CREATING AN ACADEMIC COMMUNITY AT A REGIONAL LAW SCHOOL THAT OFFERS A LARGE ONLINE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Social media use has arguably become a fundamental part of modern day western society. People engage with social media for many reasons, including a desire to connect with an online community. Increasingly, businesses and education institutions are also starting to use social media for various purposes. Like most other universities, and to a lesser extent faculties and schools within Universities, the School of Law at the University of New England ('UNE') has started using social media to improve UNE's brand awareness and aid the UNE's marketing efforts. The overall rationale for building a social media presence was to generate a sense of community for UNE students, the majority of whom are studying online.

In order to evaluate the marketing effectiveness of the UNE School of Law's social media in raising brand awareness, the UNE School of Law team developed a survey instrument that was advertised via Facebook, Twitter, Moodle and email, and received more than 70 responses. The survey's results are discussed and critically evaluated in this article and indicate that UNE students, alumni and other interested parties, do feel more a part of the UNE School of Law community as a result of social media efforts.

To gain a clearer idea of how the UNE's social media presence has impacted on the UNE School of Law, it will be necessary to repeat a similar survey at a later date. Presently, the original survey indicates how social media has developed at the UNE School of Law since it was launched.

I INTRODUCTION

Subconsciously, from the outset of our journey, the underlying philosophy of the UNE School of Law was to create a UNE School of Law online community. Community building can be difficult to achieve at a university where more than 80 per cent of its students are studying from a distance off campus, and online. Studying online in these circumstances can leave university students to feel isolated without a community. There are also fewer opportunities for the lecturers at the UNE School of Law to meet their students directly in a face to face environment. Due to these realities, the UNE School of Law aimed to counteract these arguably negative aspects of online learning, by developing a strong social media presence.

Kyeonj-Ju Seo notes that the advent of social media has significantly changed the 'landscape of distance education.'[1] That is, the learning environment can be extended beyond both the classroom and any online resources that a university officially sets up.[2] Social media platforms such as Facebook are used by universities to 'improve student integration into academic

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1   Kay Kyeong-Ju Seo, 'Empowering Learning Communities With Social Media' (2016) 30 *American Journal of Distance Education* 1,1.

2   Ibid.

culture.'[3] The ability of a wide range of students to learn and interact via social media platforms also allows students to become content creators in their own right, by allowing them to change and amend information to suit their individual learning styles.[4]

The use of social media at a school or faculty level also can have other positive ramifications. These are increasing brand awareness and recognition, which helps to complement more centralised marketing strategies. Given these benefits, in 2014 the UNE School of Law chose to enter the world of social media. A Community Moodle page was also established to broadcast events and news exclusively to law students and provide exposure to those students not using social media. Instead of being used in specific units, we focused on using social media as a general informational tool.

Anecdotally, these efforts were seen to be successful, and students and academics expressed that they felt more connected to the UNE School of Law. It was decided however, that formal data was needed to measure the success of these efforts. We chose to create a survey instrument to better gauge the level of success of our initiatives. Human ethics committee approval was sought and gained at the University of New England before the survey was distributed.[5] Interestingly, our anecdotal thoughts that interested parties did feel more of a part of the UNE School of Law as a result of our social media initiatives, were reaffirmed in the survey results. We also gained valuable feedback on how to improve our social media presence.

II The Context?

In 2014, staff of the School of Law at the University of New England joined together to discuss what steps to take to market the school via social media. Understandably, many academics had concerns about entering into the social media space. These concerns included: how to handle public criticism, and managing the extra workload of social media. Most academics agreed that as we are a predominantly online law school, it was very important to have a presence in the fast growing social media world. The authors of this article committed to fostering a social media presence within the school. Neither of the authors had any formal training in social media and collaborated to create a Facebook page, and a Twitter account. Another staff member generated a Moodle based community page. This article will primarily focus on the UNE School of Law's Facebook page efforts.

During the first few months of the UNE School of Law's Facebook page, the level of participation and interaction was very low. For several months, there were less than 50 'likes' on the page, but over time we built up our engagement and page 'likes'. We now have a large audience (2526 'likes' at the times of writing) who engage readily with our stories. The people who 'like' our page include: UNE School of Law students, alumni, and academics from other universities, members of the legal profession, high school teachers and other interested community members.

When we first started our social media efforts, we had no budget to create online advertisements or boost posts. This was a problem as many of our posts got lost in Facebook as they were not engaging, interesting or personal enough to gain anyone's attention. We have since been granted a small budget that can be used for these purposes. This has been a very successful strategy for the UNE School of Law.

When we started our social media journey at the UNE School of Law, we did not have a plan and had not thought about how we were going to feed this 'beast' we had created. We started

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3   Marta Cuesta, Monica Eklund, Ingegerd Rydin and Ann-Katrin Witt, 'Using Facebook as a Co-learning Community in Higher Education' (2016) 41 *Learning, Media and Technology* 55, 55.

4   Kyeong-Ju Seo, above n 1, 1.

5   Approval No HE16-288, Valid to 28/11/2017.

sending emails out to staff members asking them to tell us anything that they were doing or had done in the past that could be shared on our Facebook page. We also approached UNE School of Law alumni to ask them for interviews and write stories about them. Luckily, a number of alumna agreed to our request which really helped to get the Facebook page up and running.

III The Importance and Proliferation of Social Media?

Times are changing dramatically in our society. The use of technology and the emergence of digital natives have impacted on our universities considerably. [6] A 2013 survey found that 55 per cent of university lecturers use social media in a professional context. [7] In the same study, 41 per cent of those surveyed used social media in their teaching. [8] This is understandable as many current university students are known as 'digital natives'. Digital natives are people who have never known a world without the internet. [9] Digital natives spend a great deal of their time exploring and interacting with digital technology. [10] In 2008, people born into an internet world spent more than eight hours a day engaging with digital technology. [11] The figures were even higher in 2015, averaging at 12 hours of digital interaction per day. [12]

Since social media arrived in our lives after 2004 it has gone from strength to strength. As an example, Facebook now has 1.65 billion monthly active users around the world. [13] Recent data indicates that 89 per cent of 18-20 year olds, and 82 per cent of people in the 30-49 year old age bracket, use Facebook. Interestingly, it is not just young people who use social media channels such as Facebook. In the 50-64 year old age group, 65 per cent use Facebook and in the 65 years + age group, 49 per cent of people use the same social media channel. [14] In total, close to 40 per cent of the human population are said to use social media regularly. [15]

Increasingly, social media is being used as a marketing tool by businesses, including universities. Arguably, the interaction which people have on social media with businesses, makes consumers see a brand as more trustworthy. [16] A strong social media presence may be a very important avenue of reinforcing the brand of a university. [17] If a business creates a strong social media community, this can increase trust and loyalty. [18] Having a high level of loyalty may provide 'positive word of mouth about the university.' [19] Having a vibrant social media brand also helps to pique the interest of prospective students. [20] Arguably, a significant social media

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6   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 Behaviour* 550, 550.

7   Min Liu, Emily McKelroy, Jina Kand, Jason Harron and Sa Liu 1, 'Examining the Us of Facebook and twitter as an Additional Social Space in a MOOC' (2016) 30 *American Journal of Distance Education* 13,14.

8   Ibid.

9   Nevzat et al, above n 6, 550.

10   Ibid.

11   Ibid.

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid, 553.

14   Ibid, 554.

15   Min Liu, above n 7,13.

16   Mohammad Reza Habibi, Michael Laroche n Marie-Odile Richard, 'The roles of brand community and community engagement in building brand trust on social media' (2014) 37 *Computers in Human Behaviour* 152, 156.

17   Nevzat et al, above n 6, 550.

18   Habibi et al, above n 16, 159.

19   Nevzat et al, above n 6, 550.

20   Ibid, 551.

presence may reduce student attrition and maintain relationships with people after they have graduated.[21] The informal and friendly nature of social media may also 'promote more openness among participants.'[22]

IV PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

As previously discussed, the use of social media in the university context has many advantages. It is fair to say there are potential risks and problems associated with universities engaging in social media. In terms of workload, managing successful and engaging social media sites is time consuming and constant in nature.[23] In addition, it has been our experience that you need people with a particular skill-set to manage social media accounts. For example, it is necessary to have a team who have proficiency in terms of storytelling, whether it be through the medium of video or the written word. In addition, it is advantageous to have people who can write in an emotional and engaging way. A functional understanding of the different social media platforms is also fundamental.

Social media is still regarded 'with understandable suspicion by many lecturers.'[24] The use of social media can evoke 'privacy, security and ethical concerns at both the pedagogical and learning and teaching policy levels.'[25] Burns and Corbin note there are several issues relating to the importance of maintaining professionalism when using social media.[26] Two of the main risks are reputational damage for lawyers, as well as undermining the public confidence in the legal profession.[27] One of the main concerns with the UNE School of Law was the potential for students to post defamatory material relating to staff, students or others. Clearly, this can be an issue and it can be 'multiplied when outsiders respond to student material posted on social media sites.'[28] In addition, it is necessary to be cognisant of copyright considerations to avoid any breaches of intellectual property.[29] For example, any images must have a 'common licence' attached to them. Social media managers also need to be aware of plagiarism rules and principles. Even though there is currently a dearth of law in this area, over the coming decade there will no doubt be further common law cases which will examine issues such as the 'vicarious liability of lecturers or their institutions.'[30] From our experience, many of these problems can be managed by making sure the team is aware of these considerations. It is also fundamental that social media sites are continually checked, so that any issues can be dealt with quickly.

V SOCIAL MEDIA IN LEGAL EDUCATION

Law schools have been facing a variety of challenges in recent years, such as the increasing number of law schools entering the market and a perceived glut of law graduates. In fact, Michelle Pistone has described the situation facing law schools as a 'tsunami' or a 'perfect

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21 Ibid.

22 Cuesta et al, above n 3, 59.

23 George Callaghan and Ian Fribbance, 'The use of Facebook to Build a Community for Distance Learning Students: A Case Study from the Open University' (2017) 31 *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning* 260, 262.

24 Catherine Lumby, Nicole Anderson and Sky Hugman, 'Apres Le Deluge: social media in learning and teaching' (2014) 20 *The Journal of International Communication* 119, 122.

25 Ibid, 122.

26 Kylie Burns and Lillian Corbin, 'E-Professionalism: The Global Reach of the Lawyer's Duty to Use Social Media Ethically' (2016) *Journal of the Professional Lawyer* 153, 161.

27 Ibid 171.

28 Lumby, above n 24.

29 Lumby, above n 24.

30 Lumby, above n 24.

storm.'[31] One way that universities may be able to react to these challenges is by getting involved with new educational and social mediums. Many of our law students are digital natives, which means they have not known a time without the internet. Millennials are more likely to receive their news from facebook or blogs, as opposed to newspaper and television.[32] Developing an engaging and effective social media presence allows students to interact with ideas at any time, outside allocated classes.[33]

Engaging with social media also allows academics to share their knowledge with both the general community and with their students.[34] Therefore, using social media tools can help academics broadcast their research whilst supporting the university's marketing efforts. It is also clear that the reach of research ideas will be considerably higher when documented via social media.[35]

VI COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AND INQUIRY

The importance of creating a community of practice has been spoken about extensively in educational literature. For example, Lave and Werner argue that 'learners inevitably participate in communities of practice and that the mastery of knowledge requires newcomers to move towards full participation on the sociocultural practices of a community.'[36] In other words, for people to fully engage in education, 'communities of practice' need to evolve. In addition, communities of practice permeate our lives during both our work and leisure time.[37] As people use social media in all facets of their lives, it is an easy way to allow groups to develop these communities of practice which are important to people.[38]

Allowing students to 'investigate the problems and engage in inquiry for themselves'[39] is an approach which has been praised in the educational literature. For example, in a recent study by Akyol and Garrison, their research showed there was a significant connection between the 'collaborative development of cognitive presence in online discussions and students' perception of cognitive presence are associated with high perception of learning and actual learning outcomes in terms of grades.[40] Therefore, incorporating social media into a field of academic study, clearly has added benefits in terms of achieving educational theorist's goals, whilst also possibly assisting students increase their overall results.

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31 Michelle Pistone 'Law Schools and Technology: Where We Are and Where We Are Heading' (2015) 64, *Journal of Legal Education* 586, 586.

32 Ibid, 591.

33 Ibid, 594.

34 Kate Galloway, Kristoffer Greaves and Melissa Castan, 'Gatecrashing the Research Paradigm: Effective Integration of Online Technologies in Maximising Research Impact and Engagement in Legal education' (2013) 6 *Journal of the Australasian Law Teachers Association* 83, 83.

35 Ibid, 88.

36 Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 33

37 MK Smith, 'Communities of Practice' *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education* (2003)<www. infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm>.

38 Ibid

39 Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 15.

40 Zehra Akyol et al, 'A Response to the Review of the Community of Inquiry Framework'(2009) 23 *Journal of Distance Education* 123, 124.

VII Our Stories and Content

One of the other interesting things about creating stories for social media is that sometimes the stories that you expect to go well, do not go well, and sometimes the stories you do expect to gain traction, fail. For example, many of the posts that we published about well-respected academics being invited speakers at high end academic conferences, were not given much attention on social media, whereas a video or photo of a native animal such as a koala or a kangaroo, would gain significant attention. The other thing that we found was that posts about our past and current students, were very popular. In fact, one post that surprised the authors with its popularity was one relating to an older alumnus who was working in a voluntary part time job. Even though this particular alumnus was not 'successful' according to some people's definitions, his story clearly resonated with a lot of people.

At the UNE School of Law, we create many human interest stories where we aim to celebrate people who are connected with the UNE School of Law. Some examples of these stories include staff profiles, student profiles and alumni profiles. For these profiles, we interview the subject and then write a story based around their lives. Some of the questions which may be asked include why they decided to study law (if applicable), what was/is their favourite law subject, and what do they hope to do with their law degree? We also ask more personal questions such as what the subject's interests are. Within each of these stories we focus on the personal stories of the people who are highlighted in the Facebook post. For example, for our staff profiles we discuss their individual stories and what they love about the law. We find this approach resonates more effectively with our audience as we are creating real and authentic stories of the individuals involved in the UNE School of Law.

In addition to human interest stories we post about events, job opportunities and information relating to current legal issues. We are also working towards highlighting the research of our academic staff members. We also create humorous and relevant posts such as 'Friday Fun Fact' which document an interesting, yet humourous, aspect of the law. One example of a Friday Fun Fact is as follows:

> 'Friday Fun Fact!
>
> If you're going to do your law readings in the fridge make sure you can open the door from the inside. That seems to be the take away message from s 58B(1) of the *Summary Offences Act 1953* (SA) which states: "A person must not sell or hire, or offer or expose for sale or hire, a refrigerator, ice chest or icebox having in it a compartment of a capacity of 42.5 litres or more unless that compartment is so constructed or equipped that every door or lid can be opened easily from the inside of the compartment when any lock or catch that can be operated from the outside of the compartment is fastened." The maximum fine is $750.'

Posts such as these, arguably humanise both the School of Law and the law in general. The other way we attempt to humanise the School of Law is by identifying the importance of nostalgia and emotion within our posts.

VIII The Importance of Nostalgia And Emotion

Evoking nostalgia and emotion is an arguably excellent way to gain attention via social media. One post which triggered both a sense of nostalgia and emotion, was the following:

> In order to make property law more palatable and interesting for students Dr Kip Werren incorporates food fantasies into his lectures. Kip took on this tradition as a tribute to the late Dr Peter Hemphill who was one of the original lecturers at the UNE School of Law. Many alumni will remember Peter's food fantasies which students could draw upon when contract law became too complicated or boring. It looks like these 'food fantasies' are also helping our current

students with their exams. You see, a couple of Kip's property law students have emailed saying 'we have given ourselves a final food fantasy to get through the next week…we are planning to go to Neville's straight after the property law exam finishes for their new 'Holy Cheeze. This burger boasts a house made crumbled American cheddar cheese patty, double grass-fed beef, double Coby Jack cheese, bacon, classic Nev's sauce, Jalapenos and onion relish. This is all served with a side of crinkle cut chips. We are sure it will be, as you say, absolutely delicious!

This post reached an audience of 5411 people and attracted comments from alumni, such as:

One of my most memorable lectures for me was with Dr Hemphill and his food fantasy recipe for "human thigh bone". It was a hilarious introduction into a case on cannibalism and contracts void for public policy. His engaging lectures were probably the reason I went on to practice commercial law. A huge loss to UNE community.

The popular takeaway business also shared our post which meant that it reached different viewers to the UNE School of Law's audience. Posts such as these promote a high level of engagement as: they are unexpected on a Facebook page showcasing a law school, it is relatable to a large audience and it incorporates a powerful dose of nostalgia which evokes emotion. All of these factors lead to attention and engagement on our pages. This is important as engagement is 'perhaps the Holy Grail of social media.'[41]

IX Initial Survey

In order to determine the effectiveness of the UNE School of Law's social media efforts, we chose to examine if, and to what extent, these social media tools and online platforms can create an additional sense of community, and identify a baseline level of engagement against which to compare future results. A mixed methods approach was employed to collect a combination of qualitative and quantitative data with a survey used to collect demographic data and ask both Likert-scale and open-ended questions. Both the Facebook and Twitter feed history were analysed to determine the numbers and type of posts that had been shared, in order to compare these against the survey data.

As a rural university law school with 80 per cent of our students studying online, we were interested to see whether we could improve our students' sense of community through the use of social media and other online communication platforms. Furthermore, we wanted data on what sorts of posts and information was of most relevance, not only to current students, but also to other university members, alumni and the wider legal community. The results discussed below are in respect of an initial survey designed to provide a base comparison point. While the page had already been operating for a year at the start of the survey process, we wanted to see what improvements could be made, and if they were implemented, would students respond to them. The results from the initial survey will be used to inform any necessary changes to the content of the Facebook page. A subsequent survey will be used to gauge whether these changes have had any effect on engagement. Only the initial survey is discussed below.

X Method

A *Participants*

Potential participants for the study included all students currently enrolled in a Law course at the University of New England and those students, alumni, academics and members of the public who like or follow the Facebook page and Twitter account.

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41 Habibi et al, above n 16, 156.

B *Data Collection And Analysis*

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative data. The primary data source was survey responses to a mix of multiple-choice, yes/no, Likert-scale and open-ended questions. A study of posts made and materials available on the School of Law Facebook page, a School of Law Twitter feed, and a School of Law Community Site Moodle page, was also made to supplement these results. The survey was offered via all the online communication platforms. While coincidental recruitment of those in a dependent relationship with the researchers was necessary, as law students were those most likely to be involved in the online social media community of the School of Law, ethics concerns were addressed by ensuring all responses to the survey were anonymous and participation was voluntary. Some background demographic information was collected to provide a better understanding of the users of the platforms, however this information could not be used to determine whether a participant was from a particular unit.

C *Study Survey*

The survey sought to find out what participants' perceptions were of the current online communication platforms, which platforms were used most, what content was most popular and what participants wished to see more of. The survey consisted of 27 questions. The first part consisted of five questions to collect participant demographics including, age, gender, broad geographic location and association with UNE. Where a participant identified as a student, we further asked whether they were enrolled as an internal or external student. The second part of the survey contained six multiple-choice questions with the option for participants to provide their own free text response. These questions were designed to collect quantitative data on which communication platforms were being accessed, how often and what content on each of these was of most benefit/interest. The fourth part of the survey consisted of a series of yes/no, likert-scale and open-ended questions, to assess what content students wished to see more or less of, and to understand and gain a base understanding of whether the current platforms were contributing to developing a vibrant community, enhancing student experiences and increasing feeling of connectedness.

The quantitative data was analysed descriptively in order to present the survey results. However, due to low participation rates, this data is not necessarily representative. The qualitative data, comprising open-ended responses by participants, was analysed using NVivo. These responses were coded by one researcher while a second researcher checked these codes and modified them as necessary. These codes were used to identify themes in the responses. To enhance the reliability of these results, the content of online communication platform posts were analysed in order to supplement the researcher's interpretations.

D *The Study's Limitations*

Although this study incorporated multiple data sources, it is limited in that only the responses from those who completed the voluntary survey were included. This study provided a snapshot of how social media tools can be used at a School level by an online and on-campus university. Because this study was focused on online communication platforms that were designed to speak to those interested in law at UNE, rather than involved in specific subjects, generalisations should only be drawn for those that share similar structures. Furthermore, we were limited in our analysis by the use of NVivo for Mac. Certain content analysis tools were unavailable in the Mac version of the software such as cluster analysis. Future research will address these limitations by ensuring the data is initially loaded onto and coded, using the Windows edition of this software.

E *Facebook Page, Twitter Feed And The UNE School of Law Community Site*

The Facebook posts were analysed by looking at the posts in the six months preceding the survey. The content of each post was coded to identify the theme of the post and how this corresponded to the survey questions. The posts were also coded based on the number of 'likes' to help identify any patterns in those posts which performed well and enable these to be compared to the survey results. As Twitter posts were re-posts of Facebook, it was not deemed necessary to code those responses.

This chart below depicts a comparison of the Facebook posts:
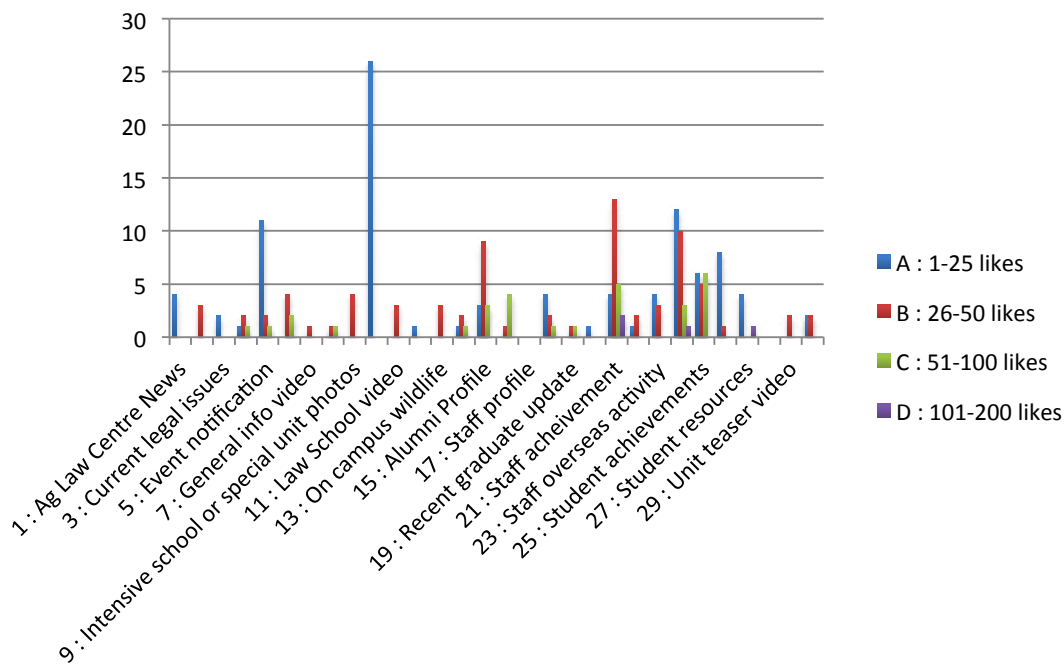
The vertical axis represents the frequency of posts which have been published in this area. The number of 'likes' which each type of story has generated, is also represented in the chart. Note that this graph is not necessarily representative of the popularity of posts. For some of the posts, the UNE School of Law may have had fewer followers than it did for others, due to the growth in followers over a period of time. As evidenced from the above chart, the UNE School of Law's audience is particularly interested in stories about staff and students of the School.

The School of Law Community Moodle site was a new initiative commenced in 2014, and is available to enrolled law students only. Content on this site is limited to: Head of School Communications; Specific School Communications, Skills Resources, Guides and Policy documents, and links to professional organisations.

F *Results*

We received 71 complete responses. Our largest response age group was 35-44 year olds (28 per cent) followed by 20 per cent of responses coming from 45-54 year olds. The group of 25-34 year olds constituted 18 per cent of respondents and 55-64 year olds 15 per cent of the responses. The groups of 18-24 year olds and 65-74 year olds, had the lowest participants with 14 per cent and four per cent respectively. More females than males participated in the survey as 42 per cent of males and 58 per cent of females completed the survey. Most of the participants were located in the New England area (32 per cent) or in regional Australia (26 per cent). Eighteen

per cent of participants were located in the Sydney metropolitan area, and three per cent were located overseas. As expected, most of our participants were UNE School of Law students (76 per cent). Eleven per cent were academics at UNE and seven per cent were alumni of the UNE School of Law. In addition, three per cent of participants were interested community members and another three per cent were students of another UNE School. One per cent of participants were high school students.

Of the current UNE students who completed our survey, 15 per cent were on campus students and 62 per cent were external students. In terms of which platforms these students accessed, 66 per cent said they regularly access the Community Moodle site and 69 per cent accessed the Facebook page. Thirteen per cent said they regularly accessed Twitter, whilst another 13 per cent said they did not access any of the platforms. Students noted they saw our content a couple of times a week (38 per cent), once a week (18 per cent), once a day (15 per cent), once a month (13 per cent) and other (one per cent).

This cohort of students found the following content most interesting and/or beneficial:

WHAT CONTENT DO PARTICIPANTS FIND MOST INTERESTING/BENEFICIAL?	PERCENTAGE
Discussion of Current Legal Issues	42 per cent
Event notifications	42 per cent
UNE School of Law Staff Achievements	35 per cent
SOL Student Achievements	31 per cent
Photos from student events or intensive schools	31 per cent
Job Opportunities	31 per cent
Information about staff research publications	28 per cent
Staff Profiles	27 per cent
Alumni Profiles	24 per cent
Current student profiles	18 per cent

In terms of the qualitative results, respondents noted 'Alumni/staff/student profiles are awesome.' Another noted that they liked the 'Information about members of the School of Law alumni' the best. Others said that they found information about 'Guest lecturer(s), staff papers and job opportunities' informative. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents stated they attended events as a result of seeing the events advertised on the online platforms. Sixty-three per cent of the respondents said they saw these events advertised on Facebook, and 40 per cent said they did not know about these events before the online platforms were created.

Respondents noted they would like to see more student focused content in terms of events, talks and profiles. Another said that they would appreciate 'more study tips, stories linking to course content to assist off campus students.' One respondent wanted to be provided with 'Ways to connect with other people nearby.' In terms of what the respondents would like to see less of, one said they would like to see less 'On campus info. Remote learners cannot connect to this and it clutters up the space.' Others noted that they wanted to see less content relating to 'Job(s) further study etc', 'alumni profiles' and 'updates that are not relevant to the law school such as social events-they belong on another site.'

When coding the open-ended questions regarding what content students wished to see more of, word frequency queries were run in order to identify recurring themes. Once generic words such as 'law' and 'school' were removed from the search, more specific words could be identified.

For example, both 'current' and 'information' were identified as part of this process. We found these results were visualised most successfully with the use of word trees. This allowed easy identification of recurring themes and phrases that surrounded the words of interest. An analysis of the below word trees identified a recurring interest in legal news, events and opportunities for students. Once these themes were identified we were able to use this information when planning future content for the social media pages.
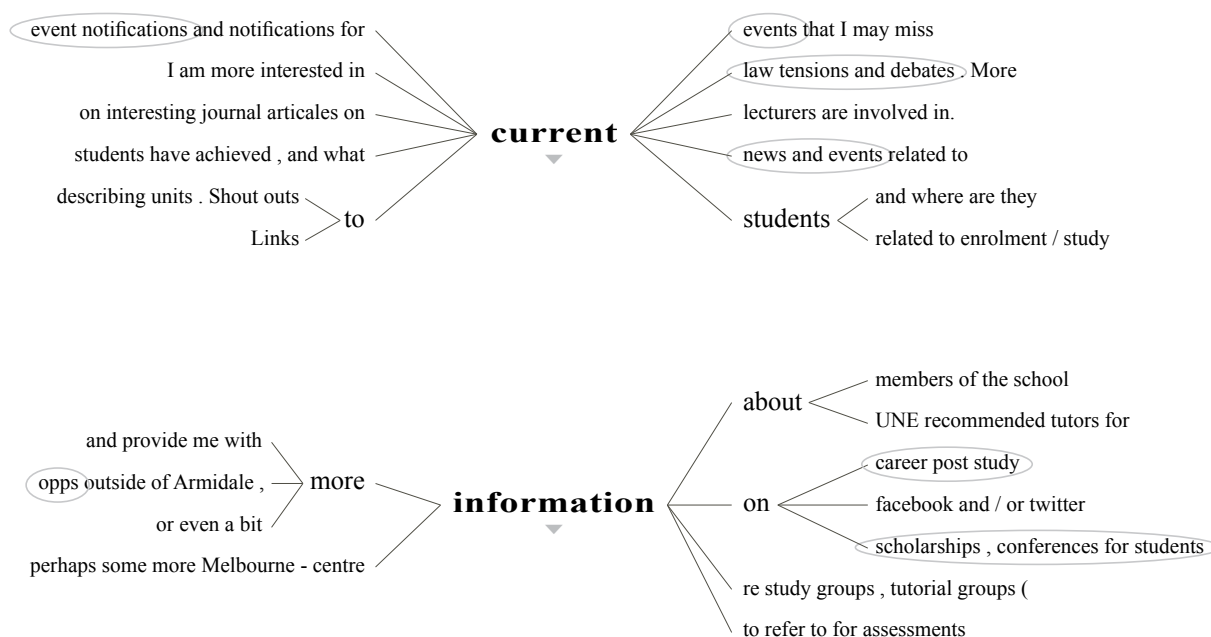

G *Discussion*

As we anticipated, most students said they felt more connected to the UNE School of Law as a result of the introduction of the online communication platforms. Twenty-seven per cent said they felt much more connected, 18 per cent moderately more, and 15 per cent slightly more. Twenty-one per cent expressed the same level of connectedness with three per cent feeling moderately less and one per cent much less. Students noted 'I feel more connected and less isolated and therefore more likely to achieve my goals and not miss out on great opportunities.' Another said that 'Facebook and other communications make me feel that I am part of a wide community' and 'helps remind off campus students that we are all linked.' Yet another said that 'the provision of ANY additional avenue of communication – in particular, interactive – is of significant value to external students, studying online.'

The other heartening statistic was in response to the question 'Do your interactions with the UNE School of Law via the online communication platforms make you feel part of a vibrant community?' Sixty-six per cent thought that it did (26 per cent said 'definitely yes' and 40 per cent said 'probably yes'). Fourteen per cent were ambivalent ('might or might not'), 20 per cent did not think it did, 17 per cent said 'probably not' and three per cent said 'definitely not.'

In terms of whether or not the UNE School of Law platforms enhanced respondents' university experience, many indicated that it had. Twenty-one per cent said the online platforms had definitely enhanced their university experience and 54 per cent said they had probably enhanced their university experience. Twelve per cent were ambivalent ('might or might not'), only eight per cent said 'probably not and four per cent said 'definitely not' about whether the online platforms enhanced their university experience.

The relatively small number of responses we received from our survey indicate what we anecdotally surmised. That is, students felt more connected to the UNE School of Law as a result of our social media initiatives. The survey responses reaffirmed existing literature which notes that social media platforms like Facebook, have only had a small amount of 'success as a formal part of learning.' [42] On the contrary however, there is evidence to suggest that platforms such as Facebook, have a 'positive contribution to make in creating more active learning communities.' [43]

The following word trees visualise the responses received from participants where they used the words 'connected', 'isolation' or 'informed'. Analysis of these responses again identified opportunities for improvements in the content we provide. As with the word trees presented above, the surrounding words again identified that it is information about news, events and opportunities which has contributed to enhancing student experiences. This qualitative data also supports the findings from the quantitative responses listed in the table above.
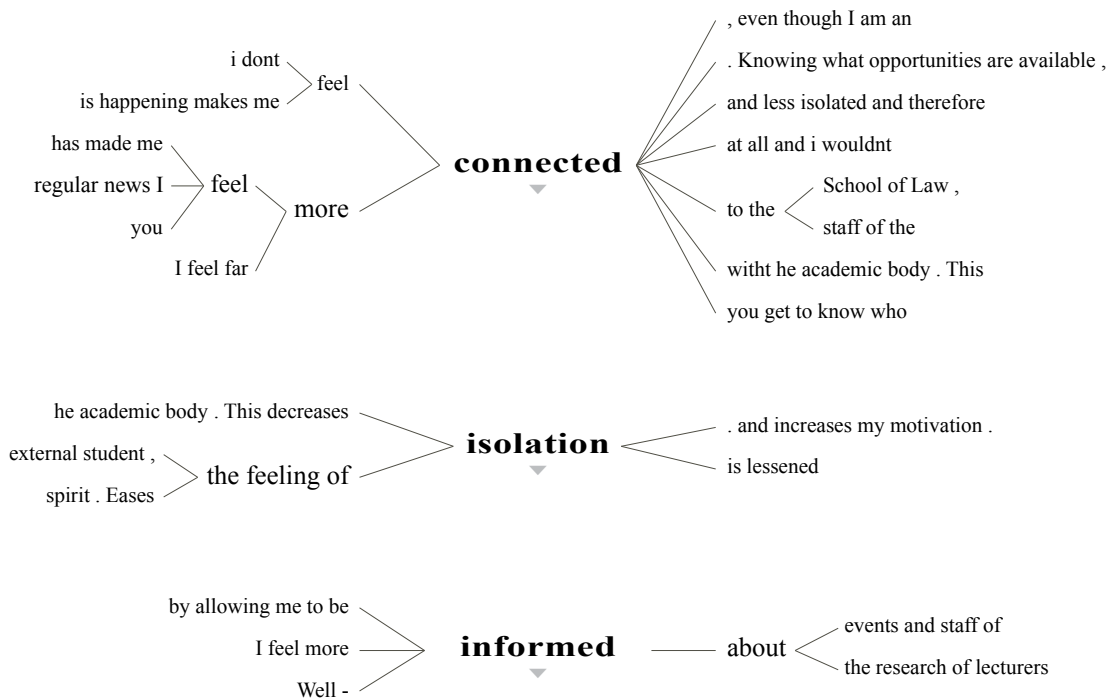
XI CONCLUSION

The initial survey we conducted indicates that respondents generally feel more connected to the UNE School of Law as a result of our online platforms. It needs to be emphasised that social media is but one part of a wider strategy that has been implemented in the UNE School of Law to create a more cohesive community. The UNE School of Law has undertaken community building activities away from online platforms. For example, we have organised community events where we invited members of the legal and education communities to build relationships in the wider community. In addition, we became actively involved with high schools in the region to build relationships with teachers and high school students. We have also used the information collected from the initial survey to change the content of social media posts, particularly via

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42 Callaghan and Fribbance, above n 23, 262.

43 Ibid.

Facebook. We have increased our focus on events, news and opportunities, and ensured they cover both on and off campus interests. Whether these changes have had the desired impact will be tested by future research.

Overall, we worked very hard to create a positive, friendly and informative environment both in our online and in person interactions. It is clear that we have a long way to go in order to create a strong and cohesive community within the UNE School of Law. We have however, built a strong social platform which will be built on in the coming years.