



# People, Power and Technology:

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The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report

doteveryone

# About DotEveryone

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DotEveryone is a think tank that champions responsible technology for the good of everyone in society. Our work explores the social impact of technology, shows what responsible technology looks like, and builds active communities to create change.

Visit [www.doteveryone.org.uk](http://www.doteveryone.org.uk) to learn more.

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## Our Principal Partners



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# Foreword

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We are at a critical moment in our relationship with the internet.

Internet technologies are changing our world at a speed we have never seen before, in ways we could never have imagined. And it's easy to feel powerless—as if change is happening *to* us, not *for* us.

Until now, feelings like these have been largely unstudied. But with the launch of the first annual Digital Attitudes Report, we have evidence to show how Britain thinks and feels about the products, the services, and the companies that have changed our lives.

I founded DotEveryone because I believe it's essential that everyone has a say in shaping the future of technology. *People, Power and Technology* is an important step towards making that happen.

The results from this first year of the survey reveal that our optimism about technology is mixed with a sense of powerlessness and resignation. They also uncover a need and an appetite for a public voice—a democratic and fair way to steer technology's progress and unlock its potential for the good of society.

We must listen to what people want from technology, how it can support and augment our lives. And we must not let change happen to us because we were too busy looking at our phones.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martha Lane Fox".

Martha Lane Fox  
Founder & Executive Chair  
DotEveryone

# Executive Summary

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The internet is the defining technology of our age. Connectivity and information are utilities, like electricity or water, that touch and influence every aspect of modern life in ways we can and cannot see.

The fact that it's happening does not necessarily mean we are happy about it. Internet-connected products and services are almost ubiquitous: often we use them without thinking; frequently we have no choice.

This new research from DotEveryone looks beyond internet usage and explores how the British public thinks and feels about the internet technologies shaping our world and changing our lives. It is based on a nationally representative survey of 2,000 people online and 500 by phone, backed by in-depth conversations in focus groups, which are quoted in this report.

This is the first of two reports on that research. In the second report we will present detailed analysis of the public's understanding of digital technologies.

This report highlights:

- The internet has had a strongly positive impact on our lives as individuals, but people are less convinced it has been beneficial for society as a whole. 50% say it has made life a lot better for people like themselves, only 12% say it's had a very positive impact on society.
- There is a major understanding gap around technologies. Only a third of people are aware that data they have not actively chosen to share has been collected. A quarter have no idea how internet companies make their money.
- People feel disempowered by a lack of transparency in how online products and services operate. 89% want clearer terms and conditions, half would like to know how their data is used but can't find out.
- There is a public demand for greater accountability from technology companies. Two thirds say government should be helping ensure companies treat their customers, staff and society fairly.

# Recommendations

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Britain needs new ways to understand and respond to the social consequences of technology. We are not just 65 million people on our own digital journeys, but one society, being changed irrevocably.

This research shows a clear public demand for technology to be more responsible and accountable. Individuals are overwhelmed by the power and potential of the changes new technologies bring. These changes will get faster, rather than slower.

We must respond to them together, as a society, and create new ways to understand the impact of technology, new protections, and new accountability. This response must listen to public concerns, communicate clearly to the public about these changes and put public representation at its heart.

Based on the findings of this first national digital attitudes survey,  
Doteveryone recommends:

1. Investment in **new forms of public engagement and education**, from both government and technology businesses
2. **Shared standards for understandability and transparency** so everyone can understand more about the products and services they use
3. **Independent regulation and accountability**, so standards are upheld and people know who to turn to when things go wrong

## 1. Investment in new forms of public engagement and education

People love the internet—but not at any cost. When asked to make choices between innovation and changes to their communities and public services, people found those trade-offs unacceptable. This research shows the need for:

- The creation and maintenance of a rigorous evidence base about public understanding and attitudes toward technologies.
- Increased public digital understanding for everyone—not just children—and identifying potential harms to individuals and to society.
- Training public leaders in digital understanding—making sure those at the top of public services and institutions are able to take advantage of technology for the benefit of everyone and mitigate possible harms and unintended consequences.

## **2. Shared standards for understandability and transparency**

People are fed up with online products and services which many feel are deliberately designed to obfuscate. 89% of people want clearer terms and conditions; more than half would like to know about the use and security of their data but can't find this out.

Our future digital society cannot operate if no one understands what they have signed up to. Technology companies should collaborate on and adopt:

- Clear, plain English terms and conditions that make it explicit how services operate and how personal information is used.
- Transparent, trustworthy design patterns that show how services work and decisions are made.
- Accessible ways for people to report concerns.

## **3. Independent regulation and accountability**

People are not sure who they should turn to when they have concerns and are sceptical about how committed technology companies are to taking action when things go wrong.

This research shows there is public demand for:

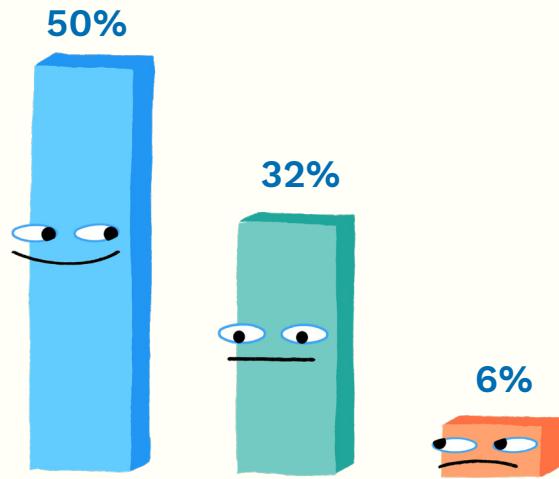
- A single place for the public to turn to. Many different government departments or regulators already cover different aspects of technology—that's partly why it's hard for the public to understand who's in charge. This body can direct the public towards the help they need and make sure that they get real accountability.
- Maintenance and upholding of standards and best practice.
- Incentivising responsible innovation that is good for society, not just good for business.



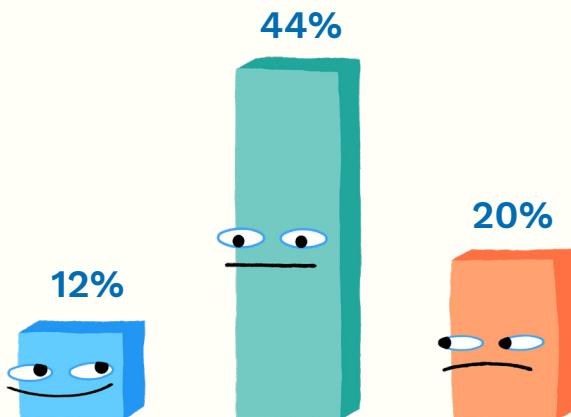
# My Digital Life. Our Digital Society.

People see the internet as good for them as individuals, but less good for society.

Half (50%) say it has made life a lot better for “people like me” and another 32% say it has made it a little better. Only 6% say it has made it a lot or a little worse.



But only one in ten (12%) see a ‘very positive impact’ and 44% a ‘fairly positive’ impact on society overall. One fifth (20%) see an overall negative impact on society.



Society is not divided into tech-lovers and luddites—people hold these apparently conflicting attitudes simultaneously. And some feel discomfort around their own reliance on technologies.

**“I use [Facebook] everyday and much like Google I find it very bittersweet. I often use this to pass the time in my day to day life or on journeys. But I also find information that I just do not want to see, for example hate speech, violence and idiotic opinions.”**

Wealthier people see the greatest benefit on their lives—57% say it’s made life a lot better for them, while only 43% of the poorest say the same.

The things people value most are making daily tasks more convenient (80%), providing opportunities to try new things, meeting new people and learning something new (68%), and using social media to keep in touch with family and friends (52%).

Half (52%) wouldn't be able to get through all the things they need to do every day if they didn't use the internet.

But a quarter report feeling under pressure to use the internet for basic daily tasks (24%), or to use social media to keep up with their social circle (26%). Amongst under 25s, 50% feel under pressure to use social media and 35% for basic tasks.

**“It’s addictive—if I forget my phone or don’t have Wifi, I feel pretty miserable.”**

The positives and negatives of the internet are not separate phenomena but flipsides of the same experience.

**“If you painted a picture of the street everyone would be looking down at a phone—I find it weird & sad.”**

Positive	Negative
<b>78%</b> Helping people to communicate and keep in touch	<b>66%</b> Making people less likely to speak to each other face to face
<b>69%</b> Helping shops and businesses sell their products or services	<b>53%</b> Making local shops and businesses compete against larger companies who are able to offer the same products and services online
<b>61%</b> Helping children and young people learn	<b>66%</b> Making it harder to encourage children and young people to play outside and exercise
<b>74%</b> Helping people to access products and services	<b>69%</b> Making it easier for criminals to access and scam people online

These responses show the dilemmas of using technologies: how do we balance personal benefit against wider social harms?

The following scenarios describe some situations where these kinds of trade-offs already take place. People were asked to rate how acceptable these are.

	NET: Acceptable	NET: Unacceptable
If an online retailer began offering free 1-day delivery for lower income families in my community, but this resulted in local shops closing down	19%	69%
If my local Council made cost savings by transferring all their services online and reduced my Council tax as a result, but this meant that some members of the community found it difficult to access these services	36%	56%
If my bank put more investment into protecting their customers from fraud and cyber crime, but this meant that they had to close down my local branch to cover these costs	31%	61%
If a delivery driver is made redundant from full-time employment, and the only work now available is with an online delivery company, with no guaranteed hours	19%	72%

The responses indicate the limits of the public's appetite for innovation. It seems they do not want digital technologies to create disruption if it occurs at the expense of communities and social structures. Poorer people found these trade-offs especially unacceptable.



# The Understanding Gap

The rapid adoption of internet technologies in our lives has been remarkable. Now 91% of the UK population have the basic digital skills to access the internet and these skills are recognised alongside literacy and numeracy as a key part of our education.

Connectivity has improved and technologies have become more intuitive, so it is easy for people to feel confident using the internet. But when it comes to understanding how digital technologies operate—how online products and services use personal information and generate income—there is a worrying gap.

The public has some awareness that the information they actively type into websites is collected. But far fewer appreciate that information about many other online behaviours is gathered in ways they don't 'see'.

And there is limited understanding that this information helps generate revenue for internet companies.

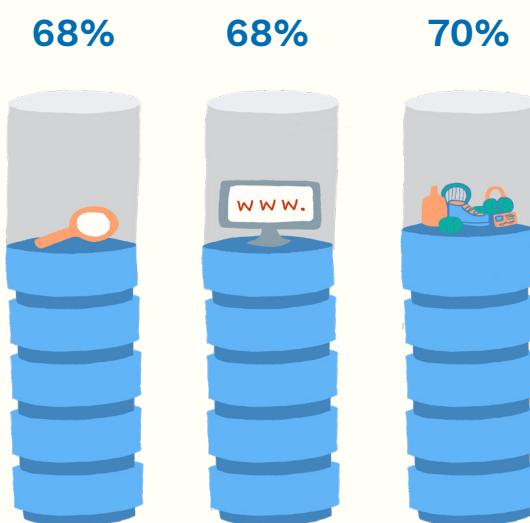
**"It does make me uncomfortable that somewhere I have this profile. You don't know what information they have and where it's stored."**

Without this understanding people are unable to make informed choices about how they use technologies. And without understanding it is likely that distrust of technologies may grow.

Doteveryone will publish detailed analysis of the nation's digital understanding in a later report, but some key points are highlighted here.

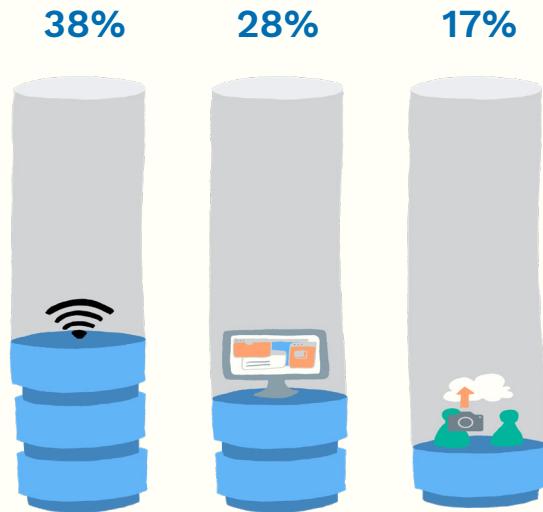
Around two-thirds of people understand that the information they actively input online is gathered—for example

- **68% believe data about their searches is collected**
- **68% believe data about the website they've been on is collected**
- **70% believe data about the products and services they have purchased is collected**



But only a third understand some of the other ways information is collected.

- **38% believe data about their internet connection (IP) is collected**
- **28% believe data about things they do on other websites on the same device is collected**
- **17% believe information other people share about them is collected**



**“I didn’t realise the extent to which companies were saving data personal to individuals to use it or sell it for their own benefit. And that it is almost accepted as a given that companies can do this.”**

A minority inaccurately believe that extremely invasive data collection takes place:

- **7% believe phone conversations they have near their internet device are being collected**
- **5% believe their eye movements when looking at the screen are collected**

The public's understanding of how companies use their data is also limited.

The great majority recognise personal information is used to target advertising (70%) and tailor information to an individual's tastes and preferences (66%).

But far fewer realise that their data can be sold to other companies (56%) or may determine the price they are charged for a product or service (21%).

Correspondingly there is a limited understanding of how companies make money from digital products and services.

Around two-thirds (64%) recognise that advertising contributes to how search and social media services are funded.

But knowledge of less obvious mechanisms, such as data selling, paid content and endorsements, is significantly lower.

- **25% think endorsements help fund blogs and vlogs**
- **22% believe search engines fund themselves**
- **8% think paid content helps fund social media**

And just under a quarter of people (24%) say they don't know at all how online services make money.



# Digital Disempowerment

It's not surprising people don't understand how online products and services work—it's not easy to discover.

People are keen to know what happens to their data, how they can control how much information they share and what protections they have. At the moment they can't find this out.

Instead, they face an almost incessant demand to agree to terms and conditions, which they can't make head or tail of. And people feel resigned to it. Most people don't read or understand them. And many don't believe that companies would adhere to them in any case.

**“They know no one is going to read all those terms and conditions – and so you don’t know what rights and information you’re giving away.”**

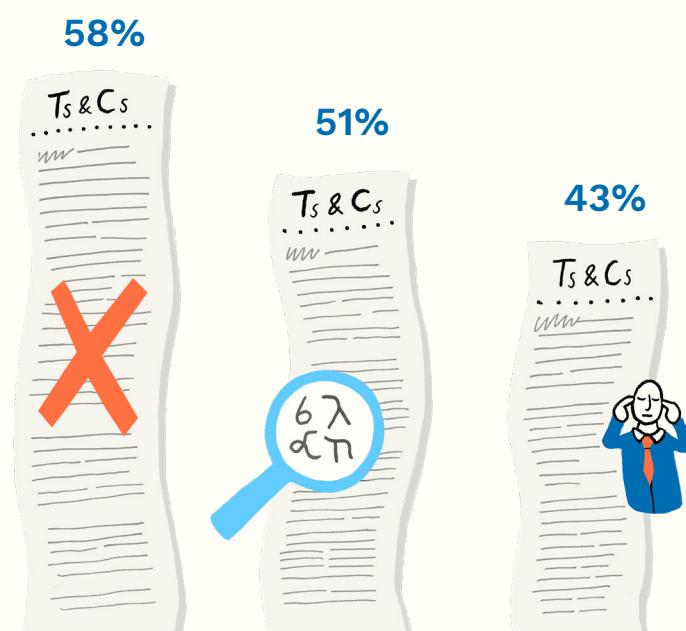
Terms and conditions have long existed offline—but were reserved for complex products such as mortgages and insurance. People might sign them a few times a year. Now they must agree to T&Cs for almost every purchase and interaction.

89% say that companies should do more to make terms and conditions understandable and clear.

**“It’s not rocket science to know what sorts of things people are going to be uncomfortable about, so they should be telling you exactly those points—what they’re collecting on you.”**

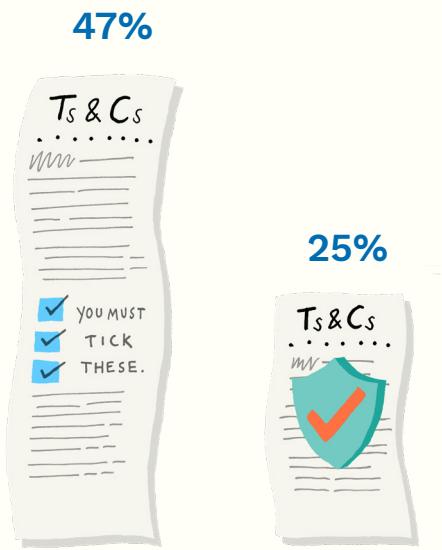
Currently more than half sign up without reading them (58%) or without understanding them when they do try to read them (51%).

And 43% say there's no point reading T&Cs because companies do what they want anyway.



**A similar number (47%) also felt they have no choice but to sign up to online services, even where they have concerns.**

**A smaller number (25%) say they trust technology companies to do the right thing so don't need to understand T&Cs.**



People are particularly keen to understand what happens to their data—95% say it's important to know their data is secure, 94% say it's important to know how their data is used.

And they would like more control over it—91% say it's important to be able to choose how much data they share with companies, but half (51%) can't currently find out that information.

But people feel they have no power to address these issues.

Almost half (46%) say they don't like companies collecting information about them, but it's worth it for the quality and convenience of the services.

**“It’s very invasive. They have too much power but we all want to use those sites so we tick the box.”**

And 43% say it doesn't matter whether they trust organisations with their data online, as they need to use them in their day-to-day life.

As well as these specific issues, people also place value on broader questions of responsibility—74% say it's important to know how a company treats its employees, 71% say it's important whether a company pays relevant taxes and 76% say it's important what values a company holds.

In all these areas most people don't have or don't know how to access such information.

This appetite for clarity is matched by a need for accountability. People struggle to identify who to turn to when they face a problem or want answers.

**“In other industries – if someone rips you off – you go to the Ombudsman. I don’t know if there is an Ombudsman for the internet—but if there is who is it?”**

**“I don’t think there are any rules. It seems to be whatever suits them [the technology companies].”**

When asked who, if anyone, should be responsible for enforcing rules that ensure service providers treat their customers, staff and society fairly, 66% of respondents believe government should play a role.

They also want to see companies responding to these questions, with 61% saying they should share this responsibility. And 60% would like to see the creation of an independent body.

There is a need therefore for government, industry and society to come together and address this gap in accountability.

# Conclusion

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This report expresses the public's feelings about the technologies that are changing our lives—what we love and loathe, what we don't understand, and what we want to change.

People are complex. In 2018, we are simultaneously excited and overwhelmed by technology—pleased by the many ways it makes life easier, perplexed by the new ways it makes life harder. This survey shows we have not yet worked out how trust or power work online, or who is responsible for the ways that technology is changing our society.

And it shows that technology is no longer something that only software developers and engineers are supposed to understand. Relatively few of us know how to code, but we all need to know how to cope.

Behavioural data tells us that many of us are online almost all of the time but it doesn't explain how that's changing our minds, our personal lives, or our communities. This new data shows that the social and cultural impact of the internet must be deeply examined, understood, and responded to as it plays out around us. As humans, as a society, we cannot wait until technology has changed us all utterly before we start to respond.

Doteveryone will be publishing a second report in 2018 that will map Britain's digital understanding in more detail, showing how aware we are of the implications of using technologies in the different parts of our lives.

Current Doteveryone projects and collaborations that address the social impact of technology include:

- Working with leaders in the public sector, helping them gain the skills, knowledge, and mindsets they need to help organisations stay relevant in a digital age.
- Working with businesses, motivating them to build technology that is responsible, fair, and good for society.
- Working with communities, showing how technology can help address great social challenges and learning how to mitigate the risks of technological change.
- And working with government and regulators, creating greater accountability between tech companies and the rest of society.

# Methodology & Acknowledgements

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Doteveryone is an independent, non-partisan organisation and a registered charity. We receive financial support from the BBC, BT, Sage, and Omidyar Network.

This work was funded through Doteveryone's partnership with the BBC and we are grateful to them for their generous support.

This research was led by Catherine Miller, Ollie Sheldrick, and Alex Lemon at Doteveryone.

Surveys and focus groups were conducted by Cordelia Hay and Max Templer at BritainThinks.

BritainThinks surveyed 2,538 respondents in total:

- 2,038 people were surveyed online between 4th and 6th December 2017. By nature, all respondents were users of the internet. These respondents were asked detailed questions about their internet understanding and use, as well as overarching questions about their attitudes towards the internet.
- 500 people were surveyed offline, by landline and mobile telephone, between 8th and 20th December 2017. All telephone respondents were screened to ensure that they were *not* regular users of the internet, with none using the internet more frequently than once a week. These respondents were asked overarching questions about their attitudes towards the internet.

Data are weighted to be nationally representative of the British adult population by gender, age and region according to ONS figures. Where telephone survey data has been combined with online survey data, this has been weighted to reflect the proportion of UK adults who are not currently regular users of the internet according to 2017 ONS data.

Focus groups were conducted online and face to face with 32 participants from Watford and Leeds in July 2017.

The report was written by Catherine Miller, Rachel Coldicutt, and Abbey Kos.

The report was designed by Josh Kwan with illustrations by James Barclay and Elin Matilda Andersson.



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