To develop effective methods to encourage communication and collaboration between online conference participants, a better understanding of preferences and attendance trends is required.

194 online conference registrants were surveyed to evaluate the networking and collaboration trends amongst online conference participants. Findings included participant perceptions towards online conference formats as well as preferences for networking and collaborating using social media.

The conference was delivered through the web conferencing system, Blackboard Collaborate, and ran non-stop for 48 hours, with consecutive handovers between partners in Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada.

**Online Conferencing**

**Participant preferences for networking and collaboration**

Angela Murphy, Australian Digital Futures Institute

Amy Antonio, Australian Digital Futures Institute

University of Southern Queensland • Toowoomba • Queensland • Australia

What is the primary reason why you were interested in attending the online conference?

- Particular interest in learning technologies
- General interest in the topics presented
- The content is directly related to my discipline
- Relationship with one of the participating host organization
- Opportunity to network

To what extent do people attend online conferences to network and collaborate?

Three in ten people are multi-tasking or dropping in and out during sessions

- I was actively listening, asking questions and/or communicating: 38%
- I listened closely to the sessions but did not ask questions: 28%
- I listened occasionally while working or multitasking: 21%
- I dropped in and out of sessions: 6%
- I tried to listen and multitask but didn’t manage it very well: 3%

Communication and attention during conference sessions

You only have fragmented attention from the audience

35% of participants are using social media or digital technologies during the conference to communicate or connect with other delegates.

Web conferencing software enables synchronous, internet-based collaboration and communication. Consequently, they are ideally suited to enabling the interaction between facilitators and participants valued in traditional face-to-face conferences.

To combine live and pre-recorded sessions

Combining pre-recordings with live questions is the ideal format for online conference participants

- For my own private use only: 20%
- For my own research or work: 44%
- To disseminate new information or content directly related to my career or work: 89%
- As a medium to deliver my own opinion on topics or events: 71%
- Marketing or promotion of my own research or work: 56%
- Marketing or promotion of my university or organisation: 45%
- Sharing personal information with friends or family: 22%
- None of these: 13%

Online conference participants are frequent users of social media

- Facebook: 68%
- Twitter: 45%
- Blog: 25%
- Curating tool: 65%

The increasing use of social media platforms and the availability of interactive spaces has increased opportunities for dispersed participants to collaborate, share and network long after completion of the event.

Twitter is considered by participants to be a social media tool for work and is therefore most appropriate for engaging conference attendees.

Find that opportunities to network and establish connections during online conferences are limited

- 20%
- 45%