

Twitternomics: Using Tweets to Teach

Twitter is a social media phenomenon with tremendous potential to offer instructors an engaging pedagogy that harnesses leading-edge technology to teach economics more effectively. Twitter is relevant to this generation of students and is not a fad. Instructors of economics who use Twitter will be able to increase student interest in the subject, satisfaction with the course, and comprehension of learning objectives by being able to connect with students on an intellectual as well as emotional level both inside and outside of the classroom.

Twitter is more than seemingly trivial messages of 140 characters or less. Twitter is a social networking and microblogging community that connects individuals in real time using concise message bursts via personal computers, gaming consoles, or mobile devices. Twitter brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds that transcend national borders to enrich the learning environment. The popularity of Twitter is such that this social networking site ranks fifth in total unique visitors behind leaders like Facebook, Windows Live, MySpace, and Baidu. Use of the site is especially prevalent among the traditional college age student.

A contemporary economic education should make use of the latest in technology and social interaction. Twitter captures the attention of students today and the effective use of Twitter by instructors enhances teaching. Twitter is a living laboratory that can provide instant feedback to immediately adapt coursework. Twitter is able to facilitate a dialogue that enables students to assess and make good judgments when confronting an overwhelming amount of digital information. Teaching with Twitter offers a wide variety of classroom applications that augment communication, collaboration, and curiosity.

Communication with students may improve with the use of direct tweets from the instructor to make announcements, share articles or websites, comment on breaking news, or conduct a poll relating to course topics. Tweets by class members may also prime in-class discussion along with capturing real world applications of economic theory. Collaboration among students increases when tweets facilitate greater familiarity among class members, encourage greater participation among members of a team project, and foment brainstorming on class projects. Student curiosity heightens when using the “follow” function to track politicians, professors, leading economists or academics, news stories, events, ideas, government agencies, or announcements from the foremost think tanks.

Various Twitter applications may also serve to expedite tweeting while also enhancing the learning process. Desktop widgets assist with tweet notification, message brevity, image posting, grouping conversations, key word searches, scheduling note releases, and turning voice messages into tweets. Online course management systems that are able to incorporate Twitter feeds will add to the range of pedagogical choice available to instructors. Tweets are able to heighten student curiosity and provide information as well as integrate into the grading structure of a course.

Teaching with Twitter will present some challenges, including off-campus internet access, off-campus connection speed, unfamiliarity with Twitter by students or faculty, time commitment to creating posts for faculty, incentivizing Twitter use, and situations requiring a help desk. While these challenges do exist they are easily overcome. Tweeting is actually more easily done than said.

Twitter will make the study of economics more enticing and satisfying for both students and instructors. Moreover, student enrollment in economics coursework could increase when students are known to have fun in a course along with learning the subject. Empirical analysis of a qualitative survey instrument will provide evidence that supports Twitter usage.

Teaching economics must include both theory and application. Tweeting is able to reduce student skepticism on the practicality of economic reasoning by encouraging a pragmatic and immediate contextualization of economic principles. Twitter empowers each class member to become a listening post for the gathering of economic intelligence in the marketplace. Time, distance, and location of the learning environment are no longer barriers to providing continuous feedback of student engagement and course relevance. Tweeting students become active rather than passive participants in the teaching and learning process.

The poster will be delivered in billboard format, one poster sheet, probably three foot by five foot (space permitting), and designed using graphic visual aids to attract and engage participants. A reduced version of the poster will be available as a handout and will include suggestions for using Twitter to teach a course. The poster will be organized into the following sections:

- Overview of Twitter and tweeting
- Research on the use of Twitter for course delivery within higher education
- How Twitter moves learning to higher cognitive domains while encompassing different learning styles
- A description of the various Twitter modes: communication, collaboration, curiosity
- Recommended Twitter widgets that expedite tweeting
- Qualitative evidence that tweeting improves student satisfaction and learning
- Next Steps: How to implement teaching with Twitter while overcoming barriers

Author Contact Information:

Howard H. Cochran, Jr., D.A.
Professor of Economics
College of Business Administration
Belmont University
1900 Belmont Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37212

Phone: 615-460-6477
Fax: 615-460-6487
Email: Howard.Cochran@Belmont.edu

Marieta Velikova, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Economics
College of Business Administration
Belmont University
1900 Belmont Boulevard
Nashville, TN 37212

Phone: 615-460-5510
Fax: 615-460-6487
Email: Marieta.Velikova@Belmont.edu