

There's a psychological reason anti-vaccine misinformation is so hard to fight | Salon

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A January 2021 poll from the Pew Charitable Trust found that 53% of Americans reported that social media was their primary source for news. Given that social media did not exist two decades ago, this is a profound social shift, particularly given that these types of sources have become a primary place for people to promote their personal opinions and “research” regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. Since sources often aren’t vetted or even reported in social media posts, it is often difficult to determine what information is reliable and what is not. As a result, social media spaces have become a hive for the spread of unreliable science and disinformation. Making matters worse, heated disagreement and high engagement with any content online can cause algorithms to privilege controversial posts, sharing them more widely than more neutral content. In a world where we easily consume that which is put before us, this makes for a particularly potent chance that misinformation about the vaccine, shared widely in social media spaces, may encourage vaccine resistance — having a secondary effect on the mental health of Americans who currently face yet another drastic spike in cases.

[...]

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