

# Challenges to Large-scale Scientific Knowledge Sharing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic poses major challenges to researchers using existing cyberinfrastructures to collaborate and share COVID-19 scientific knowledge. This paper enriches the existing literature by investigating the following challenges: (1) the mass influx of publications imposes a cognitive overload on COVID-19 researchers, (2) increasing speed of publications requires additional efforts to preserve peer-evaluation quality, (3) decentralization of research communities imposes impediments to informing the larger community about inappropriate results/interpretations in papers, (4) rigidity of papers imposes barriers to updating prior findings, and (5) difficulties with establishing common ground make interdisciplinary research more challenging. We manually reviewed approximately 1,300 tweets about large-scale collaborative research problems. We conducted a thematic analysis of about 10% of these tweets through a grounded theory approach and affinity mapping. We call on the CHI community to design scalable solutions for rapid knowledge sharing that help researchers collaboratively summarize, organize, share, and peer-review/improve their knowledge.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing → Social content sharing; Collaborative content creation; Social networks; Computer supported cooperative work; Social media.**

Additional Key Words and Phrases: E-science, E-research, CSCW, Collaborative Research, COVID-19, Knowledge Graph, Knowledge Sharing

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous studies on scientific data collection, sharing, filtering, analysis, and maintenance in the domains of E-science and CSCW. However, the design community has paid less attention to the dissemination, distillation, organization, and improvement of the result of analyzing, interpreting, and learning through the data, i.e., scientific knowledge. While traditional methods, such as knowledge sharing through journal publications, and classification of publications in knowledge repositories have been relatively efficient in past years, in the wake of the pandemic, new issues have arisen. In this study, we review the recent literature and analyze tweets by COVID-19 researchers explaining the difficulties they experience in scientific knowledge sharing, evaluating, and improving due to the nature of expedited research during the pandemic.

Within the pandemic, there is also an infodemic [125]. Misinformation about COVID-19 has spread across media platforms [32, 92], incorporated numerous topics [17] and exacerbated public

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\*Note 1

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panic [35]. While all of this is bad, there exists another underlying cause of the infodemic, taking root in the place where the pursuit of novelty and rigorous evaluation is supposed to prevent misinformation, the inability to effectively share scientific knowledge during the pandemic.

Due to the massive influx of COVID-19 related knowledge, researchers are struggling to find enough time to understand the contributions and limitations of findings [16]. The number of publications is unprecedented, with the number of academic papers related to COVID-19 being approximately 12 times more than for the MERS outbreak and more than 30 times the SARS outbreak [49].

In a recent study, it was shown that the majority of COVID-19 related papers (80%) are from medical science and only 3% from computer science, psychology, and engineering together [48]. This distribution in the number of published papers indicates that there is not a robust multidisciplinary approach to fight against the pandemic.

Knowledge sharing has been hindered by a paywall of publications, with roughly 20% of publications costing money to access. To make things worse, the number of paywalled papers increasing faster than open-access ones [114], and expected to rise to as high as 50% [16].

Preprints (papers published before peer review) accelerate the knowledge sharing process [57] and have been widely adopted as a way to do so during the pandemic. Glasziou et al. [46] reported that views and downloads of preprints had increased 100 fold. While preprints have been found useful, they are not an alternative to peer-reviewed publications [71]. Embracing of preprints can be justified by the fact that around 6/24/2020, more than 283 papers appeared in preprints in comparison to about 261 papers in journals [68]. Many novel technologies were introduced to collect and centralize publishing to facilitate searching and finding papers. Additionally, some NLP based systems were deployed to retrieve information, classify and summarize them from those repositories. However, there is a doubt whether those technologies have succeeded to address problems of medical researcher [100].

Parallel to preprint repositories, researchers have used social media (e.g. Twitter) to disseminate information faster. It might have been overlooked so far, but the lack of communication among researchers and sharing research that has been failed may cause repetitive research. Researchers have also utilized messaging technologies like Slack to communicate with each other and get informed about the state of the are research [68].

Providing researchers with technologies supporting efficient knowledge sharing and trustworthy research is crucial to solving the current crisis.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The Web has drastically changed scientific knowledge generation, evaluation, dissemination, and improvement. This large-scale virtual lab has helped researchers, engineers, and technicians to asynchronously connect and collaborate to share, analyze, and interpret data, information, and knowledge. Social media, collaborative editing tools, cloud computing, and scalable data processing units, accessible data warehouses, cheap sensory data collectors, crowdsourcing data collection and labeling, and fast searchability of a plethora of research papers including pre-prints have significantly increased the speed and the volume of knowledge generation and dissemination. In addition, citizen science has enabled non-scientists to engage in the process of data collection, filtering, assessment, and labeling, which has significantly facilitated transdisciplinary knowledge coproduction. These new technologies and methods have been studied in multiple disciplines including cyberinfrastructure, e-Science, citizen science, and transdisciplinarity. Pacheco et al. [88] classified these disciplinary fields under the term “digital science” and defined it as “a system that yields common (digital) spaces for knowledge coproduction based on open access and connectivity” (p. 378).

99 A large spectrum of people like researchers, citizen scientists, students, academic staff benefits  
100 from digital science. They collaborate and share information through connected technologies such  
101 as cloud computing. A common knowledge space is required to collaborate interdisciplinarily. [88,  
102 p. 5,6] Cyberinfrastructure (CI) was coined to give a prospect of how computing technologies can  
103 be exploited to facilitate academic research or researchers (i.e., scientists, engineers, humanists) [6].  
104 National Science Foundation (NSF) defines CI as a union of technology, interdisciplinary groups,  
105 and new educational and workforce enterprises. In other words, CI is simply a combination of  
106 shared “computing systems, data, information resources, networking, digitally enabled-sensors,  
107 instruments, virtual organizations, and observatories, along with an interoperable suite of software  
108 services and tool” among interdisciplinary research groups who generate, establish and utilize  
109 “transformative approaches to scientific and engineering discovery and learning [28]” [88, p. 2].

110 In European countries, CI corresponds to the notions of e-science (eS) and e-infrastructure. E-  
111 science is defined as “global collaboration in key areas of science and the next generation of  
112 infrastructure that will enable it. [52]”

113 Some times e-infrastructure is used instead of CI or to refer to the infrastructure part of CI. In  
114 this sense, e-science might be considered as a scientific method which facilitates the acquiring the  
115 latest digital platforms known as e-infrastructures [88, p. 2,3].

116 In the UK the realm of e-Science is so widely spread that not includes natural and physical sciences  
117 but also the social sciences and humanities. As a result, the term e-Science is being substituted by  
118 ‘e-Research.’ Consequently, Digital Humanities and e-Social Science have attracted more attention  
119 and financial support. e-Research can be seen as a collection of computing infrastructures and  
120 applications aimed to support distributed and multidisciplinary research collaboration. [56]

121 Several digital science challenges and trends have been investigated in the literature Pacheco  
122 et al. [88]:

- 123 • **Social and psychological aspects: Science of Team Science, Citizen Science and Trans-**  
**124 disciplinarity:** concerns roles, goals, norms, incentives, conflicts, attitudes, training, project  
125 management, ethics, equity, actions, and reactions within research communities and those  
126 between researchers and non-researchers who directly or indirectly engage in research  
127 projects.
  - 128 – *Science of Team Science:* Hall et al. [50] comprehensively reviewed the empirical evidence and  
129 research gaps on collaboration in science including formation, composition, performance  
130 of scientific research teams, within and between group interactions, institutional influences,  
131 and interdisciplinary research.
  - 132 – *Citizen science:* Bonney et al. [15] gives an overview of the application, requirements, and  
133 difficulties with citizen science and suggests next steps and strategies to follow. They  
134 exemplify the dataset of crowdsourced observations of more than five million birds peer  
135 month, which has been the source of analysis in more than 100 research papers so far.  
136 Carlson et al. [18] explains the coral reef data collection and analysis by 90 Earthwatch  
137 volunteers who made 6,000 measurements from 2000 to 2008 in Jamaica, as one of the  
138 successful applications of citizen science to enhance zoological research and policy making.  
139 Crabbe [30] discusses the case of Anchorage Coastal Beluga Survey conducted by trained  
140 volunteers between 2008 and 2011. Through 444 hours of observation with 507 beluga whale  
141 sightings, they collected the data regarding the presence, characteristics, and behavior of  
142 beluga whales.
  - 143 – *Transdisciplinary research:* Pohl et al. [96] describe how transdisciplinary research can  
144 address wicked societal problems through engaging private and public sectors, represen-  
145 tatives of the society, and researchers from multi-disciplines. In the same textbook [42],  
146

148 Defila and di Giulio [34], through analyzing survey results, shed light on how inter- and  
149 transdisciplinary teams frame problems based on a common ground, to reach out to a  
150 consensus in their collaboration. They also discuss “content-rich moderation” and the  
151 importance of balancing group and individual work to achieve the best outcomes.

152 • **Technological aspects: E-Science and Cyberinfrastructure:**

- 153 – *Cloud and grid computing*: Lee [73] review portability, interoperability, and scalability of  
154 cloud computing; and suggest a trajectory of best practices and standards for development,  
155 deployment, and fundamental research agendas. Nabrzyski et al. [82] provides a detailed  
156 description of the grid computing applications and technologies with a special focus on  
157 resource management.  
158 – *CSCW and e-research*: The affordances provided by CSCW technologies have enabled scientific  
159 collaboration to take place in large-scale, distributed, and international contexts. One  
160 of the prominent examples is the emergence of virtual labs and remote experimentations  
161 [3]. *Crowdsourcing scientific data management* is another application of CSCW in e-research.  
162 Lee [73] present Super-Ego as a framework for location information privacy management  
163 in ubiquitous environments and through a 2-week study show that their automated methods  
164 can predict privacy preferences for 80% and semi-automated methods for up to 90%  
165 of users. Law et al. [72] proposes strategies and circumstances of using crowdsourcing  
166 for generating, processing, or analyzing research data. Wilkinson et al. [127] define and  
167 promote the FAIR guiding principles to improve management and reusability of scientific  
168 data. O’Grady et al. [86] shed light on the issues with sparse sensor networks and suggest  
169 leveraging the power of citizen scientists as data collection relays. This trend of research  
170 has contributed to a greater interrelation between CSCW and e-science and e-research. De-  
171 signers seeking to address e-science problems through CSCW must be able to integrate the  
172 dimensions of science, sociality, and technology and develop a socio-technical perspective  
173 and approach [56].

174 • **Political aspects: Science and Technology Management**: König and Gorman [65] study  
175 how public research funding agencies such as NSF and ERC identify, promote, and constrain  
176 interdisciplinary research and how organizational constraints affect them. Huutoniemi and  
177 Rafols [55] provides a meta-analysis of the notion of interdisciplinarity in research, how to  
178 evaluate its value and significance, and tools that help with this evaluation. Roemer and  
179 Borchardt [102] discusses concerns and controversies about measuring scholarly impact of  
180 publications using bibliometrics and different alternative, and arguably more robust objective  
181 metrics to measure quality and impact of scientific publications. Walker [118] compares  
182 national, transnational, and international science; the fact that science is being perceived as  
183 national and its implications.

184 2.1 **Scientific knowledge sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic**

185 The rapid spread of the coronavirus was met with an increasing number of publications and  
186 scientific knowledge. However, the existing infrastructures for knowledge sharing failed to cope  
187 with these abrupt changes. In this section, we investigate the literature about knowledge sharing  
188 problems during the pandemic and evolved solutions to address those issues.

189 2.2 **Repetitions in COVID-19 Literature**

190 Papers and Ozimec [91] complains about the copious number of repetitive papers and review letters  
191 and call for a solution for the upcoming similar crisis. Majority of early COVID-19 articles provide  
192 no new information on the disease [36]. In a recent study, a total number of 14719 papers about  
193 COVID-19 were collected from Google Scholar, Springerlink, and PubMed. By using Mendeley  
194

197 Desktop they recognized 8499 were duplicate studies [117]. In another study, 10 paper out of  
198 157 collected papers were identified as repetitive papers [106]. Which might be because of the  
199 poor communication among researchers and being informed about ongoing research by other  
200 communities which highlights the importance of having robust social networks.

201  
202 *2.2.1 Use of Social Media for knowledge Sharing.* Twitter with more than 330 million users [109],  
203 turned out to be a useful platform for sharing health care information [126]. Twitter was used  
204 extensively to share information during the pandemic to the extent that there is a new COVID-19  
205 related Tweet every 45 milliseconds [2]. Between January 16 and March 15 there were 2, 792, 513  
206 Tweets and 18, 168, 161 retweets about COVID-19 [109], and by March 30, 2020, the number of tweets  
207 using #COVID-19 reached 386, 686, 511 [104]. About 6, 162 COVID-19 literature was mentioned  
208 in 1.4 million tweets. It was shown that about 68.1% of COVID-19 publications were mentioned  
209 by Twitter users at least once. Papers were buzzing within the first couple of days after their  
210 publication [39]. For instance, a paper titled “uncanny similarity of unique inserts in the 2019-nCoV  
211 spike protein to HIV-1 gp120 and Gag” with 21.360 mentions was among the top ten controversial  
212 papers on twitter which was retracted later [40]. As long as very few percent of annually published  
213 two million academic papers, tend to be cited and employed by other researchers, discussing papers  
214 on Twitter enhances the probability of papers to be cited and employed [85]. Currently, there  
215 are 27 active Twitter-based journal clubs that use Twitter to discuss and learn about important  
216 publishings. Recently the discussions are often centered around COVID-19. After a discussion,  
217 reviews are archived to be searched and retrieved later.  
218

219 A shortcoming of scientific communication on Twitter is that tweets are evanescent. Additionally,  
220 scrolling through tweets after the journal club is over, may not be a convenient and efficient way  
221 to grasp the ideas and information discussed live [110]. Twitter is considered a useful platform  
222 for the rapid dissemination of information. However, to overcome the flood of information it  
223 is suggested to limit the use of Twitter and only following verified sources [104]. Twitter, like  
224 other social networks, is not immune to misinformation and myths [87, 109]. One study showed  
225 24.8% of COVID-19 related tweets incorporated misinformation, and 17.4% included unverifiable  
226 information[66]. It was shown that unreliable information spread at the same rate as reliable ones  
227 on Twitter [21] which makes Twitter vulnerable to misinformation and hence may limit its use by  
228 researchers.

229 YouTube has a wide spectrum of users from ordinary people and patients to healthcare staff. It has  
230 about 2 billion users [10]. YouTube with Coefficient of relative amplification of 0.1 cuts unreliable  
231 information out over the time [21]. However useful videos are overwhelmed by deceiving videos  
232 based on average view counts, view ratios, and “Video Power Indices” and only about 37.5%  
233 of COVID-19 related videos are useful and 10.4% of English videos have misleading content [5].  
234 Another study showed that 27.5% of most-viewed English videos on YouTube contained unauthentic  
235 or misleading information, attaining over 62 million views [74]. This might be because uploaded  
236 videos on YouTube are not peer-reviewed. For instance there was a video on Youtube claiming  
237 finding an effective drug against COVID-19. Pharma Society tweeted (11 RT, 12 L): “Response  
238 to Claims of a COVID-19 Cure by Biobert Research group“Mr. Kijumbi, let the clinical trials and  
239 experiments on your drugs talk for you not the YouTube videos” [115].”

240 Wikipedia has been used for collaborative knowledge sharing. In the initial stages of the pandemic,  
241 more than 4, 500 new Wikipedia pages on COVID-19 were created and have attained almost 250M  
242 views. Content generation is continuing on WikiProject COVID-19 [22]. COVID-19 articles are  
243 usually cited in Wikipedia in advance to their official publication, because of early access versions  
244 of articles [22].

246 Although social media platforms have been used to alleviate knowledge sharing and scientific  
247 communication, lack of peer-review and dissemination misinformation and disinformation on  
248 those platforms [132] may hinder their utility.  
249

250 *2.2.2 Preprints and Repository Systems.* After the pandemic began, preprint servers took a larger  
251 role in knowledge dissemination as the research community was ever more in need for sharing  
252 findings and results. Because fast dissemination is critical, but the traditional publication takes time,  
253 more researchers are utilizing the preprint servers, and in some cases, advertising their papers via  
254 social media, e.g., Twitter. Preprint servers like arXiv, Research Square, PrePrints.Org, OSFPreprints,  
255 bioRxiv, medRxiv have been used to quickly publish findings [57]. The number of posted papers in  
256 medRxiv and the page view has been largely increased [41].  
257

258 Search and Repository tools have also been proposed to facilitate finding new publishing. CORD-  
259 19 dataset deployed a set of about 59,000 papers including coronavirus literature from as early as  
260 the 1950s [16]. However, by one an estimate only 40% of the papers in CORD-19 are even directly  
261 related to COVID-19, and about 19,000 papers in the dataset lack the full-text [16] and only 13%  
262 were deemed genuinely significant to the medical knowledge on COVID-19 [29]. CoAID [33]  
263 is another dataset focusing on news and social networks posts including verified true and false  
264 information to help differentiate fake and real news for covid2019 hashtag. They showed about 17%  
265 of the news was fake [33]. LitCovid is another literature hub for tracking up-to-date scientific data  
266 [20]. WHO introduced its own database [124]. COVID-END is a database maintained by McMaster  
267 University [129].  
268

269 Extracting valuable and meaningful knowledge from such a large set of literature is critical for  
270 decision making during a pandemic [51]. To this end, machine learning and NLP techniques were  
271 exploited to distill information from the ocean of publications. CAiRE-COVID [111] is a system that  
272 incorporates natural language processing (NLP) question answering (QA) to find related results  
273 based on a keyword and also provides a short summary of the papers [111]. EVIDENCEMINER  
274 [119] is a web application for textual data exploration for life sciences. Users' query is received  
275 as a natural language statement and EVIDENCEMINER returns textual data from a background  
276 corpora (i.e. CORD-19) automatically. Covidex [133] is a similar online service that employs deep  
277 learning and neural architectures for ranking the papers recovered from CORD-19 and incorporates  
278 BioBERT to highlight the sentences in the returned results. SciSight is a dataminer service based  
279 on CORD-19. It shows related literature to facilitate filter search results and draws connections  
280 within the literature on browseable maps [16].  
281

282 However, multiple concerns and criticisms are raised regarding the extensive usage of preprint  
283 servers even before the pandemic, one of which is the absence of a "peer-review" process. This is  
284 why the total number of peer-reviewed publications is roughly three times more than preprints [54].  
285 If the lack of a peer-review process were to result in unsound science, it is far more consequential  
286 for the COVID-19 research to directly touch on a matter of life and death. As far as preprints are  
287 not peer-reviewed they might be prone to include nonfactual findings and misinformation and  
288 readers must self-assess reliability of information. Misinformation can cost lives and exacerbate  
289 the spread of COVID-19 [43, 83]. As a solution, fact-checking websites (e.g. MythBusters [123]) and  
290 crowdsourced peer-reviewing are proposed [103].  
291

292 Numerous platforms are deployed to employ crowdsourced peer-reviewing. Science Rapid  
293 PREreview is a system for fast review of preprints related to COVID-19 [58]. Reviews on this  
294 web system are crowd-sourced and can be anonymous [107]. PubPeer is another service for post-  
295 publication peer review [71]. Additionally, to inform the research community about retracted  
296 papers Retractionwatch was launched as a web system aimed to make a list of retracted papers [37].  
297 According to this website, more than 30 papers about COVID-19 were retracted, being 1410 times  
298

295 cited totally. Each paper retracted because of misconduct costs the National Institutes of Health  
296 (NIH) about 425, 000US\$ [37].

297 Preprints are not meant to be a substitution of peer-reviewed publication, they are only hoped  
298 to reduce the reviewing delay [71]. Researchers highlight the quality of papers, not the quantity,  
299 many papers have been shared on social media or as preprints— which are not peer-reviewed and  
300 may contain non-factual and misleading information [63, 68, 130].

301 2.2.3 *Multidisciplinary Research During the Pandemic.* The uneven distribution of COVID-19 related  
302 papers among different disciplines [48] may indicate the lack of interdisciplinary collaborative  
303 research. As long as fighting against the pandemic is a multifaceted task and involves researchers  
304 of a variety of disciplines, ignoring researchers of the fields outside medical science has raised  
305 some concerns. Miranda van Tilburg tweeted (6 RT, 68 L): “Sad to notice the pediatric research  
306 agenda around #COVID19 excludes psychosocial aspects of the #pandemic and #lockdown. We  
307 cannot view health as purely biologic. Currently the approach to this virus is behavioral (eg, social  
308 distancing) [112].”

### 310 311 2.3 CSCW and knowledge management

312 The history of knowledge management can be divided broadly into two generations: repositories  
313 and expertise or knowledge sharing. The former is associated with data and information flows  
314 while the latter deals with the transmission of knowledge through interpersonal communication  
315 channels [CoP , knowledge embedded within practice] [1].

316 Having mutual knowledge between collaborating researchers is integral to their success in  
317 coordinating actions in order to reach their research goals. Mutual knowledge is the knowledge that  
318 communicating parties share and are aware that they share. However, for dispersed researchers  
319 whose main form of communicating and collaborating is through technological spaces, it is more  
320 challenging to maintain mutual knowledge. When relaying knowledge to their peers, researchers  
321 often experience what is called “uncertainties”. This is defined as “the gaps in information needed  
322 for decision-making during the process of designing and executing a research project” [72]. Five  
323 identified challenges in maintaining mutual knowledge are as follows: “failure to communicate  
324 and retain contextual information, unevenly distributed information, difficulty communicating  
325 and understanding the salience of information, differences in speed of access to information, and  
326 difficulty interpreting the meaning of silence” [31].

327 Socioality and its connection to technology and science can be examined through the lens of  
328 communities of practice (CoP). CoP is a concept developed to investigate the ongoing practices  
329 and interactions within a community as the community’s means of developing knowledge and  
330 expertise within a particular domain [122]. A scientific community can be examined as a CoP, which  
331 usually will be made up of groups of knowledge workers. Each group will focus on a particular  
332 problem or topic [60]. When compared to CoP in corporate contexts, scientific communities are  
333 more heterogeneous and its groups will operate with greater independence [38].

## 334 335 3 METHODS

336 We analyzed 130 tweets which was about 10% of the total tweets we manually collected from  
337 COVID-19 researchers discussing problems, or topics related to problems, with large large-scale  
338 collaborative research. The tweets we selected for our analysis were chosen based on their relevance  
339 to our research question: What are the challenges of large-scale scientific knowledge sharing and  
340 collaboration in the context of the pandemic?

341 We followed a grounded theory [45] approach to develop concepts and categories which in-  
342 formed our theoretical sampling. As we developed and refined these concepts and categories, we

344 simultaneously consulted relevant literature to compare our interpretations to existing theories.  
345 To facilitate our analysis, we used open and axial coding alongside an iterative construction and  
346 reconstruction of an affinity diagram.

### 348 3.1 Data collection

349 An initial phase of data collection allowed us to create a preliminary set of problem categories  
350 to refine our search. These initial categories were substantiated and expanded by a review of  
351 the pertinent literature [4, 16, 90]. In our initial literature review, we identified a few themes of  
352 challenges and met with four senior epidemiology PIs at R1 schools in the U.S. who had recently  
353 published a significant number of research papers on the COVID-19 pandemic. These researchers  
354 validated the themes we had identified and provided us with accounts of experiences they have had  
355 with these issues, including their frustrations with the magnitude of incoming research papers they  
356 have to review. They also introduced us to new themes and keywords to include in our research  
357 data collection process. Based on the keywords we learned from these PIs and the literature, we  
358 initiated our tweet search and expanded the list of keywords as we found them in tweets. We  
359 searched for tweets that included content related to our problem categories:

- 360 • Time-consuming to self-judge many rapidly released papers leading to cognitive overload;
- 361 • Difficult to efficiently inform the research community about inappropriate results/findings;
- 362 • Repetition among studies;
- 363 • Published papers are static and do not get updated dynamically;
- 364 • Difficulties in multidisciplinary research collaboration;
- 365 • Flawed preprint papers are shared without peer-review process;
- 366 • Marketing and subscription fees of journals leading to inaccessibility to knowledge;
- 367 • Personal ambitions and career incentives.
- 368

369 We followed two approaches to locating tweets:

- 370 (1) Keyword search for all tweets posted during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 371 (2) Keyword search filtered to only include tweets made by a list of prominent COVID-19  
372 researcher profiles we had followed.
- 373

374 For our second approach to tweet searches, we followed Twitter accounts of COVID-19 re-  
375 searchers from multiple disciplines including epidemiology, statistics, science communication,  
376 virology, and biostatistics. The researchers that we followed were usually verified by Twitter  
377 (indicated by a blue checkmark icon) or had their academic/research title(s) and affiliated institu-  
378 tion(s) listed in their profile bio. These researchers had titles such as *Professor*, *Researcher*, *Scientist*,  
379 *Epidemiologist*, and *Director*. We also continuously followed new accounts to expand our author  
380 sources for collected data. During the retrieval period (May 1, 2020 – August 19, 2020), we used  
381 Twitter's search function and entered different keywords suggesting a problem (e.g., *difficulty*,  
382 *challenge*, *barrier*, *jargon*) combined with keywords suggesting collaborative, COVID-19 research  
383 contexts (e.g., *COVID-19*, *collaborative*, *research*, *multidisciplinary*, *across disciplines*). All the data  
384 we collected from Twitter is public and includes both original tweets and reply tweets in Twitter  
385 threads. We compared new data to our existing thematic analyses and iteratively constructed and  
386 reconstructed a large affinity diagram to aid in data and code organization and interpretation. All  
387 the tweets and their classifications from our affinity diagram are available in the appendix.

### 388 3.2 Thematic analysis

389 Our thematic analysis was facilitated by iterative phases of coding and affinity mapping. Through  
390 this process we were able to determine which tweets to analyze based on how well they addressed  
391

	A Title	Post	Sequences	Causes / Conditions	Themes	
393	1	Natalie E. Dean tweets about the challenges she's encountered while reading through scientific papers	*Most common issues I see in scientific writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Doesn't explain why the problem is important.</li><li>• No clear takeaway message. (How would the reader explain it to a colleague?)</li><li>• Sentences too long/complex.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scientists produce papers with poor scientific writing &gt; Papers are less useful to and less understood by other scientists</li><li>• Researchers are eager to share their insights with the research community &gt; Researchers write conclusions that don't discuss limitations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Researchers often write without considering their audience</li><li>• Researchers assume that scientific papers should or must be written in complex, wordy, and jargon-laden prose in order to be published and/or accepted in</li></ul>	<span style="background-color: #ADD8E6;">Scientific writing and discourse</span> <span style="background-color: #FFFFE0;">Info overload</span>
394	2	Kareem points the need to show both sides to the argument using literature review to come to a consensus.	"In the age of covid, I've seen a few literature reviews that amount to 'a list of all the papers that say I'm right'. Gentle reminder: the goal of a literature review is to determine the state of the scientific CONSENSUS through a BALANCED survey of ALL available evidence."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incomplete/unbalanced literature reviews &gt; Papers published that exhibit selection and confirmation bias</li><li>• Preprint papers are published without peer review &gt; Scientists are able to conduct cherry-picked literature reviews that reinforce their</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Covid-19 research is being published through preprint papers which lack peer review</li><li>• Scientists are under pressure to publish Covid-19 research with strong and definite conclusions/implications</li></ul>	<span style="background-color: #FFFFE0;">No peer review</span> <span style="background-color: #FFDAB9;">Criticism of claims</span>
395	3	Steven Nono tweets about the importance of science communication with so many papers being published	This pandemic has proven to me that researchers have to spend less time in lab and more engagement in #SciComm. Great COVID-19 research is happening but it's being lost in the sea of journal publication. We need more front-facing researchers communicating results + implications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Important Covid-19 research is conducted &gt; Research is "buried" in the influx of new journal articles</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Massive influx of literature being published on Covid-19</li><li>• Papers are published and their significance is not explicit / complicated</li><li>• Researchers don't have means of easily surfacing most important and relevant</li></ul>	<span style="background-color: #ADD8E6;">Info overload</span> <span style="background-color: #ADD8E6;">Scientific writing and discourse</span> <span style="background-color: #FFDAB9;">Limits of journals</span>
396	4	Ellie Murray tweets about how to communicate with other scientists from other disciplines to collaborate	This pandemic has scientists & scholars from a multitude of fields all working towards a common goal, which is good! But it means when we write our research findings, we can no longer assume shared context or jargon among our readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Media misinterprets science &gt; scientists reinforce misconceptions &gt; leading to further misunderstanding among non-specialists</li><li>• Researchers lacking key context/expertise &gt; Researchers fail to understand significance (or lack thereof) of research finding</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Researchers communicating with other researchers in different disciplines</li><li>• Researchers lacking key context/expertise</li><li>• Researchers across disciplines have the same goal</li></ul>	<span style="background-color: #ADD8E6;">Scientific writing and discourse</span> <span style="background-color: #FFDAB9;">Disciplinaries and expertise</span> <span style="background-color: #FFDAB9;">Criticism of claims</span>

Fig. 1. Our open coding of tweets using Airtable

our research question. We also considered whether a tweet addressed a specific problem and provided context.

To begin our thematic analysis we first looked at the causes and conditions of each tweet. We then used an open coding approach to code terms to specific phrases within these causes and condition statements.

These general themes emerged in our initial coding phase:

- Scientific writing and discourse
- Information overload
- Lack of peer-review
- Criticism of claims made by researchers
- Limits of journals
- Disciplinaries and expertise
- Knowledge access
- Credibility of researchers
- Roles/audience (public versus science)

After labelling tweets with associated codes, we categorized grouped codes using axial coding. These categories were then used to restructure our affinity diagram. Through an iterative theoretical sampling approach, we were able to redevelop, refine, and validate our concepts and categories.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Online communities of researchers emerge out of a need to collectively summarize, share, and discuss recently published studies (i.e., to quickly and efficiently share scientific knowledge). This section focuses particularly on the inefficiencies and unsuitability of current information organization and filtration mechanisms of these platforms for the scientific community. We also highlight the consequences of not having an appropriate infrastructure in place for scientists during the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity for it.

One example of Twitter being used to summarize and disseminate recent scientific research can be seen in a tweet by Professor Francois Balloux (3,000 RT, 5,100 L): "Over the last weeks, a substantial amount of new evidence has become available about immunity to #SARSCoV2. This information can be difficult to process and integrate. As such I felt it may be helpful to write a thread to summarise the information and provide some context (1/13) [7]. "Understanding copious

amounts of new literature regarding COVID-19 literature is timeconsuming and tiresome to do by oneself.

While Balloux acknowledges these difficulties, he also provides insight into an important solution - the power of crowds. By summarizing the literature and sharing it with others to more efficiently learn the novelty of the findings, he has saved other researchers more time than he spent in his efforts.

Much of the struggle COVID-19 researchers are facing with effectively sharing knowledge could be alleviated with more awareness of the issues. Through our analysis of tweets and recently published articles, we identified the following themes of challenges to the large-scale scientific knowledge sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Shortcomings of scientific knowledge sharing on Twitter;
- Preserving quality of evaluation while increasing speed;
- Difficulties in efficiently informing research community about inappropriate results/interpretations in papers;
- Reliance on bibliometrics and altmetrics;
- Repetition in Published Papers;
- Rigidity of papers;
- Difficulties in multidisciplinary research.

Throughout the rest of this section we will discuss our analysis of each of these challenges in details. We refer to all authors of tweets by the specific profile name they used on Twitter at the time we collected their tweet. Additionally, we will be including the number of retweets(RT) and likes(L) as part of tweet descriptions.

#### 4.1 Shortcomings of Scientific Knowledge Sharing on Twitter

In lack of a platform tailored for and populated by scientists for collective knowledge sharing, researchers have turned to Twitter as a very popular social media platform for research communication. Researchers have turned to Twitter as a very popular social media platform for research communication [23, 59, 116]. However, this platform lacks key design affordances needed to address the particular needs of users engaged in scientific knowledge sharing. As evinced by Professor Francois Balloux's tweet in , Twitter is used by researchers to quickly and efficiently share knowledge, but the dissemination of misinformation and an experience that is not tailored to research communication has left researchers using the platform looking for more support. PT Peters tweeted (1 RT, 1 L) "The word limit, and fleeting nature of Tweets, makes this format best for a simple IT KSM: Knowledge Sharing Network. ... Twitter is not good format for debate... [98]."

Lacassin et al. [70] call the reliability and legitimacy of knowledge sharing on Twitter into question, due to the lack of peer-review of the content. Additionally, they claim that some scientists may be reluctant to share novel findings or knowledge on Twitter because there is a chance of publishing the data or analysis by other researchers rather than the original author. It can be dangerous to both the public and research community when unreliable content is widely disseminated on Twitter. Dr. Krutika Kuppalli describes this situation in Figure 2 referring to a tweet made by Michael Levitt, with 2K RT, 4.5K L.

Pershad et al. [93] discuss the drawbacks of knowledge sharing on Twitter in medical sciences. One issue is that the limited number of characters in tweets restrains researchers to briefly convey sophisticated research, which may result in miscommunications and negatively impact scientific communication. The second problem is the time required to go through all tweets to self-judge and filter the necessary information. For instance, 80% of tweets from reliable professionals are posted

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Dr.Krutika Kuppalli   
@KrutikaKuppalli

Why do these ridiculous statements without any scientific data come from old white men who have zero experience working on #infectiousdiseases outbreaks? Just b/c you are affiliated with a big name university doesn't give you credibility. In fact it causes more problems.

Michael Levitt @MLevitt\_NP2013 · Jul 25  
US COVID19 will be done in 4 weeks with a total reported death below 170,000. How will we know it is over? Like for Europe, when all cause excess deaths are at normal level for week. Reported COVID19 deaths may continue after 25 Aug. & reported cases will, but it will be over. [twitter.com/MLevitt\\_NP2013...](https://twitter.com/MLevitt_NP2013...)

7:43 PM · Jul 25, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

30 Retweets 161 Likes

Fig. 2. Twitter used to disseminate inaccurate information by academics with institutional credibility [69].

510  
511 during the workday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. that may deprive health care workers to allocate their  
512 time to patient care routines.

513 Researchers are using Twitter to communicate science. While some take their papers to social  
514 media to share, others use the platform to actively challenge studies that they found misleading,  
515 as an unofficial form of quality control [16]. In a conversation among researchers on Twitter, the  
516 context of the conversation can get confusing. A researcher may have a diverse set of followers from  
517 many backgrounds: other researchers (possibly from different disciplines), laypeople, politicians,  
518 etc. This can have negative ramifications on how a message is framed and received, since different  
519 audiences can react differently to the same message. Kareem Carr tweeted (156 RT, 486 L) "One  
520 big problem is there are at least four possible ways for a scientist to have a conversation on  
521 Twitter...Talking to other scientists as a scientist...Talking to other scientists as a member of the  
522 public...Talking to the public as a scientist...Talking to the public as a member of the public...These  
523 conversations are happening all at once and it can change from sentence to sentence. Scientists are  
524 generally not good about specifying the role we're playing in public discussions. This can lead to  
525 terrible fights [19]."

## 526 4.2 Preserving Quality of Evaluation While Increasing Speed

527 Rapid dissemination of the COVID-19 research findings is important to facilitate the acceleration  
528 of the research. Dissemination of fast and rapidly reviewed papers makes researchers self-judge  
529 and screen most of the studies on their own, which is extremely time-consuming. While fast  
530 dissemination of factual information is beneficial, misinformation can grow fear and panic or cause  
531 lethal movements in society [77]. Palayew et al. [90] stresses the importance and the need for novel  
532 solutions to guarantee sustainable trust in the large-scale scientific publishing process during a  
533 pandemic. They conducted single-query searches on PubMed and analyzed data for COVID-19 and  
534 Ebola-related papers. The results showed that COVID-19 publications had a median acceptance  
535 time of 6 days, while it was about 15 days for Ebola. The fast dissemination of information is  
536 needed to keep up with a global pandemic but has cast doubt on the quality of publications and the  
537 probability of misinformation [90]. Some medical journals have drastically reduced publication  
538

time [54, 68]. Peer-review delay has been reduced by 49%, or 57 days on average (even higher for some journals like Archives of Virology) [54]. Fourteen medical journals that published most COVID-19 papers reduced the average time taken from submission to publication to about 60 days [16], which may adversely affect the quality of published papers.

Lonni Besançon investigated 12,682 publications related to COVID-19 on PubMed. Their study revealed that about 8% of papers were published in the day that they were submitted. What can be inferred is that the peer-review process might have been rushed for some papers. Editorial conflicts of interest were recognized in 43% of these papers. Such a short acceptance interval raises concerns about the integrity and clearness of the peer-review process [12]. Some concerns regarding quick peer-review surround the ethics of research being done. Mamas tweeted (74 RT, 145 L): "Pandemic vs paperdemic, the risks of speed science and research ethics as exemplified by #covid19 Sometimes we take at face value the honesty of researchers and veracity of data [76]." Mamas' concerns are noteworthy given recent scandals surrounding data that could have cost lives, namely Surgisphere's mishandling of Hydroxychloroquine data [108]. Sapan Desai, the founder of Surgisphere who has published two papers in the most reputable medical journals, is currently being sued in two different medical mal-practiced cases and had incentive to promote work using data from his company, and yet the Lancet and New England Journal of Medicine both published his work in fields completely unrelated from his expertise, largely due to a lack of adequate peer-review [95].

Falsified data and misleading findings in publications may also stain the reputation of journals and decrease public trust in scientific findings. Gregory Makles tweeted (0 RT, 0 L): "NEJM is suddenly reliable again? Have they investigated their latest peer review incredible failure? [75]."

Speedy peer-review is not the only gateway for improper research to disseminate throughout the scientific community. Preprints, who publish work with no peer-review process also pose a threat. Block tweeted (0 RT, 0 L): "...I'm seeing a ton of COVID-19 pre-print research coming out, though that poses issues of its own because of lack of peer review Block [14]." Preprints have certainly been a useful resource for scientists to communicate with one another efficiently, but at what cost?

#### 568 569     **4.3 Difficulties in Efficiently Informing Research Community About Inappropriate** 570     **Results/interpretations in Papers**

571 Researchers have expressed concerns about the lack of an efficient mechanism to communicate their  
572 criticisms. After analyzing recent studies, they lack a unified platform to document their criticisms.  
573 Other researchers who come across the same studies may not be aware of those criticisms if they  
574 do not have contact with previous readers or forgot what has been critiqued.

575 We have noticed many instances that researchers express their frustrations in informing the  
576 research community when they identify issues in analysis, methods, results, or interpretations  
577 reported in a paper. An example of researchers using Tweets to inform the research community  
578 about retracting a paper is shown in Figure 3. Other examples of advocating on social media for  
579 retraction on Twitter is shown in Figure 4. The use of Twitter for science communication has been  
580 very valuable, however for reasons we discuss in subsection 4.1, system design tailored to science  
581 communication are needed.

582 In a recent study, it was found that the researchers' followers on Twitter are relatively low and  
583 only 25% of researchers have more than 429 followers[25]. Another study discusses that nearly 40%  
584 of scientists' followers are nonscholars [27]. Also, it was shown that only 1.1% of Web of Science  
585 researchers in the field of biomedical and health sciences use twitter. And the use of twitter by  
586 scholars is mostly (40%) confined to the USA and the UK [26].

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**Elisabeth Bik** @MicrobiomDigest

Blog post describing some problems with the Gautret et al. paper about Hydroxychloroquine and Azithromycin treatment of COVID-19 infections

treatment of COVID-19: results of an open-label non-randomized clinical trial

Philippe Gautret <sup>a, b, §</sup>, Jean-Christophe Lagier <sup>a, c, §</sup>, Philippe Parola <sup>a, b</sup>, Van Thuan Hoang <sup>a, b, d</sup>, Line Meddeb <sup>a</sup>, Morgane Mallie <sup>a</sup>, Barbara Douillet <sup>a</sup>, Johan Courjon <sup>e, f, g</sup>, Valérie Giordanengo <sup>b</sup>, Vera Esteves Vieira <sup>a</sup>, Hervé Tissot Dupont <sup>a, h</sup>, Stéphane Honore <sup>i, j</sup>, Philippe Colson <sup>a, c</sup>, Eric Chabrié <sup>a, c</sup>, Bernard La Scola <sup>a, c</sup>, Jean-Marc Rolain <sup>a, c</sup>, Philippe Brouqui <sup>a, c</sup>, Didier Raoult <sup>a, c, k</sup>

<sup>a</sup> IHU-Méditerranée Infection, Marseille, France  
<sup>b</sup> Aix Marseille Univ, IRD, AP-HM, SSA, VITROME, Marseille, France  
<sup>c</sup> Aix Marseille Univ, IRD, APHM, MEPHI, Marseille, France  
<sup>d</sup> Thai Binh University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Thai Binh, Viet Nam  
<sup>e</sup> Infectiologist, Hôpital de l'Archet, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Nice, Nice, France  
<sup>f</sup> Université Côte d'Azur, Nice, France  
<sup>g</sup> U1065, Centre Méditerranéen de Médecine Moléculaire, C3M, Virulence Microbienne et Signalisation Inflammatoire, INSERM, Nice, France  
<sup>h</sup> Department of Virology, Biologocal and Pathological Center, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Nice.

Thoughts on the Gautret et al. paper about Hydroxychloroquine and Azithro...  
There has been a lot of excitement – and even a presidential tweet about a recent paper from the lab of Didier Raoult, an infectious disease specialist in ...  
@scienceintegritydigest.com

4:58 PM · Mar 24, 2020 · Twitter Web App

212 Retweets 27 Quote Tweets 341 Likes

608 Fig. 3. An example of researchers using blog posts, Tweets, and any medium they can to inform the research  
609 community about retracting a paper [13]

611 watch tweet.png

612 Retraction Watch @RetractionWatch

614 Elsevier investigating hydroxychloroquine-COVID-19 paper retractionwatch.com/2020/04/12/els...



2:51 PM · Apr 12, 2020 · WordPress.com

126 Retweets 47 Quote Tweets 215 Likes

615 tweet.png

616 Carlos del Rio @CarlosdelRio

618 Hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin as a treatment of COVID-19: results of an open-label non-randomized clinical trial - Time to take this study down  
@sciencedirect it was wrong to publish it, too much damage already. Take this study down!

620 Antimicrobial Agents

622 Hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin have been found to be efficient on SARS-CoV-2, and reported to be efficient ...  
@sciencedirect.com

624 10:52 PM · Apr 8, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

626 122 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 299 Likes

631 Fig. 4. Examples of advocating for retraction on Twitter [101, 121]

#### 634 4.4 Reliance on Bibliometrics and Altmetrics Exacerbates the Issue

635 Bibliometrics is a set of methods for estimating scholarly impact which might generate conflicts  
636 and concerns [102]. Internet-based impact metrics known as alternative metrics or altmetrics

were proposed to mitigate those problems. There is an ongoing challenge to find and develop new methods for tracking scholarly impact [102]. Merely relying on citation count as a metric to measure the *quality* of research papers has exacerbated the difficulties bound up with efficiently informing the research community of inappropriate results and/or interpretations.

It is shown that the number of citation and publications are not a reliable gauge for scholars' talent and scientific merits [105]. NatureNews tweeted (0 RT, 0 L): "...Bibliometrics alone clearly do not offer a reliable way to gauge the quality of research [24]." Joe Kraus tweeted (0 RT, 0 L): "...Citation data does not provide reliable evidence of quality of research [67]." This heuristic can be misleading, especially, in case of retractions. We observed that retracted papers continue to receive citations. As an example, on 3/20/2020, a paper titled, "Hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin as a treatment of COVID-19: results of an open-label non-randomized clinical trial" was published by International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents [44]. The manuscript appeared on medRxiv on 3/16/2020. It was also submitted to the International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents on 3/16/2020. The paper was accepted for publication by the journal on 3/17/2020, and was published on 3/20/2020. This paper raised many concerns by multiple scientists on Twitter and ten days after publication, on 3/30/2020, another article titled, "A Rush to Judgment? Rapid Reporting and Dissemination of Results and Its Consequences Regarding the Use of Hydroxychloroquine for COVID-19" [62] was published by Annals of Internal Medicine, retracting Gautret et al. [44] and pointing out various flaws in it. However, as of 09/02/2020, while Gautret et al. [44] has received 2,304 citations on Google Scholar, Kim et al. [62] has received only 97. We hypothesized that most of the papers citing Gautret et al. [44] may have criticized or retracted it. However, reviewing a random sample of 100 papers out of the 2,304 that were citing the study, showed that 82 out of 100 papers were using the results or reporting follow-up studies, which indicates inefficiency of:

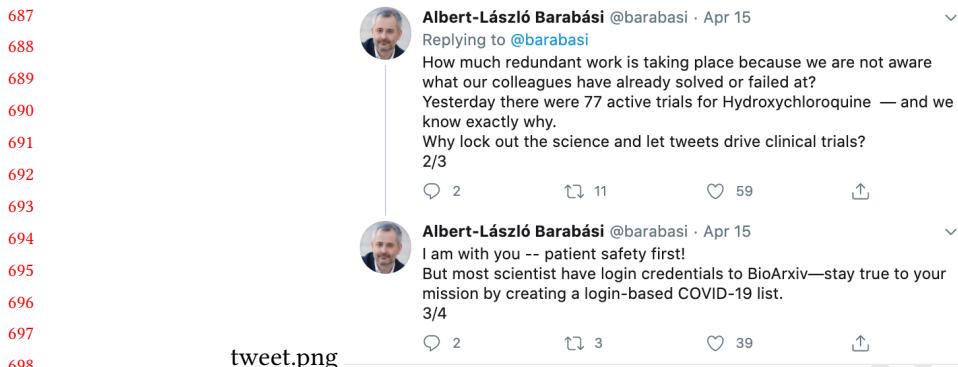
- Evaluation of publications merely based on their number of citations;
- Informing the research community about inappropriate results/interpretations in papers.

As another example, a paper titled "Cardiovascular Disease, Drug Therapy, and Mortality in Covid-19" was retracted on 4/6/2020 and had 358 citations however by 9/13/2020 the number of citation had reached 452. We hypothesized that it might be because the upcoming papers are retracting the original paper. We randomly went through 25 of those papers and to our surprise, 18 of those papers were really exploiting the findings of the retracted paper. To be able to compare the results we checked a third paper titled "SARS-CoV-2 infects T lymphocytes through its spike protein-mediated membrane fusion" was published in Nature Cellular & Molecular Immunology on 4/7/2020 and retracted about three months later on 7/10/2020 [120]. By 9/13/2020 this paper had 152 citations. We randomly picked 10 out of 40 papers citing that paper, which were published after the retraction date. We observed that only one paper was retracting the original paper. This might be due to prolonged delay before retracting.

The problem with retracted papers and how often they are cited is summarized in a tweet by Andrew R. Timming (34 RT, 334 L): "Why the h-index is a poor performance metric: I could write a bunch of egregiously bad papers and everyone would cite them by pointing out all the flaws. Plus, it punishes single authored papers and artificially inflates the worth of co-authored ones. Am I wrong? [113]"

#### 4.5 Repetition in Published Papers

To allow researchers to keep up with the massive and rapid dissemination of academic papers, it is important that the redundancy of content is as minimal as possible. With no great way to signal to an entire community what has already been done, we are in danger of wasting resources on what is already known (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). Take the hydroxychloroquine controversy where an



tweet.png

Fig. 5. Repetition in published papers [8]



Fig. 6. Repetition in published papers [94]

excess of evidence came out against its efficacy, possibly wasting valuable time, energy and risk in the process. In Figure 5 Barbási tweets about the issue of redundancy as it pertains to active trials regarding hydroxychloroquine, stating that there was a whopping total of 77 active trials within the previous day. Barbási goes as far as to place the blame on "...lock[ing] out the science...", and letting twitter drive research directions (see subsection 4.1 for more analysis on why twitter is not the optimal place for scientific dissemination).

Richard Poynder tweeted: "The number of publications related to COVID-19 is growing exponentially. Many articles are being hastily and non-critically published, contain repetitive or inaccurate information, illogical and non-evidence based recommendations, and are highly biased [97](5 RT, 12 L)." (727)

Dmitri Zaitsev shared their hopes for reducing redundancy and the problems it creates: "When this pandemic subsides we could use this situation as a motive to reduce redundancy in publication, to modernize the way data is presented, and to avoid the same issues when the new pandemic arrives.- Any details about how that would happen? :) [131](0 RT, 1 L)." (731)

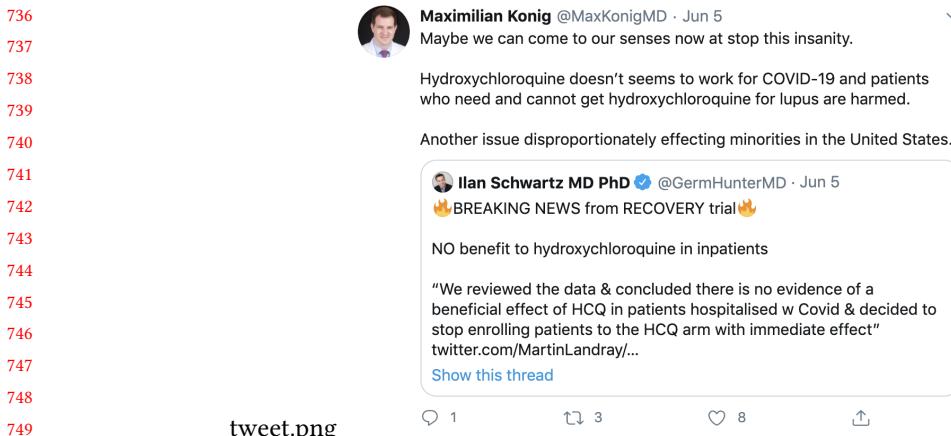


Fig. 7. Repetition in published papers [64]

#### 4.6 Rigidity of Papers

When a paper is published, its content stays static. Review papers of the publications of the previous day or week have gained significant attention, but they often miss some of the main points or misinterpret findings. As new investigations are made, there is no way to update these papers. Egon Willigh tweeted "I am really frustrated with the fact that our publications are static objects. why can't we improve them over time?... [128]."

This may be especially problematic when the number of citations is considered to be the primary metric to assess the quality of a publication and whether to pay attention to it. It would take a fair amount of time for new publications to get a comparable number of citations (Mathew's effect [11]) to grab attention and make the outdated papers obsolete, similar to the problems discussed in subsection 4.4. George Musser tweeted (2400 RT, 3200 L): "Google Scholar seems to be altering scholarly citation patterns. Citations are getting more concentrated: the same few papers get cited over and over, @jevinwest has found. People lazily cite whatever papers the search engine ranks highly [81]."

Jeffrey Barrett tweeted about desiring the capability of editing papers that have content that is redundant and not relevant in the near future (4 RT, 36 L): "I don't know who needs to hear this, but if you're writing a paper about Covid-19, just delete the sentence that states there is a pandemic and provides the current (already out of date) estimate of the number of global cases and deaths. Just. Delete. It. [9]." His sentiment echoes the claims from subsection 4.5, that too much space in COVID-19 literature is used to repeat the same things to the same audience.

To mitigate this problem a system called Manubot has been suggested. Manubot is an open collaborative authoring platform providing handy version control and multiple access levels. Casey Greene tweeted, asking about its usage (1 RT, 13 L): "What if you're writing a collaborative review paper using manubot, and you use its capabilities to update from external data sources each night? [47]." While Manubot works to alleviate some of the problems, using it requires some computational skills (e.g. version control workflows and GitHub). Also, discussions between writers are not tracked using Git [53]. As a result, collaborative authoring in many disciplines including medical science and epidemiology might be not very efficient using the platform [53].

#### 785 4.7 Difficulties in Multidisciplinary Research

786 Large-scale collaboration across different disciplines presents obstacles in reaching shared research  
787 goals due to differences in terminology and context within each discipline. Many researchers have  
788 taken to Twitter, open conversations about this insufficiency.

789 Ellie Murray tweets about how to communicate with other scientists from other disciplines to  
790 collaborate (58 RT, 221 L): "This pandemic has scientists & scholars from a multitude of fields all  
791 working towards a common goal, which is good! But it means when we write our research findings,  
792 we can no longer assume shared context or jargon among our readers [80]."

793 "There's been a fair amount of discussion of the dangers of pre-prints being misinterpreted by  
794 the public or journalists. But, we don't talk about a potentially more dangerous issue: scientists &  
795 scholars in other disciplines getting the wrong message b/c they lack key context [79]."

796 Murray continues in another tweet (2 RT, 36 L): "Second, since combating the pandemic is our  
797 shared goal, any failure to communicate between scientists & scholars creates a barrier to achieving  
798 that goal, and thus has a cost in human lives lost [78]."

799 Another tweet, by Dr. Angela Rasmussen, discusses the difficulty of communicating across  
800 disciplines because of different definitions and contexts to terms used in different disciplines (9 RT,  
801 53 L): "I think the real problem has been communication across disciplines. The terminology is  
802 confusing and means different things to different people, which is why I agree with SaskiaPopescu  
803 that we need to reconsider the language we use to discuss airborne' transmission [99]."  
804

#### 805 5 DISCUSSION AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

806 We found that researchers are having a difficult time keeping up with the massive influx of papers.  
807 This is due in part to the use of inefficient methods of organization and filtration of information  
808 that do not work at scale. Cognitive overload is being imposed on COVID-19 researchers as they  
809 struggle to stay aware of what has been studied.  
810

811 Readers familiar with Natural Language Processing (NLP) may feel that the question of its  
812 efficiency in facilitating scientific knowledge summarization must be addressed. Many applications  
813 using NLP algorithms have been developed to summarize the newly published papers and reduce  
814 the overload on scientists who must review hundreds of newly published papers every day. However,  
815 researchers have raised concerns over NLP-based tools promoting retracted papers or papers with  
816 overstated findings [16]. One reason for this issue is the fact that the content of about 20% of  
817 subscribers-only journals papers is not free to download (which has a forecasted trend of a 50%  
818 increase) and therefore, cannot be reviewed by NLP-based tools [16]. Even among free publications,  
819 many of their papers are in a PDF format, which are not considered to be FAIR (Findable, Accessible,  
820 Interoperable, Reusable) and therefore cannot be processed by NLP algorithms [84]. To train  
821 machine learning models, researchers rely on preprint databases such as arXiv.org to be able to  
822 retrieve the content of a large number of papers for free [16].  
823

824 In addition, reviewing the papers can be its own challenge. Scientific jargon is often complex  
825 and difficult to understand even by human standards. The terminology found in peer-reviewed  
826 literature is not always present in the mainstream text where the model training is performed. This  
827 problem is more common when the literature is domain-specific (outside of the training domain).  
828 This is present in the CORD-19 dataset (and others), leading to adverse effects on the fine tuning of  
829 the text summarization models [61]. Some scholars also doubt the efficacy of automated procedures  
830 to help the research community. In our informal interviews with COVID-19 PIs, two of them told  
831 us "automated text summarization is very helpful for use-cases like distilling product reviews  
832 on amazon, but research papers are totally different. If understanding the analysis or findings in  
833

research studies was that easy, our undergraduate students would be able to do it and we would not need to spend so much time reviewing papers on our own.”

COVID-19 researchers’ need for a faster mechanism to learn about new studies on one hand, and their frustration with the NLP-based text summarization services, on the other hand, necessitates design and development of an online crowdsourced research hub, where researchers collaboratively summarize newly published literature and continuously update it as new findings are published. Every day COVID-19 researchers and their students study and summarize newly published research papers. They present their summaries in focus groups, classes, and journal clubs to help each other cope with the accelerated rate of publications. For the same reason, some research groups have also focused on publishing review papers of studies published in the past few days to help a larger community of researchers. However, focus groups and journal clubs are only helpful for small groups of people. Review papers are also rigid (as discussed in subsection 4.6) and any misinterpretation or missing findings of a study would not be corrected until new review papers make the old ones completely obsolete. The time and energy used by the existing research community could be more efficiently utilized if an online crowdsourcing research hub existed which would enable researchers to collaboratively summarize, discuss, comment, and criticize research publications.

In the remainder of this section, we discuss and ideate the necessary features of such a research hub to mitigate the issues discussed in the analysis and results section. We follow the same order of classifications of difficulties based on the themes identified from the analyzed tweets.

## 5.1 Difficulties in efficiently informing research community about inappropriate results/interpretations in papers

Our analysis of tweets indicates that many COVID-19 researchers experience difficulties to find a tribune to let other researchers hear their voice. They have expressed a need for a large-scale online research hub only for certified researchers, where they can easily access:

- Each other’s names and validated credentials;
- Published papers with their number of citations;
- Comments about each publication and related discussions;
- Classified questions and answers about each topic;
- Direct contact channel to other researchers for follow-up questions/comments.

## 5.2 Reliance on bibliometrics and altmetrics

We found many tweets indicating the researchers’ reliance on citation count to assess the quality of research papers has misled many, especially in the case of retracted papers. While algorithms such as PageRank [89] have been proven helpful for website searching, similar citation-based ranking does not necessarily guarantee the quality of research papers. While altmetrics also consider mentions of a paper on tweets, blogposts, and other online social networks, it is still insufficient. A mere citation does not indicate anything about the quality of a study. In the research context, a citation should be assigned a positive, neutral, or negative weight. Then a weighted summation of the citations could be produced and it would be a more accurate metric for evaluation of research papers.

- **Positive:** if a study is cited to be admired/replicated/continued/rederived in another paper.
- **Neutral:** if a study is cited to be reviewed/meta-analyzed/classified in another paper.
- **Negative:** if a study is cited to be retracted/contradicted/corrected in another paper.

### 883 5.3 Difficulties in multidisciplinary research

884 The COVID-19 pandemic has made the need for multidisciplinary research more prominent than  
885 ever. However, COVID-19 researchers' tweets indicate that they need a more efficient communica-  
886 tion method between researchers from different disciplines. They need a common ground around  
887 a shared set of vocabulary that can be easily deciphered by any researcher, regardless of their  
888 discipline and specialty area. To fulfill this objective the large-scale online research hub should  
889 provide a new search UI to researchers where they can easily find the term/concept they need  
890 to understand and facilitate back-tracking prerequisite concepts to be learned to understand the  
891 searched query.

892 Conventionally, scientific jargon or words are highly interdependent to each other where un-  
893 derstanding one requires understanding others and to understand the others, one should read a  
894 graduate level textbook. This makes building a common ground between researchers extremely  
895 difficult. To solve this issue, a collaborative prerequisite linking mechanism is necessary where re-  
896 searchers link every concept/term/jargon to its prerequisites and expand upon them. This should be  
897 an asynchronous collaborative process because the scale of the terminology in different disciplines  
898 is growing fast and providing data to such a search tool requires crowdsourcing and collabora-  
899 tion between many scientists and possibly their students. The tool should enable researchers to  
900 start from a term/concept and back-track the prerequisite knowledge required to understand that  
901 term/concept recursively. Compared to the conventional method of studying a textbook to learn a  
902 new field's jargon, this tool enables researchers to only focus on the concepts/terms necessary to  
903 efficiently learn what they need without getting distracted by other concepts or discussions around  
904 them.

## 905 6 CONCLUSION

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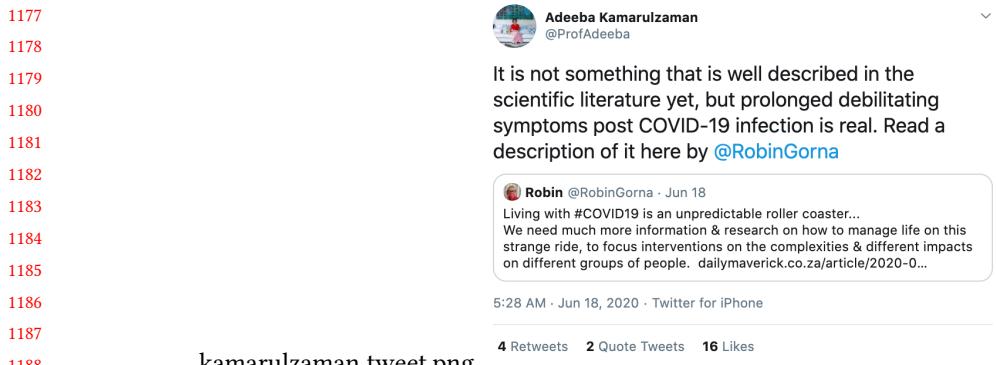
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1144        bad papers and everyone would cite them by pointing out all the flaws. Plus, it punishes single authored papers  
1145        and artificially inflates the worth of co-authored ones. Am I wrong? <https://twitter.com/timminglab/status/1258571672522637312>
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1178        improve them over time? Fix a typo here, some character casing there... just the typography, not the content... sigh  
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kamarulzaman tweet.png

Fig. 8. Adeeba Kamarulzaman tweets about COVID-19 findings that are not yet widely talked about in scientific literature

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## A TWEETS

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Alice Sim 😊  
@alicesim  
Explaining technical scientific findings to the public is a whole science - called Risk Communications. Those who are fueling the #infodemic are not helping public health during this critical time 😞

Dr. Saska Popescu @SaskaPopescu · Jul 5  
This kind of sensationalism is absolutely not ok and fuels fear. As @apoorna\_nyc emphasized, these events are in close range/indoors, and ultimately, as @BillHanage noted, the way we communicate aerosols and call things "airborne" is poorly done and often misinterpreted.  
[Show this thread](#)

#SARSCoV2 coronavirus is airborne. Epidemiologists & aerosol Scientists have been saying it for months. Now 239 scientists have penned a letter to @WHO, coming out next week, demanding WHO acknowledgement. Implications? 🧠

4:28 AM · Jul 6, 2020 · Twitter Web App

11 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 46 Likes

Fig. 9. Alice Sim tweets about fueling the infodemic with misinterpreted terminology

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Andy Slavitt @ @ASlavitt · 23h  
People are getting information from pre-prints, observational studies, Journal articles, opinion pieces, increasingly double blind trials & challenge trials.  
It's difficult for the public to know the difference. And gives ripe opportunity for some to cherry pick data. 4/  
5 218 2.2K

slavitt tweet.png

Andy Slavitt @ @ASlavitt · 23h  
We feel like we're told one thing one day, the opposite the next. No masks/masks. This medicine works/it doesn't (it doesn't). Spreads on surfaces/spreads through the air.  
Definitely. Maybe. Probably. 3/  
8 214 2K

slavitt tweet2.png

Fig. 11. Andy Slavitt tweets about confusion over scientists advice

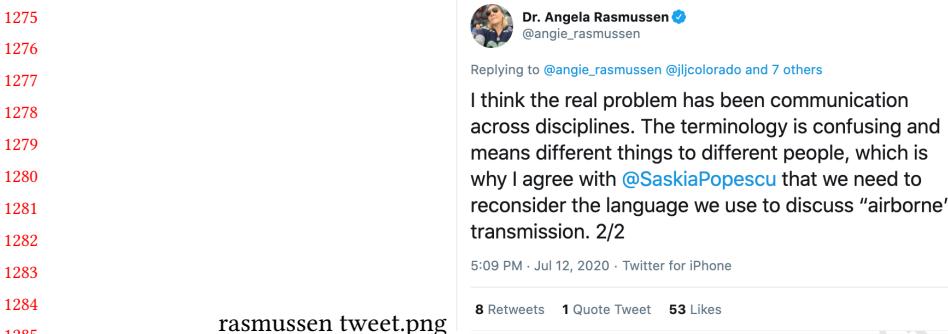


Fig. 12. Dr.Angela Rasmussen tweets about the miscommunication across disciplines



Fig. 13. Dr.Angela Rasmussen tweets about the focus on validity of statements



Fig. 14. Dr.Angela Rasmussen tweets how painting WHO as the enemy is counterproductive in terms of coming to a consensus

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Fig. 15. Dr. Angela Rasmussen tweets about the harm of others not sharing data and being unable to make her own analyses

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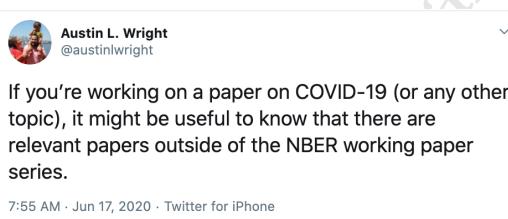


Fig. 16. Austin L. Wright tweets about using a variety of resources for finding papers

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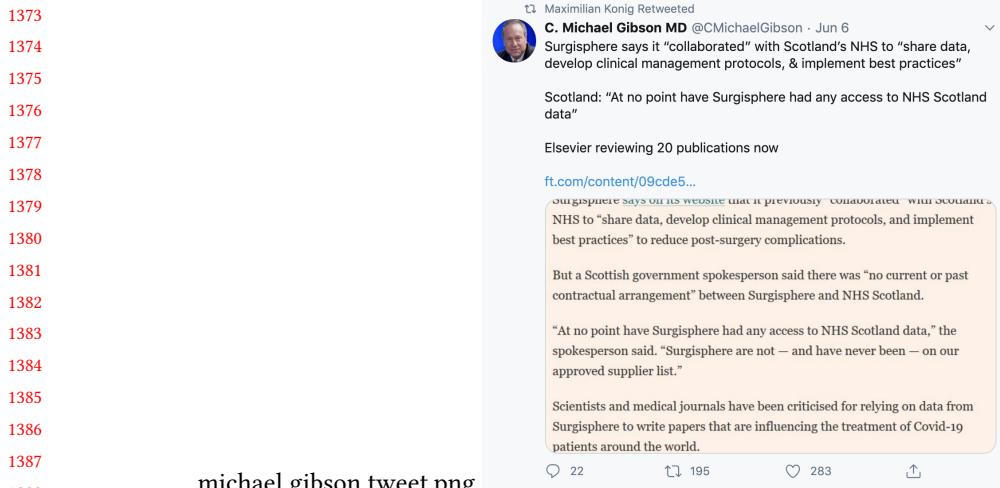
Fig. 17. Bhramar Mukherjee tweets about the increasing number of papers

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Fig. 18. Jonathan Block replies to tweet by Glen de Vries about sharing research within the research community

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michael gibson tweet.png

1389 Fig. 19. C. Michael Gibson tweets about surgisphere (a health analytics company) lying about collaborating  
1390 with NHS Scotland  
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1405 Fig. 20. Caitlin Rivers tweets the original WHO report on COVID-19 modes of transmission  
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1417 Fig. 21. Dr.Caitlin Rivers tweets about the confusion led by many different expert opinions being shared on  
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Fig. 22. Dr.Caitlin Rivers tweets about the confusion led by many different expert opinions being shared on Twitter



Fig. 23. Caroline Chen tweets about being clear and defining terminology when speaking to an audience as scientists and Arun Divakaruni replies in agreement

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Charulatha Banerjee  
@drccbjee

@DrPatrickWebb in session on Challenges in Research & Practice in Covid 19 on Ag,Nut & Health.Need more info on what works particularly in crisis?The need for more evidence base before rushing into new measures for eg. in #childwasting. @IMMANA\_res

Key Questions:

1. What's happening? (science versus operations needs) – 'what works' is a key issue.
2. Who is most affected and why? Ethics of research *during* crises versus *on* crises?
3. How much information is 'accurate', and so what?
4. Can we 'do no harm' with imperfect knowledge?

8:56 AM · Jul 1, 2020 · Twitter Web App

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2 Retweets 3 Likes

banerjee tweet.png

1500 Fig. 24. Charulatha Banerjee tweets about the need for more evidence base for publishing on COVID-19

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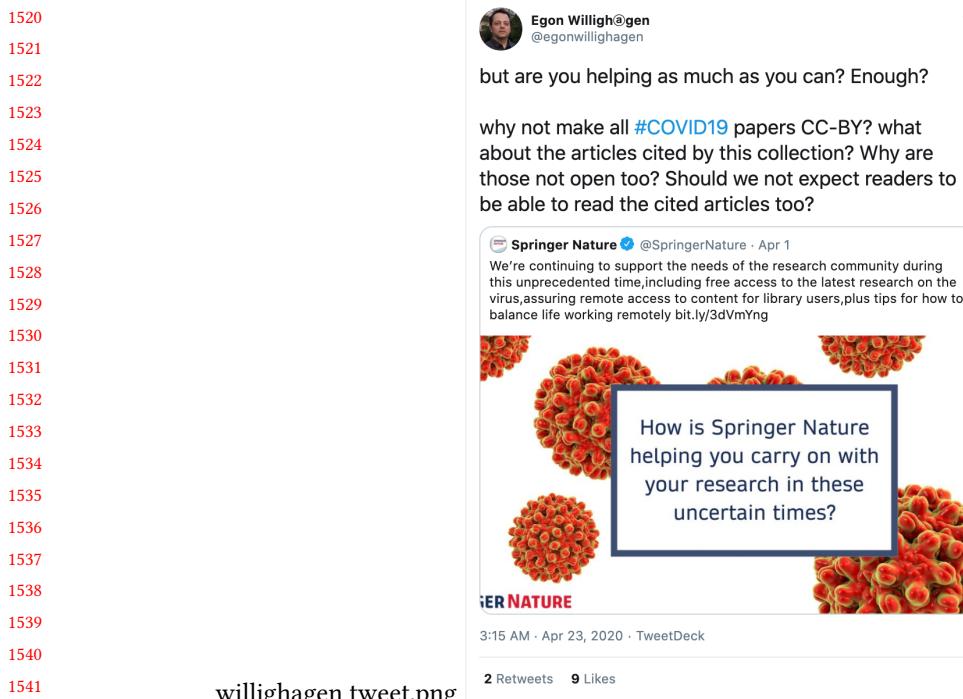


Fig. 25. Egon Willighagen tweets about the inaccessibility to papers and their cited papers



Fig. 26. Eli Perencevich tweets about how he's been advocating for PPE since April

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Fig. 27. Ellie Murray tweets about precautions when sharing research findings

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murray tweet contd.png

Fig. 28. Ellie Murray tweets about precautions when sharing research findings

1667 Dr Emma Hodcroft  
1668 @firefoxx66

1669 When a scientist says "This paper doesn't show this"  
1670 or "We don't have enough evidence to say"

1671 They are not saying it's wrong. Or that it will never be  
1672 shown. They are saying we all need to be really careful  
1673 how we interpret this.

1674 #COVID19 #SARSCoV2  
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1676 1/13  
1677 10:25 AM · Apr 21, 2020 · Twitter Web App

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1679 hodcroft tweet.png 226 Retweets 39 Quote Tweets 682 Likes

Fig. 29. Dr. Emma Hodcroft tweets that when a scientist points out that a paper doesn't have enough evidence, they are not saying it is wrong

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 **Gail Carson**  
@gail\_carson

Call to action on responsible communication of scientific research | COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition @SCBriand @mvankerkhove @mugecevik @nicolamlow @BogochIsaac @ISARIC1 piero olliario if was on twitter



Call for action on responsible communication of scientific research  
More than ever, we need high quality scientific research to provide the evidence to answer pressing questions on how best to prevent the spread ...  
[@ covid19crc.org](https://covid19crc.org)

10:43 AM · Jun 19, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

carson\_tweet.png 13 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 41 Likes

Fig. 30. Gail Carson tweets a call to action on responsible communication of scientific research

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**Geoffrey Siwo**  
 @gsiwo

Crowdsourcing COVID-19 gene sets and drug sets from research community, great resource to find consensus, wisdom of the crowds @AviMaayan @IcahnMountSinai

**AviMaayan** @AviMaayan · Mar 30  
 Help us collect gene and drug sets relevant to #COVID19 research by submitting lists to this website: amp.pharm.mssm.edu/covid19/  
 These sets can be used to identify consensuses & connections across studies; #crowdsourcing programmers r welcome 2 help us develop the site #COVID19cure

**COVID-19 Crowd Generated Gene and Drug Set Library**  
 A collection of gene and drug sets related to COVID-19 research contributed by the community

Description	Genes	Enrichr link
ACE2 Pathway from BioCarta 2013	12 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
ACE2 Co-expressed genes from ARCH54	100 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
ACE2 PPI from the NCBI Gene database	11 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-A132 protein host PPI from Kroger	332 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-E protein host PPI from Kroger	6 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-M protein host PPI from Kroger	20 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-N protein host PPI from Kroger	15 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-S protein host PPI from Kroger	6 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-Nsp10 protein host PPI from Kroger	5 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>
COVID19-Nsp10 protein host PPI from Kroan	9 genes	<a href="#">🔗</a>

10:09 AM · Mar 31, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Retweet 3 Likes

siwo tweet.png

Fig. 31. Geoffrey Siwo tweets about crowdsourced COVID-19 gene library that helps reach consensus

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**Helen Branswell** @HelenBranswell

With preprints playing such a big role in the dissemination of #Covid19 data & with there being such a firehose of info coming out, I wish journals would stipulate "this was out as a preprint" when they push out papers, especially ones for immediate release.

2:41 PM · Jun 22, 2020 · Twitter Web App

16 Retweets 79 Likes

branswell tweet.png

Fig. 32. Helen Branswell tweets about how journals should be clear about using COVID-19 preprints

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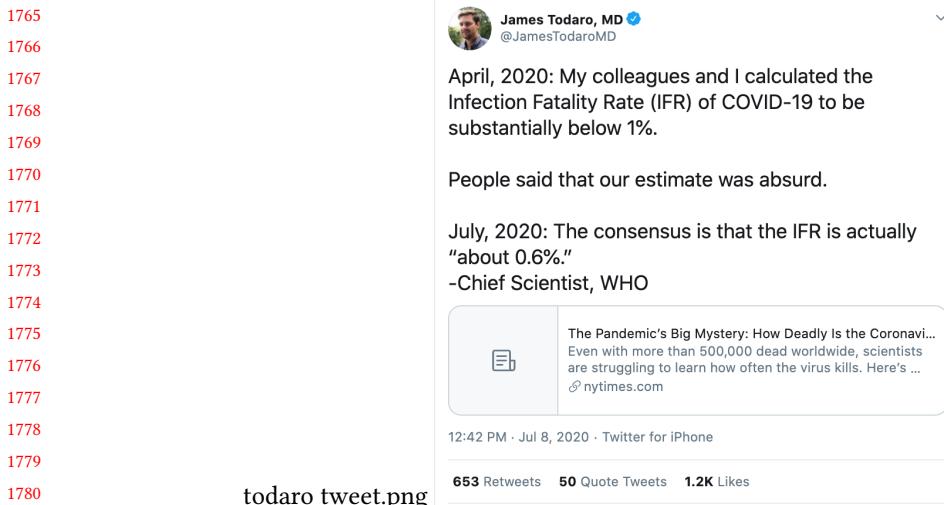


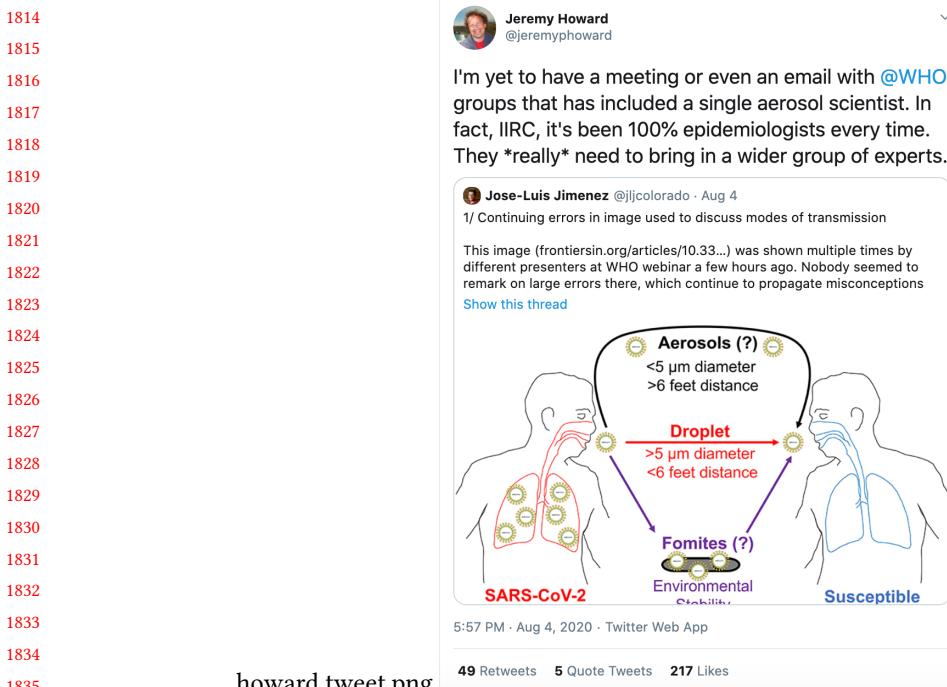
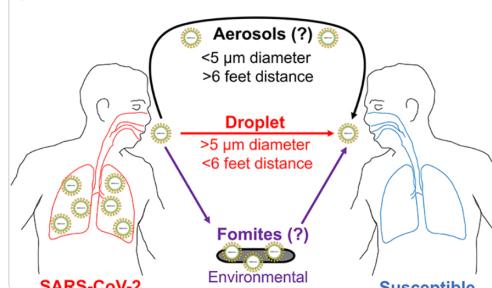
Fig. 33. James Todaro's tweets about not finding a consensus on the IFR and current WHO estimates



Fig. 34. James Pogue's tweets about opening up a conversation on Hydroxychloroquine and Azithromycin

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 Jeremy Howard  
 @jeremyphoward  
 I'm yet to have a meeting or even an email with @WHO groups that has included a single aerosol scientist. In fact, IIRC, it's been 100% epidemiologists every time. They \*really\* need to bring in a wider group of experts.  
 Jose-Luis Jimenez @jjcolorado · Aug 4  
 1/ Continuing errors in image used to discuss modes of transmission  
 This image (frontiersin.org/articles/10.33...) was shown multiple times by different presenters at WHO webinar a few hours ago. Nobody seemed to remark on large errors there, which continue to propagate misconceptions  
 Show this thread  
  
 5:57 PM · Aug 4, 2020 · Twitter Web App  
 49 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 217 Likes

howard tweet.png

Fig. 35. Jeremy Howard tweets about the lack of variety in experts at meetings

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**jimenez tweet.png**

1/ Continuing errors in image used to discuss modes of transmission

This image ([frontiersin.org/articles/10.33...](https://frontiersin.org/articles/10.33...)) was shown multiple times by different presenters at WHO webinar a few hours ago. Nobody seemed to remark on large errors there, which continue to propagate misconceptions

The diagram shows two human figures. The left figure is labeled 'SARS-CoV-2 Infected Host' and contains several green virus particles. The right figure is labeled 'Susceptible Host'. Three types of transmission pathways are depicted:

- Aerosols (?)**: Represented by small green circles labeled '<5 μm diameter' and '>6 feet distance'.
- Droplet**: Represented by a red arrow pointing from the infected host's mouth to the susceptible host's nose/mouth area, labeled '>5 μm diameter' and '<6 feet distance'.
- Fomites (?)**: Represented by a purple arrow pointing from the infected host's hands to the susceptible host's nose/mouth area, labeled 'Environmental Stability'.

4:18 PM · Aug 4, 2020 · Twitter Web App

89 Retweets 11 Quote Tweets 196 Likes

Fig. 36. Jose-Luis Jimenez tweets about errors in presentation slides talking about modes of transmission

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**marcus tweet.png**

Julia Marcus, PhD, MPH

I've been writing about the need for empathetic public health messaging, which is more effective than trying to shame people into changing their behavior. Some have asked what exactly that looks like.

Here are a few simple examples.

9:36 AM · Jun 29, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1.5K Retweets 222 Quote Tweets 4.2K Likes

Fig. 37. Julie Marcus tweets about how public messaging should be more empathetic

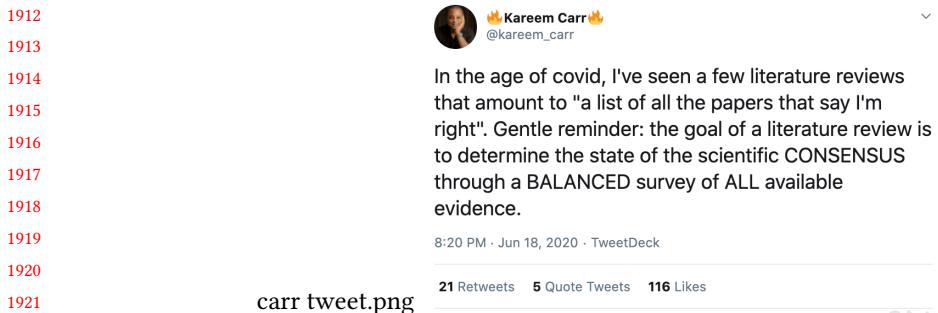


Fig. 38. Kareem Carr tweets about unbalanced literature reviews



Fig. 39. Kareem Carr tweets about science communication mistakes made by scientists



Fig. 40. Kareem Carr tweets about science communication mistakes made by scientists

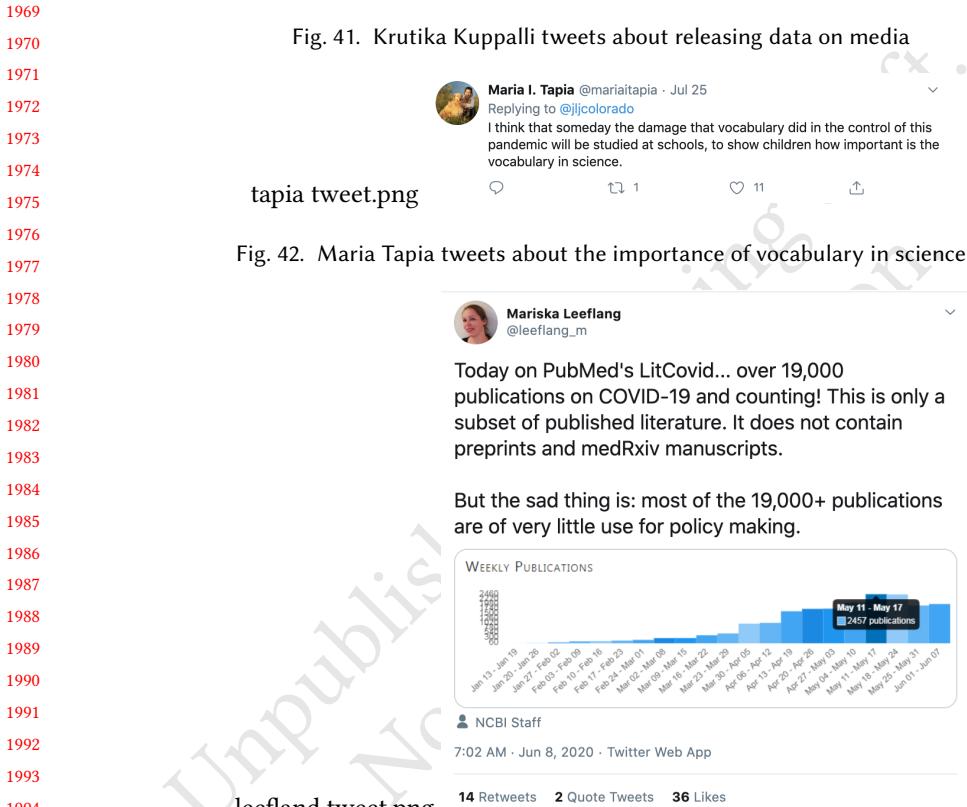




Fig. 44. Matt Le Tissier tweets about the contradictions in inscientist point of views on COVID-19

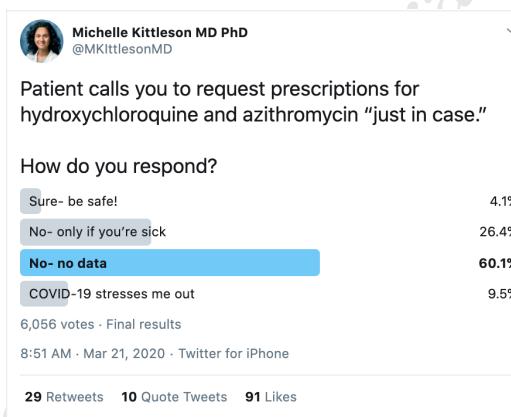


Fig. 45. Michelle Kittleson tweets a poll of how people respond to request for hydroxychloroquine



Fig. 46. Mike Putman tweets a letter they wrote on Hydroxychloroquine in COVID-19



Fig. 47. Natalie Dean tweets about the issues seen in scientific writing



Fig. 48. Neil Ferguson tweets about focusing on uncertainties as scientists



Fig. 49. Jessica Malaty Rivera tweets about the coverage of preprints



Fig. 50. Roberto Rocha has a twitter thread on the conversation between scientists on finding a consensus about COVID-19





popescu tweet.png

Fig. 51. Dr.Saskia Popescu tweets about evolving data



popescu tweet2.png

Fig. 52. Dr.Saskia Popescu tweets about how the term “airborne” is communicated by scientists



popescu tweet2 contd.png

Fig. 53. Dr.Saskia Popescu tweets about how the term “airborne” is communicated by scientists

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 **Soragni:Lab** @soragnilab · Apr 7  
This may be unpopular but here it goes. I am seeing a whole lot of places and people from disparate, unrelated fields with no relevant expertise trying to put together COVID-related proposals.  
I don't think this is a good way forward.  
🕒 46    ⟲ 369    ❤ 1.6K    ⬤

 **Rune Linding** 🇩🇰🇩🇪🇨🇦🇫🇷🇬🇧🇺🇸 📸 @RuneLinding · Apr 7  
Disagree people from different fields cannot contribute. It is the lack of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research that got us to where we are at.  
🕒 2    ⟲ 2    ❤ 24    ⬤

 **Dr Emma Hodcroft** ✅ @firefox66  
Replies to @RuneLinding and @soragnilab  
She isn't arguing against interdisciplinary & multidisciplinary research - she is warning about "disparate, unrelated fields with no relevant expertise."  
Multidisciplinary proposals are key! But should have experience & be relevant to COVID efforts, not doing it "just to apply".  
5:21 PM · Apr 8, 2020 · Twitter for Android

2 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 18 Likes

lab tweet.png

Fig. 54. Soragni:Lab tweets their thoughts on experts from unrelated fields with no relevant expertise contributing to COVID-19 research

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 **Steven 'Ñoño'** @Nono MPH · May 21  
This pandemic has proven to me that researchers have to spend less time in lab and more engagement in #SciComm. Great COVID-19 research is happening but it's being lost in the sea of journal publication. We need more front-facing researchers communicating results + implications.  
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nono tweet.png

Fig. 55. Steven Ñoño tweets about the lack of science communication among COVID-19 researchers

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 **Trevor Bedford** ✅ @trvrb  
Replies to @JustinLessler  
I'm glad #nCoV2019 exists as a separate hashtag, but things have seemed to have flipped from mostly scientists talking to each other to scientists doing public outreach.  
10:18 AM · Feb 3, 2020 · Tweetbot for iOS

24 Likes

bedford tweet.png

Fig. 56. Trevor Bedford tweets about a Twitter space whose function is no longer about hosting conversations but is now about outreach

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