Chapter 11

The Impact of Instructor Twitter Use on Course Performance Indicators: A Quasi-Experiment Within Higher Education Communications Courses

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ABSTRACT

An exploratory quasi-experiment of college-level students was used to examine the difference in a variety of course indicators among instructors when they did not use Twitter as a supplement to their courses, when they moderately used Twitter, and when they used Twitter a great deal in their courses. When instructors used Twitter in their classes, perceived learning via technological mediums, perceived classroom community with regard to technological media, perceived pedagogical affect, perceived course effectiveness, perceived learning performance, and perceived perception of learning from Twitter were all greater than when they did not use Twitter in their courses. Overall results of this study recommend further research and a continued focus on the usage of Twitter in the higher education classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

In a study of the top technologies to incorporate into the classroom, Tomei (2011) recommended greater inclusion of online technologies by teachers whenever possible. Scholars have conducted research into a variety of ways of incorporating technology into teaching, but research into the use of social networking sites (SNS) was very limited (Nemetz, Aiken, Cooney, & Pascal, 2012) until a recent surge in interest. Scholars have examined the use of online technologies such as blogging (Chang, Liu, & Chang 2011), mobile video blogging (Kim, 2011), and social bookmarking (Gray & Carter, 2012) in an instructional context. Research has also, particularly in the last few years, empirically examined the use of the microblogging SNS Twitter (e.g., Clarke & Nelson, 2012; Jacquemin, Smesler, & Bernot, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2016; Lowe & Laffey, 2011; Rinaldo, Tapp, & Laverie, 2011; Tsai, 2016). This chapter adds to that literature by describing an exploratory study in the varying levels of use of Twitter by instructors in the college classroom, noting its impact on several dependent variables, and suggesting possible avenues of future research. Dagada and Chigona (2013) contend that the majority of academics do not fully understand the interrelationships between content, pedagogy, and technologies. Because online technologies carry potential to enrich professional growth (Isman, Gazi, & Aksal, 2012), the value of this chapter is greater insight into effective Web-based teaching methods for academic professionals interested in online learning. As faculty members increasingly search for ways to connect with their students, both within and outside the traditional classroom, Twitter offers another avenue to augment instructional content. As Juhary (2016) notes, “As the way of learning changes day by day, these Digital Natives must be given learning tools that match their demands and expectations” (p. 9).

TWITTER

In the past, Twitter (2013) described itself as “a real-time information network that connects users to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting.” Now, Twitter (2017) is “what’s happening in the world and what people are talking about right now.” Despite the slight shift in emphasis, the fundamental Twitter platform has remained virtually unchanged since its inception. The first short message from a user, or “tweet,” was sent in 2006 (blog.twitter.com, 2011). In its twelfth year of operation, there are now over 328 million active users of Twitter, including 68 million in the United States (Fiegerman, 2017). Though Twitter user growth is currently somewhat stagnant (Fiegerman, 2017) as other social networking sites, notably Instagram, have exploded in popularity (Constine, 2017), Twitter still occupies a unique and important place in the social media landscape and remains of great interest to scholars. According to Kim and Kim (2016), a recent Google Scholar search for articles including the word “Twitter” in the title yielded approximately 1,150,000 papers. Twitter may be used both by individuals and organizations, none of whom pay a fee or face a limit on the number of “tweets” they can produce per day. Twitter effectively occupies two categories of internet sites researched by scholars, qualifying both as a weblog (specifically, microblogging) site and as an SNS.

A blog, a portmanteau of the phrase web log, is a website containing discrete data entries presented in reverse chronological order. Ebner and Schiefner (2008) attribute what they call “the amazing growth of weblogs” to three factors, which they term “usability, collaboration, and personality” (p. 156). They argue that weblogs are easy to use, encourage connection, and enable someone to assert a unique personality on