[Trustworthy data governance will unlock innovation, research suggests](#)

- A major new CDEI poll finds that the public believe digital technology has a role to play in tackling the pandemic, but its potential is not being fully realised.
- Public support for greater use of digital technology depends on trust in how it is governed. The single biggest predictor for supporting greater use of digital technology was an individual believing that 'the right rules and regulations are in place'. This was more important than demographic factors such as age.
- Trend analysis of the use of AI and data-driven technologies in the same period reveals that conventional data analysis has been more widely used in the COVID-19 response than AI.

The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI), the UK government's advisory body on the responsible use of AI and data-driven technology, has published new research on the use of AI and data-driven technology in the UK's COVID-19 response, highlighting insights into public attitudes, as well as trends it has identified.

The major longitudinal study, with a representative sample of over 12,000 people, ran from June to December 2020. The results show significant public support over that period for the use of data-driven technology to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost three quarters (72%) of the UK population felt that digital technology had the potential to be used in response to the outbreak — a belief shared across all demographic groups. A majority of the public (average 69%) also showed support, in principle, for a number of specific use-cases — including technologies that have not been widely adopted — such as wearable technology to aid social distancing in the workplace.

However, many respondents felt that the potential of data-driven technology was not being fully realised. Fewer than half (42%) said digital technology was making the situation in the UK better (only 7% claimed it was making matters worse). Respondents cited concerns about whether people and organisations would be able to use the technology properly (39%). This was more than double the number who pointed to problems with the technology itself (17%). This points to an opportunity gap — a disconnect between support for technology's potential, and the extent of its current application.

The research uncovered a clear relationship between trustworthy governance and support for the adoption of new technologies. When controlling for all other variables, the CDEI found that 'trust that the right rules and regulations are in place' is the single biggest predictor of whether someone will support the use of digital technology. This was substantially more predictive than attitudinal variables such as people's level of concern about the pandemic, belief that the technology would be effective, and demographic variables such as age and education. Just under half (43%) said existing

rules and regulations were sufficient to ensure the technology is used responsibly, still close to a quarter (24%) disagreed. Older respondents tended to have lower levels of trust in the existing rules and regulations.

The CDEI urges action to build trustworthy governance that earns the confidence of citizens over the long-term, pointing to principles outlined in its [Trust Matrix](#), such as enhancing accountability and transparency. There is currently relatively low knowledge about where to seek recourse in cases where data-driven technology has caused harm: 45% do not know where to raise concerns if they are unhappy with the way digital technology was being used. This finding is consistent with [other CDEI-commissioned](#) research: 68% of people reported that they would not know who to complain to if they felt that an unfair automated decision had been made about them in response to a job application.

The report also highlights trends and patterns relating to the use of AI and data-driven technology during the pandemic. One of these is that, aside from advancing vaccine research, AI did not play the outsized role many thought it would in relief efforts, in part due to a lack of access to data on COVID-19 to train algorithms. Instead, conventional data analysis, underpinned by new data sharing agreements, has made the biggest difference to the work of health services and public authorities.

Edwina Dunn, Deputy Chair for the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, said: "Data-driven technologies including AI have great potential for our economy and society. We need to ensure that the right governance regime is in place if we are to unlock the opportunities that these technologies present. The CDEI will be playing its part to ensure that the UK is developing governance approaches that the public can have confidence in."

John Whittingdale, Minister of State for Media and Data at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said: "We are determined to build back better and capitalise on all we have learnt from the pandemic, which has forced us to share data quickly, efficiently and responsibly for the public good. This research confirms that public trust in how we govern data is essential. Through our National Data Strategy we have committed to unlocking the huge potential of data to tackle some of society's greatest challenges, while maintaining our high standards of data protection and governance."

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Notes to Editor

- The CDEI was set up in 2018 to advise on the governance of AI and data-driven technology. The Centre is overseen by an independent Board, made up of experts from across industry, civil society, academia and government.

- The CDEI collated examples of novel use-cases of AI and data specifically being used to counter and mitigate the effects of the pandemic in its [COVID-19 repository](). The database highlights the breadth of applications, which range from the piloting of drones that delivered medical supplies to remote regions, to the creation of health equipment databases that monitored the availability of assets in the NHS. It comprises 118 individual use-cases, spanning a broad array of locations and sectors.
- On behalf of the CDEI, over the period of June-December 2020, Deltapoll conducted six surveys to understand public attitudes towards the use of digital technology in the UK's COVID-19 response. Each online survey asked the same set of questions every month to over 2,000 members of the public, representing all regions of the UK. Results were weighted to be representative of the UK adult population as a whole. By combining all six datasets, the CDEI was able to analyse the results from a total population of 12,113 respondents.
- The CDEI published a report on [public sector data sharing]() in 2020. It involved a detailed analysis of projects where data had been shared between government departments, and with commercial organisations, identifying recurring barriers, and the steps that were taken to address them. The report focused on citizen trust, arguing that it needs to be addressed if we are to maximise the value of data held. It included a [framework]() to drive forward trustworthy data sharing in the public interest. The CDEI is working in [partnership]() with other organisations to apply, test and revise the framework in different contexts.
- In June 2020, the CDEI published its [AI Barometer](), which is a major analysis of the most pressing opportunities, risks, and governance challenges associated with AI and data use in the UK, initially across five sectors. The CDEI convened over 120 experts to generate a community driven view of AI and data use in the UK. It identified barriers to innovation, such as low data quality and availability, a lack of coordinated policy and practice, and a lack of transparency around AI and data use, arguing that these barriers contribute to public distrust, which acts as a more fundamental brake on innovation.