

# Design Thinking in the Digital Age

Design thinking has become one of the most widely adopted approaches for innovation across products, services, and systems. Yet the context in which design takes place has changed dramatically. Today's products and services are increasingly digital, connected, data-generating, and shaped by artificial intelligence. These changes raise an important question: how should design thinking evolve in a digital age?

This talk explores how data and AI can extend, rather than replace, human-centred design. It examines how designers can combine qualitative, contextual insight with large-scale behavioural and sensor data to better understand users, frame problems, generate ideas, and support decision-making. It also considers the growing role of AI in design practice, from supporting creativity and evaluation to enabling more personalised, adaptive, and intelligent products and services.

Moving beyond conventional design thinking stages, the talk introduces emerging approaches to data-led, stakeholder-led, and mission-led innovation, showing how design can respond not only to market needs but also to societal and planetary challenges. It concludes by reflecting on the responsibilities that come with designing through data and AI, including ethics, bias, ownership, sustainability, and the changing relationship between humans, data, and intelligent systems.



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**Dr Ji Han** is an Associate Professor in Design and Innovation at the University of Exeter. His research focuses on design creativity and innovation, with a particular interest in developing new design methods and computational approaches to support innovative design practice. His work spans AI in and for design, data-driven design, design sustainability, and design for healthcare. He is a Chartered Engineer (CEng) and a Fellow of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (FIMechE). He currently serves as Associate Editor for Research in Engineering Design. Prior to joining Exeter, he was an Assistant Professor at the University of Liverpool and completed his PhD in Design Engineering at Imperial College London.



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All are welcome

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