Democracy, inclusion and participation in the age of social media

by Farah Abdi

Content

1. Introduction

This workshop covers the following topics: democracy, the importance of participation, inclusion of marginalised communities, and how to use the digital space to start movements and advocate for change.

We are living in a time when "fake news" is rife. Xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination are on the rise. Right-wing parties and movements in Europe are using issues such as immigration to spread fear, win elections and challenge democracy. It is therefore very important for us to educate young people so that future generations do not have to live in a world that thrives on fear and hate.

There are three modules in this workshop: firstly participants come up with a common definition for democracy, then they learn about the three I's and lastly they together develop an idea of how to use the digital space to create change. The workshop was developed digitally in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but it can also be done in person.

It is recommended that trainers ask as many questions as possible over the course of the workshop. Not only to increase engagement but also to understand the varied knowledge level on these topics within the learning group.

DURATION
90 minutes

TARGET GROUP
high school students and other young people between the ages of 14 and 18

FORMAT
digital or on site

MATERIALS
DIGITAL
Each participant and the trainer need their own laptop

ON SITE
At least one computer and projector will be needed in order to use the PowerPoint (see annex)

→ **All materials can be downloaded here**

2. Schedule

DURATION	MODULE	TOOLS	DESCRIPTION
10 min	**Introduction**	PowerPoint-presentation	The workshop should start with a welcome by the trainers, an ice-breaker and an introduction to the workshop.
10 min	**MODULE 1** **Definition of democracy**	PowerPoint-presentation	After a quick welcome, the first module focuses on the development of a common definition of democracy. It is important to ask the participants about their understanding and knowledge as it might differ within the group.
40 min	**MODULE 2** **The 3 i's. Inform, Inspire and Involve**	PowerPoint-presentation	Next, we delve deep into what we call the three I's. For a democracy to be vibrant, members of that democracy need to be informed when making choices, they also need to be inspired to take part in that democracy and finally they need to be involved. This module is the heart of the workshop. This is where participants will get the most information and engagement.
10 min	**MODULE 3** **What is next?**	PowerPoint-presentation	Now that we are informed, inspired and involved, what is next? How can we use the digital space to fight for change? The last module develops ideas of how to continue to engage with this topic.
20 min	**MODULE 4** **End of workshop and homework/exercise**	PowerPoint-presentation or printed and then shared with the students	This last part of the workshop is to introduce participants to a guide on how they can start their own digital campaigns. They can then work on this at home or in a session after the workshop.

3. Implementation

INTRODUCE YOURSELF – 2 min

The workshop should start with an introduction of the trainers:
- What is your name?
- Where are you from?
- What do you do?

ICEBREAKER – 5 min

It is very useful to start the workshop off with a fun ice-breaker so that the students feel comfortable and open. Engagement during the workshop is important and this is one of the areas where this can be tapped into.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSHOP – 3 min

In order to introduce the workshop to the participants, the trainers can answer the following questions:
- What is it about?
- What discussions are we going to have?
- What are the aims of the workshop?

The introductory round can be used to also ask partici-pants about their expectations and first thoughts on the workshop.

Definition of democracy — 10 min

What is democracy?
When asking this question as a trainer, you should give the students the opportunity to collect their answers in a mind map. If the workshop is digital, you can use apps like Miro to visualize their brainstorming. If the workshop is in person, you can hand out moderation cards that the students can write on. You can then respond to their answers accordingly before reading out the definition of democracy according to Wikipedia.

The mind map can be referred to when necessary or helpful during the upcoming parts of the workshop.
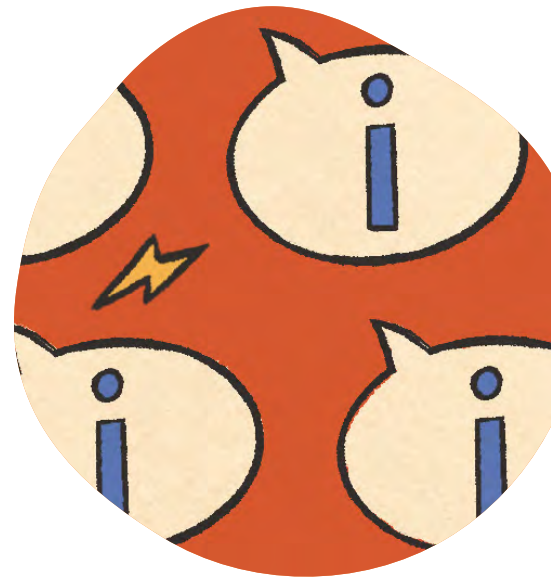
The 3 i's — 40 min

In order to simplify the tools of participation when it comes to a vibrant and inclusive democracy, the students will learn about the three I's: inform, inspire and involve.

INFORM

Information is key when it comes to participation and making decisions. A lot of people make decisions based on where they get their information from. This is why factual information is very important.

At this point, the trainers ask the students where they get their information from primarily: television, radio, newspapers or the Internet. Depending on whether the workshop is virtual or in person, students get to raise their hands either in the chats or in person. You can then pick three participants to answer the question. Please do not pick the same three students each time.

After finding out where the students get their information from, the trainer should present facts and talk about their implications with the students:

According to a study released by → Statista at the beginning of 2021, the Internet and television are the most common sources of information for Europeans:

70% of Germans, 79% of Spaniards and 74% of Italians get their information from the internet.

This clearly shows us that digitalization plays a very important role in our democracy. Therefore, we have to make sure that as many people as possible have access to, and have a voice on, digital platforms so that no one is left behind.

Ways in which we can ensure widespread access to digital platforms
Even though the internet is the biggest source of information today, not everyone has access to it. Internet poverty is real and it needs to be dealt with in order for us to guarantee equal participation. The trainer asks students about their ideas:

● How can we do this?

Asking this question is another way of increasing engagement with the students. They get to think and come up with potential solutions. You can divide the students into two groups, and then give them the necessary time to discuss. Each group can then share three ideas.

The digital chasm
The trainer should introduce participants to the meaning of digital chasm:

Availability and affordability of the internet is what we refer to as the digital chasm. Fast and reliable internet at an affordable price. If we work on these two issues, then more and more people will be brought on board.

The trainer can then address the questions of who needs to do this and quickly explain why a collaboration between the private and public sector can be one way of increasing access.

INSPIRE.

For the second I, trainers ask participants about their understanding of inspiration:

- What does inspiration mean to you / define inspiration?

You can ask the students to answer this question by writing on moderation cards if the workshop is in person, or on digital pads if the workshop is online. You can then read through the answers and summarise them before proceeding.

Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration also propels a person from apathy to possibility, and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities. Recent research conducted by the → Harvard Business Review shows that inspiration can have a major effect on important life outcomes. A summary of these results can be shared with the participants if there is enough time.

A second question can specify the different approaches that people have when it comes to inspiration:

- What/who inspires you?

The trainers should ask participants to raise their hands, either in the chat if it is digital or in person if it is in the classroom.

INVOLVE.

For a democracy to thrive, we need to have equal and diverse participation. Diversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet. Civility is a sensible attribute in the kind of world we have. Narrowness of heart and mind is not.

So how can we make sure everybody is involved, and that marginalized communities are not left behind? The trainers should divide participants into groups of 4 to 6 students, depending on the number of students in the classroom, and give them 5 minutes to discuss and come up with answers. Then each group should pick one person to present the group's answers/solutions.

Some of the answers/solutions might include:

1. To lobby social media platforms to put in place stronger safety measures to guard against online hate and bullying.

2. To encourage lawmakers to enact tough laws against any form of discrimination.

3. To create safe bubbles on the internet where members of different communities can meet to discuss issues affecting them in a civil way.

4. To increase and promote positive visibility so that young people from marginalized communities can have images of themselves on mainstream platforms.

Trainers are advised to keep these answers in mind during the exercise in order to support the working groups in case they are stuck or need some suggestions.

Now that we are informed, inspired, and involved, what is next? — 10 min

After we have informed ourselves, and we are inspired to take on the world, it is important to now develop ideas to implement these learnings in the future. The trainers start off this part by asking participants:

- How can we use social media as a tool to advocate for what we are passionate about?

The trainers ask them to raise their hand (in chat or on site) and then again pick three students to answer the question.

As a second step, we take a look at two popular social movements that have extensively used social media to advocate for change:

- Fridays For Future
- Black Lives Matter

The trainers ask participants who know of these movements to raise their hands. They then pick two students to explain to the other students what they are about. Other students can add to what is presented by their peers.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

The → Black Lives Matter movement is a decentralized political and social movement protesting against incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against black people.

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE

→ Fridays for Future is an international movement of school students who skip Friday classes to participate in demonstrations to demand action from political leaders to take action to prevent climate change and for the fossil fuel industry to transition to renewable energy.

MODULE 4
End of the workshop (kind of)
– 5 min

Trainers are supposed to quickly summarise the workshop and then introduce (as a voluntary exercise or homework) the information below. If there is enough time, the trainers can also decide to make it a part of the workshop.

Before ending the workshop, open the floor to questions and feedback.

Homework/exercise part of the workshop — 15 min

The following introduction is sent to the participants or distributed as a printout in class and quickly explained. It summarises things to keep in mind when creating social movements online. This exercise is still a part of the workshop, so it is very important that the trainers encourage students to actually follow up on what they have learnt and create a digital movement on social justice issues and other things they care about.

Harnessing the power of social media
According to → Statista, social media users in 2020 amounted to over 3.6 billion users across all platforms. This number is set to increase to 4.41 billion users by 2025. Social media has also shown us that we can all have a platform and a voice by simply creating an account. Gone are the days when a few powerful people had exclusive access to traditional media platforms like TV, radio and newspapers.

THE 4 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENT

1. Establish your visuals.
Branding and visuals can make or break your campaign idea. So it's very important to get this right. Being creative helps in creating viral campaigns. Think outside the box!

2. Language matters.
When we are drafting a campaign, it is very important to use sensitive and inclusive language so that no one is left behind. Discriminatory language reproduces discriminatory structures that we are trying to change.

3. Have a clear idea of the audience you want to reach.
A successful campaign always has a strong focus on who it wants to reach first. For example, Fridays For Future first targeted school children and once that was successful, others came on board.

4. Make it easy.
We live in a world that's constantly on the move. Most people don't have the time to consume or read complex campaigns. So the simpler and catchier the message is, the more successful the campaign will be.

Now try to implement these four steps and create your own campaign!

AUTHOR
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Farah Abdi is a 26 year old Somali transgender refugee, blogger, author, feminist, human rights activist, motivational speaker and youth education advocate. She has been living in Berlin for the last 4 years.

4. Sources

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5. Imprint