

Six or Seven Things Social Media Can Do For Democracy | Medium

By Ethan Zuckerman

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Ethan Zuckerman notes that we are in a moment where assessments of social media's relationship with democracy come predominantly in the form of a critique. But he argues that it is important to imagine the positive potential that social media may have.

Social media doesn't work the way we think it should. That's the conclusion many people have come to in the wake of revelations about [Cambridge Analytica's mining of Facebook data to build political profiles and sway elections](#). Perhaps the concerns go further back, to the election of a US president in 2016 who seems fueled by social media, the more polarizing and divisive the better. Or perhaps it was Brexit that broke you. Or a gunman ["self-investigating" the Comet Ping Pong pizza parlor](#), spurious accusations of [crisis actors at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas](#) and the amazingly inventive web of conspiracies the internet seems to engender. The cyberutopians have retreated, [the creators of the modern internet are doing penance](#) and we're all social media critics now.

Those critics include (suddenly) self-reflective executives at social media platforms, who are desperate for ideas on how their tools can return to society's good graces. Having learned that platforms manage to metrics, making business decisions to maximize revenues, pageviews or engagement, there's a new urgency to create a metric that will give us better social media, tools less likely to isolate, polarize and radicalize us. Tristan Harris has preached the gospel of [Time Well Spent](#) to newly receptive audiences at Facebook. At Cortico, my MIT colleague Deb Roy is working to [define measures of healthy online communities](#), so Twitter and other platforms can optimize to encourage these behaviors.

These are worthy projects, and I am following both with optimism and interest. But I am concerned that we've not had a robust conversation about what we want social media to do for us.

Source: [Six or Seven Things Social Media Can Do For Democracy](#)