

Many a true word is spoken in jest, part two: more social media content that mocks, self-ridicules, and brings a smile to academia



*Two years ago, **Andy Tattersall** highlighted those Twitter accounts that offered some light relief from the often all-too-serious world of academia. This 2018 instalment includes an account “sadly” overlooked last time, as well as moving beyond the Twittersphere to share some the best memes, videos, and more to provide sharp commentary on peer review, academic advisors, and altmetrics.*

In April 2016 I wrote about [the growing number of parody Twitter accounts](#) to take the best and worst of academia and serve it up as a comedy dish. As the title suggests, many a true word is spoken in jest but we all know that just below the surface lie the real home truths of our industry. The problem, however, for many academics trying to be “witty”, is that they can fall flat on their faces. I thought it would be good to visit some of the other tongue-in-cheek academic excursions that capture the weird and wonderful within academia.

When I wrote the first post it was solely focused on the Twitter community, and sadly neglected to include one of the scholarly Twitterati’s most vocal protagonists: [@ScientistTrump](#). When my post went live I was flattered to receive a tweet from “Donald Trump, PhD” calling my piece “biased” as it had not included him – he even concluded his tweet with one of the real Donald Trump’s trademark sign-offs: “SAD”. Thankfully the Trump obsession with fake news was not yet in full flow, but I am sure the post and the LSE Impact Blog would have been labelled as such. Whoever is behind this great account – and it is the greatest scientific Twitter account – has expanded to a full [website](#) and a forthcoming web store. Not wanting to inflate that already fully blown narcissistic ego any more, but the tweets are that of a very stable genius and reflect the kind of communication that is typical of President Trump but with a scientific slant applied. For example, in December Donald Trump, PhD proudly reported:

H-INDEX RISES 5000 POINTS ON THE YEAR FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER – MAKE SCIENCE GREAT AGAIN!

— Donald Trump, PhD ([@ScientistTrump](#)) [December 19, 2017](#)

His supporters will no doubt still be keen to see that wall built to ensure academic literature stays out of the public domain.

Given the daily communications coming out of the White House, it is not hard to satirise the 45th President of the United States. Putting an academic spin on The Donald is not so easy but psychologist Matt Crawford made a good go of it with a fictional paper he published. The paper, “A title for a really great piece of research, just the best, really”, is full of classic Trump boasts, so much so that you will hear Donald’s voice inside your head as you read it.

Donald Drumpf as a scientist [pic.twitter.com/8YwFpt0oeE](#)

— Matt Crawford ([@MCrawford221](#)) [April 1, 2016](#)

Donald Trump’s tweets might make you feel outraged, but imagine how your social media stream would have looked with Hitler kicking and screaming across the web? Putting an academic slant on it, how would he have dealt with scientific peer review? Thankfully someone took that much-parodied scene in Hitler’s bunker from the film Downfall and re-subtitled it to show how Hitler would have responded to negative comments from a third reviewer. After a raging tirade, the Führer concedes that maybe he should just submit to one of those new “open access” journals.



Captioned images shared across the web, better known as memes, also offer much light-hearted humour that only those within academia will truly appreciate. Some of the sharpest include the popular memes [Boromir](#) (Lord of the Rings) and [Willy Wonka](#) alongside the tweets from [Research Wahlberg](#) and the [Hey Girl. I like the library too](#) blog.

That feeling when a paper based on correlational data starts using causal language
pic.twitter.com/DJOUL729Y3

— Research Wahlberg (@ResearchMark) [June 16, 2016](#)

A personal favourite comes from that most cosmic of sages, Yoda:

academic life explained pic.twitter.com/p68o204GoN

— Shit Academics Say (@AcademicsSay) [October 30, 2016](#)

Some of the finest moments can be found by searching “academic memes” on Google Image Search or Pinterest.

Every institution has professors who are dapper in their fashion choices and those who look like they have crawled out of a hedge before heading into work. [Prof or Hobo](#) tests your ability to spot the professors from the tramps. I was made aware of the quiz by a professor in reference to one of his peers who proudly wears his dishevelled look as a badge of honour, actively trying his best to look like he lost a fight with a bear. The site features ten images and for each you simply have to choose whether the man in question is a professor or a hobo. Just remember that looks can be deceiving.

Whilst we are on the topic of chairs, there are also the kind you sit on to conduct your research. In case you wondered what happened to them after they were retired from duty, they appear on the [Sad Chairs of Academia](#) blog. Before they are dispatched to that great office in the sky, they are captured for one last time for this most surreal of blogs. I’m waiting for the best images to be compiled into a 2019 calendar.

Metrics and social media are never far away from academic discussion, and both are valuable tools in communicating and gauging interest in a piece of research. The two are combined perfectly to calculate the satirical [Kardashian Index](#) where a scientist's citations are compared to followers on Twitter. Of course citations and Twitter followers are no true measure as to a researcher's true worth, but those with a high Kardashian Index score could indicate popularity over productivity. We are eagerly awaiting the Kanye West Index.

For most publishing in the academic sphere, you will no doubt receive regular invites to write for predatory journals. Whilst this issue becomes increasingly problematic there are a few things you can do to tackle these charlatans whilst also having a bit of fun. One idea is to use the tool [Re:Scam](#) which is part of the New Zealand online safety website [Netsafe](#). This tool bounces replies back to scam emailers and keeps them tied up with computer-generated emails. Whether this will work with those actually sending out the phishing messages will be hard to tell, but it's certainly worth a try in case any are bots. If that fails you can do as I did (in my lunch break) after receiving several requests to publish in a dubious fisheries and agriculture journal. I sent them a PDF formatted manuscript with the word "fish" repeated 6000 times, with a few fishy references to Jacques Cousteau and Michael Fish thrown in too, in addition to a table of different fish. For some reason they did not accept. Nor did they ever contact me again. Funny that.

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.

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About the author

Andy Tattersall is an Information Specialist at The School of Health and Related Research (SchARR) and writes, teaches and gives talks about digital academia, technology, scholarly communications, open research, web and information science, apps, altmetrics, and social media. In particular, their applications for research, teaching, learning, knowledge management and collaboration. Andy received a Senate Award from The University of Sheffield for his pioneering work on MOOCs in 2013 and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He is also Chair for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals – Multi Media and Information Technology Committee. Andy was listed as one of Jisc's Top Ten Social Media Superstars for 2017 in Higher Education. He has edited a book on [altmetrics](#) for Facet Publishing which is aimed at researchers and librarians. He tweets [@Andy_Tattersall](#) and his ORCID ID is [0000-0002-2842-9576](#).