

## More than the number of followers

**Dr Anastasia Mihailidou**

**Cardiology Department & Kolling Institute, Northern Sydney Local Health District & Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia**



There have been several articles recently published about the impact of social media for academia (1,2). The message is consistent - engagement on social media, Twitter specifically, is the most efficient platform to engage in scholarly discussion, have research achievements recognised, form networks and develop collaborations.

By sharing my personal experience with Twitter, I hope to engage those colleagues who continue to be skeptical about the social media platform. The best analogy I can offer is that Twitter can amplify life's "sliding doors" moments towards opportunity, collaborations and friendships. While some individuals focus on self-promotion and their number of followers or "likes", Twitter has a major role in science communication; not only peer review, but also engaging our community. The flow of information and interactions is faster and greater than traditional channels and it has transformed the world into a supportive network, without boundaries of distance or status.

While many who interact with me on Twitter will be surprised to hear this, I was exactly like the sceptics and against engaging in social media until two years ago. I am still a novice, but following a seminar I heard by the founder of Wiki-doc, Dr Michael Gibson, on how social media will change academia, I began to engage and it was the best decision I have made. It certainly has enhanced my career by providing me with collaborations that would never have developed through traditional channels. It has connected me with leaders in diverse specialties and led to wonderful friendships across the world.

Initially my interactions with Twitter were limited, but I quickly noticed that in addition to the personal opinions, there were discussion threads for case presentations or journal articles. Wanting to maintain professional interaction I didn't interact in these online discussions for the first year as I had heard the warnings to "be careful what you post since it cannot be removed". One day there was a discussion thread and I bravely added my comment. The response from the group was so uplifting and encouraging. It was a new experience for me to have people that I had never met, not only interested in what I had to say but also congratulatory. It was empowering and restored my confidence that my knowledge and viewpoint were valued. I found my network and friendships growing and recognition for my content expertise. Being supported in this manner allowed me to share my sense of humour, which had been hidden in my professional interactions. Having previously been referred to as "an enigma" or "falling between the cracks" as well as been exposed to academic bias by a former institution and isolation by colleagues, I found Twitter provided me strength in the knowledge that I was not alone in having experienced bias. I felt supported and not abandoned. There have been some challenges, but overall it has been a very positive experience with a faster pace and rewarding method of learning. In a traditional academic path, I would still be struggling to receive recognition. Unlike my other colleagues, I did not have a sponsor or local support.

The impact of social media is also personal – it has provided me with friendships not only for exchange of scientific content, but also with a community. I feel part of a team, supporting and encouraging each other, including the #DropAndGiveMe20 family for promoting less sitting and more activity. In academia, we are now asked about identifying the impact our research has in addition to the scholarly publications. There is now discussion that this should also include the influence on Twitter (**Figure 1** provides an example). There were 150 people who "liked" my message to support awareness for heart disease in women, with 30 people sending my message out to their followers, resulting in it reaching over 19,400 people. Further, the opportunities that have arisen entirely as a result of my activity on Twitter include: Member of ISH Women In Hypertension and Communications Committees; Scientific Committee Member of the National College of French Cardiologists; Invited Speaker to European Society of Cardiology & Session Chair: *How to measure blood pressure*; 15th Asian-Pacific Congress of Hypertension (APCH) 2019 Organising Committee as Social Media Chair; Collaborations across the world. (**see figure 2**)

## References

1. Logghe HJ, Selby LV, Boeck MA, Stamp NL, Chuen J, Jones C. (2018). The academic tweet: Twitter as a tool to advance academic surgery. JSurg Res. 226: viii-xii. doi: 10.1016/j.jss.2018.03.049
2. Topf JM, Sparks MA, Phelan PJ, Shah N, Lerma EV, Graham-Brown MPM, Madariaga H, Iannuzzella F, Rheault MN, Oates T, Jhaveri KD, Hiremath S. (2017). The Evolution of the Journal Club: From Osler to Twitter. Am J Kidney Dis. 69: 827-836. doi:10.1053/j.ajkd.2016.12.012

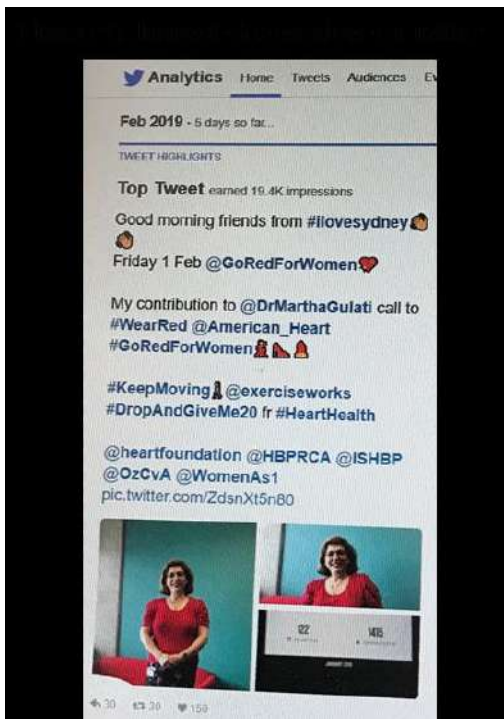


Figure 1



Figure 2: Global Collaborations which resulted from engaging on Twitter

**Dr. Anastasia Mihailidou**  
**@AnastasiaSMihai**

