

Learning in fewer than 140 characters on Twitter

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Twitter can be an engaging communication tool for building a learning community according to research just published in the *International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning Environments*. Scott Warren of the College of Information, at the University of North Texas, in Denton, USA, explains how the merits of the microblogging platform have been little discussed as an educational tool despite its widespread use and familiarity as a social networking platform.

"Research on the use of specific tools and reports of curriculum or instruction designed to leverage them remains weak," Warren explains. He describes how an instructor has developed a course using Twitter as an important means of academic communication and support for a nascent [learning](#) community. "The study found that designing a course to include Twitter for out-of-class discourse fostered desired communicative actions for learning while also allowing the instructor to help foster student-initiated community," Warren adds.

Warren points out that there is a lot of work in the research literature that describes the pros and cons of online social networking and social media tools in the business and marketing context, but there has been only limited research into the role such tools might play in education. However, given the near ubiquity of mobile devices such as smart phones and tablet computers, there is an urgency in finding out how these tools might benefit learners and improve the educational process. Twitter, Warren suggests, has not been adopted widely so far by educators although academics in Europe, North America and elsewhere have reported some successes. It is commonly used to augment conventional blogs, online forums and learning management systems and has been used as a peer-to-peer support [tool](#) by educators and learners.

Warren points out that the hashtag system, familiar

to regular Twitter users can be used as a tool for organizing information while Twitter lists can be utilized to build communities. Twitter's searchable archive has obvious merits for retrieving old posts while its direct messaging (DM) system allows private communication. He adds that the 140-character limit on a Twitter update afforded users, enforces brevity in communication which can accelerate discussion by limiting expansive comments somewhat in normal use. Twitter as an educational communication tool is not perfect, but then no tool is.

"Communication is at the heart of teaching and learning and...today's [social media](#) tools can be employed validly and robustly to support educational experiences for today's students," Warren concludes.

More information: Scott J. Warren. The Twitter academic: supporting learning communications in 140 characters or less, *International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning Environments* (2016). [DOI: 10.1504/IJSMILE.2016.075052](#)

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