Dear Dan,

Why would people rather believe a viral social-media post over credible scientific information?

–Efrat

Because we are cognitively lazy and want simple answers.

As for posts on social media, their believability has to do with what psychologists call “social proof.” That is, we instinctively follow the herd, without realizing that we are doing it. The algorithms that social networks use are designed to exploit social proof and to get people to spend more time online. When a post becomes popular, the social networks promote it even more heavily, targeting users who are likely to be sympathetic, with the goal of maximizing their use of the network. Of course, that means that more people will see the popular post, pushing the chance of something going viral even higher.

CITING SOURCES
AMERICAN PHYSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ADVANCED SEARCHING SKILLS
Phrase searching

Put phrases in quotation marks to search as a phrase.

These two searches will yield different results:

vertical velocity

“vertical velocity”
Truncation

Truncate root words with an asterisk * to find all forms of the word.

Instead of using:

thermodynamics OR thermodynamic

use:

thermodynamic*
Boolean Logic

This is a way of combining search terms together using these “Boolean” words or operators:

• AND

• OR

• NOT
**Boolean logic: AND**

“road salt” AND thermodynamics

“road salt” AND thermodynamics
Boolean logic: OR

resistance

drag

resistance OR drag
swimming AND (resistance OR drag) AND (biokineti* OR biomechanic*)