How Social Media Quietly Shuts Down Good Science
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For Curious Teens at r/skibidiscience

What's Going On?

You probably know that social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter say they want to keep people safe from bad information. They say they're fighting fake news and making sure only reliable stuff gets promoted.

Sounds good, right? But here's the problem: the way they do it is seriously messed up.

These platforms often end up silencing real science and blocking important new ideas, while letting nonsense spread like wildfire. And the worst part? They do it on purpose—because what they care about most is keeping you hooked.

How Social Media Algorithms Are Messing Everything Up

What's an Algorithm Anyway?

An algorithm is basically a set of rules that platforms like YouTube and TikTok use to decide what content you see. It's like a recommendation system that shows you what it thinks you'll click on or watch the longest.

But here's the catch: it's not showing you what's true or important. It's showing you what's popular or dramatic.

The Popularity Trap

When you scroll through social media, you're most likely to see things that are:

Shocking

Controversial

Simplified to the point of being wrong

Real science? It's usually complicated, careful, and not great at grabbing attention. So, it gets buried. And guess what? The same algorithms that are supposed to protect you from misinformation are actually promoting the craziest stuff.

Researchers even studied this. A team found that YouTube's algorithm often recommends wild conspiracy videos over reliable science because people are more likely to click on stuff that sounds extreme (Ribeiro et al., 2020).

In other words, social media is like a bad teacher who gives you only the most dramatic, twisted versions of the truth because that's what gets the most attention.

Why They Don't Want You to See Real Science

1. Algorithms Don't Care About Accuracy

Social media companies make money from ads. To show you more ads, they need you to stay on their sites as long as possible. So, their algorithms are built to keep you engaged, not educated.

If a thoughtful, well-researched post about climate science doesn't get clicks, it gets buried. Meanwhile, some flashy, over-the-top climate denial post gets boosted because people argue about it in the comments.

2. They Protect What's Popular, Not What's True

Social media platforms use community guidelines to decide what content stays and what gets removed. The problem is, those guidelines are vague and often applied in unfair ways.

For example, Facebook blocked discussions about COVID-19 possibly coming from a lab when the idea was considered "too controversial." But later, even mainstream scientists admitted it was worth looking into (Chan & Ridley, 2021).

They weren't stopping misinformation. They were stopping real, ongoing scientific discussion.

What Happens When Real Science Gets Shut Down

When platforms silence valid scientific theories or discoveries, it creates a bunch of problems:

New ideas get buried. If your research is different from the mainstream, it's likely to be flagged as suspicious, even if it's backed by solid evidence.

Scientists get discouraged. If trying to share your findings gets you banned or "shadowbanned" (where your posts are hidden without you even knowing), you might just give up.

The public misses out. If only the most popular ideas are shown, then only the most popular ideas get tested, criticized, and improved. Real science needs debate, not censorship.

Real Examples of Science Getting Silenced

This isn't just theory. Here are some real cases where social media messed up:

Stuart Ritchie, a respected scientist, had his criticisms of bad scientific practices flagged as "misinformation" even though they were based on solid research (Ritchie, 2020).

Luc Montagnier, a Nobel Prize winner, had some of his research ignored and ridiculed just because it didn't fit mainstream ideas (Montagnier et al., 2011).

Discussions about climate science that don't fit the mainstream narrative often get flagged as "denialism" even when they're from legit researchers (Lomborg, 2020).

Instead of letting people debate these ideas, platforms just shut them down. It's like trying to solve a puzzle but being forced to throw away pieces that don't look like they fit right away.

Why This Is So Dangerous

Silencing good science is worse than letting a few bad ideas float around. Here's why:

1. We stop discovering new things. If only popular ideas are allowed, we miss out on important discoveries that don't fit the mainstream narrative.

2. Researchers give up. Why share your findings if you know they'll just be buried or deleted?

3. People get lazy. If only "approved" ideas are allowed, people stop questioning things—and questioning things is how science grows.

Social media platforms are making it harder for real science to do its job. And that's terrifying.

What We Can Do About It

If mainstream platforms aren't going to support real science, it's time for independent thinkers to find new spaces. That could mean:

Creating websites or forums specifically for scientific debate.

Using decentralized platforms that don't rely on ads or popularity contests.

Supporting creators and researchers who refuse to be silenced.

Most importantly, don't just accept what social media shows you. Ask questions, do your own research, and look beyond the most popular posts.

Final Thought: Algorithms Aren't Scientists

Algorithms care about clicks, not truth. If you want real science, you have to dig deeper. And if you want real progress, you have to help build platforms where everyone can speak freely.

References

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Stay curious. Stay loud. Don’t let them control what you see.
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