

UK INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM REPORT 2020

15th - 17th September 2020

Virtual event

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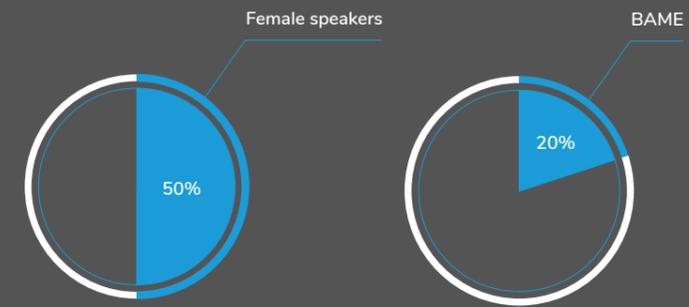
The UK Internet Governance Forum (UK IGF) is the national IGF for the United Kingdom. IGFs are an initiative led by the United Nations for the discussion of public policy issues relating to the internet. A key distinguishing feature of IGFs is that they are based on the multi-stakeholder model – all sectors of society meet as equals to exchange ideas and discuss best practices. The purpose of IGFs is to facilitate a common understanding of how to maximise the opportunities of the internet whilst mitigating the risks and challenges that the internet presents.

In 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK IGF was held virtually for the first time. The virtual nature of the event presented new challenges, but also allowed us to reach new audiences – with many participants and panellists joining for their first IGF. The events of 2020, with the Internet becoming even more central to our daily lives, have also highlighted that there is no better time to be discussing such important issues.

From 15th – 17th September, 286 delegates from government, civil society, parliament, industry, the technical community, and academia met virtually to discuss The Role of the Internet in Shaping Society. The content was aligned to the five themes: Trust, Inclusion, Data, Environment and Covid-19.

This report summarises the discussion and provides key messages for consideration at the United Nations IGF and beyond.

The diversity of speakers participating in this year's event was reflective of national averages in the UK with just over 50% female speakers, and just over 20% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME).



The sessions were streamed from 29 different countries, with the majority of attendees joining from the UK. All presentations were recorded and are available to watch at ukigf.org.uk/2020.

The UK IGF has a steering committee and secretariat. The committee members can be found at ukigf.org.uk/committee and the secretariat is provided by Nominet, the UK's national domain name registry.

We would like to thank all those who participated and made the event possible.

If you are interested in contributing to the UK IGF, please contact info@ukigf.org.uk

Download this report: ukigf.org.uk/2020



KEY MESSAGES

- The UK internet community has responded robustly to the global coronavirus pandemic, ensuring that UK citizens are able to work, learn and stay connected despite the extraordinary circumstances they have been faced with.
- This has been exemplified by the UK IGF itself this year, taking place online for the first time – while allowing new voices to be heard. A collaborative, multi-stakeholder model will be key to ensuring these voices can be heard going forward.
- UK citizens have become digital citizens in record numbers, dramatically accelerating changes that were already being seen across society and the digital economy.
- In practice, this transition has been uncomfortable for many. Digital inequalities the community has observed in previous years have been badly exacerbated over the past year, as many have been compelled to get online for lack of an alternative.
- In this context, the need for online and offline behaviours to be treated the same – in regulation and in practice - is more pressing, not less.
- This also requires continued protection for human rights, innovation and freedom of speech, as digital spaces become public spaces.
- There are clear opportunities in this transition too – if the community is ready to take them and do so with genuine public confidence and trust.
- If this can be achieved, there is an opportunity to spur technological changes that benefit the economy as we recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Public debate, civil discourse and parliamentary scrutiny are essential for public policy development. New digital modes of communication allow for wider input and fuller insight.
- And in that recovery, there is renewed opportunity and urgency to ensure a genuinely ‘green’ recovery too. Industry must play its role in decarbonising existing and legacy technologies for a digital age and consider its own responsibility in ensuring the free and open internet - and all the devices connected to it - are sustainable.
- Under these pressures, the internet has demonstrated its ability to materially benefit us all in a time of crisis, so the challenge now will be to ensure it does so on a fair and equitable basis as we build an inclusive, sustainable recovery.

THEMATIC KEY MESSAGES

Trust: Trust, based on a clear ethical code, is key to successful digital identity systems for both individuals and organisations. A range of issues including: privacy; public education; engagement to ensure genuine public buy in; and, the use of plain and accessible language are key considerations in system development and deployment.

Inclusion: Inclusion needs to be considered at the design stage of technologies. The focus should be on outcomes rather than learning and skills training alone. Research is needed into the wider circumstances/context that leave people disadvantaged. When decisions regarding digital technology policies are made, there needs to be inclusive representation among those involved, as this will lead to more fair and robust policies.

Data: The question of how and where algorithms are used is complex. It is ultimately about defining the kind of society we want to live in. Public buy in is essential. In order for the public to trust the algorithms used, the data sets, assumptions and purposes must be transparent.

Environment: The tech sector has a range of roles to play in addressing environmental issues, particularly climate change. These include: decarbonising digital providers own energy supplies; ensuring hardware components are replaceable, repairable, and longer lasting; educating and potentially legislating for sustainable software practices; and, making sure the network is sustainable through collaboration between environmental and internet specialists.

Covid-19: The pandemic has highlighted the digital divide and inclusion will be critical to a tech supported recovery. It is important not blame technology and algorithms themselves, but instead how they are developed and deployed by people. We need to work towards positive vision for the internet and society – promoting digital and democratic rights in order to address challenges.

WELCOME

Russell Haworth, CEO, Nominet welcomed attendees, noting that Nominet believes collaboration and debate moves conversation on key issues. The UK IGF therefore represents a forum for experts and policymakers to advance these discussions.

Noting the online nature of the UK IGF in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, he also set out the opportunities that this format had presented that might not be available otherwise. These include the UK IGF's record attendance in 2020, and the diversity of its participants, including international participants in record numbers.

Setting out the theme of UK IGF 2020, 'the role of the internet in shaping society', he also confirmed the four main questions the agenda would address – namely trust, inclusion, data and for the first time, the environment. In addition to this, a final theme has been added: the Internet in mitigating the economic impact of Covid-19 and fuelling the recovery in the UK.

Thanking the high calibre of representatives from across the internet community, public life and civil society, he also highlighted that these were the voices to help understand complex policy and innovation, and bold ideas on how on internet governance can react to new challenges since our lockdown this year.



"Lockdown gave us all a moment to draw breath and think about change. There are many challenges and opportunities ahead."

Russell Haworth, CEO,
Nominet

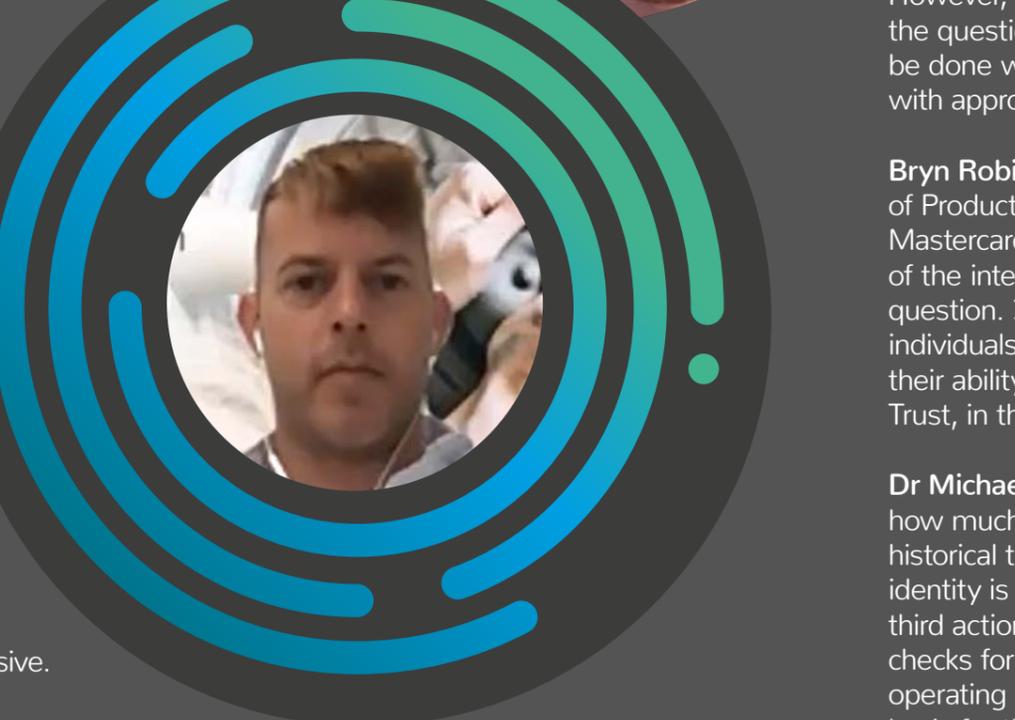
TRUST: PROTECTING DIGITAL RIGHTS DURING A PANDEMIC

Lilian Edwards, Chair of Law, Innovation and Society at Newcastle University presented sharing her work and insights on privacy and digital rights in the context of Covid-19.

Noting the proliferation of proximity and contact tracing technologies through 2020, Professor Edwards set out the case to have a statement in law that the installation of any state developed contact tracing app should always be voluntary. In addition, it should not be a basis for discrimination, particularly given that many vulnerable citizens either do not have a smartphone or are uncomfortable using them.

Professor Edwards also discussed where proximity and location tracking might exacerbate existing trends in surveillance, including in the private sector. Workplaces, and university campuses especially, are becoming unintended testbeds for new technologies and wearables. This has opened a risk that not only students, but citizens more widely, might leave bracelets and wearables at home to protect their privacy. Rather than rejecting tracing altogether, which is a valuable tool to fight Covid-19, the onus is on those responsible to think about which measures are more and less privacy invasive.

She also identified that such unintended consequences would need to be considered in any form of immunity passport, and how such data points might eventually fit into any eventual form of digital health identity.



BUILDING TRUST IN DIGITAL IDENTITY

Sue Daley, Tech and Innovation Lead at Tech UK, chaired and opened the session, flagging the Government's response to its digital identity call for evidence published in September, and how Covid-19 had changed considerations around digital identity.

Dr Edgar Whitley, LSE spoke about the accepted benefits of digital identity to simplify processes, prevent fraud, and simplify activities that might otherwise be more difficult because of social distancing. However, Dr Whitley also underlined that the questions remain around how this can be done with a robust basis in trust, and with appropriate checks and balances.

Bryn Robinson-Morgan, Vice President of Product Management, Digital Identity, Mastercard set out why from the very dawn of the internet identity had been a central question. 30 years on – we still lack a way for individuals and organisations to demonstrate their ability to prove their identity to one another. Trust, in this context must go both ways.

Dr Michael Veale, UCL Faculty of Laws explained how much of the debate had been caught in historical thinking – and that in many cases identity is an intermediary step to do another, third action. We therefore need additional checks for these intermediaries. Smartphone operating systems have been an unintentional basis for the ecosystem of identity verification. So it is essential to keep sight of who these powers are and to hold them to account.

Julie Dawson, Director of Regulatory & Policy at Yoti, set out her view that economic drivers will be the key consideration in digital identity – and a means of helping us rebuild our economy – and that knowing who someone is will be key to doing so. Industry has been effective in streamlining policies and processes by asking “who is their customer” and now, excitingly, Governments are waking up to their ability to do this too.

Panellists welcomed the Government's recent Digital Identity: Call for Evidence as a first step in the conversation – and called for further detail and a clearer timeline. The panel also discussed how the issue had been covered in media, noting that key aspects of digital identity that had been potentially misunderstood in society. The need then is for broader public education and engagement to ensure genuine public buy-in, and confidence, in potentially transformative technologies.

The panel also identified a role the UK may be able to play on the global stage in developing standards, supported by the UK's experience and expertise in drawing information from multiple data sources. However, in practice, the new digital identity landscape will likely be defined by competing companies as opposed to competing countries. On the subject of trust specifically, Dr Veale highlighted the role of middle-men entities in the system.

More broadly, these systems must feel trustworthy. To do so, the debate needs to use plain, and accessible language, with a clear ethical basis for discussion.

INCLUSION: INCLUSION IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INTERNET GOVERNANCE: BREAKING THROUGH THE BUZZWORDS

Anriette Esterhuysen, UN MAG gave the second keynote, setting out the role of the IGF and what the multi-stakeholder model has to offer in a globally digital society. The UK IGF too should be multi-stakeholder, sectoral and multi-disciplinary, and including new and different voices on this basis will be key to its success.

In her remarks Esterhuysen called for people to “fight out and speak out” if they feel they are being excluded and highlighted where access remains unequal within and between countries. The challenge for the many decisions surrounding the internet, is that we must make them in a way that is less exclusive and more open, simple, and easily understood. Practical changes to regional and global IGFs, to make them more user friendly, will be key to this.

“Inclusion is not easy & restful, can add noise and complexity but adds understanding and relationships which developed more robust policy”

World Summit on the Information Society:

“Build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”



“Let’s
move away
from seeing it as a
technical problem to a
social problem & realise
we have a collective
responsibility”

Ellen Helsper

DIGITAL EQUALITY

Helen Milner, Chief Executive at the Good Things Foundation, chaired the session, setting out her organisations work in championing digital equality not least through the Covid-19 global pandemic - with an array of civil society partnerships.

Ellen Helsper, Professor of Digital Inequalities at LSE set out in her remarks her working definition that digital inequalities constitute systematic differences about who benefits and who doesn’t, and that therefore the LSE focusses on digital inequalities rather than equalities.

Atif Choudhury, Chief Executive of Diversity and Ability offered background on his work supporting technology training for those who need it most. Historically, this had focussed on students and those in higher education, and their ability to make “meaningful choices” that go beyond employment alone. However, in recent years this has increasingly shifted towards the workplace, where support is still badly undervalued and underutilised.

Discussing the causes of digital inequalities, the panel agreed poverty, social economics, familiarity, safety and a sense of belonging are key drivers. Digital inclusion is often more socially acceptable to talk about than poverty, when in fact those poverty might be the very thing that makes someone unable to use the internet in the way their peers do. Much of our work on digital inequality is focussed on the skills needs of individuals, not the wider circumstances that might have left them disadvantaged.

The panel called on a renewed focus on outcomes. Rather than delivery and administration of learning and skills training alone. There is reason for optimism as well. Amid the global pandemic, the digital inclusion agenda is tackling loneliness in practical ways. The challenge now is to identify where these tools can help people across the board, from keeping them alive, to providing vital information and education.

The panel also discussed how we can make digital spaces safer and more accessible – Ellen Helsper set out to dispel the myth that young people and young adults are all ‘digital natives’. Indeed for many there is shame about asking good questions. Instead we should encourage dialogue between generations and being honest that we do make mistakes, and how we can prevent digital shaming in the future.

This will also require developers to be mindful of digital equality as they write, design, and require certain barriers to entry for their users – even as simple as downloading an app. These barriers have consequences especially as digital spaces become key for public life.



“The biggest asset
in the room isn’t the
technology it’s the
real experiences.”

Atif Choudhury



MINISTERIAL KEYNOTE

Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister for Digital, set the Government's priorities in the light of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic this year, noting that the UK intended to be active and engage in international forums - now more than ever. The Minister paid tribute to the benefits digital has played through the pandemic, noting the opportunities for learning, and upskilling, and why these will be key to the fitness of the UK's digital economy and society as the country emerges from the pandemic.

The Minister also set out her Department's work on the new Digital Strategy - to be published by the end of the year - focussing on harnessing innovation in the UK. To do this, the Government intends to ensure that regulation is "fit for the digital age" while being "pro-innovation, proportionate, and coherent".

This will still include online harm regulation, and a new duty of care to "ensure companies have robust systems and processes in place" for illegal activities and be "accountable for enforcing their own terms and conditions". In responding to questions from the audience, the Minister reaffirmed this point, noting that regulation would target services that host "user-generated content".

The Minister encouraged the sector and society to get involved - and make their voice heard in public debate - including to Government directly through consultation, and in forums such as UK IGF.

DATA: EXAMINING ALGORITHMIC TRANSPARENCY AND HOW TO EXPLAIN IT

Carly Kind, Director of the Ada Lovelace Institute, chaired the session on algorithmic transparency. In her opening remarks, she set out why the discussion was timely - noting recent controversies in the UK around the use of algorithms in public life, including calibration for examination results. Yet while many public bodies are stepping back from using algorithms - this comes at a time they might ideally help us respond to difficult problems.

Dr Brent Mittelstadt, Alan Turing Institute, shared his view that when deciding on fairness in algorithms, the power rests with those developing any given system. These definitions need to be robustly debated by those procuring these systems as well. More broadly, as a society we need to hold algorithms to a higher standard, especially considering the potential 'AI ethics fatigue' emerging in civil society.

Ashley Casovan, Executive Director at AI Global emphasised need for us to find agreed terms for discussion on these challenging issues. Increasing trust in public algorithms would be critical. She noted that where these tools are used in systems without robust oversight functions, so it will be hard to judge what is and is not acceptable otherwise.

Milly Zimeta, Head of Public Policy at the Open Data Institute noted that algorithms are built from data, and that data inevitably has a range of gaps and unintended biases. None the less, even if the data we base algorithmic decision making on is perfect, and complete, this would never ensure we arrive at the 'perfect' outcome or answer. Ultimately, humans need to define the society we want.

"Tech and data is a dynamic field we need the tools and guidance to reflect this... When there is more transparency, there becomes more opportunities to innovate".

Natalia Domagala, Head of Data Ethics at the Cabinet Office

Natalia Domagala, Head of Data Ethics at the Cabinet Office, set out why transparency around algorithms needed to be viewed in an institutional context, and driven by an interdisciplinary approach. Praising the Open Data community in the UK for taking a lead on this, Domagala explained that a proactive approach to transparency on the part of Government was key to its revised Data Ethics Framework.

The panel as a whole agreed that the UK appears to be approaching a turning point in public trust in algorithms, and that public buy in would be essential to ensure these tools can meaningfully support decision-making and public life in future. This could include use of Citizen Assemblies, focussed on technology, transparency, and fostering new digital models of public deliberation.

Practitioners and decisionmakers have a responsibility to raise awareness of where algorithms will fall short and why, and to transparently accept that public use of algorithms is a first step in a longer journey. Managing these risks, as well as ensuring robust audit of algorithms in public life throughout their lifecycle, is key to ensuring their sustainability in our emerging digital society.

ENVIRONMENT: THE INTERNET AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Myles Allen, Professor of Geosystem Science and Head of the Climate Dynamics Group, University of Oxford gave his introductory keynote to the challenge of human-induced global warming, noting the steps needed to limit warming to 1.5 set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This will have distributional inequalities and impacts – disproportionate to the Global South. These challenges will shape geopolitical challenges throughout the century.



The rate of human-induced warming is still going up – and emissions rising – despite any blip from the Covid-19 pandemic. While promises of a ‘green recovery’ are welcome, this must be implemented in practice, rather than words alone. Every tenth of a degree increase will have consequences and risks.

The tech sector must play its role to challenge this. This cannot simply involve industry reducing its own emissions. Indeed tech can develop new and energy intensive ways of using carbon (eg blockchain transactions). The challenge then is for tech to not just decarbonise its own energy supplies, but fossil fuels more generally. Professor Allen set out why a wealthy sector has market power to make this demand, not just for less fossil fuels but safer fossil fuels.

Following Professor Allen’s presentation, **David Souter**, Managing Director at ICT Development Associates Chaired the session on the internet and the environment. He noted this was the first year the global IGF had discussed the environment as a main theme as well. He also flagged that it is easier to prevent or pre-empt problems than it is to respond to them once they are system critical.

Michelle Thorne, Senior Program Officer, at Mozilla Foundation set out the need for the internet as a “global public resource” for all, and that the network itself has to be sustainable too. Responding requires communication and collaboration between environmental specialists, and internet specialists alike.

Daniel Zeichner MP, Member of Parliament for Cambridge and Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPGs) for Climate Change, set out his role in representing a ‘tech city’, and the APPG’s previous research on the environmental cost of energy consumption for data centres and internet infrastructure – and the potential environmental benefits of changing production methods.



Ugo Vallauri, Co-Founder, at the Restart Project, explained that the Internet and the Environment is not just an infrastructure problem, but one related to the range of devices used to access the internet the world over. The rapid proliferation of these, and their disposable nature, poses risks. There is an urgent need to ensure such components are replaceable, repairable, and longer lasting to ensure they are genuinely longer lasting.



The panel agreed the digital sector is the fastest growing contributor to emissions, and that international cooperation would be required to solve climate challenges related to the internet. In practice, this should involve educating and potentially legislating for sustainable software practices, and how we can empower people to make the right decisions about when they need to buy new products.

AN ADDRESS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE INTERNET

Yih-Choung Teh, Group Director, Strategy and Research, Ofcom gave his keynote opening the final day of UK IGF 2020, setting out the wider landscape Ofcom regulates today. Teh noted the difficulty addressing the ‘current’ state of the internet, given its pace of change. In 2003, when Ofcom was founded, 46% of households had internet access – today at 96%.



The pandemic appears to have accelerated the trends we have seen already, with greater adoption of video on demand over traditional broadcast content, working from home practices and use of the internet to stay connected to friends, family and loved ones.

More broadly, the opportunity of a sustainable internet community is that it can inform, advise and advocate for change, store and share knowledge and discuss new ways of doing things.

However, these changes are not without risks. 98% of young people have used a video sharing platform in the past year, an area where Ofcom is discussing its potential role under the new online harms regulatory framework. Teh noted that more than 3 in 5 adults, and 4 in 5 children, had had a potentially harmful experience online in the past 12 months, with experiences relating to interactions with other people or content much higher amongst children.

In addition to this, Ofcom has been working closely with operators of essential digital infrastructure to ensure resilience through the pandemic. We will need a wider debate about internet usage going forward, given new working from home models and the potential impact this might have on bandwidth.

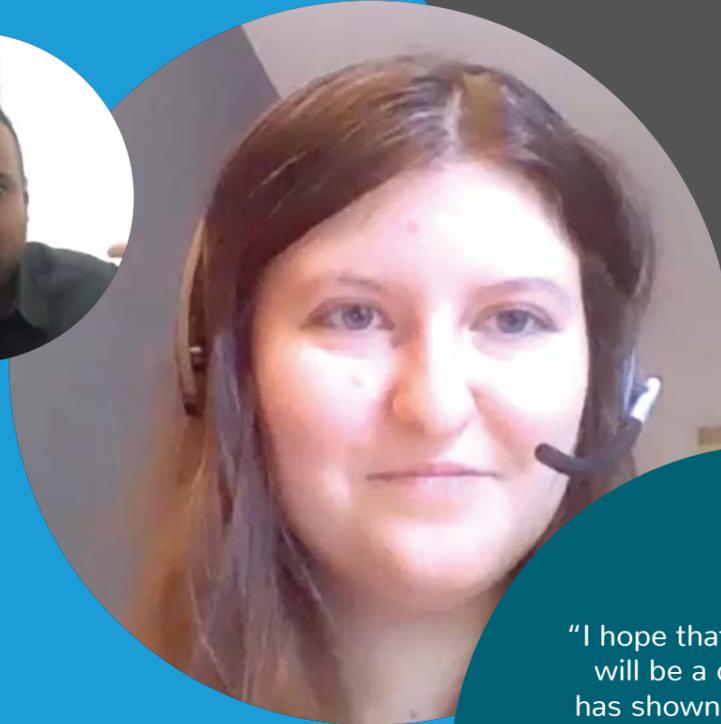
- The average amount of time spent online each day increases from 3h30 in November 2019, to 4h02 in April 2020 at the height of the pandemic.
- 12 million UK adults accessed streaming video on demand for the first time during the pandemic.

COVID-19: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN MITIGATING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND FUELLING THE RECOVERY IN THE UK

Gus Hosein, Privacy International chaired the session, setting out questions on how the economic impact of Covid-19 can be mitigated, and what role will the internet play if the UK economy is to recover.



Ellen Judson, Researcher at Demos, asked the audience what it means that people are living online more than ever. The goal must be to work towards a positive vision for the internet and society – promoting digital and democratic rights. Unsurprisingly, more people are relying on technology to work, socialise and live their lives. And people are learning new technologies quickly. However, a growing frustration is a concern; noting skills, pace of change, social pressure, cost and broadband speeds as exacerbating factors.



The panel agreed that Covid has shown us both the advantages and disadvantages of technology. Noting the tech lull pre-covid, technology has been instrumental in bringing people together - yet has highlighted the digital divide. Public trust is easy to lose and hard to gain. Panellists agreed that it is important not to blame technology and algorithms though, as the responsibility ultimately lies with people.

Inclusion will be critical to a tech supported recovery, and in order that citizens know technology is not something done 'to' them. Chi Onwurah flagged the challenge as hearing the voice of citizens and smalls business who often don't have the time to meet with regulators and decision makers.



Chi Onwurah MP, Member of Parliament for Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central and Shadow Digital Minister, welcomed the UK IGF as an important institution and forum for this discussion. The Shadow Minister contrasted today's internet with her experiences at Ofcom 15 years ago – noting she was disappointed at a lack of progress in industry - expecting more from industry to respond, and protect people. Whilst technology had been instrumental in responding to the disease, Covid-19 highlighted the "digital divide" for those left behind.

"I hope that this Covid moment will be a call to arms. Covid has shown us that change can happen in lightning speed if we make the right investments and decisions. What we need is technological empowerment for citizens and a strong competitive environment."

Ellen Judson, Researcher at Demos

Kulveer Ranger argued the challenge lies around skills - and that is shouldn't only sit on governments shoulders to support businesses. A standardised enterprise portal or account to get an easy access to technology information for all may be a means to enabling this.

Kulveer Ranger, Global Head Strategy & Communications at Atos flagged that Covid-19 was a moment of choice in how technology businesses will support the future, and technology will support society in a way that is sustainable, and secure. These considerations were there already - but were brought forward by the pandemic.



SUMMARY SESSION

In closing, the three convenors for each day of the UK IGF returned to offer their reflections and takeaways from the discussion.

Olivier Crepin-Leblond, Chair of UK Chapter of Internet Society, who convened the first day of UK IGF provided an overview of the discussions on trust, privacy, and regulation. He reiterated a common theme from his discussions; the need to focus on outcomes, not just processes and measurements. He also acknowledges UK's continued commitment to the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance. This is more important when we see other international actors agitating for alternate models. The need is for countries to commit, openly, to a free, open and inclusive model of internet governance.

Sheetal Kumar, Senior Programme Lead, Global Partners set out Day Two's discussions – noting that themes of outcome focussed policymaking and holistic approaches were repeated. The need is there for an inclusive approach to connecting people, while abiding by principles of equality. On algorithmic transparency, just because we can something, does not mean we should. We do though have a human rights framework as a reference point for all these questions. These points can be taken forward to the Global IGF, also taking place virtually this year.

Ben Bradley, Tech UK noted that the themes were common across of the three days, including his own. Bradley reflected on the changes in internet usage since Covid-19, and the patterns, themes and behaviours anticipated over a 5-year period being accelerated to a matter of months. The need is for the infrastructure, physical and social, to support this and to best understand whose responsibility it is to provide these. In practice, it is everybody's responsibility.



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