

Paul Feyerabend's Epistemological Anarchism and The Crisis of Scientific Authority in The Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital media has transformed the landscape of knowledge production and distribution, leading to a crisis of trust in scientific authority. In the post-truth era, scientific claims are no longer the primary reference point, but instead compete with disinformation, conspiratorial narratives, and algorithm-based content that influence public perception. This study aims to critically examine Paul Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism and reconstruct its relevance in understanding the crisis of scientific authority in the digital era. This study uses a qualitative approach based on a literature review with a philosophical-critical orientation. Data were obtained from Feyerabend's main works and contemporary literature related to post-truth, disinformation, and digital epistemology, which were analyzed through literature reduction, thematic synthesis, and conceptual reconstruction. The results show that the crisis of scientific authority is not a direct consequence of epistemological pluralism but rather is influenced by structural transformations in the digital information ecosystem, such as algorithmization and epistemic fragmentation. Feyerabend's ideas are better understood as critical pluralism, rather than extreme relativism. This study concludes that a critical-dialogical pluralism model is needed to strengthen the legitimacy of science in an open, reflective, and accountable manner in the digital public space.

Keywords: *Epistemological Anarchism, Crisis of Scientific Authority, Paul Feyerabend, Epistemic Pluralism*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, public trust in scientific authorities has undergone complex dynamics amid the rapid development of digital media. The global phenomenon of disinformation and misinformation has eroded the public's ability to distinguish between valid scientific information and misleading narratives, making the trust gap in scientific institutions increasingly apparent (Meer & Hameleers, 2026). This change has given rise to what several researchers call a crisis of trust in science, where the scientific consensus that was once considered the sole reference is now being questioned, even by large sections of society (Reif et al., 2024). In this digital context, scientific content competes with non-scientific opinions, algorithms for the dissemination of unverified information, and alternative narratives on platforms such as social media, which together massively influence public perceptions of the validity and authority of scientific knowledge (Lestari et al., 2025). This phenomenon reflects not only the challenges of information technology but also fundamental epistemological challenges to the position and authority of science in the contemporary public sphere (Kirmayer, 2024).

It is in this context that Paul Feyerabend's thoughts become relevant for re-examination. In his landmark work *Against Method*, Feyerabend criticized the idea that science develops through a single, fixed, universal method. He demonstrated that the history of science actually demonstrates violations of supposedly fixed methodological rules, so that scientific progress often arises from creative irregularity and a plurality of approaches (Feyerabend, 1993). In

Science in a Free Society, he even argued that science should not monopolize the public sphere in the name of rationality, because in a democratic society, various forms of knowledge have the right to be considered equally (Feyerabend, 1978). This position challenges the epistemic superiority of science and opens up space for the democratization of knowledge.

The development of digital technology has radically changed the landscape of knowledge production, distribution, and legitimacy (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Social media platforms not only function as a medium of communication (Neylan et al., 2023). but also as an arena of epistemic contestation where scientific claims compete directly with personal opinions, conspiratorial narratives, and unvalidated information (Essien, 2025). Several studies have shown that the spread of disinformation, particularly on public health and science issues, results in a decline in trust in scientific institutions and academic authorities (Vraga et al., 2020). This phenomenon is further exacerbated by algorithmic logic that reinforces echo chambers and epistemic polarization, so that people tend to consume information that aligns with their ideological preferences (Cinelli et al., 2021). In such a situation, scientific authority is no longer accepted as a taken-for-granted normative reference, but instead becomes an object of negotiation, even public delegitimization (Guess et al., 2020).

This crisis does not stand alone, but is intertwined with what is often called the post-truth condition, namely, a social condition in which emotions, group identity, and political affiliation determine the acceptance of truth more than empirical verification (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Research in science communication shows that rejection of scientific consensus, for example, regarding vaccines, climate change, or pandemics, does not always stem from ignorance, but from an erosion of trust in institutions and experts (Jamieson & Albarracin, 2020). Thus, the problem faced is not merely an information crisis, but a crisis of epistemic legitimacy. Science, as a social institution, faces serious challenges in maintaining its authority amidst the pluralization of knowledge sources facilitated by digital technology (Scheufele & Krause, 2019).

Feyerabend's critique of methodological monism was essentially aimed at freeing science from internal dogmatism, not at justifying extreme relativism (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). However, in a hyperplural digital landscape, the idea of epistemological pluralism faces new interpretations that are not always in line with its original intent (Brahimi & Abid, 2026). This perspective can be expanded through the body of Islamic eco-theology, which positions humankind as *khilāfah* and stewards of the earth, and links freedom of action to the principles of *mīzān*, *amānah* and *‘adl*, so that epistemic openness does not stop at a diversity of

perspectives, but is directed towards moral responsibility and the sustainability of life (Rahman et al., 2026).

A number of contemporary philosophers of science warn that blurring the lines between criticism of authority and rejection of rationality can lead to what has been called epistemic relativism or even epistemic nihilism (Kusch, 2017). When every claim is considered equal without adequate evaluation mechanisms, the public sphere is vulnerable to information manipulation and the production of pseudo-truths; a similar concern emerges in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), where assessment requires systematic mechanisms to ensure that judgments about students' affective development are not merely subjective claims but are grounded in valid, reliable, and contextually relevant instruments (Pranoto et al., 2026).

On the other hand, some studies in the sociology of knowledge argue that the crisis of trust in science cannot be understood solely as a consequence of the theory of pluralism, but rather as a result of the structural dynamics of the digital era: the commercialization of attention, the algorithmization of information distribution, and the fragmentation of epistemic communities (Douglas et al., 2017). Within this framework, the delegitimization of scientific authority is more a product of the digital political economy than a direct consequence of philosophical critiques of scientific methodology. Therefore, the relationship between epistemological anarchism and the crisis of scientific authority cannot be simplified into a linear cause-and-effect relationship (Brahimi & Abid, 2026).

Based on this explanation, a fundamental problematization arises: is the crisis of scientific authority in the digital era a logical consequence of epistemological pluralism as formulated by Feyerabend, a relativistic distortion of his ideas, or is it a structural symptom born from the transformation of technology and the information economy? Until now, studies on Feyerabend have tended to stop at historical-philosophical analysis without systematically linking it to the contemporary digital epistemic crisis. Herein lies the research gap and novelty of this paper: reconstructing Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism in a critical dialogue with the phenomenon of the crisis of scientific authority in the digital era, thus producing a new reading that is not reductionist towards epistemic pluralism or relativism.

METHOD

This study uses a library research approach with a philosophical-critical analysis orientation to examine and reconstruct Paul Feyerabend's epistemological anarchist thinking in the context of the crisis of scientific authority in the digital era. This approach was chosen

because the focus of the research lies in conceptual exploration, not the collection of empirical field data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the framework of qualitative research, literature review allows researchers to explore, understand, and evaluate theoretical ideas in depth through relevant and verified scientific literature (Creswell, 2014). In addition, this research also utilizes a conceptual and critical analysis approach to dialogue Feyerabend's thoughts with contemporary phenomena such as disinformation, post-truth, and the crisis of trust in science (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

The data sources for this study are secondary data obtained from reputable academic literature, both in the form of classic books and international journal articles. Paul Feyerabend's major works include *Against Method* and *Science in a Free Society*. (Feyerabend, 1978) used as the main theoretical basis (Feyerabend, 1993). In addition, this research also examines various scientific articles that discuss epistemic dynamics in the digital era, including the phenomena of disinformation, echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021), and a crisis of confidence in science (Meer & Hameleers, 2026). Inclusion criteria include publications within the 2015 – 2026 period, relevance to the themes of epistemology and science communication, and significant conceptual contributions to the research focus (Snyder, 2019).

The data analysis procedure was carried out through the stages of literature reduction and thematic synthesis. Literature reduction aims to select the most relevant and up-to-date sources by eliminating references that lack conceptual depth (Snyder, 2019). Next, thematic synthesis was used to group the literature into several main themes, namely Feyerabend's construction of epistemological anarchism, the crisis of scientific authority in the digital age, and the dynamics of epistemic pluralism in a post-truth society. Through this process, the research was able to identify patterns of relationships, tendencies of thought, and conceptual gaps that have not been widely studied (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The final stage of the analysis is a critical-interpretive conceptual reconstruction. At this stage, Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism is reinterpreted in the context of the epistemic transformation of the digital era, particularly regarding the algorithmization of information, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the delegitimization of scientific authority. The result of this process is the formulation of a conceptual model that leads to a synthesis between epistemic pluralism and normative responsibility, thus producing a framework of critical-dialogical pluralism as an alternative to extreme relativism and scientific authoritarianism. This approach aligns with the goal of conceptual research, which is not only to explain theory but also to generate new meanings relevant to the contemporary context (Thomas, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. A Short Biography of Paul Karl Feyerabend

Paul Karl Feyerabend (January 13, 1924 – February 11, 1994) was a leading philosopher of science of the 20th century whose influence transcended the disciplines of philosophy and science. Born in Vienna, Austria, at the beginning of the 20th century, Feyerabend's early interest in physics, astronomy, and scientific phenomena brought him into contact with science journalists, philosophers, and other leading thinkers. He earned his doctorate from the University of Vienna in 1951 under the guidance of Victor Kraft, who opened his path to a vibrant and critical philosophy of science community (Wahyudi et al., 2023).

During his academic career, Feyerabend served as a lecturer at various universities worldwide, including the University of Bristol, the University of California, Berkeley, University College London, and ETH Zurich, where he developed a reputation as a persistent and controversial thinker in the philosophy of science.

Feyerabend was initially influenced by Karl Popper and his empirical falsificationist views, but he later rejected the idea that science could be explained through a universal set of methodological rules. His interactions with figures such as Wittgenstein, Niels Bohr, and David Bohm enriched his thinking on the relationship between scientific theory, observation, and practice (Santo, 2022).

His most famous contribution is the concept of epistemological anarchism, the argument that no single scientific method can be applied universally and that science is not a homogeneous institution subject to rigid methodological rules. Feyerabend argued that scientific progress often occurs through a plurality of approaches and creative irregularity, which he called “anything goes.”

Feyerabend is also known for his involvement in debates about the authority of science, its role in a democratic society, and the pluralism of knowledge. He argued that science should be subject to public criticism and should not dominate all other forms of knowledge. He continued this debate in works such as *Science in a Free Society* and *Farewell to Reason* (Feyerabend, 1978).

Paul Feyerabend spent the rest of his life developing his ideas until his death on February 11, 1994, in Genolier, Switzerland. His legacy remains an important reference material in the study of scientific methodology, epistemology, the democracy of knowledge, and the critique of scientific authority (Wahyudi et al., 2023).

The main works that are well known by Paul Feyerabend include:

1. Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge (1975)

This book is Feyerabend's most famous work and the starting point for his epistemological anarchism. He proposed the thesis that "there is no universal scientific method" and that scientific development often involves seemingly arbitrary strategies. The book became essential reading in the philosophy of science because it challenged the uniformity of the dominant methodological views until then (Feyerabend, 1993).

2. Science in a Free Society (1978)

In this book, Feyerabend extended his critique from the methodology of science to the political and social consequences of the dominance of science in modern society. He asserted that science should not have absolute authority in a democratic society and that epistemic pluralism needs to be respected (Feyerabend, 1978).

3. Farewell to Reason (1987)

This collection of essays explores critiques of classical rationalism and combines historical and philosophical examinations of the origins of the idea of rationality. In this work, he interweaves ideas about relativism and the diversity of knowledge with a critique of the dominance of modern rationalist thought.

4. Three Dialogues on Knowledge (1991)

A dialogue format book that presents Feyerabend's thoughts in a more reflective and polemical style, approaching the reader through the form of a philosophical conversation.

5. Killing Time: The Autobiography of Paul Feyerabend (1995)

A personal memoir released after Feyerabend's death, it presents an autobiography and reflection on his life, including his academic experiences and often controversial personal views.

6. Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being (1999)

This post-publication work reflects Feyerabend's final thoughts on how the scientific tendency to simplify reality can come at the expense of the vast richness of human experience.

B. The Construction of Epistemological Anarchism in Paul Feyerabend's Thought

Paul Feyerabend's ideas about epistemological anarchism emerged as a sharp critique of the idea that science develops through a single, rational, universal, and normative scientific method. According to Feyerabend, the historical reality of science shows that scientific progress often involves violations of methodological rules that are considered standard, so that claims of a single, always superior scientific methodology actually close

off opportunities for creative discovery (Brahimi & Abid, 2026). In other words, what has been considered an absolute principle of scientific methodology is actually a historical construct that does not always apply in scientific practice (Efendi & Fanani, 2025).

This condition led Feyerabend to the idea of methodological pluralism, namely the belief that there is no single rule that is able to absolutely guide all scientific knowledge processes (Muna & Muqtada, 2025). In this context, he proposed that a variety of strategies, including unconventional ones, can contribute to the development of knowledge. Feyerabend's popular principle of anything goes is often misunderstood as a call to epistemic chaos, although philosophically he intended to reject the subordination of science to a single methodological doctrine (Shaw, 2017).

Another important aspect of epistemological anarchism is what Feyerabend called counterinduction. This strategy involves accepting hypotheses that seem to contradict the rules of the dominant method if they can yield productive new insights (Shaw, 2017). This approach asserts that science should not close itself off to new possibilities simply because they do not conform to established methodological rules. Rather, scientific progress often occurs because of the courage to think beyond the boundaries of existing rules (Feyerabend, 1993).

Feyerabend's epistemological construction not only positions science as a dynamic arena of practice but also lays the philosophical foundation for openness to other forms of knowledge (Coniglione, 2024). This reflects the view that science, like other knowledge traditions, is situated within a socio-cultural context and cannot be separated from its historical dynamics. Therefore, science does not possess absolute epistemic privilege over other forms of knowledge simply because of its status as “scientific” according to certain methodological standards.

A number of contemporary studies have also emphasized that Feyerabend's anarchism is not total epistemic relativism. Instead, he advocates a pluralism that retains an internal evaluative mechanism, although it is not dogmatic (Markle, 2023). That is, Feyerabend rejects the monopoly of methodological scientific authority without necessarily eliminating critical evaluation of knowledge claims, but rather shifting it towards dialogical and historical openness.

Thus, Paul Feyerabend's construction of epistemological anarchism can be understood as a paradigm that rejects a single methodological domination, places a plurality of knowledge strategies as a vital foundation for the development of science, and advocates openness to other forms of knowledge that have the potential to enrich scientific insight

(Brahimi & Abid, 2026). This paradigm asserts that science is a historical, creative, and contestative practice that is more alive when freed from the constraints of methodological rigidity.

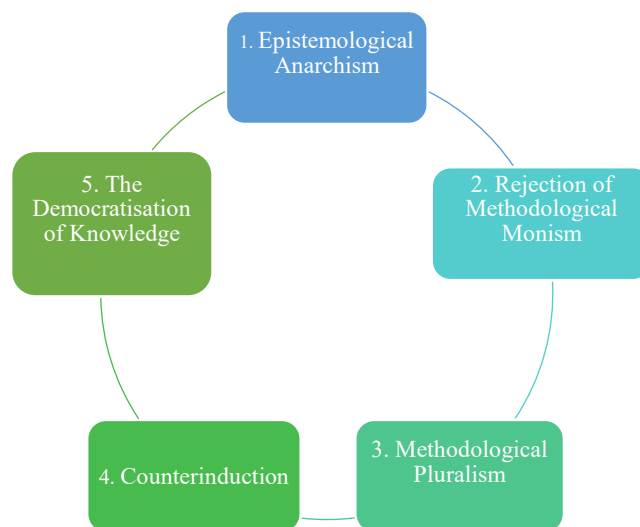


Figure1. *Flowchart of the Construction of Epistemological Anarchism*

C. The Crisis of Scientific Authority in the Digital Age from the Perspective of Epistemological Anarchism

The crisis of scientific authority in the digital age can be understood as a transformation of the structure of knowledge legitimacy in the public sphere. The development of social media and information distribution algorithms has shifted science's position from a relatively stable epistemic authority to one voice among many competing truth claims (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). This phenomenon is often associated with increasing disinformation, polarization, and epistemic fragmentation (Bragazzi & Garbarino, 2024). In this context, scientific authority is no longer automatically accepted based on its institutional status, but must be negotiated in a pluralistic and competitive digital space.

From the perspective of epistemological anarchism, this situation can be read as a consequence of the collapse of methodological monism in public consciousness. Feyerabend rejected the claim that science has absolute privilege over truth. As digital space opens up widespread access to various forms of knowledge, this condition seems in line with the epistemological pluralism he advocates. However, digital plurality is not identical to rational pluralism. As shown by Jasanoff (2017), scientific authority is always social and political, so that scientific legitimacy depends on collective trust, not simply methodological validity.

The findings from contemporary digital education and Islamic communication studies further reinforce this distinction between epistemological pluralism and unrestricted relativism (Maulana et al., 2025). Digital literacy based on local cultural contexts demonstrates that the expansion of access to digital information needs to be accompanied by structured literacy, contextual understanding, and validation processes, while the use of artificial intelligence in Islamic learning and preaching similarly requires expert evaluation, contextual sensitivity, and ethical oversight because algorithmic outputs may contain bias, inaccuracies, or contextual misunderstandings (Maulana et al., 2023). From a Feyerabendian perspective, these findings suggest that the democratization of knowledge should not be understood as the equalization of all truth claims, but rather as an expansion of opportunities for competing perspectives to enter a critical and dialogical process, in which openness to alternative knowledge is balanced by mechanisms of intersubjective correction and epistemic responsibility.

This crisis can also be understood through the concept of epistemic fragmentation. Digital media creates echo chambers that reinforce group beliefs without exposure to critical correction (Nguyen, 2018). In such situations, scientific claims compete horizontally with opinion, conspiracy narratives, and pseudoscience. When read through Feyerabend's lens, this phenomenon is not simply a consequence of pluralism, but rather demonstrates the absence of the intersubjective evaluation mechanisms he considered essential in theoretical competition. In other words, what occurs is not the realization of the ideal of pluralism, but rather its distortion without a critical framework.

The post-truth era further complicates this situation. Research shows that information reception is often more influenced by political identity and emotion than by empirical verification (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018). Within Feyerabend's framework, this demonstrates that science is never entirely socially neutral. However, unlike extreme relativism, Feyerabend still recognizes the importance of open debate and the exchange of arguments as a corrective mechanism. The digital crisis demonstrates that this deliberative structure is actually weakening.

Furthermore, the crisis of scientific authority is also intertwined with the digital political economy. Platform algorithms are designed to maximize engagement, not truth (Hongladarom, 2020). In this situation, scientific claims are treated on a par with sensational content, as both are evaluated based on the logic of attention. The perspective of epistemological anarchism helps us understand that the primary problem is not simply the plurality of knowledge, but rather the transformation of legitimacy structures, which

are no longer based on rational argumentation but rather on the algorithmic distribution of information.

Thus, through Feyerabend's perspective, the crisis of scientific authority in the digital age cannot be reduced to a direct consequence of epistemological pluralism (Rider, 2018). Rather, it is the result of a complex interaction between epistemic openness, socio-political dynamics, and digital infrastructure that changes the way knowledge legitimacy is constructed (Peters et al., 2020). This perspective allows for a more nuanced reading: not a return to scientific authoritarianism, but a reflection on how pluralism can be maintained without losing standards of critical evaluation.

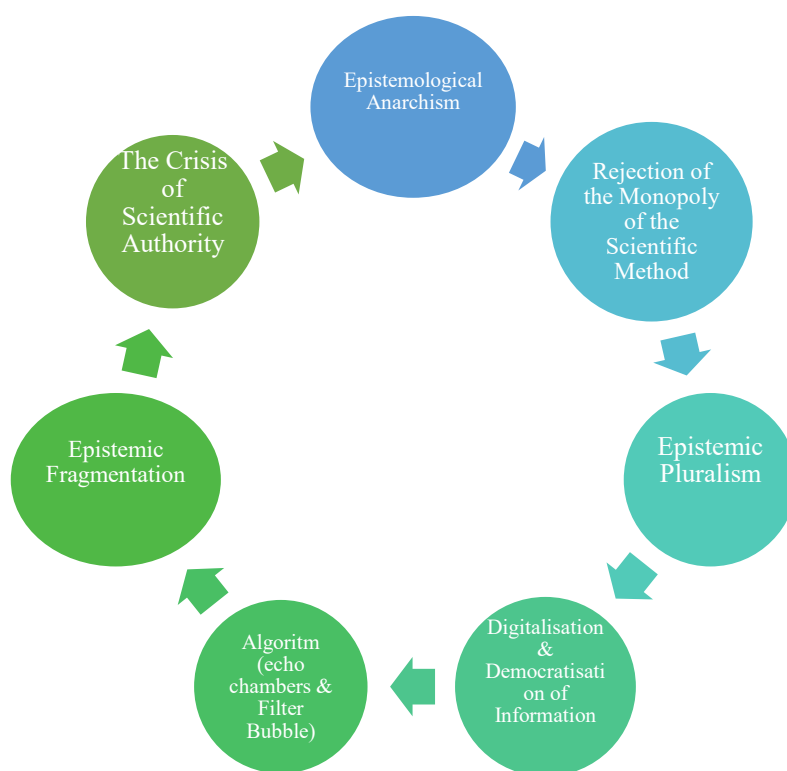


Figure2. *Conceptual Model of the Crisis of Scientific Authority from the Perspective of Feyerabend's Epistemological Anarchism*

D. Reconstructing Epistemological Anarchism to Respond to the Crisis of Scientific Authority in the Digital Age

The reconstruction of epistemological anarchism in the context of the crisis of scientific authority in the digital age needs to begin with a reinterpretation of the principle of pluralism inherited from Paul Feyerabend. The principle of "anything goes" cannot be understood as radical relativism, but rather as a critique of methodological monopoly. In a digital context filled with disinformation, pluralism without an evaluative framework actually accelerates the erosion of scientific authority (Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

Therefore, reconstruction is necessary so that pluralism remains compatible with standards of public rationality.

First, epistemological anarchism needs to be reformulated as critical pluralism. Feyerabend envisioned theoretical competition as a mechanism for scientific advancement, not the abolition of evaluation criteria. In the era of echo chambers, this competition is distorted because individuals are only exposed to information that reinforces their beliefs (Nguyen, 2018). Studies on the dynamics of misinformation show that epistemic segregation hinders collective correction (Kirmayer, 2024). Thus, the reconstruction of pluralism must add the principle of shared epistemic responsibility.

Second, scientific authority needs to be reconceived as dialogic authority. Research shows that public trust in science depends on perceptions of scientists' transparency and integrity (Massarani et al., 2016). In a digital society, legitimacy is no longer hierarchical, but participatory. Thus, Feyerabend's anti-authoritarian spirit can be reconstructed as a push towards open and deliberative scientific communication, rather than as a justification for anti-science.

Third, the reconstruction must take into account the algorithmic structure of digital platforms. Algorithms shape patterns of visibility and amplify sensational content, preventing epistemic competition from taking place in a neutral arena (Cinelli et al., 2021). Online polarization has been shown to deepen epistemic fragmentation and weaken shared reference to scientific facts (Del et al., 2016). In this context, epistemic pluralism must be accompanied by digital literacy and regulation of algorithmic transparency to prevent it from being co-opted by the logic of the attention economy.

Fourth, the reconstruction of epistemological anarchism needs to emphasize the importance of intersubjective correction mechanisms. Scientific knowledge derives legitimacy not only from methods, but also from processes of open criticism and replication.(Mancilla, 2015). This perspective is in line with the idea that the democratization of knowledge must be accompanied by collective evaluation structures (Jasanoff, 2017). Pluralism without correction will turn into relativism, while correction without pluralism risks becoming dogmatism.

Ultimately, this reconstruction leads to a synthesis between epistemic pluralism and normative responsibility. The crisis of scientific authority in the digital age is not a reason to reinstate scientific authoritarianism, but rather a momentum to strengthen legitimacy based on dialogue and accountability. As studies on post-truth and the epistemic crisis have shown, the solution lies not in silencing alternatives, but in strengthening public

deliberative structures (Gallotti et al., 2020). Thus, a reconstructed epistemological anarchism can serve as the foundation for a model of scientific authority that is democratic, reflective, and adaptive to digital challenges.

Table1. *Reconstructing Epistemological Anarchism in the Digital Age*

No	Initial Concept (Feyerabend)	Digital Era Problems	Conceptual Reconstruction	Practical Implications
1	Rejection of the monopoly method	Competing claims to truth without standards	Critical pluralism (not relativism)	Argument & evidence-based evaluation
2	Scientific anti-dogmatism	Anti-science & public distrust	Dialogic authority	Transparency & open communication
3	Theory competition	Echo chambers & polarization	Public deliberation across perspectives	Data-driven discussion forum
4	Epistemic freedom	Viral disinformation	Collective epistemic responsibility	Critical digital literacy
5	Critique of the hegemony of science	Algorithms amplify sensationalism	Algorithmic regulation & transparency	Digital platform accountability
6	Dynamics of scientific change	Epistemic fragmentation	Intersubjective correction mechanisms	Public peer review & fact-checking

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the crisis of scientific authority in the digital age is not a direct result of Paul Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism, as is often simplistically assumed. Rather, it is the result of structural distortions resulting from the algorithmization of information, the attention economy, and the fragmentation of the digital public sphere. The epistemological pluralism that Feyerabend referred to was never intended to legitimize limitless relativism, but rather as a critique of methodological dogmatism, ensuring that science remains open to correction and creativity. Thus, what is collapsing today is not scientific rationality itself, but rather the social mechanisms that have sustained its legitimacy and public trust.

The main contribution of this paper lies in its attempt to reconstruct Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism in critical dialogue with the contemporary epistemic crisis. This study does not stop at a historical reading of Feyerabend's thought, but rather positions it as a

reflective framework for understanding the transformation of knowledge legitimacy in the digital era. The novelty of this research lies in the synthesis of epistemic pluralism and normative responsibility, which produces a conceptual model of "critical-dialogical pluralism" as an alternative to two extremes: scientific authoritarianism and nihilistic relativism. Thus, epistemological anarchism is not positioned as a threat to science, but rather as a reflective foundation for re-strengthening scientific authority in a democratic, deliberative, and adaptive manner in digital society.

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