

Social Media Advocacy Impact on Awareness Regarding Racial Biases Associated with Pulse Oximetry: An 11-Year Longitudinal Study

Wasim Ahmed, Mariann Hardey, Bradford David Winters, Aarti Sarwal

Submitted to: Journal of Medical Internet Research on: January 03, 2024

Disclaimer: © **The authors. All rights reserved.** This is a privileged document currently under peer-review/community review. Authors have provided JMIR Publications with an exclusive license to publish this preprint on it's website for review purposes only. While the final peer-reviewed paper may be licensed under a CC BY license on publication, at this stage authors and publisher expressively prohibit redistribution of this draft paper other than for review purposes.

Table of Contents

Original Manuscript	5
Supplementary Files.	28
Figures	
	30
Figure 2	31
Figure 3	
Figure 4	
Figure 5	
Figure 7	36

Social Media Advocacy Impact on Awareness Regarding Racial Biases Associated with Pulse Oximetry: An 11-Year Longitudinal Study

Wasim Ahmed¹ BA, MSc, PhD; Mariann Hardey² BA, MA, PhD; Bradford David Winters³ PhD, MD; Aarti Sarwal⁴ MD

Corresponding Author:

Wasim Ahmed BA, MSc, PhD
Marketing Management and Business Strategy
Hull Business School
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Kingston Upon Hull
GB

Abstract

Background: The principal objective of this study was to investigate the influence of X (previously known as Twitter) on the dissemination of information and the extent to which it raised healthcare sector awareness regarding racial disparities in pulse oximetry.

Objective: To explore the impact of social media on increasing awareness of racial disparities in the accuracy of pulse oximetry and how information spreads among physicians.

Methods: We utilised social network analysis to examine the impact of X conversations concerning pulse oximetry device. Searches were conducted using the X API each year (January to December) from 2012 to 2022 to cover an 11-year period with up to 52,052 users that generated 188,051 posts. We identified the nature of influencers in this field and monitored the temporal dissemination of information in relation to social events and regulatory changes. Moreover, we mapped this against the evolution of published literature on this topic in both biomedical and grey literature.

Results: Conversations on X increased healthcare awareness of racial bias in pulse oximetry. They also facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, attaining a substantial audience within a compressed timeframe, which may have impacted regulatory action announced in relation to the investigation of racial biases in pulse oximetry.

Conclusions: These findings provide valuable insights into the potential of social media to be used as a tool for promoting health equity

(JMIR Preprints 03/01/2024:56034)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.2196/preprints.56034

Preprint Settings

- 1) Would you like to publish your submitted manuscript as preprint?
- ✓ Please make my preprint PDF available to anyone at any time (recommended).

Please make my preprint PDF available only to logged-in users; I understand that my title and abstract will remain visible to all users. Only make the preprint title and abstract visible.

No, I do not wish to publish my submitted manuscript as a preprint.

- 2) If accepted for publication in a JMIR journal, would you like the PDF to be visible to the public?
- ✓ Yes, please make my accepted manuscript PDF available to anyone at any time (Recommended).

Yes, but please make my accepted manuscript PDF available only to logged-in users; I understand that the title and abstract will remain v

¹Marketing Management and Business Strategy Hull Business School University of Hull Kingston Upon Hull GB

²Durham University Business School University of Durham Durham GB

³Anesthesiology & Critical Care John Hopkins School of Medicine Baltimore US

⁴Neurology Atrium Wake Forest School of Medicine Winston-Salem US

Original Manuscript

Social Media Advocacy Impact on Awareness Regarding Racial Biases Associated with Pulse Oximetry: An 11-Year Longitudinal Study

Wasim Ahmed (corresponding author)

BA (Hons), MSc, PhD
Senior Lecturer in Marketing, Hull University Business School,
Kingston Upon Hull, UK
Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX
+44 1482 466914

Mariann (Maz), Hardey

BA (hons), MA, PhD
Professor Computing & Business
Durham University Business School
Durham University

Bradford David Winters

MD, PhD Associate Professor, Anesthesiology & Critical Care John Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD

Aarti Sarwal

MD, FCCM,FNCS,FAAN, RPNI
Professor, Neurology
Atrium Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston Salem, NC

Abstract

Background: The principal objective of this study was to investigate the influence of X (previously known as Twitter) on the dissemination of information and the extent to which it raised healthcare sector awareness regarding racial disparities in pulse oximetry.

Objective: To explore the impact of social media on increasing awareness of racial disparities in the accuracy of pulse oximetry and how information spreads among physicians.

Methods: We utilized social network analysis to examine the impact of X conversations concerning pulse oximetry devices. Searches were conducted using the Twitter Academic Track API (as it was known then). These searches were conducted each year (January to December) from 2012 to 2022 to cover an 11-year period with up to 52,052 users that generated 188,051 posts. We identified the nature of influencers in this field and monitored the temporal dissemination of information in relation to social events and regulatory changes. Moreover, we mapped this against the evolution of published literature on this topic which we located using PubMed.

Results: Conversations on X increased healthcare awareness of racial bias in pulse oximetry. They also facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, attaining a substantial audience within a compressed timeframe, which may have impacted regulatory action announced in relation to the investigation of racial biases in pulse oximetry.

Conclusion: These findings provide valuable insights into the potential of social media to be used as a tool for promoting health equity

Keywords: social media; X; racial biases; pulse oximetry

Introduction Background

Pulse oximetry is a non-invasive technique utilized extensively in critical care and other clinical environments to measure the oxygen saturation of blood (SpO2). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of pulse oximetry for home oxygen saturation monitoring became widespread, allowing clinicians to track oxygen saturation levels, hence disease progression at home, with the goal of reducing avoidable emergency room visits [1]. Several applications of pulse oximetry, including self-monitoring at home, constant wireless monitoring in hospital facilities, and closed-loop oxygen delivery, were investigated during the pandemic [2]. With increasing monitoring, potential problems were noticed with pulse oximetry, such as accuracy concerns in skin colours and sources of error that could affect its use [3].

Subsequent investigations revealed that pulse oximetry measurement devices exhibit reduced accuracy when used on individuals with darker skin tones, a measurement issue that has been underappreciated for decades [4]. This phenomenon is attributed to the higher melanin content in individuals with dark skin, which leads to increased light absorption, impeding the accurate measurement of oxygenated blood levels by pulse oximeters [5]. Further investigations uncovered an adverse impact of pulse oximetry accuracy and evidence of statistical bias in pulse oximeter measurements, specifically in relationship to race on patient care in black and coloured patients, putting these patients at risk of hypoxemia and delayed escalation of care both in COVID-19 and non-COVID related clinical scenarios [6, 7, 8].

Researchers called for more investigation into measures of bias, precision, and accuracy in the use of pulse oximetry to improve the interpretation of evolving research findings and facilitate the identification of potential solutions to these disparities [9]. Increasing awareness highlighted the racial bias in several medical devices, increased variation in monitoring data for Black patients and its adverse impact on delivering evidence-based care, including pulse oximeter readings [10].

Healthcare professionals and the general public are now more aware of this issue due to campaign groups, advocacy, communities and social media activism [3, 11–13] and increasing awareness of disparities associated with pulse oximetry use in biomedical literature. With several hallmark social events around the time of the pandemic elaborating existing societal biases in health care that were disseminated globally through social media, we wondered about the role social media played in connecting social events to health care awareness on racial biases in a monitoring device such as pulse oximetry. We undertook this project to explore the impact of social media on increasing awareness of racial disparities in the accuracy of pulse oximetry and how information spread among physicians. We used social network analysis to analyze the evolution of the conversations around pulse oximetry devices on X (previously known as Twitter) in relation to timelines of major social events raising healthcare disparities. Social network analysis has recently been used to

explore and analyse the drivers of conspiracy theories [14,15].

We found that social media helped raise awareness of racial bias in pulse oximetry and should be considered a key communication channel alongside traditional methods such as medical publications and conferences. Our findings suggest that social media platforms have the potential to raise awareness about health inequities effectively and can be used to advocate for transformative regulatory action, adding to the growing body of evidence that social media can play a crucial role in advancing health equity. Our study is the first to analyze social media discussions on the specific topic of racial disparities in pulse oximetry accuracy.

Methods

Data Retrieval

The study adopted a retrospective review of social media activity, drawing upon data from X. Specifically, data were retrieved using the Academic Track Application Programming Interface(API), as it was known then, using the search string: "pulseoximetry" OR "Pulse Oximetry" OR "Oximetry". Searches were conducted using the X API each year (January to December) from 2012 to 2022 to cover an 11-year time period. This time period was selected as it generated the most sufficient data. We also examined literature indexed on PubMed between 1945 and 2020 and mapped it corresponding to 2012-2022. We captured data leading up to end of 2022 when U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) convened a group about ongoing concerns on accuracy of pulse oximeters in individuals with darker skin pigmentations despite initial notification related to its use in pandemic in Feb 2021.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed drawing upon Network Overview Discovery and Exploration for Excel (NodeXL, version number 1.0.1.514) to perform social network analysis and generate social network visuals. The Harel-Koren Fast Multiscale layout algorithm, which is useful for visualizing large undirected networks (14), was used to lay out the report. The nodes, entities like people or organizations between which connections are being explored, were clustered, drawing on the Clauset-Newman-Moore algorithm [16]. This gathered data specific to 2020 provided the most influential organizations and individual users on X participating in the discussion involving pulse oximetry. We also extracted their number of followers. NodeXL was also used to analyze the content of tweets to generate 'word pairs', which are able to show the two most frequently cooccurring words. Our study also drew upon the betweenness centrality algorithm [17]. Betweenness centrality is a method for determining the degree to which a node affects the information flow in a graph. It is frequently employed to identify nodes that function as a connection between two sections of a graph. The algorithm calculates shortest paths between all pairs of nodes in a graph. We also categorized all posts based on the 6-types of X social network structures can emerge (17), which are visually represented in Figure 1.

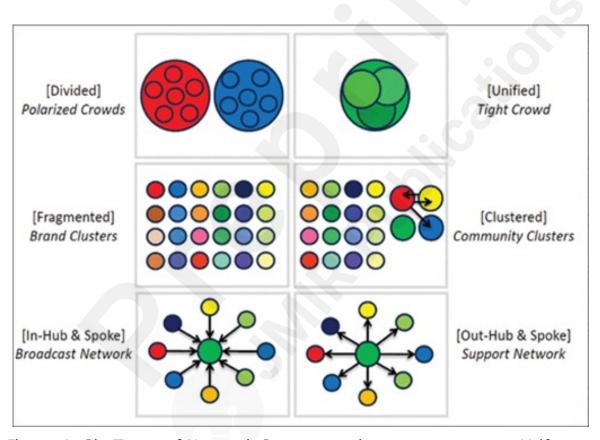


Figure 1. Six Types of Network Structures that can emerge on X (formerly Twitter)

Polarized Crowds in X networks are formed by distinct, large groups discussing the same topic but with little to no interaction between them, often reflecting divergent views on contentious subjects like politics. Tight Crowds are formed around specialized topics or communities, such as professional interests, hobbies, or niche activities. In these networks, participants are highly interconnected, creating a dense web of interactions. Brand Clusters emerge when conversations on X revolve around specific brands or products without forming strong interconnections among the discussing participants. This results

in many isolated individuals or small groups mentioning the brand but not engaging with one another, creating a scattered landscape of discussions. Community Clusters appear in conversations that encompass a broad topic with multiple subtopics or perspectives, forming several smaller, densely connected groups within the more considerable debate. The Broadcast Network structure is observed when a single, prominent account or a few accounts disseminate information to many followers, mirroring a hub-and-spoke model. Support Networks are identified by their hub-and-spoke configuration, where a central account, typically belonging to a company's customer service department, interacts with numerous individual users.

Social media platforms have become central hubs for civil society, serving as venues for sharing information, engaging in public discourse, and hosting debates and conflicts [18]. As modern equivalents of the public square, the discussions on social media hold significant importance, comparable to documenting any substantial public gathering [19–21]. Creating network maps of these social media dialogues on platforms like X can shed light on the societal impact of social media. These maps resemble overhead snapshots of a crowd, revealing approximate population size and diversity. Enhancing these maps with face-to-face interviews with individuals in the crowd, capturing their opinions and interests, can provide deeper insights. The combination of network analysis, visual representation, traditional research methods like surveys or focus groups, and sentiment analysis of textual content such as posts offers a comprehensive understanding of social media dynamics.

Like topographic maps display mountain ranges' peaks, network maps can reveal the most prominent points within a network landscape [22]. Specific individuals hold positions in these networks that are akin to strategically essential locations in physical terrain [22]. Using network metrics of "centrality," it's possible to pinpoint key individuals who are pivotal in discussion networks, acting as leaders in the conversation. The content generated by these central figures tends to gain considerable popularity and is often widely shared across the network, underscoring their influential role in shaping social media discourse (refer to Vassey et al., 2023 for further details).

Ethical considerations

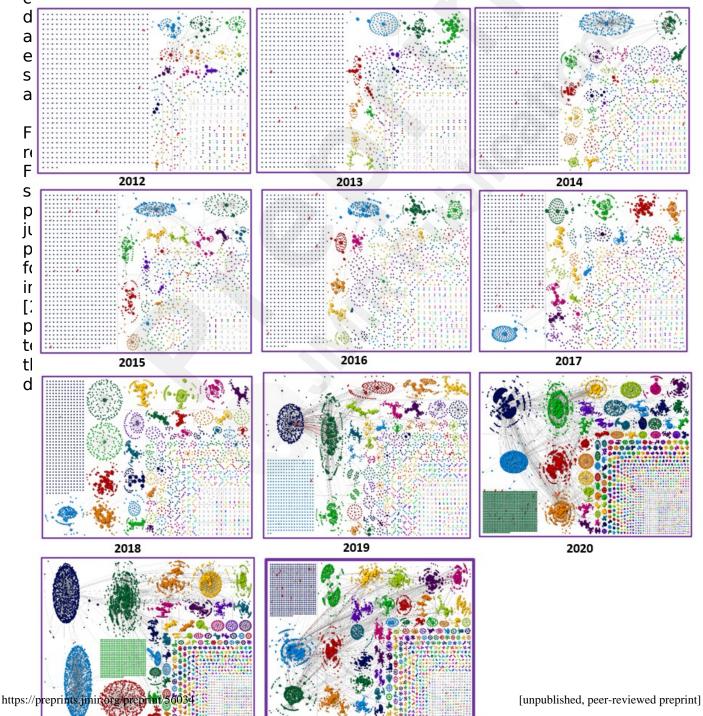
All of the data analysed within this paper was observational drawing upon X data, and data was analysed and reported in an aggerate format. The study operated under ethical approval from Newcastle University (26055/2022).

Results

Social network and interaction analysis

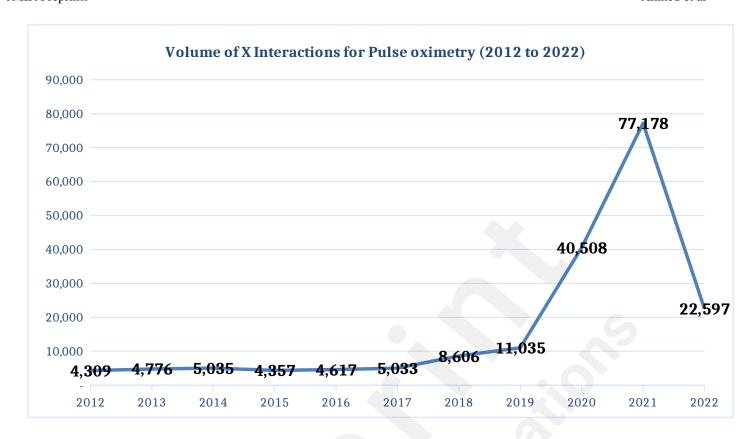
The social network of pulse oximetry discussions on X from 2012 to 2022 is shown in Figure 2. We cut-off at 2022 due to changes in the X (Twitter) API and are no longer able to access data through the Academic Track API. The Social Network Analysis shows that the social network of pulse oximetry discussions on X has evolved significantly since 2019. In the early years (2012 to 2018), the largest group in each network consisted of a significant "isolates" group where users posted without being reposted and/or mentioning other users. Our

analysis suggests that the topics were broad-ranging, with many "islands" of users conversing with each other. There was also very little cross-collaboration, suggesting that the networks lacked content and engagement. In 2019, there was a transformation as a "broadcast network" appeared for the first time as the largest group in the network. This change resulted from the discussion around pulse oximetry becoming more centralized, with a few key users influencing many others. There was also some evidence of cross-collaboration, suggesting that the networks were becoming more integrated. The most significant change occurred in 2020, when the network had been completely transformed, with many densely connected groups of users and several broadcast networks. Users also appeared to be conversing across groups. Our results show that the discussion around pulse oximetry had become much more active and engaged, with various perspectives being represented. A similar pattern emerges in 2021 and 2022, with even larger individual groups and more evidence of crossclinnacto that tha cocial



2022

Figure 2. Social Network Analysis Overview (2012 to 2022) of X posts and interactions (all forms of reposts and replies) on Pulse Oximetry



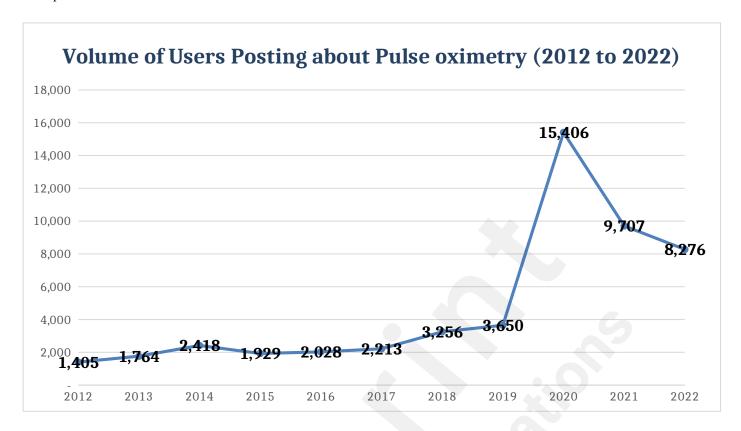


Figure 3. Interactions on the X platform



Figure 5 provides an overview of all literature indexed in PubMed for 'Pulse Oximetry' between 1946 and 2020. When searching specifically for the search

string of 'pulse oximetry racial bias', PubMed highlights two papers published in 2020, a total of ten papers in 2021, and 14 papers in 2022. These studies were widely shared and posted across X.

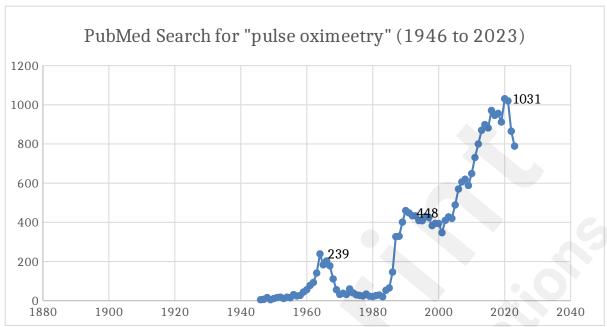


Figure 5. PubMed Search for 'Pulse oximetry' (1946 to 202)

The relationship between pulse oximetry readings and skin pigmentation has been known within the medical community for an extended period, as evidenced by research such as Adler et al. [26], Bickler et al., [27], and Sjoding et al. [28]. However, the significant implications of this correlation on racial disparities in healthcare outcomes remained largely unexplored unaddressed until a surge in social media discussions around racial issues in 2019-2020. While a limited number of studies have explored knowledge sharing and data in this field, Jamila et al. [29] shed light on a critical issue underscoring the racial disparity in oxygen saturation measurements by pulse oximetry. Sudat et al. [30] and Shi et al., [31] report similar findings and racial disparities at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This heightened awareness coincided with an increase in scientific research focused on the topic, indicating a newfound recognition of the need to understand and reconcile these disparities in medical technology and its application. This shift marks an essential step in addressing and rectifying biases in medical diagnostics that disproportionately affect people of color. Figure 6 and 7, created by searching PubMed for published papers, highlights how the increase of peer-reviewed publications on Pulse oximetry coincides with the increased social media activity on X.

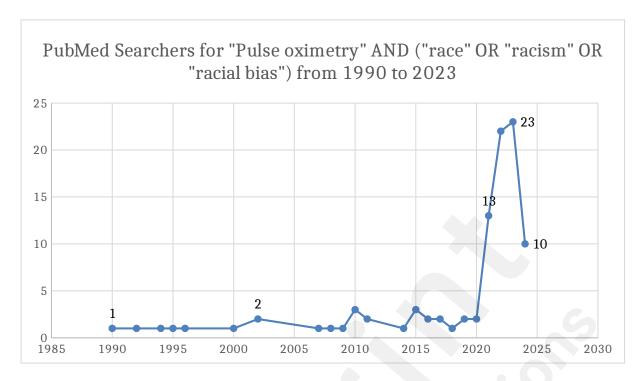


Figure 6. PubMed Search for Pulse Oximetry and race-related keywords (1990 to 2023)

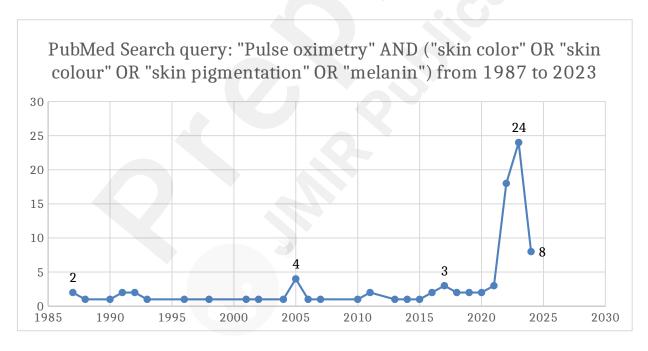


Figure 7. PubMed Search for Pulse Oximetry and skin-related keywords (1987 to 2023)

Examining Key Sources and Information Shared in 2020

Several key web sources were frequently shared during discussions surrounding racial bias in pulse oximetry, shown in Table 1. The table includes details of the

title, publisher, and number of shares.

Table 1. Overview of Key Sources, Publisher, and number of shares (year 2020)

Source Title	Publisher	No. of Shares
Racial Bias in Pulse Oximetry Measurement	New England Journal of Medicine	327
The Infection That's Silently Killing Coronavirus Patients	The New York Times	187
Takuo Aoyagi, an Inventor of the Pulse Oximeter, Dies at 84	The New York Times	57
Pulse oximetry to detect early deterioration of patients with COVID-19 in primary and community care settings	NHS England	50
COVID Oximetry @home	NHS England	48

The article "Racial Bias in Pulse Oximetry Measurement" [28], published by the New England Journal of Medicine, emerged as a leading reference with 327 shares. The New York Times was also featured prominently in the discourse, with its articles covering various newsworthy aspects around pulse oximetry and other general COVID-19-related articles. Additionally, content from NHS England, which provided general information on pulse oximetry during COVID-19, was frequently cited. The three sources were the most repeatedly shared sources during discussions surrounding racial bias in pulse oximetry. Due to the frequency of the sources, they were considered the most authoritative and informative sources on the topic. The sources were identified through a thorough search of online discussions and social media posts about racial bias in pulse oximetry. The frequency of sharing was used as a metric to determine which sources were the most prominent and influential.

The discussions surrounding racial bias in pulse oximetry revealed certain recurrent word pairs summarized in Table 2 that shed light on the focal points of the conversation. The provides insight into the top word pairs used together alongside their frequency.

Table 2. Overview occurring word

Occurren	
ces	
2462	
1499	
1494	
1479	
1478	
1477	
1477	

key instrument

of most frequently pairs in 2020

The pairing "covid,19" with pulse oximetry with 2,462 occurrences reflects the increasing interest in the device in monitoring COVID-19 patients. The word combination "darker skin" at 1,499 instances highlights concerns about the potential inaccuracies of pulse oximetry readings in individuals with darker skin tones. This is further supported by the pairs "inaccurate, darker" with 1,477 mentions, which directly addresses the issue of instrument precision with darker skin. Other word pairs appear to highlight the importance and centrality of pulse oximetry in certain contexts, hinting at its foundational role in medical procedures or monitoring. Other discourse appeared to tie the tool's clinical management capabilities, particularly in the management of COVID-19 patients. In the context of discussions on racial bias in pulse oximetry, several key influencers were identified based on Betweenness Centrality, which is summarized in Table 3. The table provides insight into the rank, name description, follower count and location of the users who were most impactful.

Table 3 Overview of most Influential users in 2020

Influence Rank	Description	No. of Followers	Locatio n
1	Emergency	201,890	USA
	physician and		
2	professor	2.640	England
Z	National Clinical	2,648	England
	Director-		
3	ICU &	513	USA
	pulmonary		
	physician &		
	associate		
	professor		
4	Physician-	25,782	USA
	scientist and		
	Assistant		
	Professor of		
	Medicine		
5	clinician and a	496,647	USA
	certified		
	physician		

executive.

The most influential user was an emergency physician and professor from the USA. With an impressive following of 201,890, they stand out as a dominant voice on the subject. Following this year is another user from the National Clinical Director from England. Although they have a notably smaller audience, of only 2,648 followers, their influence in the discourse remains significant. The third influencer is a pulmonary physician and associate professor from the USA. They engage with a community of 513 followers.

Another notable figure is also from the USA and is a physician-scientist and Assistant Professor of Medicine, who has a following of25,782 followers. Lastly, a clinician and certified physician executive from the USA, brings a substantial audience into the fold with 496,647 followers. The presence and reach of these influencers shaped the narrative and discussions.

Discussion

The preliminary findings showed that utilization of general keywords such as "pulse oximetry," "Pulse Oximetry," or "Oximetry" yielded a substantial cohort of individuals who expressed concerns or shared information regarding the racial bias inherent in the output of the pulse oximeter device. This observation implies a noteworthy and escalating level of interest in this subject matter inside the X platform. Such conversations will typically occur in biomedical research, but these conversations were occurring on social media amongst the public, highlighting that people turned to social media as a serious source for information related to medical care. Additionally, it was observed that several notable users used their position to increase public consciousness regarding potential concerns associated with pulse oximeters, highlighting the influence of leaders through engagement in social media. The rapid global dissemination of these posts underscores the influential capacity of X as a platform for expeditious information sharing. As modern equivalents of the public square, the discussions on social media hold significant importance, comparable to documenting any substantial public gathering [19-21]

The findings of our study have successfully identified and categorized the primary clusters and users participating in this discourse. Like other social network analyses, we found a form of targeted dispersion in which trending topics were used to reach particular types of actors [32,33]. X, in particular, appears to seek broad audiences and networks of influence. The tight shaping of the clusters illustrates how health topics are designed to get other users interested by grouping common topics to anticipate user interests and get them to spend longer on the site. Therefore, digital access to health information is vital in helping debunk issues and bias. However, the validity of health information is crucial to interrogate.

Whether the information on social media related to pulse oximetry and its racial bias was valid or good enough to change people's behaviours in increasing conversation and advocacy around the topic is a complex question.

Understanding the shape and types of influence among health networks on social media is essential for identifying the challenges of using social media for health communication. Abroms et al. [34] acknowledge the potential of social media for improving public health while raising concerns about its negative impact on physical and mental well-being and its role in spreading misinformation. Relatedly, there is growing interest in the influence of professional health workers posting on social media. Engebretsen [35] emphasizes the importance of health practitioners maintaining a balance between establishing social proximity and maintaining professional detachment while disseminating health guidance on social media platforms such as Additionally, engaging responsible professional practitioners in disseminating valid and accurate information through social networks is essential to addressing the concerns raised by Abroms et al. [34].

Here, the lack of formal access to health policy has forced health advocacy movements to advocate on a global and cross-platform level. Many social media users typically prefer one or two platforms, which means they may risk missing crucial health information. Vance et al.[36] acknowledged the growing importance of social media platforms as sources of health information, especially among adolescents and young adults. However, they also emphasized the drawbacks of anonymous authorship and the dissemination of subjective viewpoints as objective facts. Pradekso et al.'s [37] study highlights the importance of understanding the distinct health misinformation concerns linked with different types of social media.

Our findings highlight X's potential as a platform for raising awareness of important health issues, even among those who may not be traditionally engaged with scientific research. We emphasize how health experts can use platforms like X to target specific communities, partnering with influential users and tailoring content to trending topics to appeal to different audiences. Moreover, in this study, we are investigating the ramifications of this dissemination of information by doing a comparative analysis of our findings with those from 2019, during which a few concerns regarding pulse oximeters were identified. Preliminary findings indicate that X is a viable medium for disseminating scholarly research about the racial bias observed in Pulse Oximetry devices. The pandemic represented a significant inflexion point for discussion in the public domain about racial bias in pulse oximetry. This led to a significant scaling up of social media content around health information and is misinformation. In response to the early stages of the pandemic, there was an increase in scientific papers concerning oximetry. The recent surge in research on racial bias in pulse oximetry stems from several factors. First, the COVID-19 pandemic reignited concerns about racial disparities in healthcare outcomes. This renewed focus exposed biases embedded in the design of medical devices [38], particularly home-based products like pulse oximeters[39]. Second, the increased availability of data on pulse oximetry readings and patient outcomes provided researchers with real-world evidence of these biases [31,40]. Finally, heightened public and scientific interest in the topic attracted additional funding for health research efforts [41]. With the increased number of studies on racial bias after 2020, we can speculate that the rigor of the studies also improved

due to the availability of data and development of new analytical methods and the growing number of researchers working in this area.

Social media platforms like X allowed researchers, health experts, patients and the general public to share information quickly and widely, raising awareness about the potential for racial bias, finding other people interested in the topics and generating discussions for further research. Our study, therefore, has some limitations:

- 1. Selection bias is limited to a single sample of posts on one platform. Further research encompassing different platforms and related terms is needed to confirm our findings.
- 2. We did not collect demographic data on the users in our sample, so we cannot say who is most likely to be exposed to information about racial bias in pulse oximeters.
- 3. We did not perform a sentiment analysis or qualitative analysis of the posts to show advocacy-related follow-up, so we cannot say how users respond to this information.
- 4. We could not objectively report how these could have tied into increasing scientific discourse on the topic or heightened the need for action for regulatory authorities like the FDA.
- 5. There isn't deeper understanding of the context in which race and oximetry are being discussed, as our study looks at activity generated by posts. However, our future work aims to better understand the context of the discussions.
- 6. The reliance on social media data presents another limitation. Platforms like X, while offering rapid access to health information, have their own limitations. Concerns exist regarding potential biases within platform algorithms, as evidenced by Savolainen's (27) work on algorithmic governance and user struggles with platform expectations. This highlights users' potential difficulty accessing valid health information on social media.

Notwithstanding these constraints, our research offers a crucial foundation for understanding the function of X and other social media platforms in disseminating health-related information about potential biases in health devices such as pulse oximeters. Social events are invariably discussed in social media-fueled scientific discourse on a topic known to the scientific community for decades but only researched in relation to healthcare disparities after social media raised awareness. Future research should aim to expand upon our study by using more comprehensive and diverse sampling techniques, gathering user demographic information, and employing qualitative analysis of posts to gain a deeper understanding of user reactions. Furthermore, research by Philip et al. (10) during the pandemic emphasized the need for a critical reevaluation of pulse oximetry technology. Their work highlighted concerns about racial bias in pulse oximetry readings and proposed modifications to account for patient skin colour variations. In response to data bias, Ferrari et al. [42] advocated for implementing multi-wavelength pulse oximeters that incorporate melanin absorption correction to enhance accuracy, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies parallel the concerns we observed in social

media discussions, further highlighting the need for continued research and technological improvements.

Conclusion

Our analysis of social media discussions revealed a significant increase in public interest surrounding racial disparities in pulse oximetry readings. These findings highlight the need for increased public awareness and education about pulse oximetry limitations. Additionally, our study provides valuable insights for future research efforts focused on improving pulse oximetry technology Ultimately, ongoing collaboration between addressing identified biases. healthcare professionals and the public is crucial for ensuring the fair and accurate use of pulse oximetry for all patients. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the potential of social media platforms like X as a space for disseminating academic research about racial bias in pulse oximetry. We observed key influential users leveraging their platforms to raise awareness of these issues and rapidly disseminate early scientific findings. These results offer valuable insights for raising awareness of critical health issues and understanding health information propagation on social media.

Our analysis suggests that social media can significantly enhance health information sharing and advocacy strategies, particularly for non-health professionals. This study highlights the role of key influencers and network links on social media in shaping health information dissemination. These influencers and network connections crucially impact how health organizations utilize social media and how individuals engage in health social movements like advocacy. While traditional, offline health information channels aimed at patient education remain important, our findings suggest that influence in the health sphere is increasingly intertwined with, or even dependent upon, the presence of key actors on digital platforms.

Data Availability

Some of the nonsocial media data sets generated during and/or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Author Contributions

Wasim Ahmed: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Writing - Original draft preparation, Methodology Mariann (Maz) Hardey: Data curation, Writing - Original draft preparation, Methodology Bradford David Winters: Supervision, Conceptualization, Visualization, Investigation Aarti Sarwal: Supervision, Writing - Review & Editing, Validation

References

1. France MW, Porter AH, Bennett CJ, McCarthy KL. Use of home pulse oximetry to enhance remote COVID-19 monitoring: Evaluating a single centre experience. bioRxiv. 2022. doi: 10.1101/2022.11.07.22281915

- 2. Michard F, Shelley K, L'Her E. COVID-19: Pulse oximeters in the spotlight. J Clin Monit Comput 2021 Feb;35(1):11–14. PMID:32578070
- 3. Luks AM, Swenson ER. Pulse Oximetry for Monitoring Patients with COVID-19 at Home. Potential Pitfalls and Practical Guidance. Ann Am Thorac Soc 2020 Sep;17(9):1040–1046. PMID:32521167
- Valbuena VSM, Merchant RM, Hough CL. Racial and Ethnic Bias in Pulse Oximetry and Clinical Outcomes. JAMA Intern Med. 2022. p. 699–700. PMID:35639397
- 5. Cabanas AM, Martín-Escudero P, Shelley KH. Improving pulse oximetry accuracy in dark-skinned patients: technical aspects and current regulations. Br J Anaesth 2023 Aug 4; PMID:37544838
- Sjoding MW, Dickson RP, Iwashyna TJ, Gay SE, Valley TS. Racial Bias in Pulse Oximetry Measurement. N Engl J Med 2020 Dec 17;383(25):2477-2478. PMID:33326721
- 7. Palmer SJ. Racial bias in pulse oximetry: a significant problem in healthcare. Br J Health Assist Mark Allen Group; 2022 Sep 2;16(9):430-433.
- 8. Patwari N, Huang D, Bonetta-Misteli K. Racial disparities in pulse oximetry cannot be fixed with race-based correction. arXiv [eessSP]. 2022. Available from: http://arxiv.org/abs/2210.04990
- 9. Philip KEJ, Tidswell R, McFadyen C. Racial bias in pulse oximetry: more statistical detail may help tackle the problem. BMJ. 2021. p. n298. PMID:33531354
- 10. Plaisime MV. Invited commentary: Undiagnosed and undertreated-the suffocating consequences of the use of racially biased medical devices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Am J Epidemiol. Oxford University Press (OUP); 2023. p. 714–719. PMID:36702767
- Cabanas AM, Fuentes-Guajardo M, Latorre K, León D, Martín-Escudero P. Skin Pigmentation Influence on Pulse Oximetry Accuracy: A Systematic Review and Bibliometric Analysis. Sensors 2022 Apr 29;22(9). PMID:35591092
- 12. Colvonen PJ. Response To: Investigating sources of inaccuracy in wearable optical heart rate sensors. NPJ Digit Med 2021 Feb 26;4(1):38. PMID:33637822
- 13. Sikka T. The Colour of Technology: Covid-19, Race, and the Pulse Oximeter. Disrupted Knowledge Brill; 2023. p. 55–77.
- 14. Ahmed W, Vidal-Alaball J, Downing J, López Seguí F. COVID-19 and the 5G

Conspiracy Theory: Social Network Analysis of Twitter Data. J Med Internet Res 2020 May 6;22(5):e19458. PMID:32352383

- 15. Ahmed W, Seguí FL, Vidal-Alaball J, Katz MS. Covid-19 and the "film your hospital" conspiracy theory: social network analysis of twitter data. J Med Internet Res jmir.org; 2020; Available from: https://www.jmir.org/2020/10/e22374/
- 16. Clauset A, Newman MEJ, Moore C. Finding community structure in very large networks. Phys Rev E Stat Nonlin Soft Matter Phys APS; 2004 Dec;70(6 Pt 2):066111. PMID:15697438
- 17. Freeman LC. A set of measures of centrality based on betweenness. Sociometry JSTOR; 1977 Mar;40(1):35.
- 18. Papacharissi Z. The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. New Media & Society SAGE Publications; 2002 Feb 1;4(1):9–27.
- 19. Cowls J, Ma C. The internet's town square? A critical discourse analysis of Parler's "past imaginary." Soc Media Soc SAGE Publications; 2023 Apr;9(2). doi: 10.1177/20563051231181099
- 20. Agudelo-Hernández F, Cardona Porras LF, Giraldo Álvarez AB. Declaration of the Town Square: The Urgency of Speaking as One. J Hum Rights Pract Oxford University Press; 2024 Feb 1;huae002.
- 21. Myers West S. Censored, suspended, shadowbanned: User interpretations of content moderation on social media platforms. New Media & Society SAGE Publications; 2018 Nov 1;20(11):4366-4383.
- 22. Smith MA, Rainie L, Shneiderman B, Himelboim I. Mapping Twitter topic networks: From polarized crowds to community clusters. Pew Research Center; 2014 Feb 20; Available from: https://policycommons.net/artifacts/620393/mapping-twitter-topic-networks/1601593/ [accessed Oct 25, 2022]
- 23. Gupta S, Bhusan DS, Mahajan R. The role of social influencers for effective public health communication. Online Information Review Emerald Publishing Limited; 2021 Jan 1;46(5):974–992.
- 24. Lutkenhaus RO, Jansz J, Bouman MP. Tailoring in the digital era: Stimulating dialogues on health topics in collaboration with social media influencers. Digit Health 2019 Jan 28;5:2055207618821521. PMID:30729023
- 25. Lim MSC, Molenaar A, Brennan L, Reid M, McCaffrey T. Young Adults' Use of Different Social Media Platforms for Health Information: Insights From Web-Based Conversations. J Med Internet Res 2022 Jan 18;24(1):e23656. PMID:35040796
- 26. Adler JN, Hughes LA, Vivilecchia R, Camargo CA Jr. Effect of skin pigmentation on pulse oximetry accuracy in the emergency department. Acad Emerg Med 1998 Oct;5(10):965–970. PMID:9862586

27. Bickler PE, Feiner JR, Severinghaus JW. Effects of skin pigmentation on pulse oximeter accuracy at low saturation. Anesthesiology 2005 Apr;102(4):715–719. PMID:15791098

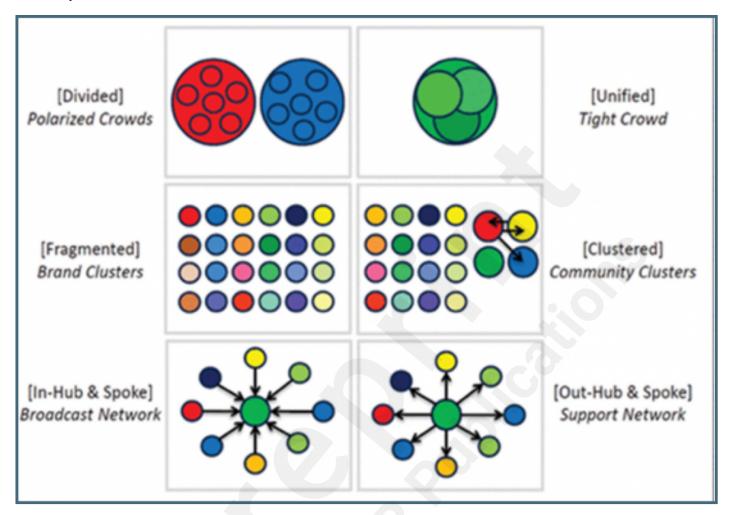
- 28. Sjoding, Michael W., Robert P. Dickson, Theodore J. Iwashyna, Steven E. Gay, and Thomas S. Valley. Racial Bias in Pulse Oximetry Measurement. N Engl J Med 2021;385(26):2496. PMID:34936755
- 29. Jamali H, Castillo LT, Morgan CC, Coult J, Muhammad JL, Osobamiro OO, Parsons EC, Adamson R. Racial Disparity in Oxygen Saturation Measurements by Pulse Oximetry: Evidence and Implications. Ann Am Thorac Soc 2022 Dec;19(12):1951–1964. PMID:36166259
- Sudat SEK, Wesson P, Rhoads KF, Brown S, Aboelata N, Pressman AR, Mani A, Azar KMJ. Racial Disparities in Pulse Oximeter Device Inaccuracy and Estimated Clinical Impact on COVID-19 Treatment Course. Am J Epidemiol 2023 May 5;192(5):703-713. PMID:36173743
- 31. Shi C, Goodall M, Dumville J, Hill J, Norman G, Hamer O, Clegg A, Watkins CL, Georgiou G, Hodkinson A, Lightbody CE, Dark P, Cullum N. The accuracy of pulse oximetry in measuring oxygen saturation by levels of skin pigmentation: a systematic review and meta-analysis. BMC Med 2022 Aug 16;20(1):267. PMID:35971142
- 32. Hönings H, Knapp D, Nguyễn BC, Richter D, Williams K, Dorsch I, Fietkiewicz KJ. Health information diffusion on Twitter: The content and design of WHO tweets matter. Health Info Libr J Wiley; 2022 Mar;39(1):22–35. PMID:33682996
- 33. Kullar R, Goff DA, Gauthier TP, Smith TC. To tweet or not to tweet—a review of the viral power of twitter for infectious diseases. Curr Infect Dis Rep Springer Science and Business Media LLC; 2020 Jun;22(6). doi: 10.1007/s11908-020-00723-0
- 34. Abroms LC, Gold RS, Allegrante JP. Promoting health on social media: The way forward. Health Educ Behav SAGE Publications; 2019 Dec;46(2_suppl):9-11. PMID:31742461
- 35. Engebretsen M. Communicating health advice on social media: A multimodal case study. MedieKultur Det Kgl. Bibliotek/Royal Danish Library; 2023 May 24;39(74):164–184.
- 36. Vance K, Howe W, Dellavalle RP. Social internet sites as a source of public health information. Dermatol Clin 2009 Apr;27(2):133-6, vi. PMID:19254656
- 37. Pradekso T, Manalu SR, Setyabudi D. Social Media Use and Exposure to Health Related False Information. EAI; 4 2020. doi: 10.4108/eai.21-10-2019.2294449
- 38. Mousavi SS, Reyna MA, Clifford GD, Sameni R. A Survey on Blood Pressure Measurement Technologies: Addressing Potential Sources of Bias. Sensors

- Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute; 2024 Mar 7;24(6):1730.
- 39. Alboksmaty A, Beaney T, Elkin S, Clarke JM, Darzi A, Aylin P, Neves A-L. Effectiveness and safety of pulse oximetry in remote patient monitoring of patients with COVID-19: a systematic review. Lancet Digit Health 2022 Apr;4(4):e279–e289. PMID:35337644
- 40. Philip KEJ, Bennett B, Fuller S, Lonergan B, McFadyen C, Burns J, Tidswell R, Vlachou A. Working accuracy of pulse oximetry in COVID-19 patients stepping down from intensive care: a clinical evaluation. BMJ Open Respir Res 2020 Dec;7(1). PMID:33361436
- 41. Sauermann H, Vohland K, Antoniou V, Balázs B, Göbel C, Karatzas K, Mooney P, Perelló J, Ponti M, Samson R, Winter S. Citizen science and sustainability transitions. Res Policy 2020 Jun 1;49(5):103978.
- 42. Ferrari M, Quaresima V, Scholkmann F. Pulse oximetry, racial bias and statistical bias: further improvements of pulse oximetry are necessary. Ann Intensive Care Springer Science and Business Media LLC; 2022 Feb 22;12(1):19. PMID:35190907

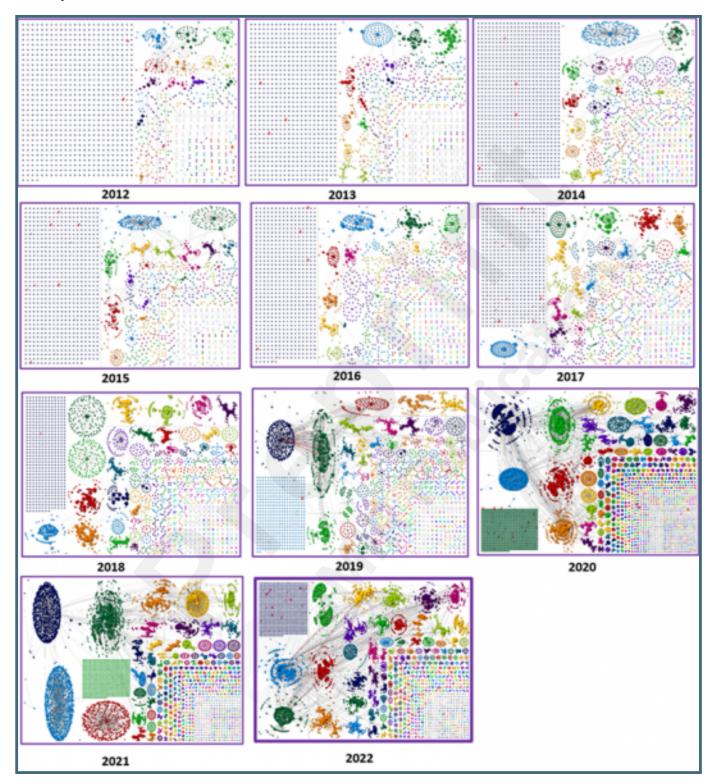
Supplementary Files

Figures

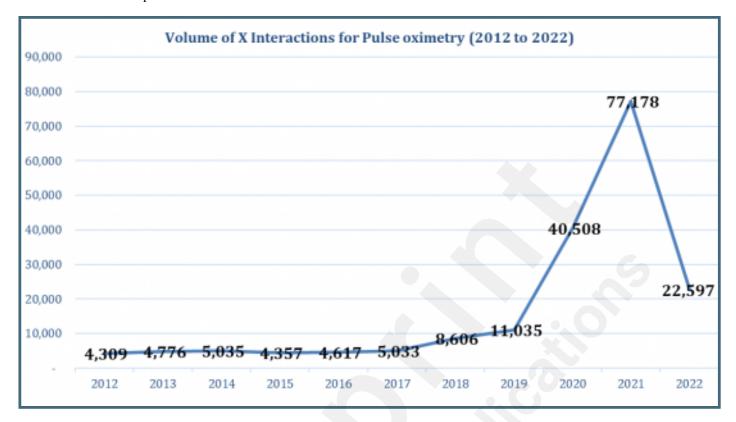
Social Network Analysis Overview (2012 to 2022) of X posts and interactions (all forms of reposts and replies) on Pulse Oximetry.



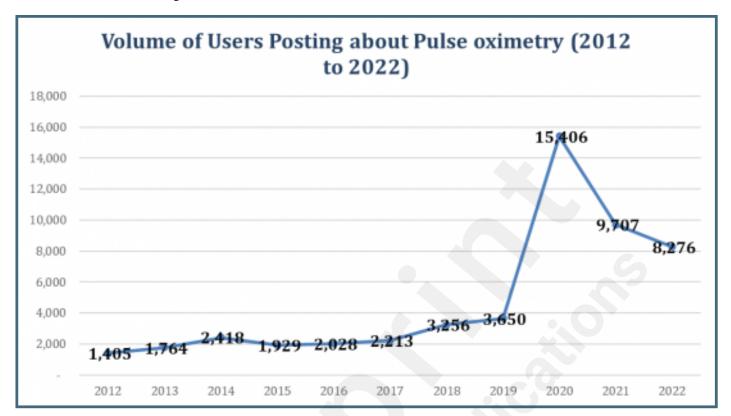
Social Network Analysis Overview (2012 to 2022) of X posts and interactions (all forms of reposts and replies) on Pulse Oximetry.



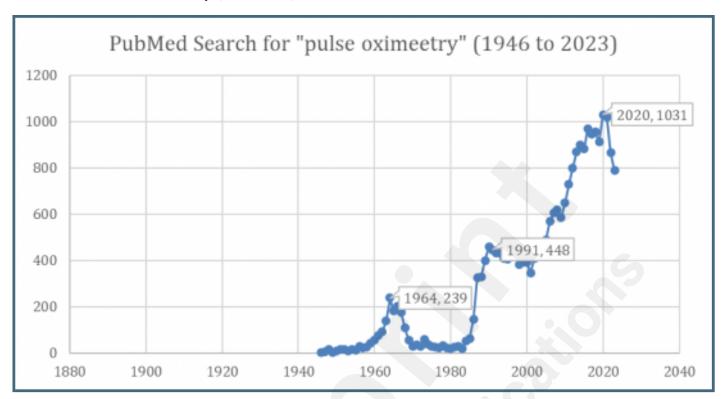
Interactions on the X platform.



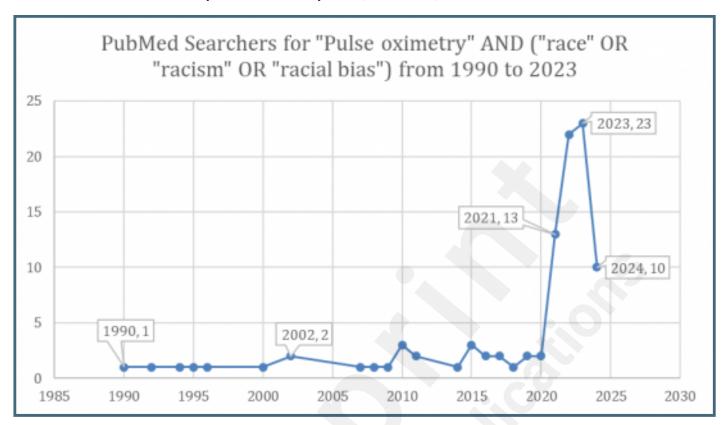
The volume of Users Posting.



PubMed Search for 'Pulse oximetry' (1946 to 2023).



PubMed Search for Pulse Oximetry and race-related keywords (1990 to 2023).



PubMed Search for Pulse Oximetry and skin-related keywords (1987 to 2023).

