

Digital innovation for social good

Digital technologies and the internet have transformed many areas of business – from Google and Amazon to Airbnb and Kickstarter. Huge sums of public money have supported digital innovation in business, as well as in fields ranging from the military to espionage. But there has been much less systematic support for innovations that use digital technology to address social challenges. Digital technologies are particularly well suited to helping civic action: mobilising large communities, sharing resources and spreading power. A growing movement of tech entrepreneurs and innovators in civil society are now developing inspiring digital solutions to social challenges. These range from social networks for those living with chronic health conditions, to online platforms for citizen participation in policymaking, to using open data to create more transparency about public spending. In our [latest report](#) on the matter, we call this digital social innovation (DSI). The most promising DSI projects are the ones combining novel technology trends such as open data, open hardware, open networks, and open knowledge in new ways to achieve social impact. Nesta has also identified key socio-economic trends that we believe will have a bigger impact such as “open democracy” that means a wider citizen participation in policy making; the “collaborative economy” that is the emergence of new economic models based on knowledge commons and sharing platforms or digital currencies; and “new ways of making” based the open hardware and open manufacturing revolution. These examples show how communities can mobilize collective intelligence, create awareness, promote collective action, and then contribute to meaningful social change. However, today digital technologies still fail to deliver anticipated solutions to tackle large-scale problems, and the growth of digital services has resulted in an imbalance between the dramatic scale and reach of commercial Internet models and the relative weakness of alternatives, mainly filling marginal niches and unable to gather a critical mass of users that can adopt the services. The main question is whether digital social innovation can provide fundamentally new forms of power that are capable of tackling large-scale social, and even global crises, while empowering citizens and allowing democratic participation.