

License to Tweet? UK may restrict posts from court

February 7 2011

(AP) -- English courts may restrict the public's freedom to post Twitter updates from inside hearings to avoid the risk of prejudicing trials, the head of the judiciary in England and Wales said Monday.

In a consultation report on the use of [smart phones](#) and live, text-based communications from court, Justice Igor Judge's office said in some instances only members of the press - not the public - attending court may be permitted to use [Twitter](#).

"The combination of instant reporting without the self-restraint presumed to be exercised by accredited members of the media might lead to a greater likelihood of prejudicial reporting," the report said.

It added that the risks of the public sending tweets may be amplified by their informal nature, as they "usually involve less measured remarks, which are presented in a manner which invites commentary and opinion from other users, and are posted in real time with no opportunity for review."

The report follows concern that members of the public don't have knowledge of media law and could post updates that fall foul of the rules. In Britain, television cameras are not permitted to broadcast criminal cases.

The report said that courts could restrict Twitter use to accredited reporters, or consider applications from the public on a case by case

basis.

The consultation report is meant to gather [public opinion](#) after a judge issued interim guidance in December that there was no ban on using Twitter in court - but that users would have to seek the judge's permission first. Such permission could be refused in criminal trials if there is a risk that information posted on Twitter might influence witnesses or jurors.

In the U.S., federal courts tell jurors to avoid Twitter, Facebook and other [social networking sites](#), but deciding whether journalists can tweet or blog from court has generally been left up to judges. Relatively few federal courts have embraced Twitter, although last year a [federal judge](#) in Kansas allowed a reporter to use the microblogging service to provide updates from a gang trial.

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Citation: License to Tweet? UK may restrict posts from court (2011, February 7) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-02-tweet-uk-restrict-court.html>

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