

Social media a vital teaching tool for students of today

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RELYING only on traditional teaching methods to engage students is becoming increasingly difficult, and lecturers need to change their mindsets and recognise the value of social media in education.

So said Durban University of Technology marketing, retail and public relations lecturer Nisha Ramlutchman in her talk – *Generation Theory: Harnessing the power of emerging technologies and social media in higher education* – at the Careers, Exhibitions and Information Association conference in Durban yesterday.

Ramlutchman described today's students as complex, saying they grew up in a rich media environment which they would also encounter in the workplace. These

students had a heightened sense of technology – often more so than their lecturers.

"In his seminal essay, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* in 2001, Marc Prensky assigned the term 'digital natives' to a new breed of students who are entering the education system. He says our students have changed radically and that they are no longer the people our education system was designed to teach. This is very evident in today's classroom environment," said Ramlutchman.

While some lecturers might challenge the value of using applications such as Twitter and Facebook for education, she said they offered an opportunity to connect with students outside the lecture theatre in unprecedented ways. Lecturers could use these to con-



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duct group discussions, post class notes and create group discussions.

Speaking on the educational

advantages of blogs and Wikis, she said these made learning independent of time and place and gave students time for reflection.

"Sites such as YouTube and SchoolTube are redefining traditional education. There is an incredible array of educational videos available online, covering a wide range of topics like politics, health, economics, humanities and the social sciences. This variety of information includes real lectures from top universities and presentations from experts."

Ramlutchman called today's lecturer "technophobic", adding that both students and lecturers need to realise that social media had uses beyond entertainment. She said the country's higher education institutions were undergoing a "curriculum renewal" which

would see the inclusion of modules like gender studies, gender-based violence and HIV/Aids.

"The inclusion of these modules aims to engender debate around critical issues relevant to South Africa. I strongly believe that herein lies a great opportunity to use social media tools to foster debate on very real and important SA issues. Cambodian students are learning how to use Facebook and Twitter to address the issue of violence against women."

Ramlutchman said while risks were involved in using social media in education, including poor levels of online discussion and plagiarism, the key to using these techniques was to ensure that impact and engagement were maximised.