The Oxford Internet Institute

Understanding life online
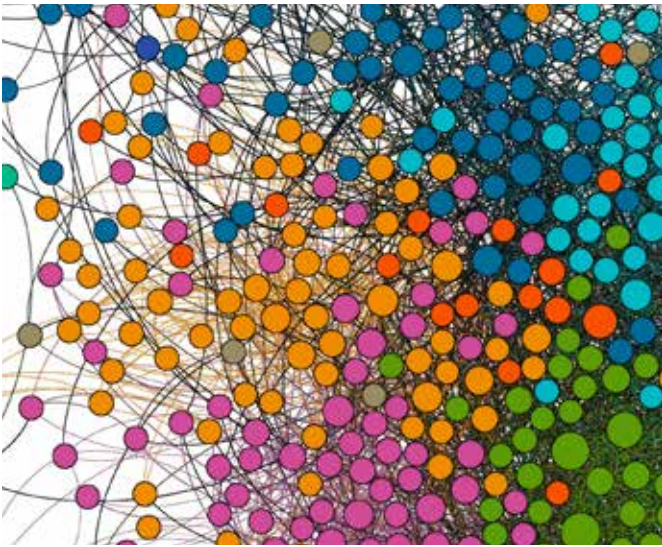
"My aim is always to make a difference to society. Fifteen years after my founding gift facilitated the Oxford Internet Institute, I can certainly say it has done just that, for the OII has become the world's leading centre of excellence on the relationship between the internet and society. The OII shares my belief in the potential of the internet to benefit the world. It has been my pleasure and pride to watch it grow."

– Dame Stephanie Shirley, *pictured above with Sir Tim Berners-Lee*
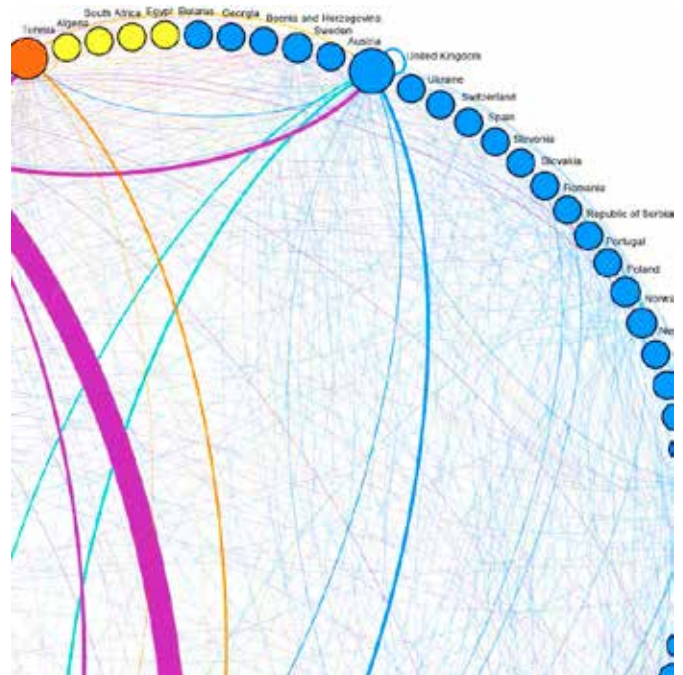
The challenge

Internet technologies are now woven into almost every fibre of daily life. In countries with well-developed internet infrastructure, we work, play, shop, date, socialise, educate, inform and entertain ourselves online. All these activities generate unprecedented digital footprints and provide a bounty of new forms of data that social scientists can use to illuminate the most pressing questions of civic society. These data can quite literally reveal who we are, how and why we act and interact, and even generate new understandings of life itself. They are ripe for research and analysis. Understanding how to channel and filter the new data torrent, however, has taxed the standard tools of governments, businesses and academia alike.

The architecture of the digital platforms we use daily without reflection also demands close inspection. The features of these platforms affect every decision that we take. They shape markets and institutions, they exert pressures on long-standing norms and values, and they drive social change. Whether by design or by accident, rapidly changing digital architectures defy familiarity and resist orthodox analysis. They call instead for a deep grasp of an intricate convolution of people, institutions, networks and data in order to make informed judgements about everything from simple web-searches to multi-faceted cyber security.

Understanding our new digital society is a challenge akin to that posed by newly encountered continents and cultures in previous centuries. It's both exciting and disorienting. Very little about the current revolution is predictable except this: our success or failure in understanding and harnessing the forces that are determining our collective future will have long-lasting repercussions that touch almost everyone.

The Oxford Internet Institute

The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) was founded in 2001 to understand our technologically mediated society and shape it for the better. It is the only department of a world-leading university dedicated to tackling this challenge.

Our remit requires assembling the best minds and methodologies from across the disciplinary spectrum. The internet transcends national borders and blurs organisational boundaries. Accordingly, the OII employs a holistic approach to the converging relationship between humans and technology, avoiding a focus solely on questions of economy, or society, or politics, or psychology. We work together to share our expertise, driven by mutual determination to understand digital life in all its splendid complexity.

Approach and impact

Our approach

Addressing such societal puzzles is rarely straightforward. It can be hard to obtain the best data, or it may involve sifting through an extraordinary data deluge to extract only what is needed. In doing so, OII researchers use and develop cutting edge methodologies, including the application of mathematical and computational models from the physical and life sciences to new forms of data about human beings.

We value not just innovation but methodological diversity, meaning that our faculty also develop new ways of using traditional methods, such as digital ethnography, online surveys and internet experiments. The OII faculty research the generic features of individual and collective behaviour and relationships in digital settings, encompassing social, economic and political interactions and institutions.

We are proud of our reputation for multi-disciplinarity, methodological innovation and empirical rigour, and have achieved social and political recognition for our work addressing the normative and ethical challenges of a digital society.

Our impact

Since the foundation of the department, the OII has sought to ensure our research makes a difference. The world is moving faster than policy-makers can react, and there is a particular onus on us to make sure our expertise is disseminated broadly.

Our researchers are embedded across policy-making networks in the UK and the wider world, from the World Economic Forum to the European Union. They give evidence to parliamentary committees, respond to policy-makers' requests for expert advice, sit on advisory boards of government departments and work directly with practitioners in the field.

Research from the OII is used in the writing of legislation, in courts and in parliaments. Our faculty regularly feature in national and international media, and our research is reported around the world in top-ranking press outlets such as *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *China Daily* and *New Scientist*. And as you might expect, they are highly active on social media.

Vitally, we shape the digital future by educating the next generation of internet literate policy-makers. The OII's MSc in the Social Science of the Internet, our thriving DPhil programme, our Summer

Our People, Projects and Questions

The OII's world-class faculty is 40 strong and includes economists, political scientists, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and lawyers – but also computer scientists, a physicist, a psychologist and a philosopher. Only in Oxford do such a diverse group of scholars come together to address the most pressing issues of our times.

Crucially, we investigate all aspects of the complicated two-way relationship between society and the internet. We look at the *good* – citizen science, for example – as well as the *bad* and the *ugly* which includes online terrorism, internet trolls and cyberbullying. We even highlight the *beautiful* in the form of crowd-sourced music and cultural markets.

Researchers at the OII are involved in a huge variety of projects, large and small, with topics including video gaming and young people's wellbeing; learning technologies and massive open online courses; political mobilization and social media; the geography of information; the African internet; digital exclusion and its impact; virtual currencies and internet advertising; internet security, privacy and censorship.

The range of issues is huge – as huge as life itself. Every new member of faculty allows us to expand our scope and reach, delving into new corners of the digital world, making new connections across schools of thought, with new disciplinary perspectives and methodological tools.

Doctoral Programme for internet scholars all over the world – as well as newer initiatives such as the OII Internet Leadership Academy for policy-makers and parliamentarians from across Europe – have collectively created a burgeoning network of digitally aware alumni across every continent and sector.

Our graduates go on to take up key positions across the world in the technology industry, government, NGOs, finance, law, journalism, academia and the policy sector. Non-academic destinations of graduates have included companies such as Google and Facebook, start-ups, as well as regulatory positions and consultancy. With some 40 students every year, our legacy consists as much in our network of outstanding alumni as in the ever-expanding array of articles published and policies informed. This is how we meet the greater societal challenges set out above, and with additional support from donors, we plan to expand our reach and impact ever further.

Be part of our future

The OII seeks partners who share our vision and our drive to explore the internet from every angle. Specifically we welcome partnerships to help us accelerate our research output in the areas where the OII is currently an indisputable pace-setter. These strengths include the following:

- Virtual currencies such as Bitcoin and the blockchain technologies on which they are based; OII fellow Vili Lehdonvirta is the leading authority on these
- Information geography, mapping the consumption and production of the world's knowledge, building on the work of OII Associate Professor Mark Graham and his team
- Understanding internet security, the most pressing issue facing firms and governments today, currently led by OII Professor Ian Brown and research fellow Joss Wright
- Children's rights and well-being, particularly the relationship with video gaming and social media, led by Vicki Nash and Andy Pryzbylski

The OII also welcomes partners to support new work in important topics that are currently under-explored by scholars and practitioners worldwide. In particular, we seek to build knowledge about:

- Digital health, including the changing relationship between doctors and patients
- Smart cities and transport, building on our urbandata2decide project
- Organisational and market design
- The relationship between the internet and mental health and well-being, both good (how can the internet improve well-being) and bad (the relationship with suicide and self-harm, for example)
- Understanding influence in serious organised crime, particularly terrorism and paedophile rings
- Migration and diaspora transformed by the internet
- Politics of hate and the far-right
- Digital exclusion and marginalisation, developing new ways of understanding internet usage across populations based on age, gender and mobility

Finally we invite partners to collaborate with us to identify and deliver new avenues of inquiry into important subjects that provide the fullest understanding of life online.

Costs

People are the heart of the OII. Our work is driven forward by talented research fellows and graduate students who tackle their topics in full collaboration with OII colleagues. To deliver ground-breaking research, therefore, we seek support for early- and mid-career academics to join our teams exploring specific topics over delineated time periods. Support for short-term posts and scholarships delivers defined outputs, builds capacity and ensures that some of the world's most capable and innovative scholars are able to pursue their education and research.

OII Research Fellowships

Most OII faculty start as research fellows, undertaking independent research and developing taught courses and supervision in a given area. Typically, they soon raise grant funding and form research teams in their specialism, progressing towards the professorial title. Three years of funding can therefore create a sustainable stream of research and teaching in an area of interest to the funder.

Senior Research Fellow	Costs for three years
£118,061 per year	£354,183

Graduate scholarships

We offer postgraduate degrees at Master's and doctoral levels, and these highly competitive courses attract outstanding international applicants. The DPhil in Information, Communication and the Social Sciences is offered to students wishing to undertake ground-breaking, detailed study of the internet and its social impact. The MSc in Social Science of the internet offers students internet-related courses in law, policy and other social sciences in the context of this dynamic and supportive multi-disciplinary department and is now available part-time.

There is significant demand for our course offering as reflected by the growing pool of applicants to our degree programmes. It is important that the most promising students be accommodated, regardless of their ability to pay. This is a tenet of Oxford's educational mandate, and also important for the success of our research programme.

The University has created the Oxford Graduate Scholarship Matched Fund to encourage new philanthropic support of fully-funded postgraduate scholarships, covering all fees and living costs. A donor's contribution of 60% towards an endowment could be matched by the University's contribution of 40%, ensuring that a donor's gift will go much further towards supporting postgraduate researchers.

The costs for supporting Master's scholarships are detailed below.

Master's scholarships

Fee status	Annual Fees + living costs total	Minimum endowment required per scholarship	Oxford's contribution (40%)	Donor's contribution (60%)
Overseas students	£35,999	£899,975	£359,990	£539,985
Home/EU students	£29,169	£729,225	£291,690	£437,535

Doctoral scholarships

The OII admits up to six new doctoral students per year, leading to a maximum of 18 students in the programme at any given time. Costs for doctoral scholarships are outlined below.

Doctoral scholarships

Fee status	Annual fees + living costs total	Minimum endowment required per scholarship	Oxford's contribution (40%)	Donor's contribution (60%)
Overseas students	£34,784	£869,600	£347,840	£521,760
Home/EU students	£24,414	£610,350	£244,140	£366,210

The Chair in Information Ethics

The OII Professor of Philosophy & Information Ethics leads a team of researchers working to identify and shape the guiding normative principles for living well and working ethically in digital age. We seek to secure the future of our existing Professorship in Information Ethics on a long-term basis, through either a ten-year or permanent endowment. At current costs, the endowment of the Professorship over a ten-year period requires funding of £1.44 million, whereas securing the post in perpetuity requires funding of £3.6 million.

Acknowledging our benefactors

Since its founding more than eight centuries ago, Oxford and its colleges have been shaped and sustained by the patronage of visionary individuals, groups and organisations, who share our commitment to advancing human knowledge. In turn, Oxford has been deeply committed to providing lasting and fitting recognition to its philanthropic partners. Major forms of acknowledgement include:

The Chancellor's Court of Benefactors

Philanthropic contributions which cumulatively total more than £1.5 million by an individual benefactor or £3 million by an organisation, once received in full, may enable the Chancellor to invite the benefactor to join the Chancellor's Court of Benefactors (CCB). The Court meets annually in Oxford for the formal ceremony of admission, business meeting and formal dinner. The Chancellor, The Rt Hon Lord Patten of Barnes CH, presides at CCB meetings.

The Vice-Chancellor's Circle

The Vice-Chancellor's Circle recognises benefactors who have provided generous support of between £250,000 and £1.5 million to the collegiate University. The Circle engages members in the life and work of the University, and meets each year in Oxford.

Encaenia

Encaenia is the annual ceremony in which honorary degrees are awarded to distinguished men and women, and benefactors are celebrated. Major partners of the University's work are invited to attend this important occasion, held at the Sheldonian Theatre since 1670. Every year, the University's Public Orator delivers the Creweian Oration on the events of the past year and in celebration of the University's benefactors. In addition, the University records the year's principal gifts in the list of benefactions in the *Encaenia* Programme.

Oxford's commitment to excellence

Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world. For almost 900 years, we've been working to advance the frontiers of knowledge and human possibility. Today, you will find Oxford's world-class researchers and scholars at the front lines of learning and practice across the globe. They are helping to strengthen civic life, build businesses and harness the power of technology. They are bringing fresh insights to bear on the undercurrents that shape the modern world. We invite you to join us in advancing our historic mission for the benefit of future generations.

For more information, please contact:

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