Values for Digital Responsibility: Agency, Intention and Stewardship

Digital technologies are developing exponentially, bringing big economic and social benefits but also significant challenges. Policymakers cannot stay ahead of the problems, leading to a crisis of public trust and confidence which could provoke unhelpful 'regulation by outrage'. Tech companies must therefore act and be seen to act. The Internet Commission seeks to help with this process.

Working with technology companies, policymakers, researchers, and NGOs the Internet Commission has mapped the unintended negative consequences of digital development. Problems range from personal abuse and addiction to social exclusion and the undermining of democracy. They can harm individuals directly and also coalesce to damage public trust and confidence in digital environments. Policymakers are planning more regulation and advertisers are concerned about risk to their brands and reputation.

Accountability = transparency + values

Recognising the need to act, Internet firms are deploying increasingly sophisticated processes to manage content and conduct on their platforms. For many years policymakers and researchers have sought to understand these processes better[1].

Some seek reassurance that everything is being done to prevent harm whilst upholding rights to privacy and freedom of expression. Others aim to benchmark and build best practices[2].

A better understanding of content and conduct on their platforms is now required by wide-ranging societal and economic interests: shareholders, fund managers, brands, industry in general, policymakers and citizens are ever-more invested in the long-term success of digitalisation[3].

Digitalisation is a huge social, cultural and economic process in which all these stakeholders are invested. Some of the biggest Internet companies now publish transparency reports on the subject[4]. *But they set their own questions and evaluate their own answers.*

With help from practitioners and experts the Internet Commission is developing detailed questions about how content and conduct are managed. They focus on processes for reporting, moderation, and governance, and the resources applied in these areas[5]. It aims to ask these questions with a better world in mind. Establishing a credible and reliable basis for its work is the agenda of the Internet Commission's Dialogue on Digital Responsibility.

Accelerating a positive digitalisation

The United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda is based on a vision of a better world. Consideration of digital technologies in this context is normally focussed on the vital role that they will play in enabling delivery of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals[6].

By contrast, this dialogue is more concerned with how the United Nations' vision can inform a more values-driven digitalisation. For this reason, the Internet Commission's dialogue considered the UN vision with a particular focus on people, prosperity and peace[7].

First ideas were taken from the work of the Atomium European Institute[8], CAN[9], Telefónica[10], the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change[11] and the World Wide Web Foundation[12].

Values for Digital Responsibility:

Agency: Enabling understanding and the power for people to decide.

Intention: Developing technologies that support the best of humanity.

Stewardship: Setting strategy with the interests of society in mind.

United Nations' vision:

People: Enabling all human beings to fulfil their potential in dignity and equality.

Prosperity: Ensuring that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives.

Peace: Fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies, free from fear and violence.

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[1] For example Prof. Sonia Livingstone at London School of Economics, John Carr of CHIS, Victoria Nash and Mark Bunting at Oxford internet Institute.
[2] Santa Clara Law conference on Content Moderation & Removal at Scale: http://bit.ly/2FSH8Au.
[3] Transformation of society and economy through the adoption of digital technologies, see Autio, Erkko. (2017) Digitalisation, ecosystems, entrepreneurship and policy.
[4] http://transparency.facebook.com and https://transparencyreport.google.com.
[5] Current draft is at http://bit.ly/2TyBiab.
[6] For example "Digital technology for the sustainable development goals": http://bit.ly/2UqNie7

[7] Three of the five aspects of the UN 2030 vision: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. See http://bit.ly/2B7N0SQ.
[8] Atomium European Institute for Science, Media and Democracy – "AI4People - An Ethical Framework for a Good AI Society: Opportunities, Risks, Principles, and Recommendations": http://bit.ly/2K6a1Z5
[9] Conscious Advertising Network manifestos: http://bit.ly/2E6AfKK
[10] Telefónica – "A Manifesto for a New Digital Deal": http://bit.ly/2yw9ev8
[11] Tony Blair Institute for Global Change – "A New Deal for Big Tech: Next-Generation Regulation Fit for the Internet Age": http://bit.ly/2Pw0wbu
[12] World Wide Web Foundation – "Contract for the Web": http://bit.ly/2K9sm7S

Which values should underpin a new cycle of disclosure, deliberation and improvement?

Agency
Digital technology is too often cast as an autonomous, and outside force. People must be brought into the picture, helped to understand and given the power to decide. This should include clarity about how services are funded and value is exchanged, as well as respect for privacy and personal data.

Intention
Rapid technological development has been seen as something that just happens; something neutral and objective. Developing technologies that support the best of humanity requires a much more deliberate and intentional approach. This is necessary to achieve a prosperous online ecosystem characterised by processes and practises that are safe, accountable and ethical.

Stewardship
Organisations must take responsibility for content and conduct in the online spaces they operate. Their strategies must be formulated with the interests of society in mind, encompassing, enabling and consistently enforcing standards that promote diversity, solidarity and inclusion, and reduce the potential for harm.

Internet Commission Accountability Model (January 2019)
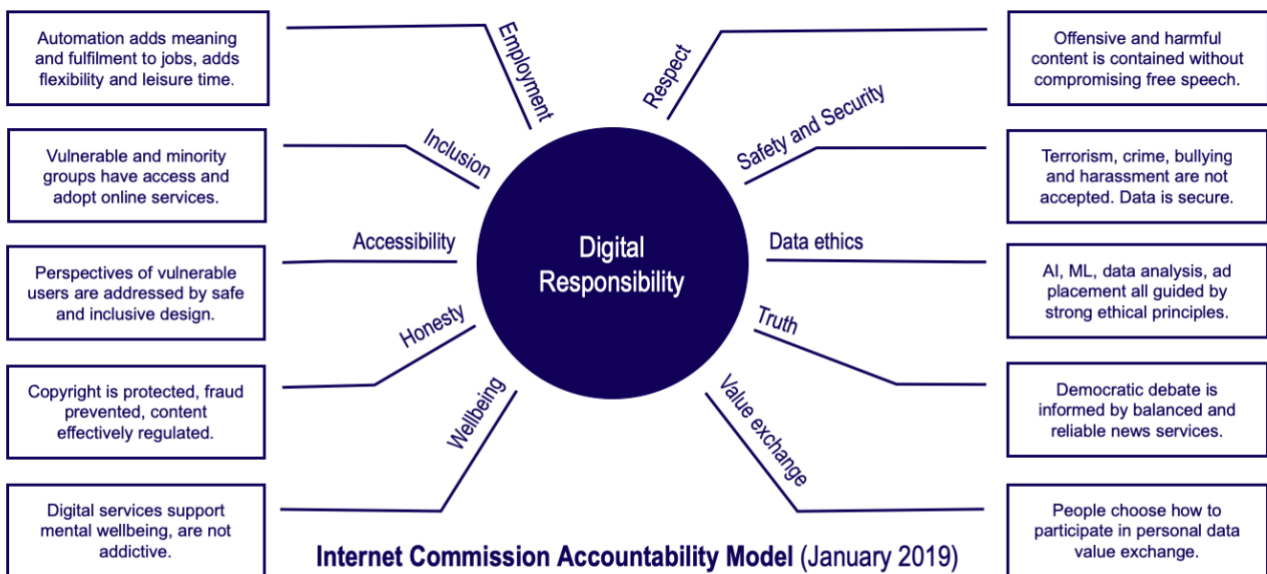
Values to inform questions and independent evaluation:

Agency: enabling understanding and the power for people to decide.

Intention: backing technologies that support the best of humanity.

Stewardship: setting strategy with the interests of society in mind.

Participants in October and December 2018 included: Arm • ARTICLE 19 • BBC • Brunswick Group • Carnegie UK Trust • CIPL • CHIS (Action for Children, Barnado's, The Children's Society, NSPCC and others) • Coalition for Reform in Political Advertising • CAN • Datum Future • Deloitte • LSE • Diplo Foundation • European Commission • European Parliament • EY • FIPRA • Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data • Google • Index on Censorship • ICO • Kings College London • Match Group • Microsoft • Mozilla • PWC • Siemens • Telefónica • Tony Blair Institute for Global Change • Trust Elevate • Truth Media • DCMS • UNICEF • UCL • UN University

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