

Can Social Media be a Space for Democratic Inclusivity?

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Lynn Schofield Clark

Abstract

This think piece invites readers to imagine what it might be like to seek a technological solution regarding the problems inherent within participatory democracy. The piece suggests that such a process must begin by first identifying the constraints to participation that are structured into society in relation to privilege, and then imagining how social media could be designed to play a role in addressing these constraints in order to work toward a more equitable and participatory future.

Keywords

inclusivity, diversity, imagination, democracy, participation, privilege

Imagine if there were an algorithm in social media that, over time, guided us all toward understanding those people and groups in our society whose voices are least likely to be heard. Imagine if there were an algorithm that could disallow dominant voices from speaking until those from non-dominant groups felt heard.

Imagine if there were an algorithm that brought together diverse teams of people and guided them through a process designed to address society's complex problems in collaborative and innovative ways. Imagine if there were an algorithm that could anticipate what we needed to know about people and groups whose life experiences differed from our own in order to enhance our own empathy.

Imagine if there were an algorithm that provided those persons least likely to participate in democratic decision making with information that was not only timely and accurate, but connected to their deepest concerns, and that then privileged their voices in discussions about how to address those concerns and guided them through the processes of participating in decisions that would affect their—and our—collective outcomes.

What would social media look like then?

What would our society look like?

Is it really so difficult to imagine?

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Author Biography

Lynn Schofield Clark (PhD, University of Colorado) is Professor and Chair of the Media, Film, and Journalism Studies Department and Director of the Estlow International Center for Journalism and New Media at the University of Denver. She is author of *The Parent App: Understanding Families in a Digital Age* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and is currently researching the ways urban young people create and share news through social media.

University of Denver, USA

Corresponding Author:

Lynn Schofield Clark, Estlow International Center for Journalism and New Media, University of Denver, 2490 S. Gaylord St., Denver, CO 80208, USA.

Email: Lynn.Clark@DU.edu

