

Study shows students find personal tweets from professors makes them more credible

29 March 2011, by Bob Yirka



(PhysOrg.com) -- In a study that will surely shake the ivory towers of academia, authors Kirsten Johnson and undergraduate student Jamie Bartolino, both of Elizabethtown College, have published a paper in *Learning, Media and Technology*, disclosing their findings regarding student perceptions of professors that tweet.

In their study, 120 students were split into three groups and all were sent 22 tweets with hyperlinks that were purportedly sent by a professor; one group was sent tweets that were considered all business, or scholarly, another group received tweets that were all of a personal or social nature, while the third group received tweets that were a mix of the two. After receiving the tweets, the students were then asked to rate the degree of credibility they ascribed to the faux professor. Johnson reports that the group that received the social or personal [tweets](#) rated the professor as having the highest credibility of the three groups.

Johnson, a professor of communications, chose to undertake the study, apparently, to better understand not only how students perceive their professors, but also to offer a guide for professors seeking to make their way in world where the technology around them likely changes faster than any material they may be covering in their lectures.

While the report does seem to support prior research that has suggested that students respond better to instructors who are more open or personable, as Johnson maintains in the paper, there are detractors that suggest that such a study doesn't take into account other personality factors that would occur naturally were the students in the group actually exposed to an instructor by sitting in his or her classroom. Also, the fact that the professors in the study were all presented as female, might have skewed the results. This along with the fact that older students that participated in the study tended to sway the opposite way, and in fact felt inclined at some points to suggest that professors tweeting about personal stuff was in fact unprofessional, which caused them to grade them as less credible.

It's clear that before any grand assumptions can be made regarding what professors should or shouldn't be tweeting to their [students](#), far more research is needed on the subject; and until then, [professors](#) would be wise to be cautious, as the line between divulging personal information to engender [credibility](#), and inappropriate behavior, could be to closer for comfort.

More information: The effect of Twitter posts on students' perceptions of instructor credibility; by Kirsten A. Johnson, *Learning, Media and Technology*, [DOI:10.1080/17439884.2010.534798](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2010.534798)

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