

Science journal calls on scientists to combat Facebook misinformation

September 30 2021



A smart phone screen displays the logo of Facebook on a Facebook website background.

Leading US journal *Science* on Thursday issued a rare editorial calling for scientists to fight back against the COVID misinformation that

proliferates on Facebook.

"The pandemic has revealed shocking ineptness by the scientific establishment at conveying messages about masks, vaccination, or the dangers of consuming horse drugs and aquarium cleaner," wrote editor-in-chief H. Holden Thorp.

The former chemistry professor added that [social media](#) had been skillfully exploited by "antiscience forces," singling out Ben Shapiro and Dan Bongino, right wing public figures who have built up loyal followings.

Communicating about research is inherently difficult because the scientific process is slow and iterative, with caveats and answers that aren't always definitive, conceded Thorp—and such content does not always lend itself to viral posts.

But the problem is "the antiscience opposition doesn't care about the caveats," he added.

While the pandemic has seen the rise of numerous credible scientists who have amassed large followings on Twitter—examples include Ashish Jha, dean of Brown School of Public Health and NYU professor Celine Gounder—the same is not true on Facebook.

"People tend to trust individuals they know on Facebook, making it powerful for changing hearts and minds," said Thorp, urging engagement rather than a boycott.

"To do battle in this arena, [science](#) will need to find its own super figures who can compete directly with the Shapiros and Bonginos of the antiscience world," he added, whether they be practicing scientists or skilled science communicators.

"Since the end of World War II, scientists have clung to the idea that if they stay objective and state the science, then the rest of the world will follow," he said, concluding that hostility to both climate and COVID research had proven this naive.

More information: Editorial: Time to unfriend Facebook? *Science* (2021). www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abm5515

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Science journal calls on scientists to combat Facebook misinformation (2021, September 30) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-09-science-journal-scientists-combat-facebook.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--