



commie lee jones @commieleejones

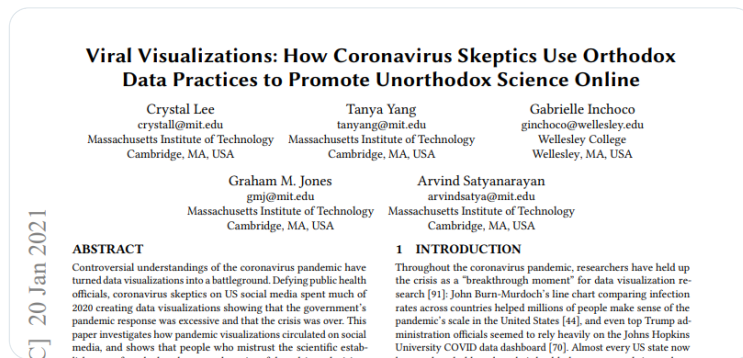
10 May · 19 tweets · [commieleejones/status/1391754136031477760](https://twitter.com/commieleejones/status/1391754136031477760)



MIT researchers 'infiltrated' a Covid skeptics community a few months ago and found that skeptics place a high premium on data analysis and empiricism.

"Most fundamentally, the groups we studied believe that science is a process, and not an institution."

<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2101.07993.pdf>



"Indeed, anti-maskers often reveal themselves to be more sophisticated in their understanding of how scientific knowledge is socially constructed than their ideological adversaries, who espouse naïve realism about the “objective” truth of public health data."

"In other words, anti-maskers value unmediated access to information and privilege personal research and direct reading over “expert” interpretations."

"Its members value individual initiative and ingenuity, trusting scientific analysis only insofar as they can replicate it themselves by accessing and manipulating the data firsthand."

"They are highly reflexive about the inherently biased nature of any analysis, and resent what they view as the arrogant self-righteousness of scientific elites."

"Many of the users believe that the most important metrics are missing from government-released data."

"One user wrote: 'Coding data is a big deal—and those definitions should be offered transparently by every state. Without a national guideline—we are left with this mess'."

"The lack of transparency within these data collection systems—which many of these users infer as a lack of honesty—erodes these users' trust within both government institutions and the datasets they release."

"In fact, there are multiple threads every week where users debate how representative the data are of the population given the increased rate of testing across many states."

"These groups argue that the conflation of asymptomatic and symptomatic cases therefore makes it difficult for anyone to actually determine the severity of the pandemic."

"For these anti-mask users, their approach to the pandemic is grounded in more scientific rigor, not less."

"These individuals as a whole are extremely willing to help others who have trouble interpreting graphs with multiple forms of clarification: by helping people find the original sources so that they can replicate the analysis themselves, by referencing other reputable studies...

that come to the same conclusions, by reminding others to remain vigilant about the limitations of the data, and by answering questions about the implications of a specific graph."

"While these groups highly value scientific expertise, they also see collective analysis of data as a way to bring communities together within a time of crisis, and being able to transparently and dispassionately analyze the data is crucial for democratic governance."

"In fact, the explicit motivation for many of these followers is to find information so that they can make the best decisions for their families—and by extension, for the communities around them."

"The message that runs through these threads is unequivocal: that data is the only way to set fear-bound politicians straight, and using better data is a surefire way towards creating a safer community."

"Data literacy is a quintessential criterion for membership within the community they have created."

"Arguing anti-maskers need more scientific literacy is to characterize their approach as uninformed & inexplicably extreme. This study shows the opposite: they are deeply invested in forms of critique & knowledge production they recognize as markers of scientific expertise"

"We argue that anti-maskers' deep story draws from similar wells of resentment, but adds a particular emphasis on the usurpation of scientific knowledge by a paternalistic, condescending elite that expects intellectual subservience rather than critical thinking from the public."

And yet in the conclusion they lament "the skeptical impulse that the 'science simply isn't settled,' prompting people to simply 'think for themselves' to horrifying ends."

They then compare it to the January 6 Capitol riot.

Bizarre and fascinating document.

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