

UK Internet Policy Forum – “Digital Citizens” – Thursday 21 May 2015

This year’s Internet Policy Forum on “Digital Citizens” brought together a range of speakers and perspectives to discuss three broad themes; the role the internet can play in strengthening our democracy, particularly by encouraging greater participation in democratic processes, how an effective policy and regulatory environment can support an innovative and thriving digital economy, and the challenges faced by the corporate digital citizen, particularly in how they balance the use of consumer data and opportunities in big data. The key points from the day are summarised below.

Welcome by the Nominet Chair, Baroness Rennie Fritchie DBE

Baroness Fritchie welcomed delegates to the conference, set the agenda for the afternoon and introduced the event chair, Dr Simon Moores.

Session 1 - The Internet, Governments, and Democracy

Emma Mulqueeny - Founder of Rewired State and Young Rewired State and a Commissioner for the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy

Emma had three priorities for parliament to improve digital democracy which were open data, which she explained using a unique blue trousers and chicken lady metaphor, education and skills. She pointed out that huge cultural change was imminent as a generation of ‘digital natives’ born around 1997 were about to pop out of the education system armed with an innate ability to engage with a community and test out different perspectives in real time.

Emma also suggested that many of our politicians don’t have the necessary digital skills and that more change would be needed to address this gap. Finally, she called for a commitment to educate every child by 2020 that they know they can vote at 18 and know how to do so and can choose who to vote for.

Audience questions

What should be done to develop the level of knowledge and digital skills amongst parliamentarians so they can engage with constituents?

New tools were seen as the best solution by the audience with 46.6% voting for the new parliamentary digital service to look at their introduction to increase the volume and quality of interaction between MPs and their constituents. The next most popular option was the introduction of a parliamentary digital strategy that set targets for the development of digital skills and the provision of training.

Which of the main parties do you think used social media most effectively?

34% of the audience voted that none of the parties used social media most effectively. The SNP were the highest actual party with 20.8% of the audience votes.

Dr Andy Williamson - Founder of Democratise and expert in digital democracy and citizen engagement

Andy suggested that the biggest digital media winner from this General Election had been voter registration, which had seen a big increase in take-up since the introduction of a simplified online process under gov.uk.

He also suggested that social media had mainly been an echo chamber for activist and politicians on all sides highlighting some amusing misfires including some apparently scripted ‘impromptu’ tweets and unfortunate photography.

Finally, Andy suggested that a major success of digital during the election was the use of data about individual voters helping parties identify where and to whom they should focus their efforts and resources in a much more granular way.

James Stewart - Director of Technical Architecture, Government Digital Service

James explained that Government Digital Service is now responsible for supporting 12 million visits a week to gov.uk serving 300 government departments and saving approximately £62 million a year.

He said that they have learned much about topics such as identity, security, and consumer experience; for example that usability is not just about how something looks but also how it works.

James suggested that the example of voter registration as mentioned earlier by Dr Andy Williamson was a great example of success and finally suggested that service design could be deeper and wider in the future.

He also mentioned that although they are aiming to massively reduce processes and increase overall digitization, for example in the case applying for career's allowance, some laws and processes are not yet ready for the digital world and still require wet signatures so they will need time to catch up.

Session 2 – Digital Markets & Innovation

Malcolm Harbour CBE - MEP (1999 – 2014), Former Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection and Director of the Digital Policy Alliance

Malcolm explained the background to the European Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy.

He highlighted three important areas which the strategy covers: better access to digital services; a level playing field to encourage innovation; and maximizing growth in the digital economy.

He suggested that criticism of US data privacy is over the top and called for more sensible EU data protection laws.

Malcolm highlighted the importance of engagement in the dynamism and innovation of the proposals and finally called for the UK internet community to take part in consultations on the digital single market in order to help improve and develop the plans.

Russell Haworth, CEO, Nominet

Russell covered three themes in his address; firstly looking at the need to encourage more small businesses to get online, suggesting that the UK is well placed and linking to the earlier presentation from Malcolm Harbour in making the point that the EU has an important role in getting the framework right.

He then went on to look at Nominet's work on building smart cities and smart communities, highlighting the work our Research and Development team has been doing to make use of TV white space in support of the Oxford Flood Network.

Finally, Russell discussed the linked issues of privacy, trust and the use of data, highlighting how Nominet's own in-house data visualization tool has already helped our research team to identify online threats and work with the relevant parties to resolve them.

Session 3 – Data & the Digital Citizen

Audience question

Does today's digital citizen have sufficient control over the digital footprint they leave behind?

Over half of the audience (59.2%) said that they didn't think people had enough control over how personal data was used. 16.3% however took a more pragmatic view voting that we need to adjust to a new concept of privacy for the digital age.

Liz Coll - Digital Policy Manager, Citizens Advice

Liz looked at what benefits and value do consumers get from sharing their personal data.

She asked if connected consumers knew and willingly gave up their data and its use. Liz made the case that we need a new vision and approach to personal data which gives as much attention to the empowerment potential of sharing personal data as the risks and detriments.

She also pointed towards a fair value exchange where the benefits and risks are made clear and called for control of data to be organised around individuals and not organisations.

What are the risks and opportunities in enabling consumers to have more control over the value and benefits they get from their data?

Audience Question

My greatest fear with regard to misuse of my private data is; embarrassment from exposure, reputational damage, stigmatization, economic loss, potential job loss, affront to their dignity, identity theft or no such fear.

Over half of the audience selected identity theft as their biggest fear from misuse of their private data. However, 10% of the audience had a more laid back attitude voting that they had no such fear.

Professor Ian Brown - Professor of Information Security and Privacy at the Oxford Internet Institute

Ian tackled the challenges for consumers in making informed decisions about the data they share with businesses. He made the point that individuals are not good at deferred gratification or considering the risks that may occur down the line in return for a positive experience in the moment.

Ian suggested that the social and regulatory environment needs to evolve to ensure good corporate citizenship in the use of personal data, putting forward a creative commons standard licensing system as one possible way to address the problem of complex and confusing privacy policies.

Audience Question

Who would you trust most with your personal data? Private companies, Central Government, Local Government, Banks, NHS, Telecommunications companies, or none of the above.

The majority of the audience (43.5%) voted that they would not trust any of the listed bodies with their data. Interestingly only 2% selected private companies, however 19.6% selected banks as being trusted with private data.

Alan Mitchell - Strategy Director, Ctrl-Shift Ltd

Alan looked at the principles that businesses are adopting in managing their customer's personal data.

He suggested that companies should adopt a common sense approach, recognising that building trust around personal data is the best way to sustain access to our data.

He pointed out that trusted data sharing could be a potential springboard for those companies to develop their brand and revenue.

Alan also highlighted that personal data is often concentrated in a few large firms but that data protection was not on the radar of competition authorities.

Alan suggested that companies seeking consent to access or use data up front has become a mechanism for citizen disempowerment and that this was a missed opportunity as consumers should be empowered to take advantage of their own data.

He went on to suggest a common sense way forward for brands to handle personal data to say what you will do and do what you say even as you implement new technology.

Finally he suggested that an alternative privacy promise should be safe by default where your data is always only one click away from being able to be removed at your request.

Audience question

After everything that I have heard today, I am feeling...

- *Confident that the Internet can have a positive impact and motivated to look at ways to innovate in my own organisation*
- *Unconvinced that an institution such as Parliament can embrace digital democracy*
- *Concerned that issues relating to online privacy and the potential for misuse of personal data will get worse*
- *Excited by the prospect of a Digital Single Market but that there are challenges in the way it is implemented.*

The majority of the audience (53.1%) said they were concerned after everything they had heard that issues around data privacy will get worse. However, by contrast, 18.8% voted that they were confident the internet could have a positive impact and they were motivated to innovate in their own organizations.

Presentations

You can view the presentations here: <http://www.slideshare.net/NominetUK>

You can view videos from the day here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7IcVx4vKUE&list=PLY0Aww8Get1I5C2FNP7ekQK4J7izf93s->