great care over what I write in my social media posts.	78.57%
	33
Protecting my private information on social media platforms.	71.43%
	30
Highlighting to students, the importance of protecting their personal information on social media platforms.	35.71%
	15
Challenging any inappropriate comments that I see on social media.	40.48%
	17
Total Respondents	42

Table 5  
*Uses of Social Media in Teaching Practice*

Use of social media in teaching	Percent	Frequency
Managing events, excursions	34.09%	15
Group work	40.91%	18
Discussion of course content	45.45%	20
Announcements	54.55%	24
To remind students	40.91%	18
Solicit opinions	20.45%	9
Sharing of student work	25.00%	11
Journal work	13.64%	6
Clarify assessments	31.82%	14
Assessment	15.91%	7
Sharing of interesting materials and information relevant to the course	75.00%	33
Sharing of inspirational materials and ideation relevant to the course	54.55%	24
Total Respondents		44

### Discussion

One of the key findings from this pilot study was that academics in FABL used social media more than their FoSHEE counterparts. Within the Faculty of Arts, Business and Law are disciplines such as Communication, Creative Industries, Social Sciences, and Marketing in comparison to the predominantly STEM-focused disciplines in the Faculty of Science, Health, Engineering, and Education. The difference in social media use by academics between the faculties may be explained by the largely communication, creative, and business-centered disciplines within FABL. We propose that academics in communication-centered disciplines may have greater confidence and fewer concerns when deciding to adopt new communication technologies such as social media.

A significant concern raised in our study related to privacy breaches when using social media to communicate with students; this is also a prominent theme in the literature (Willems et al., 2018; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Fenwick, 2016; Lupton, 2014; Moran et al. 2010). However, academics in FoSHEE (again STEM-related disciplines) reported having the greatest concern. This could be due to a lesser focus on communication technologies within these disciplines, as mentioned, with this unfamiliarity and inexperience in using social media resulting in increased concern and inhibitions relating to its use.

Furthermore, concerns regarding time scarcity as a result of social media use were also present in our results, thus corresponding to the literature (Guy, 2012; Fenwick, 2016; Lupton, 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Willems et al., 2018). Yet, male participants registered much greater concern than female counterparts about

the perceived time commitment of using social media. This may be because in general, Australian women use social media more on a daily basis in comparison to men, therefore, its use is already firmly embedded in their day-to-day activities and not perceived as an additional task (Yellow, 2018).

Again, and in line with the literature, participants identified feelings of awkwardness when using social media, but the perception was strongest with academics within their first five years of teaching (Lupton, 2014). Feelings of awkwardness for new academics may be attributed to this period of professional development in general, and they may not be solely related to social media use.

Concerns relating to bullying of students and staff via social media were present in this pilot study, but not highlighted in the literature. However, it seemed the academics experienced with social media effectively addressed and managed these concerns by setting up clear rules, boundaries, and guidelines for their interactions with students at the very beginning of using social media in a teaching context.

The social media platforms used by academics reinforce those used in the Moran et al. (2010) study. However, the platforms used by academics in our study differ slightly to those used by the general Australian population in which Instagram and Snapchat are used more than LinkedIn and Twitter (Yellow, 2018, p. 14). The difference may be due to LinkedIn being a professional platform and therefore of greater relevance and appropriateness to academics and Twitter being used to share academic material and to increase research profiles (Lupton, 2014).

Reluctance in using social media for assessments was present among academics in our study. Lupton

(2014) found that academics felt that they lacked credibility in the eyes of their peers if they used social media. Possibly this perception of a lack of credibility has been extended to social media's capacity and legitimacy as an assessment tool. Innovation, experience and relevance will be key factors in increasing the use of social media for assessments.

One of the most significant findings in our study is that social media is predominantly being used by academics to broadcast information to their students instead of leveraging its two-way functionality. More needs to be understood to determine whether social media is being used for one-way communication as a result of lack of training in how to use the characteristics of the technology, feelings of awkwardness in engaging with students using the platforms, perceptions of time scarcity and increased workload as a result of two-way communication or a risk mitigation strategy to limit negative interactions with students and reducing potential privacy breaches. Parallels can be drawn with other professions, such as public relations where social media was also used for one-way communication when it was first adopted by the industry as a communication tool (Grunig, 2009; Macnamara, 2010).

### Limitations and Further Research

This pilot study was limited to one university and a small sample size. Further research is required to investigate its findings at a greater depth with a larger sample of academics to better understand the difference between academics who have embraced the use of social media in a teaching context and the perceptions of those who are reluctant to do so. Further investigation is also necessary to explore why academics are using social media as a channel to broadcast information to students rather than leveraging the functionality of social media technology to engage and collaborate with students as part of the teaching and learning process.

### Conclusion

Overall, this pilot study highlighted that the academics not regularly using social media in their teaching had the greatest concerns about its use and that those using the technology are effectively implementing strategies to address and manage the perceived concerns of those not using it. Furthermore, the two different faculties had very different perceptions and approaches to social media. These silos within this particular university may be diminished with greater collaboration between the faculties where academics using social media can mentor those who are unfamiliar with, fearful of, and/or unconfident in using it.

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