

Author's reply to Letter to the Editor

Thank you for your letter about our Twitter research. I believe that you've made valid points about language and how the study was presented, but we would like to clarify some aspects of the design and address validity questions.

In retrospect, we should have provided a more detailed account of what we did on Ning beyond just saying that the Ning group received the same information through the comment wall and that they "engaged with faculty in all of the educationally-relevant activities listed previously, with the exception of forming study groups." Even though we could have included more information, we stand strongly by our methodology in this regard. We were diligent to ensure that we were attempting to engage the students on Ning as much as we were on Twitter. The students in the Ning group were required to do the same assignments as the students in the Twitter group. One example was that both groups were required to discuss how reading the book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* changed their ideas about people who are less fortunate than they are. The qualitative difference in student responses to this discussion question was that while students in the Twitter group had brief responses that elicited numerous replies from other students, students on Ning wrote longer responses to discussion questions and did not continue their discussions beyond what was required. In effect, students on Ning were posting reaction-paper length commentary on the comment wall while those on Twitter were engaging in a discussion. Neither the Twitter group nor the Ning group members had partners.

What was *not* equivalent between the groups was that the students on Twitter engaged the instructors more and that led to more engagement with them, a point you made in your letter. In our paper, we discussed that the outcomes should be attributable to *how* Twitter was used, and not purely the technology itself. But we also believe that different technologies can be more or less facilitative of creating increased engagement; for instance, email doesn't lend itself to a similar conversational tone and is not the best multi-user communication and collaboration tool.

In summary, while perhaps we could have described our study and findings that would have led to better clarity for some readers, the fact remains that we carried out a controlled study of how using Twitter in educationally-relevant ways can impact engagement. As we stated in the paper, we consider this work a first step and hope that our findings "will motivate further controlled studies of Twitter and other social media."

Sincerely,

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