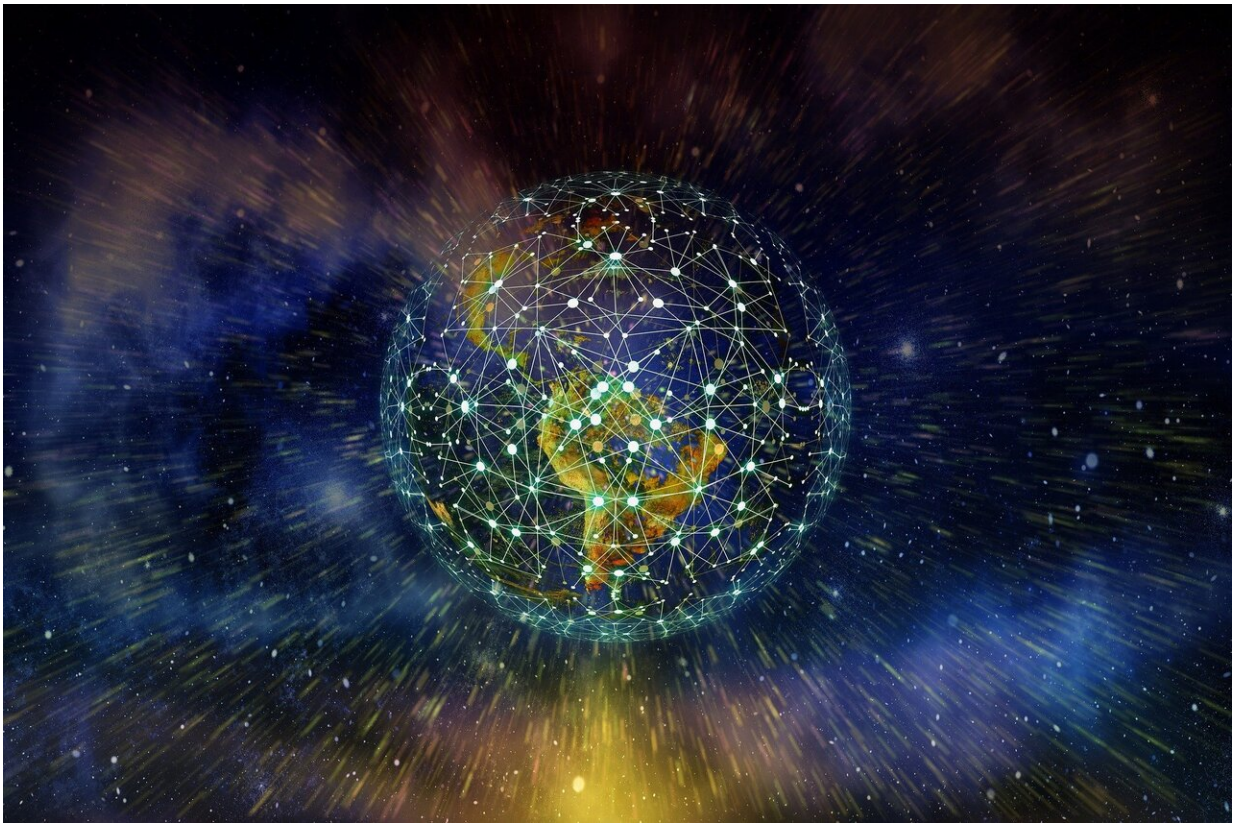


# Digital technology in government: Over-promised and under-delivered, says study

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Politicians and tech bosses have spun a "Digital Enchantment" fairytale, which does not present a realistic or helpful view of digital technology, according to new research from the University of Birmingham.

For decades, governments have been beguiled by a naïve techno-solutionism that views networked [digital technologies](#) as key to solving all manner of economic and social woes. In reality, from COVID apps to blockchain, the benefits have often been trivial. As large language models (LLMs) take [artificial intelligence](#) mainstream at ferocious speed, it is time to critically interrogate the real benefits of [digital technology](#) for the public good.

Published in the journal *Prometheus*, the study, "Dispelling the Digital Enchantment," argues that governments have looked to digital technology as a magic bullet for solving major social problems, without appreciating its downsides and risks. A flawed and unexamined belief that unfettered innovation will deliver transformational benefits has led to limited regulatory oversight or restraint. As generative AI becomes mainstream, this trend must be halted.

Professor Karen Yeung, Interdisciplinary Professorial Fellow in Law, Ethics and Informatics at Birmingham Law School and author of the paper explained, "As a society we have become enchanted with digital technology. We have been told by companies and governments that it holds the solutions to some of our greatest challenges with little to no [negative impacts](#) and the price we pay for it is a largely unregulated sector for the sake of 'progress.' But this is a fairytale constructed by tech industry leaders and peddled by [politicians](#) for years, and we are only just starting to realize this."

While policymakers are starting to introduce legislation to try and combat some of this, such as the EU's Digital Service Act and Digital Markets Act, Professor Yeung argues that most legislators, and even companies, have shown little interest in understanding the interaction between digital technologies and the unruly and messy social world we inhabit.

As governments rush to develop regulatory frameworks for AI, including the forthcoming AI Summit in the UK, there is an urgent need for a holistic, clear-eyed appraisal of the costs and benefits offered by networked digital technologies and for evidence that they deliver on their promises.

"For too long we have been engrossed in the myth that unconstrained innovation and emerging technologies will solve our problems for us without taking into account the adverse impacts this tech is likely to cause. It is incredibly hard to meaningfully extract ourselves from that narrative," says Professor Yeung.

"We need a thought-out and sophisticated response to this digital enchantment, based on a realistic and evidence-based understanding of technology, its relationship with society and legal regulation. We need to consider the worst-case scenarios so that we can take the steps necessary to make sure this technology serves us, rather than the other way around."

**More information:** Dispelling the Digital Enchantment: how can we move beyond its destructive influence and reclaim our right to an open future? *Prometheus*. [DOI: 10.13169/prometheus.39.1.0008](https://doi.org/10.13169/prometheus.39.1.0008)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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