

# natureOUTLOOK

## DIGITAL REVOLUTION

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In the space of 50 years, the digital world has grown to become crucial to the functioning of society. The revolution has proceeded at breakneck speed — no technology has reached more people in as short a space of time as the Internet — and it has not finished yet.

Digitization is generally seen as a positive force. The governments of countries such as Estonia, for instance, are embracing digital technology to become more efficient and transparent to their citizens (see page S136).

However, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) are sometimes greeted with fear. For example, as self-driving cars near fruition, the public's willingness to ride in them is declining (S141). And concern over the impact of AI on people's jobs is growing, even though economists say that occupations are likely to adapt to technological change, rather than be lost altogether (S132).

There are also worries about the effects of smartphones, video games and social media on our mental well-being. These concerns are so prominent that the tech giants of Silicon Valley are already starting to take steps to address them. But many researchers contend that evidence of harm — and of the effectiveness of corrective interventions — is notably lacking (S138).

An increasing amount of our culture exists only in digital form. Archivists around the world are taking action to preserve what they can for future generations (S144). However, the content of the Internet does not represent everybody. If the Internet is to realize its democratizing potential, it must better represent and serve people who are currently marginalized by their gender or their skin colour (S147).

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**Richard Hodson**  
*Supplements editor*

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