doteveryone

Engaging the Public with Responsible Technology

Four principles and three requirements

Catherine Miller
October 2019

Executive summary

There is a power imbalance in the current tech landscape.

Technologies that infiltrate every part of people's existence are largely impenetrable. People have little chance to understand how and why tech affects them and few opportunities to shape their experience, either as individuals or collectively.

Doteveryone's *People Power and Technology*[1] research exposed the blindspots in the public's digital understanding: for example, 91% of the public say it's important to choose how much data they share with companies but half (51%) can't find out that information.

There's now enthusiasm among both policymakers and business to change this and a spate of campaigns for education and awareness. This report explores what it would take for people to be both engaged and empowered - and to tip the scales of power between the public and tech.

Our findings identify **four principles that underpin public engagement in a digital age**. It must:

1. **Take place in tandem with regulation and industry change** so that the public is not expected to shoulder the responsibility to tackle challenges alone.
2. **Focus on specific issues with a clear call to action** to make tangible change. It should not ask the public to change the whole tech landscape in one go.
3. **Recognise many publics** - people begin with different mindsets and will respond differently to any initiative
4. **Have metrics for success** and must be deployed with the same care and rigour that would be applied to any change in regulation or business practice.

And outline the **three requirements for engaging the public in a digital context:**

- **Provide opportunities** - it must meet people where they are, with opportunities to act embedded into products and services
- **Meet capabilities** - it should be specific to the issue and tailored to the individual's capability and mindset

[1] Miller C, Coldicutt R and Kitcher H. (2018) *People, Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Understanding Report.* London: Doteveryone. Available at: <https://doteveryone.org.uk/report/digital-understanding/>

- **Aid motivation** - it needs to enhance and not detract from current online experiences and create feedback about the impact of any action, creating the motivation to act.

These are necessary. But they are not sufficient. Technological disruption has ripped up the rules and norms of society - not just for people but also for government and for business.

But rethinking public engagement is not enough. To achieve a new and fair settlement for the future requires a broader project to rework the social contract for the digital age. That means giving the public not just awareness but agency - the power to act on their understanding, to hold tech companies to account for the impacts of their products, supported by a digital social infrastructure.

"This is for everyone!"[2] declared Sir Tim Berners-Lee of the World Wide Web he invented. And it is for everyone - government, business and the public as a whole to shape a fairer future for an inclusive, sustainable and democratic digital society.

Our Recommendations:

1. An independent tech regulator[3] must establish a robust system of redress to give the public a clear avenue to hold technology companies to account and reshape the current power imbalance.

2. The Office for Civil Society should commission research into the gaps in public advocacy around the impacts of tech-driven change to design the activities of a digital public advocate.

3. The Government should base its forthcoming media literacy strategy around new models of public empowerment that:
    - **Provide opportunities** - meeting people where they are, with opportunities to act embedded into products and services
    - **Meet capabilities** - are specific to the issue and tailored to the individual's capability and mindset
    - **Aid motivation** - enhance and not detract from current online experiences and create feedback about the impact of any action, creating the motivation to act.

[2] Tim Berners-Lee, (2012) 27 July. Available at: <https://twitter.com/timberners_lee/status/228960085672599552>
[3] Miller C, Ohrvik-Stott J, Coldicutt R. (2018) Regulating for Responsible Technology: Capacity, Evidence and Redress: a new system for a fairer future. London: Doteveryone. https://doteveryone.org.uk/project/regulating-for-responsible-technology/

Introduction

Doteveryone champions responsible technology for a fairer future. We want to see a world in which digital and emerging technologies can be a force for good - used to make life better for more people, more of the time. And we work to drive that change through better business practice, bold policymaking and a stronger society.

In 2018 we ran a pilot digital public health campaign, *Be a Better Internetter,*[4] to explore whether there are simple ways to help people make their tech work better for them. It surfaced some of the challenges of public engagement which prompted us to undertake this research into the most effective methods for creating behaviour change around technologies and where the public could drive change in the tech landscape.

The work involved:

- **Desk research** into the different categories of public engagement - from awareness campaigns to citizen co-design - within tech and other spheres
- **Expert roundtable** with specialists from government, advertising, academia and civil society to surface common experiences and themes.
- **Qualitative research** on perceived harms, the impact of interventions and their experience of agency. Behavioural science research agency The Behavioural Architects hosted a 10 day online community with 24 participants from a range of backgrounds across the UK, followed by a deliberative workshop.

Public engagement is a term that can be applied to many different interventions - from public awareness campaigns broadcast to a wide audience to social movements to citizen co-design and deliberative citizens' juries. In this work we focus on initiatives which are aimed at shaping public behaviours, rather than attempts to capture and act on the public's views.

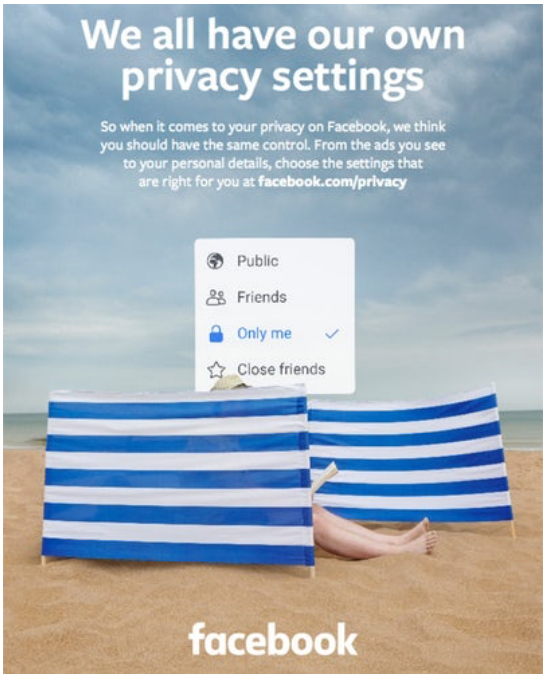
There are also many different definitions of 'the public', across different academic disciplines and legal definitions. This is not the place to settle that debate. But this work highlights that for public engagement to be inclusive, it needs to acknowledge that there are many intersecting and conflicting publics.

[4] https://doteveryone.org.uk/project/betterinternetter/

1. The principles of engaging the public

What is the public's responsibility?

As the impacts of technological change on society become apparent, initiatives that urge the public to take action are proliferating. They range from helping people to identify and stop the spread of fake news to ending online abuse.



The UK Government's Online Harms White Paper[5] promises to 'empower users to stay safe online' with a new media literacy strategy, while the DCMS Select Committee on Disinformation and Fake News recommends 'digital literacy' becomes the fourth pillar of education.[6] And each of these - alongside regulation - identify public awareness and engagement as a tool to drive change.

Alongside government initiatives, such as the S.H.A.R.E.[7] checklist for fake news, businesses have also jumped into this space - from Facebook's 'privacy is personal'[8] campaign to Google's 'Be Internet Awesome'[9] tools for children.

But should the public really be asked to act at all?

Public engagement is sometimes disparaged as a 'policy of last resort' - a tool that policymakers reach for when regulation appears too hard - and a convenient

[5] HM Government (2019) 'Online Harms White Paper', April 2019. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793360/Online_Harms_White_Paper.pdf>
[6] DCMS (2018) 'Disinformation and 'fake news': Interim Report', HC363, July 2018. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/363/363.pdf>
[7] https://sharechecklist.gov.uk
[8] Campaign (2019) *Facebook "Privacy is personal" by Possible UK.* Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=29&v=M3YXR7pSLcI>
[9] https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/

abdication of civic responsibility by businesses that avoids them making decisions that would affect their bottom line.

"People are busy, leading complicated lives and you're adding a cognitive load," says Jennifer Cobbe, coordinator of the Trust and Technology Initiative at Cambridge University, referring to initiatives that give individuals control over their data. "Online privacy harms are systemic in nature. [This approach] individualises failures for data privacy."[10]

But in Doteveryone's workshops, participants felt that - for most of the problems they had identified - there was a shared responsibility between government, regulators, industry, society as a whole - as well as themselves as individuals.

It was those who felt most confident about their own digital understanding who were most likely to highlight individual responsibility, but nonetheless they also saw a role for other parties to support their action. Some also expressed wariness of having an institution, and particularly when this institution was the Government, set boundaries on their behalf - for example, determining what content was or was not misinformation or might be considered offensive.

Research participant's views on where responsibility should lie for addressing harms.

	Individual	Society as a whole	Government legislation	Independent regulator	Tech sector
Criminal activity			✓	✓	✓
Privacy concerns	✓		✓	✓	✓
Personal abuse	✓				✓
Negative mood & distorted perceptions	✓	✓			✓
Misinformation	✓			✓	✓
Unwanted intrusions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

[10] Foroudi, L. (2019) 'The quest to reclaim our data'. *Sifted.* Available at: <https://sifted.eu/articles/the-quest-to-reclaim-our-data/>

In any push for public engagement, it's important that this takes place in tandem with regulation and industry change so that the public is not expected to shoulder the responsibility to tackle challenges alone.

What problem is public engagement trying to solve?

As technology has become integral to every part of personal and public life, digital public engagement approaches have mushroomed in response, covering issues as varied as financial scams, fake news, fake reviews, trolling and privacy.

When Doteveryone ran a pilot digital health campaign, *Be a Better Internetter,* in 2018 our aim was to find out whether it's possible to find simple and positive ways to show people how to make their tech work better for them.

Over the course of the project, we narrowed the brief considerably and focused on three issues - private browsing, chronological social media feeds and privacy settings. But we still found that we were asking too much from a single campaign.[11] Trying to both raise public awareness and drive behaviour change is unrealistic in the space of just a few words and images.

The Online Harms White Paper lists 23 areas of harm - ranging from child sexual exploitation and terrorist activity, to cyberbullying and intimidation. Each of these alone is complex and rooted in both tech and non-tech issues.

[11] Miller, C. (2018) 'Some lessons from building a digital public health campaign'. August 7, 2018. Available at: <https://doteveryone.org.uk/2018/08/some-lessons-from-building-a-digital-public-health-campaign/>

Taking the example of the S.H.A.R.E checklist, the publicly funded campaign asks a lot of the individual - without being able to offer a specific outcome.

Use the S.H.A.R.E checklist

Before you like, comment or share online, use the S.H.A.R.E checklist to make sure you're not contributing to the spread of harmful content.

S **Source**
Make sure that the story is written by a source you trust, with a reputation for accuracy. If it's from an unfamiliar organisation, check for a website's 'About' section to learn more.

H **Headline**
Always read beyond the headline. If it sounds unbelievable, it very well might be. Be wary if something doesn't seem to add up.

A **Analyse**
Make sure you check the facts. Just because you have seen a story several times, doesn't mean it's true. If you're not sure, look at fact checking websites and other reliable sources to double check.

R **Retouched**
Check whether the image looks like it has been or could have been manipulated. False news stories often contain retouched photos or re-edited clips. Sometimes they are authentic, but have been taken out of context.

E **Error**
Many false news stories have phony or look-alike URLs. Look out for misspellings, bad grammar or awkward layouts.

Without a clear problem definition and causal chain it is hard to mobilise the public around a particular response or behaviour change.

No one 'fix' by individuals can transform the tech landscape. Digital public engagement will need to focus on specific issues where a clear call to action can make tangible change.

Which ‘public’ is being engaged?

As well as the large number of issues in the landscape, there is also wide variance in people’s attitudes towards the seriousness of online harms and their own susceptibility to them.

In our qualitative research, participants spontaneously identified a range of concerns stemming from issues they encountered during their use of products and services - from the pressure to be ‘always on’ through social media to concerns about privacy. But the seriousness of each of these varied depending on each person’s experience, personal resilience and ability to activate workarounds.

From the research, we identified four different mindsets in people’s perceptions of harms, based on the combination of their actual digital understanding and their own confidence in managing online harms. These are: overwhelmed, in denial, realistically cautious and actively managing.

Each of these mindsets presents a different interpretation of the 'problem' technology can pose: the 'overwhelmed' may catastrophise issues to the point of retreating completely from using services, while those 'in denial' can disparage others who are affected by online harms as 'idiots' and 'phone zombies'.

> Attempts to engage the 'public' must recognise people begin with different mindsets and will respond differently to any initiative.

What does success look like?

There's an assumption underlying media literacy campaigns that a more informed public will be a more empowered public. But there's surprisingly little evidence to support that. Only 1% of peer-reviewed papers looking at the impact of marketing campaigns (in any field, not just digital) assess behavioural, rather than attitudinal, change.[12] Given the complexity of real world situations, where a correlation doesn't necessarily mean causation, it becomes tricky to determine the reason for apparent shifts in public behaviour.

Doteveryone's *Be a Better Internetter* adverts generated 2,187,000 impressions in the first month of launch and the associated website received 81,332 visits over the following three months. Although these figures are welcome, what we don't know is whether people had understood the messages, acted on them and whether that had translated into any sustained behaviour change.

There is some evidence for the effectiveness of public engagement: for instance, research indicates 'inoculating' people with warnings can make them slightly more willing to disregard misinformation.[13] And a Ukrainian school media literacy programme found children who took the lessons were twice as likely to detect hate

[12] Mahony, C. (2015) 'Public health marketing campaigns: who profits?' *BMJ*. 350: h514. Available at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h514.full>

[13] Stephan Lewandowsky, S., van der Linden, S., and Cook, J., (2019) 'Inoculating against fake news?' ESRC. Available at: <https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/news/news-items/inoculating-against-fake-news/>

speech and 18% better at identifying fake news stories than those who didn't.[14] Likewise *Scroll Free September,* the campaign by the Royal Society for Public Health which encourages people to take a month off social media, found over three quarters (77%) of 2018 participants had improved mental health and almost two thirds (63%) better awareness of the world around them.[15] However, such positive indicators don't evaluate long term impacts or the potential to scale any programmes.

The piecemeal nature of media literacy evaluation makes it extremely hard to answer what seems like an obvious question - does it work? Professor Sonia Livingstone, Chair of the LSE Commission on Truth, Trust and Technology and an advocate of media literacy calls for a systematic evidence base:

> *"Perhaps for the lack of agreed measures, there's more evidence of outputs than outcomes, of short term reach rather than long term improvements. There's remarkably few independent evaluations of what works. Compare media literacy interventions to other kinds of educational interventions – where's the randomised control trials, the systematic evidence reviews, the targeted attention to specific subgroups of the population, the costed assessments of benefit relative to investment?"*[16]

As well as the assumption that awareness equates with empowerment, there's also an assumption that awareness can't hurt. But there are examples where that - quite literally - is not the case. Award-winning Australian campaign *Dumb Ways to Die* was intended to reduce railway accidents and achieved 4 billion unique plays worldwide. But it was followed by a spike in people committing suicide by jumping on train tracks.[17] Unless public engagement campaigns are designed to consider the full range of their potential impacts there's a danger they can misfire.

---

[14] Drukman, M., and Vogt, K., (2019) 'Boosting immunity to disinformation'. Kiev: IREX. Available at:<https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/evaluation-learn-to-discern-in-schools-ukraine.pdf>

[15] RSPH (2019) *Why are so many millennials choosing to go social media free?.* RSPH. 16 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/why-are-so-many-millennials-choosing-to-go-social-media-free.html>

[16] Livingstone, S., (2018) 'Media literacy: what are the challenges and how can we move towards a solution?' LSE. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2018/10/25/media-literacy-what-are-the-challenges-and-how-can-we-move-towards-a-solution/>

[17] Christiano, A., and Neimand, A., (2017) 'Stop raising awareness already'. *Stanford Social Innovation Review.* Spring 2017. Available at: <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/stop_raising_awareness_already#>

The rapidly changing and vast tech landscape in itself creates a particular set of unintended consequences. Digital literacy initiatives can, and will only ever focus on, a small number of issues. As Sonia Livingstone points out: "the result is that attention to the "hygiene factors" in the digital environment dominates efforts – so that media literacy risks being limited to safety and security. Our bigger ambitions for mediated learning, creativity, collaboration and participation get endlessly postponed in the process".[18]

In some cases this 'misdirecting' of public attention towards surface issues can be deliberate. Facebook has been under scrutiny for its data collection and sharing practices since the revelation of a vast data harvesting exercise by Cambridge Analytica. The company's 'Privacy is Personal' campaign however conflates the ability to limit what people reveal to other Facebook users with data privacy, as Open Data Institute CEO Jeni Tennison highlights:[19]

American researcher danah boyd identifies an unintended consequence of media literacy in the current US political context as encouraging widespread cynicism about all information.[20] She warns against creating approaches which are aimed at delivering a particular (progressive) political outcome rather than recognising the worldview and motivations of those who promote and absorb misinformation.

And even using public engagement as a strategy at all may reduce pressure on businesses to change bad practice or remove the urgency to regulate. The large investments tech companies put into these initiatives would suggest they believe that to be the case.

---

[18] Livingstone, S., (2018)
[19] Jeni Tennison, (2019) 12 September. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jenit/status/1172060898741149696?s=21>
[20] boyd, d., (2018) 'You think you want media literacy...do you?' Data & Society Research Institute. Available at: <https://points.datasociety.net/you-think-you-want-media-literacy-do-you-7cad6af18ec2>

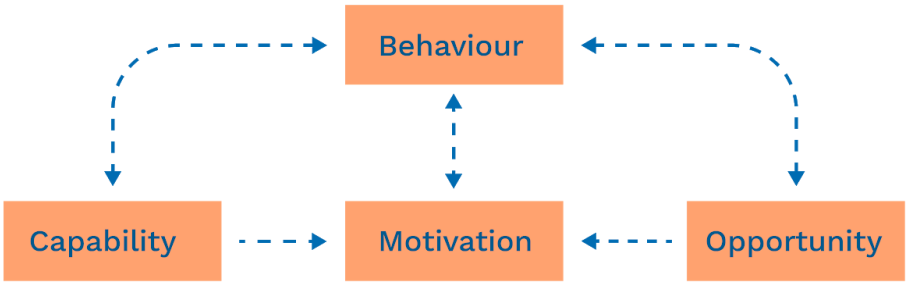
Without a benchmark for success that focuses on measuring outcomes - for good and for bad - all activities will be undermined either by overblown claims of success or by disparaging cynicism about the futility of the efforts.

For public engagement to be a tool that drives change in the way technologies shape society, it must be deployed with the same care and rigour that would be applied to any change in regulation or business practice.

2. The challenges of engaging the public

The previous section considers the principles that underpin any public engagement. But even where these have been addressed, there's still a question of how to go about it. What are the ingredients that go into effective digital public engagement?

The lack of consistent evaluation described earlier means there's no benchmark for this. However there are a number of recognised approaches to behaviour change. In our research we explored which issues were important to the participants and sought their responses to different engagement approaches. We then considered these through the lens of the COM-B framework.[21] This model considers three elements that need to be in place for people to change behaviours: capability, opportunity and motivation.



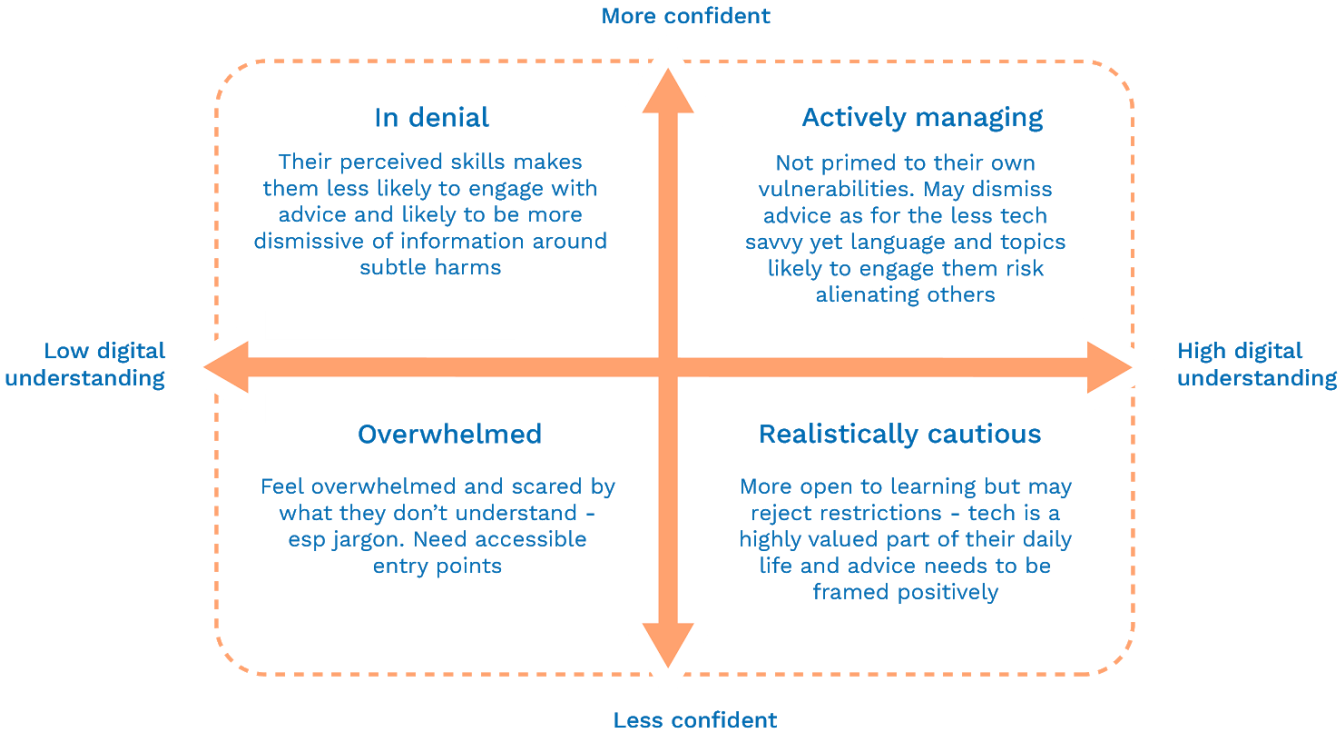
This model has been applied to public challenges in other fields - such as public health and adult education. But we found that there are particular challenges in a digital context.

Capability

If initiatives are to succeed at changing how the public uses technologies, people need to be capable of acting on the messages they receive. That includes having sufficient mental bandwidth, confidence and digital understanding.

[21]Michie et al. (2011) 'The behavioural change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions'. *Implementation Science*. 6:42. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3096582/>

The four groups we identified from our workshops each have strikingly different capabilities:



How Can I Tell If a Website Is Safe? Look For These 5 Signs

BY JOYCE TAMMANY / ON AUGUST 24, 2018 / IN CYBER ATTACKS

Every website owner should take responsibility for ensuring the safety of its visitors, but unfortunately, some websites just aren't secure. An unsafe website can spread malware, steal your information, send spam, and more. To protect yourself and your personal information, it's important to know that a website takes your safety seriously – but how can you tell? Look for these four signs that a website is safe:

1. Look for the "S" in HTTPS

If HTTPS sounds familiar, it should – many URLs begin with "https" instead of just "http" to indicate that they are encrypted. This security is provided by an SSL certificate, which protects sensitive information

This was evident in their responses when we presented the group with the Sitelock safety tips blog.[22] For some it was immediately useful:

"Everything except the pop up information was new to me. I would recommend the site to anyone who is not too sure or doesn't trust the internet."

"This site is extremely relevant to me, and I shall forward my husband the link. A lot of my security ignorance comes through the jargon involved which often leaves me as much in the dark as before I started reading. This site is brilliant in that respect."

[22] Tammany, J. (2018) 'How can I tell if a website is safe? Look for these 5 signs.' *SiteLock.* Available at: <https://www.sitelock.com/blog/is-this-website-safe/>

But others dismissed the information as too obvious:

> *"I think this is aimed at people who are not that tech savvy or knowledgeable about website safety. I can see it being useful to my parents for example."*

> *"I'm familiar with most of the content. Although useful for me and others with my level of experience I can see some users "switching off".*

Those 'in denial', for example, who have confidence yet, in reality, low digital understanding, are more likely to dismiss the information. While the 'realistically cautious' - those with high digital understanding but less confidence - are more open to learning, although it is important that the advice is framed positively. Overcoming these variances in capability is essential to engaging the public effectively.

Opportunity

Even though many participants felt that they *ought* to have responsibility to tackle issues they encountered in their digital lives, when the group explored questions in more depth they frequently found they struggled to take on that responsibility in practice - the opportunity to change behaviours didn't exist.

For example, when participants were given a task to change settings on their devices, many found the design and architecture of products and services overwhelming, making it time-consuming and requiring cognitive effort to complete.

> *"It was a really confusing layout, going in through the apps and then another layer of apps. There was no explanation of how changing the settings would impact my user experience or my experience of the apps. I was reluctant to change any settings at all as I wasn't sure what I was doing!"*

> *"It is always somewhat daunting managing settings, [it] has so many functions and sub sections that at times you can almost become lost. I think there should be most popular changes at the beginnings with a title saying this, as some settings and controls are rarely used and are quite obscure."*

Even after the intense exposure to the issues and engagement messages of the workshops, some participants felt that when faced with information about the impacts of technology the only behaviour change open to them was to use technology less - something that is unrealistic for most people.

> *"I don't feel much has changed in how I feel about being online [during the workshops], as I have to go online everyday as my job involves me having to"*

Others felt overwhelmed and frightened.

> *"I now feel that it's my moral duty to protect myself online, which is something I never thought about before."*

> *"I'm much more clued up about internet and phone security than I was before the research started. This won't prevent me from going online, but it's made me wary and even less trusting than I was before."*

> *"I found how different apps get different permissions depending on how you sign in to them interesting. Also the ease with which data can be harvested, collated, disseminated and utilized, without the express approval of a person, is a bit sinister."*

Giving the public responsibility for an issue, without the opportunity for action is the worst of both worlds and is likely to leave the public disengaged and cynical.

Policymakers and businesses must not ask the public to act without delivering the opportunity to do so.

Motivation

Finally, people need motivation to act - they must be interested enough to take action on an issue and feel that the trade-off against their previous behaviour is worthwhile.

We introduced participants to resources that encourage people to 'take control' of their tech usage, including screen time apps and tips to reduce distractions.[23] While most were positive about the advice given, in practice many struggled to sustain the suggested behaviour changes:

> *"I only managed to stay away from Facebook or Instagram for a couple of days. I was away visiting family so thought it'd be nice to switch off and disconnect from the world for a bit but in the end I couldn't resist the temptation as I was getting bored and to kill time and keep myself entertained I felt the need to go back on them."*

[23] Centre for Humane Tech (2019) *Take Control*. Available at: <https://humanetech.com/resources/take-control/>

> *"I'm always up for ways to reduce my screen time and these are really simple and easy. I've come across the one about making your screen grey previously, I think I tried it where I had the screen switching to grey past 9pm but I ended up reverting back to normal because I spend so much time on instagram at night! "*

This highlights a particular challenge for digital public engagement - people's relationship with technology is intuitive and intimate.

People use their devices from the moment they wake to last thing at night (and even in the middle of the night) and their behaviour is determined not only by the device and the service themselves but also by a whole range of social cues and norms. Devices can be an extension of people's identities, with the choice of apps or presentation of content highly personalised. Any attempt to change people's behaviour must overcome these ingrained habits.

Additionally, it's hard to motivate change because people can't perceive tangible benefits. For example, when changing settings, one participant observed:

> *"I am unsure about the changes I have made to the privacy settings [...] I will see over the next few days the impact of certain settings changes."*

Without feedback loops about the impact of any behaviour change, it will be hard to encourage people to act differently.

3. New models for engaging the public

Any digital public engagement needs to recognise and overcome the challenges described above.

Our participants explored what might need to be in place to make effective change feasible, using the issue of unwanted targeting as an example.

Simplifying changing your settings into one-click with the creation of a 'privacy mode' that you can choose to turn on or off (like aeroplane mode or battery-saving mode)	Dynamic social norms messaging e.g. "more and more people are turning off location / changing their settings... "
Emotionally motivating stories linking the privacy issues to specific tangible situations – in what can be an otherwise 'dry' area	Greater transparency and clarity from tech companies around simple changes people can make to privacy settings when using their platforms – enforced by an impartial regulator

"Changing individual settings can be quite tricky so [...] maybe having a mode that you can set [your device to] where it changes quite a lot of things in one go."

"Knowing that more people are trying to do this kind of thing [control their privacy by changing their location settings] would get more people onboard."

"For the tech companies, they've got interests in keeping things the way that they are. And that's why we got onto the idea of an ombudsman – the idea of that kind of impartiality, trying to give us the information about this kind of thing that allows to go and make these changes."

Without this kind of scaffolding to give people agency over their technology in practice, little is likely to change.

Based on our research, in order to succeed digital public engagement will need to:

- **Provide opportunities** - it must meet people where they are, with opportunities to act embedded into products and services
- **Meet capabilities** - it should be specific to the issue and tailored to the individual's capability and mindset
- **Aid motivation** - it needs to enhance and not detract from current online experiences and create feedback about the impact of any action, creating the motivation to act.

Public engagement for the digital age will have to work within the grain of the digital experience - it needs to meet people where they are, when using a product or service and not present information in isolation from experiences. It needs to be specific to the person and the issue at hand. And it requires feedback loops to motivate people to action.

But most importantly it must address the gap in opportunity and power to act on the responsibility they are being given.

Given how limited existing opportunities for people to shape their experience of technology are, there is enormous scope to explore ways to change this. The following are examples of areas we consider ripe for exploration:

Improving Terms & Conditions

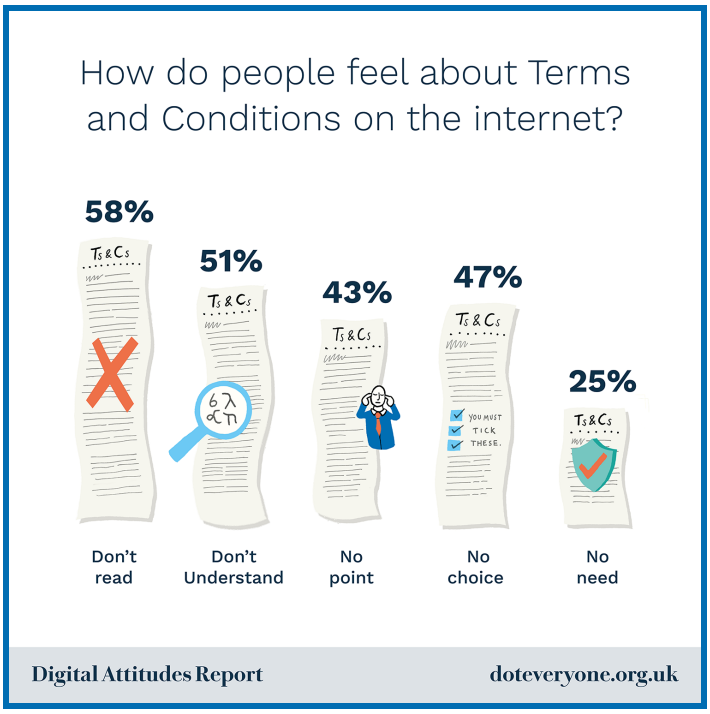
In our *People Power and Technology*[24] research, 89% of people said companies should do more to make T&Cs more understandable. Most people sign up without reading or understanding them and almost half feel they have no choice but to sign up even where they have concerns. Building on the recommendations of the Behavioural Insights Team recent report[25] and the Terms of Service; Didn't Read[26] initiative there's an opportunity to develop best practice exemplars for T&Cs that not only increase understanding but also allow people to respond and interact (eg allowing people to

[24] Miller. C, Coldicutt. R, & Kos. A., (2018) *People, Power and Technology: The 2018 Digital Attitudes Report.* London: Doteveryone. Available at: <https://doteveryone.org.uk/report/digital-attitudes/>

[25] Costa. E, & Halpern. D., (2019) *The behavioural science of online harm and manipulation, and what to do about it.* London: The Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: <https://www.bi.team/publications/the-behavioural-science-of-online-harm-and-manipulation-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

[26] Terms of Service; Didn't Read. Available at: <https://tosdr.org/index.html>

indicate where they've signed up despite concerns or overlayers to identify which terms people object to and create collective feedback to companies).



Making settings usable and relevant

Many platforms' settings are deliberately inaccessible and hard to navigate. They are buried in menus far away from the actual experience of using the service and couched in terms that people often don't understand. Our research participants wanted more opportunity to easily control the services they use. Interventions might be a 'privacy operating system' that applies your preferences across all services on your device or a 'real-time' settings option - eg when prompted to activate location services there's a plain language explanation of what the implications are and an option to automatically deactivate them.

Building benchmarks

Participants were often unsure about what constitutes reasonable behaviour - either on the part of companies or of other people. During workshops people shared tips of workarounds and techniques they had developed to deal with issues such as unpleasant social media content, intrusive advertising or perceived excessive use of their devices. There's potential to explore interventions that build social opportunity by sharing such social norms, as well as giving feedback to those who breach shared expectations.

4. A new social contract for a digital age

Rethinking public engagement cannot happen in isolation. We began this report by asking where the public's responsibility lies in shaping the impacts of technology. But that also raises the question, who else has responsibility?

Rapid technological disruption has overturned social norms. The WhatsApp groups that keep loved ones in touch, the apps that help millions to create an office anywhere, the payment systems that keep retailers running and the algorithms that tailor news and entertainment are all changing daily life for everyone. Even for those without a smartphone, data drives decisions that affect every part of life, from the price and type of milk in the supermarket to questions of children's safety or access to justice.

But this disruption has also changed the rules for business and government: a small number of large businesses provide essential daily infrastructure; government policies cannot keep pace with corporate innovation; and automation is being introduced across public services without robust governance or consultation. And, as the civil society organisations that support and advocate on the public's behalf struggle to adapt, individuals – as citizens, workers, learners, consumers, and members of society – are left mostly to their own devices to navigate this.

To create a world where technology serves the public interest, there needs to be a new social contract for a digital age. This new social contract must lay out the responsibilities of each part of society to shape a world where technology works for more people more of the time. It must not only be drawn up by the market and the state, but be shaped by the public. And for the public to do so, they will need to be informed and empowered.

Public engagement is one part of this and we have set out in this report the principles and challenges that need addressing, as well as the foundations needed for a new model fit for the digital age. But it will not be enough. There needs to be digital social infrastructure to support it.

In Doteveryone's *Regulating for Responsible Technology*[27] research we identified redress as a foundation of an effective regulatory system: people must be able to hold tech companies to account for the impacts of their products on their lives. We are now developing a one-stop-shop for the public to seek understand and exert their digital rights when things go wrong and access redress where it's available.[28] And we welcome the UK government's inclusion of redress in the proposed duty of care to be overseen by an independent regulator.[29]

But even such a system alone cannot fully empower the public. In other fields, people who want to resolve grievances are directed to, and supported by, an ecosystem of consumer groups who can guide them through a dispute and who can advocate on behalf of groups of people affected by a similar issue.

Our discussions with existing public advocacy groups found many are adapting from traditional remits to tackle the impact of tech-enabled consumer harms such as fraud and scams. But that still means other less tangible, non-economic harms fall through the gaps of the traditional civil society infrastructure. Where do you turn when your online date turns out to be not who they seemed? Or who will help when you become the subject of a social media pile on?

Technology also creates societal harms. The targeting of political material for example might have little impact at an individual level but, when replicated, can have a profound effect on democracy. We see a role for the new regulator to tackle these [30] but also for new civil society groups to speak up on behalf of the public in shaping addressing these questions.

---

[27] Miller C, Ohrvik-Stott J, Coldicutt R. (2018) Regulating for Responsible Technology: Capacity, Evidence and Redress: a new system for a fairer future. London: Doteveryone. https://doteveryone.org.uk/project/regulating-for-responsible-technology/

[28]Ohrvik-Stott., J. (2019) 'Doteveryone's made the Legal Access Challenge Final 🎉 ' *Doteveryone.* 26 September. Available at: https://doteveryone.org.uk/2019/09/doteveryones-made-the-legal-access-challenge-final-🎉 /

[29] HM Government (2019) 'Online Harms White Paper', April 2019. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793360/Online_Harms_White_Paper.pdf>

[30]Doteveryone (2019) 'The Online Harms White Paper: Doteveryone's Response' London: Doteveryone. Available at: <https://doteveryone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ONLINE-HARMS-WHITE-PAPER-Doteveryone-response_July2019.pdf>

Conclusions and next steps

Meeting the challenges that new technologies pose requires action from government, industry *and* the public.

For a fair, inclusive and sustainable democratic digital society, people must be empowered to be resilient to technological change and enabled to play an active role in shaping a digital society. But if the public steps up - so must government and industry.

A new social contract for a digital age must require all parties to work to shape technology for the public interest.

An empowered public requires more than awareness. It requires agency. Attempts to educate the public about the impacts of technology without offering people the opportunity to act on the information will backfire. But these must also be accompanied by the digital social infrastructure that will support and sustain the public as they navigate a tech-enabled world.

As actions from this report we recommend:

- An independent tech regulator[31] must establish a robust system of redress to give the public a clear avenue to hold technology companies to account and reshape the current power imbalance.
- The Office for Civil Society should commission research into the gaps in public advocacy around the impacts of tech-driven change to design the activities of a digital public advocate.
- The Government should base its forthcoming media literacy strategy around new models of public empowerment that:
    - **Provide opportunities** - meeting people where they are, with opportunities to act embedded into products and services
    - **Meet capabilities** - are specific to the issue and tailored to the individual's capability and mindset
    - **Aid motivation** - enhance and not detract from current online experiences and create feedback about the impact of any action, creating the motivation to act.

[31] Miller C, Ohrvik-Stott J, Coldicutt R. (2018) Regulating for Responsible Technology: Capacity, Evidence and Redress: a new system for a fairer future. London: Doteveryone. https://doteveryone.org.uk/project/regulating-for-responsible-technology/

Alongside our ongoing work to develop a one-stop-shop for digital redress,[32] Doteveryone is exploring new programmes of work that will help achieve these recommendations. If you would like to be involved please contact hello@doteveryone.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible thanks to funding from Omidyar Network.

Research was conducted by Jacob Ohrvik-Stott, Lydia Nicholas and Catherine Miller. This report was written by Catherine Miller, edited by Hannah Kitcher and designed by James Barclay.

Many thanks to Jo Upton, Rachel Abbot and Kate Pilling at The Behavioural Architects who ran the online community and deliberative workshops.

[32] Doteveryone (2019) *Yes to Redress*. Available at: <https://doteveryone.org.uk/project/yes-to-redress/>