

Is texting / Tweeting in lectures good for learning, or just a needless distraction?

Mobile phones in class: useful, or just a nuisance?

A recent study by Jeffrey Kuznekoff in *Communication Education* argues that the use of mobile phones in class may actually be beneficial to learning – if students stay on topic, that is.

“Having the student bring their own device and use [it] in a meaningful way that connects to the content is something we should be exploring,” Kuznekoff said in an interview. “It’s a losing battle to try to fight that.”

LSE’s Dr Kate Meagher is unconvinced.

“There are two issues here,” she says.

“First of all, does ‘beneficial’ mean the same thing as ‘not too detrimental’, and secondly, how does one ensure that they stay on topic? The study indicated that students subjected to a very structured succession of on-topic prompts achieved results that were ‘nearly on par’ which those who put away their mobile phones and actually focused on the lecture. Call me fussy, but ‘nearly on par’ is not what I would describe as beneficial to learning.



“The second issue is how one ensures that students stay on topic. Since there are not a lot of people out there texting and tweeting for details about the particular lecture one happens to be listening to at the time, this would require investing apparently scarce academic resources in arrangements for texting specific groups of students on various lecture materials being taught at various times during the school calendar, presumably by paying mobile phone companies to do it.

“It would also be necessary to create some kind of firewall to ensure that outside messages about where to meet for dinner or that outrageous thing that happened in the library last night cannot compete with the educational messages. This seems like rather a lot of trouble and expense in order to help students do slightly less well than they would if you just asked them to put their mobile phones away in class.





Smartphone Users. Image Credit: [Esther Vargas](#)

Higher education is about concepts, critical analysis and concentration.

“Edutainment”

“In this age of novelty, it is important to distinguish between innovative teaching and ‘bells and whistles’. Labour and capital intensive flourishes that entertain but do not actually contribute to improved understanding are not innovative teaching; they are ‘edutainment’.

“Such embellishments may distract some student from feeling aggrieved about the whopping fees they’re paying, but bringing technological fun’n’games into the classroom in ways that undermine the actual process of learning, however marginally, is hardly value for money.

“Higher education is about concepts, critical analysis and concentration.

“Our job as innovative educators is to teach students to engage more deeply with the material, to make new connections and to stretch themselves, not to hanker after bells and whistles so that they can be ‘nearly on par’ with less effort.

“Knowledge and the pursuit of excellence are hard work, and the skills built in getting there are part of the reward. We do our students a disservice by pretending otherwise.”

So, phones in lectures: useful? Offputting? Or even somewhere inbetween? Join the debate by leaving a comment below!

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