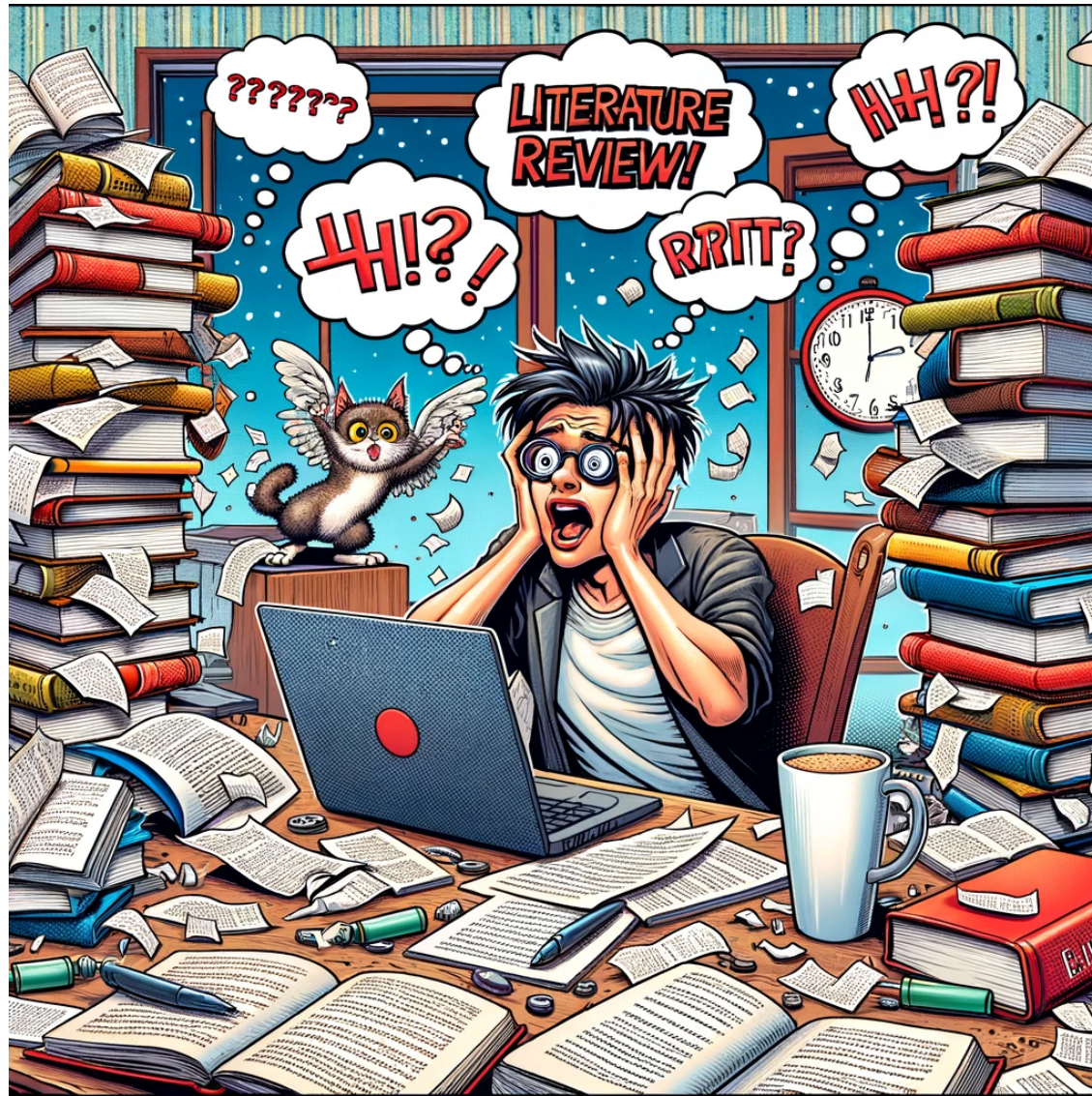


# The Art of Scholarly Synthesis: A Panoramic View of Different Literature Review Strategies.

Nicola Righetti

# Introduction



Representation by DALL·E OpenAI of a student dealing with literature review

# Introduction

- In this lesson we consider the topic of literature review. In particular, we consider three types of literature review: narrative, systematic, and scoping literature review.
- In addition, we consider the PRISMA framework for systematic literature reviews.
- As always, please read the readings indicated in the syllabus. Also, search Google Scholar or u:search for examples of literature reviews in publications in the top scientific journals in the field.

# What is a Literature Review?

- The literature review is a comprehensive overview of research studies and theoretical arguments regarding your object of study.
- A literature review should always be **comprehensive**, meaning that the evidence regarding your object of study should be carefully considered, but it can be **more or less systematic and complete**.

# Narrative, Systematic, and Scoping Review

- While there are many different terms to refer to different types of literature review, we can use “**narrative literature review**” for the less systematic type and “**systematic literature review**” for the more systematic. Somewhere in between there is the “**scoping review**”.
  - The narrative review is a typical literature review as you can find in a scientific paper. It frames the topic and set the stage for the research questions or hypotheses.
  - A systematic (or scoping) literature review is a research design in itself, and a scientific literature genre (you can write and publish a paper which is a literature review).

# Narrative Review

# Narrative Review

- Although **narrative literature review** is rather unsystematic, it does not mean that the researcher carries it out based on a systematic and comprehensive knowledge of the literature. The “narrative” character especially concerns the way the review is presented.
- This kind of review does not aim to systematically describe the field of study, but is geared toward creating “a story” that supports (arguments) some points.
- A review of this type is generally found in the “literature review” or “related works” section of the papers, but not as a stand-alone paper.



# Narrative Review

- **Definition.** A narrative review is a qualitative synthesis of literature on a broad topic, relying on the author's expertise for study selection and analysis. It is used to summarize and discuss theories or frameworks, often representing the typical literature review in research papers.
- **Objective.** The researcher summarize studies dealing with its research topic, usually to make a point and justify and frame hypotheses and research question.
- **Method.** It is not systematic as there are no pre-defined criteria guiding the review. It lacks a predefined strategy for literature search and selection. The author's expertise and judgment guide the selection of studies.



# Narrative Review

## Literature review and research questions

The widely recognized risks of misinformed citizens for healthy democracies brought a cohort of scholars to tackle this issue from a range of different perspectives. The deeply and still undergoing transformations of contemporary media ecologies led to a renewed interest in this topic resulting in a rapidly growing body of interdisciplinary scholarly works published during the last few years. While the topic has seen a recent surge of academic interest, many studies build on the long-existing field of automatic detection of problematic content or actors.

Rather than attempting to provide a systematic review of all these studies, the following paragraphs highlight the essential literature that frames our approach, clarify the terminology used and lead to our research questions.

A first necessary step is to highlight the results and limits of existing approaches to detect bad information and malicious actors. Then we describe the media manipulation frame and the concepts of amplification and problematic information. Finally, we analyze the concept of ‘coordinated inauthentic behavior’ and pinpoint its potential roots in the existing literature.

## Challenges of problematic information detection

While unanimously recognizing misinformation as detrimental for healthy democracies, the existing literature is fragmented when it comes to defining the object of study. The lack of a shared, consistent and operationalizable definition undermines both the attempt to estimate its prevalence over legitimate information (Lazer et al., 2018) and measure the impact of misinformation on citizens’ opinions or behavior (Benkler,

Fabio Giglietto, Nicola Righetti, Luca Rossi & Giada Marino (2020): It takes a village to manipulate the media: coordinated link sharing behavior during 2018 and 2019 Italian elections, Information, Communication & Society.

# Systematic Review

# Systematic Review

- **Definition.** A systematic review is a methodical and comprehensive synthesis of research studies on a specific question, employing stringent protocols for study selection, data extraction, and analysis, to minimize bias and provide reliable findings.
- **Objective.** The primary objective is to offer a comprehensive synthesis of relevant studies on a specific research question, summarizing the evidence through systematic search, critical appraisal, and synthesis of findings.
- **Method.** Involves a structured and predefined protocol, including a comprehensive literature search, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies, systematic data extraction, and a critical appraisal of study quality (see PRISMA).

# Main Elements of a Systematic Review (1/2)

- **Protocol and Registration:** Details any prior protocol registration, outlining the review's rationale, hypothesis, and planned methods.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Describes the inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies.
- **Information Sources and Search Strategy:** Details the information sources (databases, registries) and the search strategy used, including any limits applied.
- **Study Selection:** Describes the process of selecting studies from the search results.
- **Data Collection Process:** Outlines the process for extracting data from the studies.

# Main Elements of a Systematic Review (2/2)

- **Data Items:** Lists the types of data extracted from the studies.
- **Risk of Bias in Individual Studies:** Describes the method used to assess the risk of bias in individual studies.
- **Summary Measures and Synthesis of Results:** Specifies the principal summary measures and the method of data synthesis.
- **Risk of Bias Across Studies:** Outlines how bias across studies will be assessed.
- **Additional Analyses:** Details any additional analyses (e.g., subgroup or sensitivity analyses).

# Systematic Review (database query)

**Table 1.** Boolean query expressions for combined facets of difficult heritage and social network sites.

Facet A: Difficult heritage	
Contested heritage	'contested heritage' OR 'dissonant heritage' OR 'difficult heritage' OR 'troubled heritage' OR 'challenging heritage' OR 'disputed heritage' OR 'uncomfortable heritage'
Contested past	'dissonant past' OR 'contested past' OR 'disputed past'
Excluded heritage	'subaltern heritage' OR 'excluded heritage' OR 'marginalized heritage' OR 'marginalised heritage'
Trauma heritage	'trauma heritage' OR 'Holocaust heritage' OR 'conflict heritage' OR 'genocide heritage' OR 'dark heritage' OR 'war heritage'
Facet B: Social network platforms	
Facebook	'Facebook post' OR 'Facebook posts' OR 'Facebook groups' OR 'Facebook pages' OR 'Facebook group' OR 'Facebook users'
Instagram	'Instagram feeds' OR 'Instagram photos' OR 'Instagram photo' OR 'Instagram posts' OR 'Instagram post' OR 'Instagram users' OR 'Instagram photographs'
Twitter	tweet OR tweets OR 'Twitter hashtag' OR 'Twitter hashtags' OR tweeting OR 'Twitter user' OR 'Twitter users'
YouTube	'YouTube videos' OR 'YouTube video' OR 'YouTube channel' OR 'YouTube channels'
Social network sites	'social network site' OR 'social networking site' OR 'social network sites' OR 'social networking sites' OR SNS

Kelpšienė, I., Armakauskaitė, D., Denisenko, V., Kirtiklis, K., Laužikas, R., Stonytė, R., ... & Dallas, C. (2023). Difficult heritage on social network sites: An integrative review. *New Media & Society*, 25(11), 3137-3164.

# Systematic Review (PRIMA flowchart)

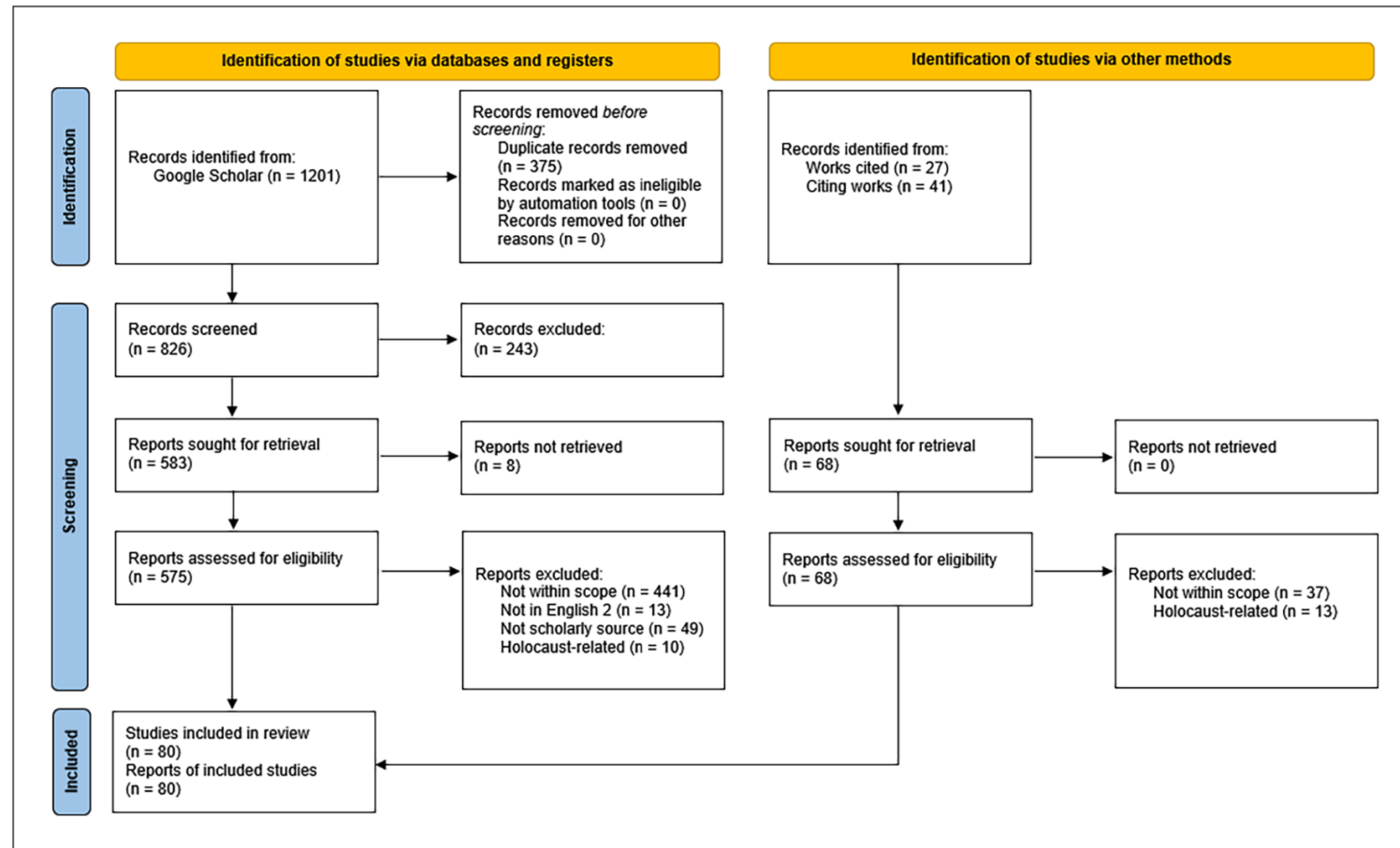


Figure 1. PRISMA-P literature selection flow diagram.

Kelpšienė, I., Armakauskaitė, D., Denisenko, V., Kirtiklis, K., Laužikas, R., Stonytė, R., ... & Dallas, C. (2023). Difficult heritage on social network sites: An integrative review. *New Media & Society*, 25(11), 3137-3164.



# Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

- A systematic review leading to the statistical analysis of findings identified in other published studies, what is called Meta-Analysis.
- Meta-analysis is a **statistical technique** used in research to combine and analyze data from multiple studies addressing the same question.
- By aggregating data, a meta-analysis can provide more precise estimates of effects, uncover patterns, or resolve uncertainties when individual studies disagree.
- Example: Matthes, J., Knoll, J., Valenzuela, S., Hopmann, D. N., & Von Sikorski, C. (2019). [A meta-analysis of the effects of cross-cutting exposure on political participation](#). *Political Communication*, 36(4), 523-542

# Scoping Review

# Scoping Review

**Definition.** A scoping review is a type of research synthesis used to map the literature on a broad topic, identifying key concepts, evidence types, and research gaps, characterized by a **systematic but flexible** approach in literature search and study inclusion, without detailed data synthesis or quality assessment.

**Method.** Combines a systematic approach with flexibility. Involves a broad literature search to identify relevant studies, with more inclusive selection criteria. Focuses on mapping the literature rather than appraising study quality or synthesizing findings in detail. A more rigorous PRISMA extension for scoping reviews has also been published: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/Extensions/ScopingReviews>

**PRISMA**

# PRISMA

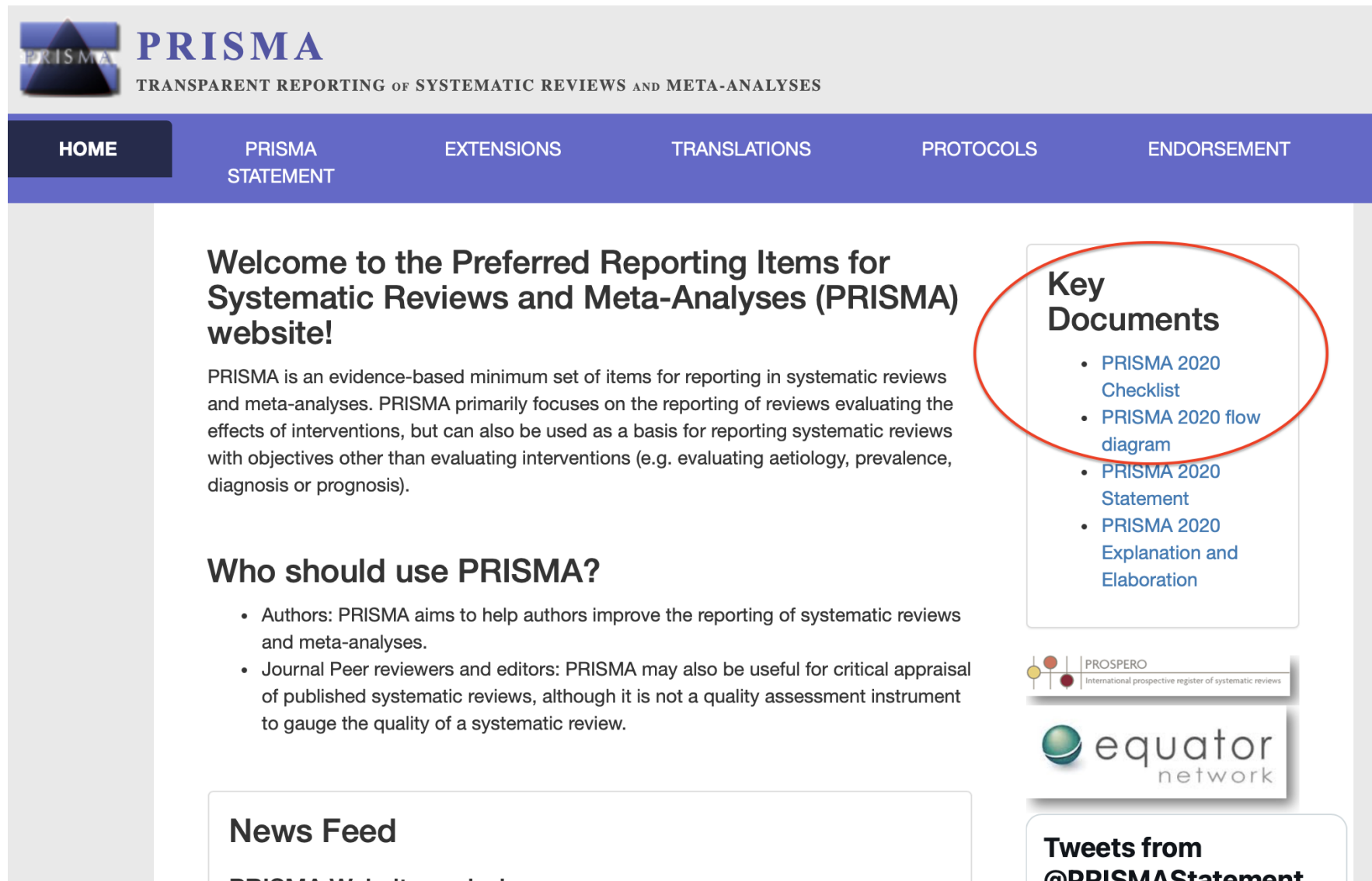
PRISMA is the acronym for **Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses**.

PRISMA is an evidence-based minimum set of items for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. PRISMA primarily focuses on the reporting of reviews evaluating the effects of interventions, but can also be used as a basis for reporting systematic reviews with objectives other than evaluating interventions (e.g. evaluating aetiology, prevalence, diagnosis or prognosis).

PRISMA was developed in the medical field (evidence-based medicine) but can be applied to other fields as well.

Website and materials: <http://www.prisma-statement.org>

# PRISMA materials: Flowchart and Checklist



The image is a screenshot of the PRISMA website homepage. At the top, there is a header with the PRISMA logo (a blue triangle with the word 'PRISMA' inside) and the text 'PRISMA TRANSPARENT REPORTING OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS AND META-ANALYSES'. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: HOME, PRISMA STATEMENT, EXTENSIONS, TRANSLATIONS, PROTOCOLS, and ENDORSEMENT. The main content area has a large heading 'Welcome to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) website!' followed by a paragraph explaining PRISMA. To the right, there is a 'Key Documents' section with a red oval around it, containing links to 'PRISMA 2020 Checklist', 'PRISMA 2020 flow diagram', 'PRISMA 2020 Statement', and 'PRISMA 2020 Explanation and Elaboration'. Below this, there are logos for PROSPERO and equator network. At the bottom, there is a 'News Feed' section and a 'Tweets from @PRISMAStatement' section.

**PRISMA**  
TRANSPARENT REPORTING OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS AND META-ANALYSES

**HOME** PRISMA STATEMENT EXTENSIONS TRANSLATIONS PROTOCOLS ENDORSEMENT

## Welcome to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) website!

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### Who should use PRISMA?

- Authors: PRISMA aims to help authors improve the reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses.
- Journal Peer reviewers and editors: PRISMA may also be useful for critical appraisal of published systematic reviews, although it is not a quality assessment instrument to gauge the quality of a systematic review.

### Key Documents

- [PRISMA 2020 Checklist](#)
- [PRISMA 2020 flow diagram](#)
- [PRISMA 2020 Statement](#)
- [PRISMA 2020 Explanation and Elaboration](#)

PROSPERO  
International prospective register of systematic reviews

equator  
network

### News Feed

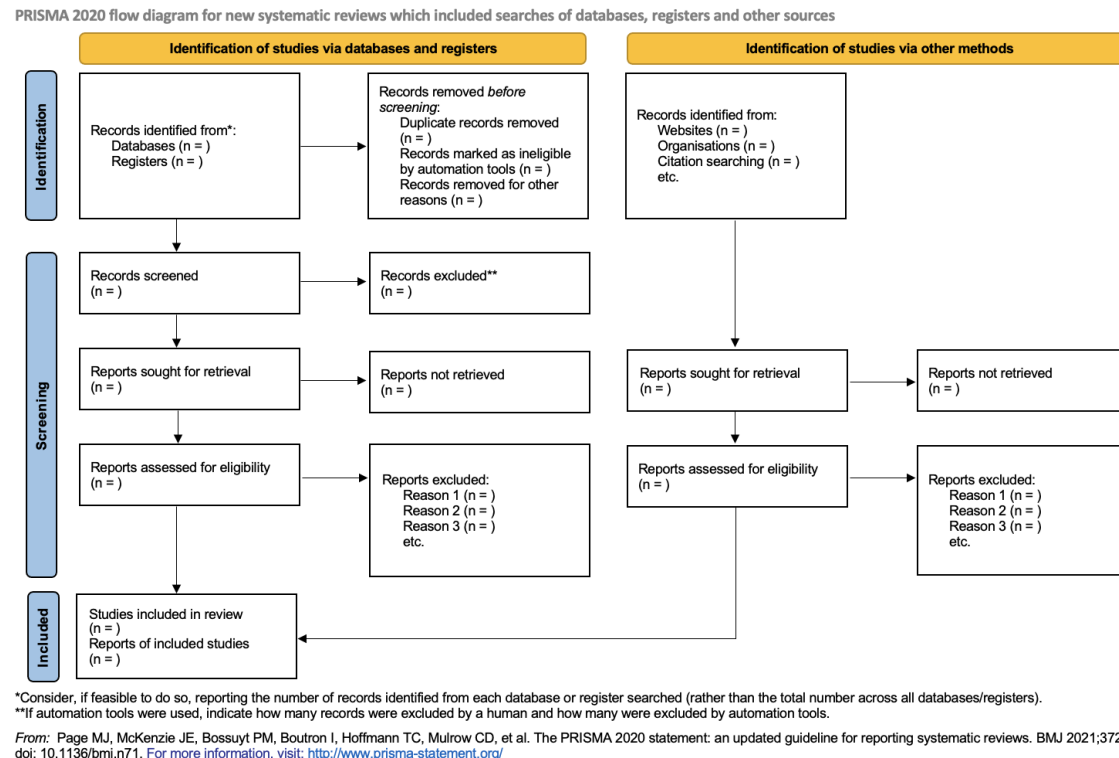
PRISMA Website design

### Tweets from @PRISMAStatement

<http://www.prisma-statement.org>

# PRISMA Flowchart

The PRISMA flowchart is particularly useful to organize and document the systematic literature review process.



PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources. Template available: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/PRISMAStatement/FlowDiagram>



# Reproducibility and Pre-Registration

The [checklist](#) provides further details on how to conduct and write the systematic literature review. Even without strictly adhering to this checklist, planning and detailing each step of the systematic literature review is crucial. The goal is to ensure **reproducibility**. **Pre-registration** of the research protocol is also used.

**Reproducibility.** A systematic literature review should be reproducible, implying that another researcher should ideally obtain the exact same results by following the methodology's described steps. Often, to ensure reproducibility, manual content analysis, when necessary, is conducted by at least two trained coders whose inter-rater reliability has been established.

**Pre-registration.** A systematic review protocol states your hypothesis, rationale, and methodology. It is recommended to register your

