

Review of: "Building a digital republic to reduce health disparities and improve population health in the United States"

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Dear Authors:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your manuscript. It was a pleasure reading about such a topical question.

Regarding my review,

In terms of form, I can see from the previous version to this that some issues were already addressed, namely, in terms of the context leading to the research question or the problem, the long-term objectives of your research, the structure of the paper, and the type of paper this is, i.e., previously I had some difficulties understanding whether this was a theoretical paper or an empirical one supported by your data or if it was more of an essay type. I can see now that it is an editorial. Namely, your article benefited from the inclusion in the first section of the paragraph stating your purposes, why you are addressing the topic, and the impact you expect it to have. Good improvement in the abstract; it is now much more enlightening.

In terms of substance, while implementing a digital republic is essential to equal opportunities in healthcare, as we have experienced with the pandemic, digital health can help people in need, draw lines of action faster, and monitor people's health more effectively. Implementing a digital identity card allowing for a digital republic to take place in which people would enroll in social benefits in one automated way and autonomously, targeting the benefits to those most in need, would be critical for the development of similar conditions in health care for all. Namely, your focus seems to be on disadvantaged people or people with mental health problems, which is essential, and I agree with your argument. Still, I think it would be helpful to emphasize its benefits in broader terms. It would be a gain if you could also state in your article the importance of the digital republic for all because by helping the ones in need, everyone gains, as the system will work better.

Nonetheless, the organization of a digital republic requires essential structures and the mobilization of different tools and ethics, particularly in terms of equal access, privacy, security, usefulness, and regulation that must be addressed clearly, both by governments and tech companies, as well as by the population in general. Therefore, I think three key points would be essential to explore further in your article: 1) literacy, 2) regulation, and 3) responsibility.

1. Literacy is critical because people must be able to make informed decisions and choices while having full awareness

of the implications of a digital republic (potential dangers, benefits, advantages, disadvantages, reach, why, and how it works/would work). This could be addressed through governmental programs on the topic directed to groups or entities. It would also imply the promotion of literacy for citizenship, which takes me to the second point, which is responsibility.

2. Responsibility regarding its individual, organizational, political, and collective aspects, which could be part of the literacy program, means people, companies, and governments, have a duty to deal with the mechanisms of a digital republic or have control over them and are accountable for their uses. Finally, we need regulation to work not just on an equal basis but on similar terms.
3. Regulation anticipating all the possible scenarios (different locations, access, people with other conditions) is fundamental. You could discuss how to create it, what is involved, its ethical and material aspects, and the significant actors and definitions involved.

Literacy, responsibility, and regulation would be essential for people to be able to negotiate the terms of their contracts in a Rawlsian world, as you stated. This follows your idea that “achievable automatic enrollment in welfare systems” would be possible in such a world because, in Rawls’s definition, justice as equality entails contractual positions between individuals, where free and rational people concerned with progressing their interests would accept the fundamental terms of their equal association, which would be grounded on comparable informed, ethical, and responsible standards. Thus, predictive analytics would work not just for “precision medicine and precision public health” but also for anticipating human behavior, e.g., in case of catastrophic events, like a war, or emergencies like a pandemic, natural disasters, and so on, where the system’s response would be faster.

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A.P.