# The promise and pitfalls of social media use in Higher Education

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Social media is pervasive in all aspects of modern life, including health, education, parenting, entertainment personal relationships and current affairs. In Higher Education however, social media is becoming a site of tension between those pursuing connected and innovative educational practice on one hand and an increasingly constrained policy environment reacting to reputational damage resulting from subversive and risky online behaviour by students and staff on the other. Social media has polarised academics, many of whom dismiss it as time-wasting and trivialising academic work and others who embrace it as an open and evolving form of scholarship and academic practice. Students engage with it for learning despite the expected norms of traditional academic practice. This symposium will highlight and explore key issues dominating current debates around the use and misuse of social media in Higher Education drawing on the wisdom of the crowd to find solutions to such challenges.

Keywords: social media, higher education, policy, research, learning, teaching, digital, identity

## Overview

Social media use is rapidly permeating every aspect of contemporary university life (Johnson et al., 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However the more it proliferates the more universities struggle to provide effective governance and policy frameworks to protect their standards and interests. This symposium will highlight the challenges and opportunities currently facing University staff who choose to connect, collaborate and create through the plethora of social media platforms available.

Some of the core university functions most impacted are:
- **Research** - crowd sourcing, crowd funding, dissemination, collaborations, open access publishing, blogging, ResearchGate, AcademiaEdu, etc.
- **Learning and Teaching** - engaging students and managing distractions, connecting with experts, knowledge is everywhere but is it valid, managing digital identity/footprint/tattoo, the walled garden of the LMS and possibilities for alternative platforms
- **Engagement** - Alumni relations, Industry/ Professions, global partnerships, blurring boundaries and the emergence of new credentials
- **Recruitment and retention** - Brand promotion, marketing, attracting potential students, tracking student progress

The symposium will be presented in the form of a debate around the pros and cons of using social media in Higher Education (HE). We will cover what is social media (in its broadest definition), consider the push and pull of social media in HE, examine the issues around policy, and consider whether it is social or in fact anti-social. We will also examine the various purposes of using social media beyond teaching and learning, such as research, creating a digital identity, and connecting with various networks, for example:
- Why is social media an issue of interest in HE?;
- Is social media a new paradigm in HE?;
- How is the use of social media being perceived, championed and challenged?;
- How is social media different in terms of the disruption and subversion?; and finally
- What questions do we need answered by collective wisdom?

## Symposium structure: format, strategies, audience

This symposium will run for one hour. The structure of this symposium will be twofold. We will first start with a 'great debate' with a panel unpacking social media as a contested space in HE. Proposed panel members are listed in the biographies below. Audience participation will be encouraged throughout the debate via the use of social media - e.g. questions on twitter will be picked up for discussion by the chair. Following the debate, the chair will ensure that the floor will be opened for a participatory discussion around this contested space. Recommendations will be drafted and fed back to Australian Journal of Educational Technology (AJET) through a subsequent paper.

## References

Johnson, L., Adams Becker, S., Cummins, M., Estrada, V., Freeman, A., & Hall, C. (2016). *NMC Horizon Report 2016 Higher Education Edition* (0989733556). Retrieved from http://cdn.nmc.org/media/2016-nmc-horizon-report-he-EN.pdf

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons, 53*(1), 59-68.