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Opinion – Sou Ciência: Will we face the parallel reality?

There are countless tasks for the reconstruction of Brazil in the coming decades, and on new bases. In this process, universities and research institutes will have different missions and, probably, one of them will be the most crucial: to be able to face and disarm the machines of lies, toxic content, denialism and hate – which are still contagious and efficient to disconnect segments of the population. shared reality, historical and scientific evidence and agreed truths. In a pandemic, this lying machine was even more deadly and perverse.

Will it be possible to “rescue” at least part of this population? What can educational institutions connected to society, media and governments do?

Several researchers and journalists have pointed out the (dis)information circuits created by leaders with particular interests (generally non-republican and non-democratic). Capillarized, they reached portions of the population unprepared to react, mobilizing beliefs, exploiting good faith, ignorance, prejudices and resentments.

Sites, blogs, youtubers, tiktokers, public or closed networks, deep web, content and streaming platforms, acting as a block or more isolated, but always in synergy, initially formed a system of “dispute of narratives” and “pseudo theories” that metamorphosed into self-fulfilling prophecy: disseminated with such intensity, they intended to recreate reality on another, parallel plane, disconnected from scientific evidence, documents and consolidated literature.

Almost 60 years ago, Darcy Ribeiro, formulator and dean of the newly created UnB, had consolidated in text the tasks of the “necessary university student” for the country: she should relate to society at all levels, in professional training, research and experimentation, extension and assistance, collaboration with the public service and the productive sectors, strengthening education at all levels, and defending the democratic regime. For this last task, the challenge would be internal and external, guaranteeing the diversity of voices and thoughts within the universities and acting for the cultural development of the country for an autonomous integration of individuals in the civilization of their time.

For Darcy Ribeiro, who would be 100 years old in 2022, the university’s social role would be fulfilled when it came out from behind its walls, amplified the connection with society and had mass communication instruments: radio, TV, publishing sector, press and cinema (and today, it would certainly include the various digital modalities). According to Darcy, “only by possessing them, the university will be able to fulfill the tasks of raising the level of knowledge and information of the national society, of fighting against the cultural marginality of certain layers of the population and of combating the campaigns of alienation , cultural colonization and political indoctrination to which the nation is subjected” (p.165).

Half a century later, Brazil has actions in this area, but still far short of what it could be. And, as Paulo Freire warns, a Communicating University is a two-way street. It should not only bring content to society, but build a dialogic process, in which both parties (re)know and (in)form themselves together.

Thinking about the Communicating University in Brazil in the 21st centuryand with the tasks of post-Covid and post-Bolsonaro national reconstruction, the proposals of SoU_Ciência and 18 entities in this area, which signed a complete document, are as follows:

1. Expand the channels of dialogue, listening and university-society articulationcreating councils and forums for participation, listening to demands and building collaborative paths, especially in conjunction with social movements;

two. Take communication as a strategic frontdefending public policies that democratize the communication system and guarantee this right by strengthening community, popular, alternative and public networks, with the production of content and investment in teams, audiovisual and digital platforms;

3. Expand and strengthen the University TV networkintegrating with the country’s Educational TV;

4. Create Quotas on all open TV for scientific dissemination and popularization programsmaking this content available on digital platforms;

5. Create incentives for science popularizers and scientific journalism, in all areas of knowledge, so that we have scientists and communicators in all channels working with institutional support and resources;

6. Include in institutional evaluations of programs, courses, teachers to communication, scientific dissemination, and cultural dissemination as relevant issues

7. Use plural languages ??and means of communication to reach different segments of society

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8. Create a broad front to combat denialism, historical revisionism and fake science (as fact check) and bring elements for permanent judicialization against quackery and producers of lies disguised as science;

9. Contribute to access and data transparency within higher education institutions and create strategies to combat the misuse of the General Data Protection Law to justify the “data blackout”.

If universities, society and public authorities, in collaboration with the professional and ethical media, do not decisively assume this task, we will continue to be haunted by a part of the country polarized by hate narratives, lies and memes. The problem is that the product widely offered by merchants of parallel reality and real resentment has been much more efficient than the limited one offered by universities, even in language that is difficult for non-specialists to understand. The challenge is urgent: either we build the Communicating University now, and amplify the dissemination on a mass scale and in dialogue with the population, or we will remain at a great disadvantage – and the future will take its toll.

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