

Is teaching by Twitter a viable option?

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Research highlights the wealth of opportunity in social networking sites; for shared academic knowledge, distribution of information, dialogue amongst peers and academic networking. However, with 40% of 300 million tweeters using Twitter passively as a newsfeed, are these opportunities going to waste? In other words, should Twitter really be used as a learning tool? Knight and Kaye explore Twitter usage by academics and students in a study published in *Innovations in Education and Teaching* wherein they aim to answer this question.

The authors surveyed 153 undergraduate and postgraduate students about their use of Twitter, asking whether they use it to share information, contact course tutors, or raise questions about course content. Responses were compared to reported Twitter use by academics and revealed a surprising disparity.

Students in higher education reported using Twitter passively in a learning context and that they were far more likely to interact with friends than teachers. Celebrity watching was more popular than following academics in their field.

Conversely academic usage is high in information sharing, event organising, promoting blogs, and international networking, but lacking in teaching forums or assignment support.

So, are academics using Twitter purely for self-promotion? Why not engage students directly in learning via Twitter?

With a prevalence of zero-hour contracts and fragmented institutional roles, [academics](#) increasingly seek legitimacy and reputation from Twitter profiles. Accountability also influences academic use; posting specific course related support, debate and assessment is a high responsibility and potentially provocative, especially in a high visibility public space.

How can Twitter be integrated into the student learning experience? Live lecture broadcast, hosted debates, practical support or course updates? Until critical mass is reached within the institution, Twitter may not yet permeate the teaching experience.

The author remarks "future trends (may) result in greater uptake...and opportunities for its utility in supporting the academic–student relationship in enhancing learning in the HE contexts."

More information: "'To tweet or not to tweet?' A comparison of academics' and students' usage of Twitter in academic contexts" by Charles G. Knight & Linda K. Kaye. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis. [DOI: 10.1080/14703297.2014.928229](https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2014.928229)

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