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A ciência precisa chegar a todos, mas não com base em estratégias fracas

Science needs to reach everyone, but not on the basis of weak strategies

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The importance of science being heard is undeniable. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted this issue, leading to global concern about how to act and prevent deaths.[1] Despite this, in several countries, scientists have found it difficult to make themselves heard. This was the case in Brazil, which at the time adopted an openly denialist policy that cost its citizens dearly.[2] At the time, many strategies were employed by scientists to avoid the pandemic's huge social impact on people (direct communication, clashes with government officials, creation of content on social networks, participation in podcasts, publications on the subject), but the reality does not seem to have changed much. In the end, what we saw was a strong and persistent mortality rate.[3]

Various communication strategies for science to reach society have been suggested over time. The lack of effectiveness of scientists on this topic led Galetti and Costa-Pereira[4], to suggest that they "need social media influencers" to spread important science messages. This suggestion was quickly refuted by Franco Souza et al.[5], who pointed out the contradictions of this strategy and suggested that, instead of exalting the opinion of influencers, scientists should "focus more attention on having representatives in the National Congress". We agree with the latter authors and, with a more current look at the situation, we are able to point out other weaknesses in this strategy. Since we are not immune to fraud even within scientific circles, it is not difficult to find celebrities supporting or gaining from pseudoscience and denialism.[6] In addition, celebrities are subject to pressure from sponsors and, even when they are not, they can be sponsored by brands that lobby to weaken or overturn science-based regulatory legislation. As if these contradictions were not enough, social networks can be acquired by deniers[7], and operate by the logic of consuming short-lived content that we do not know how it is delivered to users due to the lack of transparency of their algorithms. In addition, large social media outlets have now revealed their contempt for facts by abandoning fact-checking mechanisms[8], historically joining the great industrialists of the 19th century who only sought profit, subjecting a large part of English society to physical and moral ills.[9]

All this shows us that the challenge is much more complex and will not be easily solved on platforms where denialism can be monetized. We do not disagree that digital influencers can be allies in science communication, but in our view, they would play a much more relevant role by promoting profiles of scientists and science communication professionals. They would be even more relevant when campaigning for candidates committed to science and supporting policies to fund and strengthen science and regulate the media. To avoid new pandemics, environmental collapse, climate breakdown and the countless other tragedies that are already looming, we need to politically mobilize the whole of society to tackle the roots of the problem. With deniers in positions of power and control over information, we cannot guarantee that truthful scientific information will be delivered.

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Author´s contribution

Eduardo Guimarães Santos: idea, literature revision, writing and editing the manuscript.
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