

# **Professional development, employability, and social media training in higher education**

**Karen Sutherland**

University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, Australia  
ksutherl@usc.edu.au

**Susie S. Ho**

Monash University, Melbourne, Australia  
susie.ho@monash.edu

Social media use has increased with the evolution of smart phone technology and is widespread across society for work, education, and social connectivity. While many employers value social media capacity, they recognise a skills shortage among graduates. Universities rarely develop such skills for the changing work environment which may stem from assumptions made about 'digital natives'. There are relatively few publications on social media training in higher education. This study aimed to explore the topic from the students' perspective. Undergraduates from Law, Medicine, Science, Arts and Engineering undertook an optional workshop at Monash University to address a range of professional scenarios. Eighty-one attendees elected to complete an online survey afterwards, involving Likert scale and open-response questions about their motivations for enrolling, the effectiveness of the training, and the benefits they associated with skills in social media. The qualitative and quantitative data indicated that students linked social media skills to employability. Approximately 90% of respondents stated that having these skills would increase their employability and professionalism. Respondents had varying levels of confidence and ability in professional and strategic use of social media, with a quarter stating their ability was poor. More than 50% of respondents noted that they had underestimated the difficulty of using social media in professional contexts. While undergraduates recognise the importance of social media for their careers, many appear unconfident in using it in a professional manner. Respondents from across disciplines appear receptive to boosting their employability by developing these transferable 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills during their degree.