



## Twitter : Simulating News Media in LINKS

**A**s a longtime user of LINKS and recent entrant into the LINKS Hall of Fame, I find it important to work with Randy Chapman and other faculty on how to make the LINKS experience as real as possible. I have communicated some of these strategies in a previous LINKS newsletter, but one that I have recently begun to utilize involves the use of Twitter.



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In the real world, the popular press plays a significant role on consumer perceptions of each component of the marketing mix. In turn, corporate strategy has to take into account the influences of this press when considering both short and long term strategies. Therefore, I now use Twitter throughout the students' LINKS experience to simulate the popular press.

Scenarios about which I tweet include possible new products that could come to market (e.g., access to a third private-label product), new regions that could be opening up, weather delays regarding shipments, raw material shortages causing cost increases, etc. As I have stated before, seemingly, if you can dream it, LINKS can simulate it. Twitter allows you to divulge this information in an efficient and timely manner to the students over the course of the semester before any of these curveballs would be implemented into the simulation.

Additionally, besides providing information about scenarios that will occur, as the professor you can also provide fake scenarios that will never come to fruition. This allows you to evaluate if and how students create contingency plans. Of course, as the professor, you will have to manage this process very carefully as to not completely mislead student groups, but a fair amount of media conjecture is demonstrated on any 24-hour news source accessible in today's society. Corporations still have to decide how to interpret this information and manage it accordingly. The same is true for the all of the information that you provide through Twitter to students experiencing LINKS.

Most students, if not all, have a Facebook account and are familiar with social media, but not all students have a Twitter account at the beginning of the simulation. Hence, I find it necessary and fun to provide some type of incentive at the beginning of the simulation to entice all my students to sign up for Twitter and follow my tweets. Right after they are assigned to their groups, a message is posted to Blackboard as well as emailed to their school email regarding what I call "The LINKS Derby." The derby is a race staging each group against the other. The first group that signs up all of their members



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to follow my Twitter page wins a certain amount of “consulting bonus,” which I provide via the LINKS instructor’s webpage. If there are five groups in the simulation, then the 1<sup>st</sup> place team gets \$400,000, the 2<sup>nd</sup> place team gets \$300,000, the 3<sup>rd</sup> place team gets \$200,000, the 4<sup>th</sup> place team gets \$100,000, and the last place team obviously gets nothing. Historically, the first place team is completely signed up in less than thirty minutes (which means as the professor, you have to have a few hours available immediately after the derby begins so that you can tweet the winners of each place in the derby). As I said, it’s a fun beginning to the simulation and it provides incentive to the students to get them signed up on Twitter.

Finally, using Twitter in the class also provides a useful avenue to keep your students connected to current events. As we all know too well, many students get lost in what I call the university bubble. They become so engaged in their own schedules, activities, and social lives, that the real world eludes them. As of Wednesday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, when asked about the riots in Egypt, approximately one-third of my sixty junior level students had no idea what I was talking about. Hence, through the use of lists on Twitter, students can follow on one list the LINKS media posts and, on another list, real world events. In a perfect blend of simulation and reality, the quintessential professor could and would use tweets from both lists to impact LINKS. Unfortunately, I have yet to reach that ideal, but it is definitely something for which to strive.



I hope that I have identified some creative applications for Twitter in your classroom. If you have any questions or comments, I would be happy to discuss them with you. You can contact me at [hugginka@jmu.edu](mailto:hugginka@jmu.edu). Additionally, feel free to follow our class Twitter page @jmmumktg485. It is a protected page, but feel free to send a follow request. I just ask that in addition to your follow request, you also send me an email to identify yourself and your university for security reasons. In conclusion, for a more interesting and real LINKS experience, I highly recommend you utilize Twitter and/or other social media in your simulation courses!