

The Weird and Wonderful World of Academic Twitter: Accounts that mock, self-ridicule and bring a smile to academia.

Academic Twitter is more than just sharing research articles and live-tweeting at conferences. Andy Tattersall gives an overview of the humorous accounts that aim to pull back the curtain on the Ivory Tower and share its oddities, culture and inconsistencies. Despite the silliness, the following accounts often discuss issues rarely touched on in the academic community. These accounts offer a lighthearted take on a business that takes itself too seriously and for that, we are immensely grateful.



For many academics Twitter stands out above any other social media tool as their platform for open and scholarly engagement – partially thanks to its immediacy, reach and convenience but also because it can be a break from the formality of academic writing and dissemination. Twitter's limit of 140 characters means academics have to think carefully not just about what they say but also how they say it. Twitter allows communications to be snappy, sharp and on many occasion quick-witted. If Twitter has done anything for the academic community it has brought the research conversation out into the public domain. As a by-product, a small number of accounts that mock, self-ridicule and bring a touch of humour to the very serious world of research have flourished. Welcome to the weird and wonderful world of academic Twitter.

Research Wahlberg @ResearchMark 1239 Tweets, 15.1k Followers

Research Wahlberg is reminiscent to an old Tumblr blog titled 'Hey girl, I like the library too', that was a collection of memes of fellow Hollywood heartthrob Ryan Gosling. The purpose of that blog was to post images of Gosling, smouldering and sexy, saying things like: 'Hey girl you know I would never publish in anything but an open access journal, because changing the existing unsustainable model of scholarly communication is really important to me, you know?' @ResearchMark we see a similar collection of memes interspersed with retweets that aren't as masterful as Gosling's chat up lines, but we are open to the idea that Research Wahlberg has a bit more to him than just cheesy chat up lines this time.

Shit my Reviewers Say @YourPaperSucks 597 Tweets, 11.4k Followers

Potentially started out of angst and annoyance to the peer review model, Shit my Reviewers Say aim is in; "Collecting the finest real specimens of reviewer comments since 1456". Twinned with a [Tumblr blog of the same name](#) it sets out to document the malicious, pinnikity and sometimes confusing world of blind peer review. The pinned tweet sums up the collection nicely as one poor researcher is put to the sword with the line; "I am afraid this manuscript may contribute not so much towards the field's advancement as much as toward its eventual demise." Most academics who have ever been on the receiving end of reviews that required major corrections will know that sinking feeling they get when reading such barbed feedback. Whether all of these comments are fact or fiction, or amended we do not know, but there is plenty for researchers to take solace in, especially when they next receive such joyous feedback on their paper.

Shit Academics Say @AcademicsSay 3,038 Tweets, 171k Followers

A social experiment by Associate Professor Nathan C Hall, Shit Academics Say is a mixture of funny one liners, memes and clever irony. With an impressive 171,000 followers it is fair to say that this feed has resonated with the academic community and possibly beyond. Certainly well worth following if you are after reassurance, a good laugh or to gawp at what academics can be capable of delivering. The accompanying [blog](#) explains why the micro-blog feed appeared with Hall saying: "Like many academics, I have never been completely comfortable with the

peculiarities, predilections, or pretensions of our profession.” With snippets of advice in less than 140 characters such as; “If you can’t say anything nice, say it as a question.” and “I don’t make mistakes. I create teachable moments” there is much to take from this stream of consciousness.

Lego Academics @LegoAcademics 66 Tweets, 55.5k Followers

Another academic Twitter account with an impressive number of followers for this visual collection of tweets where female academic problems are captured in scenes acted out by Lego characters. Sadly just one tweet so far in 2016 but still worth keeping an eye on, especially if you work in a lab. Whilst the [Lego Research Institute](#) might be something you ask for next time your birthday comes round.

PHD Comics @PHDcomics 1,610 Tweets, 93.8k Followers

Another visual account that does not fall short when it comes down to effort. As you can imagine from the title, this is a comic, or series of cartoons. With an accompanying [website](#) and movies [PhD The Movie](#) 1 and 2. Created by Jorge Cham in 1997, PhD Comics is about ‘life (or the lack thereof) in academia’. The website has impressive pageview stats into the tens of millions each year and has moved on from the original monochrome version to full colour. The sheer breadth of content and issues touched on around undertaking a PhD and working in academia is incredible. For those who have an adverse fear of failure it might be reassuring to follow the latest tweets and know that you are not alone.

Improbable Research @improbresearch 8,230 Tweets, 8,252 Followers

Improbable Research aims to ‘highlight research that first makes people laugh and then think’. With the accompanying website <http://www.improbable.com/> and YouTube account It has its own Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony and Lectures. The Ig Nobel Prizes aim to celebrate the unusual, honour the imaginative and spur people’s interest in science, medicine and technology. The recording of 25th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony can be viewed [here](#). All the improbable research captured by the Ig Nobel Prize can be followed through their Twitter account. Tweets are interspersed with updates from previous prize winners, videos and events. From the outside looking in at this account, especially the 2015 prize ceremony video, it makes academia look like a weird cult – which of course it is, but we don’t like to talk about that.

There are no shortage of fictitious and spoof social media accounts, especially on Twitter. Most fail miserably or dry up after a few carefully scheduled tweets, it’s reasonable to consider that some probably start as an axe to grind and soon disappear or run out of ideas. As with some of the aforementioned accounts, when it is done well it can be profound, hilarious and even add quality to the academic conversation. Most communicate in a language that is coherent to those outside of the ivory towers, and perhaps by the number of followers some accounts have, highlights that more academics have a funny bone than we give them credit for. Despite the silliness of the above accounts they do often discuss issues in the academic community rarely touched on so publically. They are if anything a light take on a business that often takes itself too seriously. When we pull back the curtain we do see a different side to academia that can be a very strange business, filled with its own language and culture. So if you are on Twitter, love academia, occasionally feel alone, an imposter or are after some geek humour there is an online world out there waiting for you to follow

All of the accounts and a few more can be followed on this [Twitter list](#)

Featured image: [John Snape CC BY-SA](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

Andy Tattersall is an Information Specialist at the School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR) at the University of Sheffield. His role is to scan the horizon for Web and technologies opportunities relating to research, teaching and collaboration and maintain networks that support this. Andy has a keen interest in new ways of working by employing Altmetrics, Web 2.0 and Social Media but also paying close attention to the implications and pitfalls for using such advances. [@andy_tattersall](#)

- Copyright 2015 LSE Impact of Social Sciences - Unless otherwise stated, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Unported 3.0 License.