



THE ONLY CONNECT: RATIONALIZING THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MODERN AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Dr. James Eleonu

Abstract

The development of advanced cyber and artificial intelligence has appeared as a global threat to sovereignty of nations across the globe which equally affects the citizens of the respective countries. The functioning of civil society across borders has been enhanced with the development of technologies which promotes human rights but largely widens the threats for their violations. The paper looked at the ways modern technology disrupts human rights and potential global threats for human rights. It discussed about how much is modern technology good for human rights and how much good are human rights for modern technology. The paper adopted the doctrinal methodological research and concluded that the variations made in international laws and institutions as to responses of technological advances made to protect human rights.

Keywords: Human rights, Technology, Violation

1.0 Introduction

Digital expertise has altered the means through which human rights are looked at, exercised and dishonored across the world. The Internet generation has become a lucrative and an indispensable tool for the realization of a range of human rights, and for accelerating fiscal expansion. Across the world, plethora of recent developments have resulted in economic deregulations, failed states, cyber war, attacks and threats to cyber security have emerged as posing new threats to existing international human rights law. In 2001, United Nations declared Right to internet as a basic human right. This extent the focus of how does the internet affect the physical and virtual world of human right and has become such an irresistible part of human life. To study the disruptions, it is pertinent to understand the legal relation between artificial intelligence and human rights, examining whether international human rights law suffice, support and provide for concerns of human rights and to what extent to ensure the effectiveness of human rights in advanced technological times to come. It is rightly said, 'Technology is this funny thing where it's a lifeline, and then maybe it's your ticket to jail.'¹

2.0 Technology and Human Rights

Human rights are vital rights which are minimal which an individual possess against the state or official authority having power over him. They have said to be originated 2500 years ago when an Iranian ruler named King Cyrus the Great established racial equality, freed slaves and provided rights to profess religion of choice. With the advances in human intellect and conspiracies it has grown into a much-professed subject than before and without which human life cannot exist. Human rights enlarge the worth of a human, it clothes him with means necessary for basic needs such as food, shelter, water, education with equality, liberty and security. Human rights have been protected by the Constitution of

*Dr. James Eleonu ,LL.B (Hons), B.L. (Hons), LL.M, Ph.D (Law), Founder, Eleonu & Eleonu (Lawgate Chambers), Notary Public of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Phone: +2348039375898; E-mail: jameseleonu2020@gmail.com

¹ D. Eileen, 'Human Rights in the Digital Age' Just Security, December, 2014, available at <<https://www.justsecurity.org/18651/human-rights-digital-age/>> last accessed 2nd July, 2025.

the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) in the form of fundamental rights under Chapter IV and internationally by Universal Declaration of Human rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which embodies catena of rights and freedoms which belong to all as being fundamental in nature.

The development of Human rights due to global advances is not new and nothing in the inherited international system that would prevent any further protective measures. This era of digital connectedness has led to an increase in opportunities for conversation, collaboration, movement building, and collective shifts in social norms², Ideas and information circulate more freely with revolution of global technology and information revolution. Communications devices such as telephones, laptops, computers, tablets has provided for better record-keeping³. With the number of internet subscribers increasing to 700 million people, free circulation have enhanced the ability of persons to inform about the rights and redresses to violations of rights to those who are unaware or are refrained from being made aware. Information technology can be easily used to apply shame to governments and enforce rights. The complexities of interplay between the technology and human rights have been under critical studies in the recent past. Human right does not only protect the person but also its property covering intellectual property, freedom of expression across boundaries, security of data, and privacy of digital surveillance.

3.0 Dangers of Technology on Human Rights

Technology widens its horizons every day, with advancement in cyber activities, digital communication, artificial intelligence and robotics, work force and employment, digital economy, new value creation and international security. The Post COVID-19 times have taught humanity to run the new way of life and all thanks to the technology which has allowed working even in these difficult times, in short has defeated the pandemic. Human rights are not limited to a piece of earth now but have impacts over the places, where one person can violate rights of other person sitting across nations. Though it has proved to be dangerous, technology may also be used to enhance international monitoring through the creation, improvement, and use of more advanced transparency mechanisms.⁴

The digital communication has increased the connectivity and global coverage with aviation, travel and tourism, internet of things, space, aerospace, cities and globalization and economy and new value creations. In a context where worlds of reality are digitally connected and expanding cyber realms the society wide digital security and cyber vulnerability is biggest systematic threat. The availability of data of high security, digital infrastructure and components are click away accessible from anywhere across world is a threat. The feature of decentralization and distributed nature of internet which was originally seen as resilience is now imparting difficulty in complex global vulnerability. The cyber-attack in Ukrainian power plant is a recent example. The interconnected era of digital world with the humans have although made life refreshing, accessible and smooth though have also paved way for physical

² C. R. Sunstein, Social Norms and Social Roles (1996) (96) Columbia Law Review 903.

³ J. F. Metz, Information Technology and Human Rights, (1996) (18) Human Rights Quarterly (705):721-22.

⁴ D. J. Steven, *The Human Rights of Access to Legal Information: Using Technology to Advance Transparency and the Rule of Law* (2001) (1) (2) (6) Global Jurist Topic, available at <<http://www.bepress.com/gjtopics/vol.1/iss2/arto>> Last accessed 20/7/2025.

damage, threatening the most grundnorm rights such as, the Right to life, liberty and privacy of a person. Human rights actors aim to attract attention to the issues that either affect them or affect publics they represent by engaging in conversations that, increasingly, take place online. This makes sense; the amount of content and knowledge that exists on the web, reaching more than three billion people, is unprecedented.⁵

Secure data transmission poses another crucial problem as to pre-digital era such as human rights violations committed in the name of nation security, counter-terrorism, controlling and suppressing freedom of press and foreign vigilance. In countries across the world agile cyber laws implemented without considering the effects that they lead to erosion of human rights. For instance, the United Kingdom's Investigatory Power Act, which was announced in the King's speech on the 7th November, 2023 legalizes mass global surveillance by authorized government agencies, which empowers them to hack phones and computers not only in their territory but extra territorial, though only in restricted parameters.

In the mist of mass media and digital transformation, the policy uncertainty to global and corporate governance, sustainable development and public finance and social protection lead to loopholes for violations of human rights. Though human rights when made were ahead of their times but with the increase in dependency on cyber technology paves numerous ways to threaten the human rights increased proportionally. Governmental measures interstate can be implemented but with the globalization some human rights are critically threatened. Respect for Private lives and protection against personal data is essential. Though it has been held that if information is voluntarily parted with by an individual, no right to privacy exists", in *Katz v. United States*.⁶

4.0 Global perspectives

Internet as a basic right declared by the United Nations in 2001 is still not accessible to every individual in every part of world owing to the cost involved and of course the unemployment leading to poverty. The technology is causing global inequality as to lack of technology then technology itself. For all of us who live in ecology of internet it is hard to define our lives without internet and before it. Study indicates that globally six out of ten people are not connected to the internet, which means only 40% of world's population have access to internet and the remaining has not even encountered it. This is where the divide happens and widens the inequality between nations, narrowing the digital divide must be a top human right.

The Constitution of Nigeria guarantees every citizen the right to life and personal liberty under sections 33 and 35 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Also, in India, the Constitution of India provides under the extended version of Article 21 that every citizen has the right to life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court in the case of *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*⁷ decided that privacy is a fundamental right, though this right is not unbridled or absolute. The Central government exercising power under Section 69 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, has the power to impose reasonable

⁵ See United Nations Broadband Commission, *The State of Broadband: Broadband Catalyzing Sustainable Development*, 2016.

⁶ (1967) 389 U.S. 347

⁷ (2017) 10 SCC 1.

restrictions on this right and intercept, decrypt or monitor Internet traffic or electronic data if it entails a threat to security and integrity of the nation and friendly relations with other countries or to prevent incitement to commission of an offence. The Central government passed the Rules⁸ that allow the Secretary in the Home Ministry/Home Departments to authorize agencies to intercept, decrypt or monitor Internet traffic or electronic data.

5.0 Human Rights and Modern Information Technology Companies

Growing internet means growing access, which is not only limited to adults but children of all ages. As children spend more time on the internet, it is apropos for the modern Information Technologies companies to respect their rights in cyber world. Though at the same time it is pertinent to understand that the privacy is maintained and the same is not misused. The Modern information technology companies are directly related to violation of human rights as the continuous access of services, data and technology by the consumers leads to sharing of the information. The relative developments in big data analytical and artificial intelligence have ability of mass information in large quantities of greater importance. These have increased the capability of medical, trade, retail and law enforcement but also harassed the credit, housing and employment creating gaps for requirements of certain skills. This unlimited access also leads a way for distortion of personal data. To deliver privacy protocols is need for the hour as Universal Declaration of Human Right for Article 12. Encryption is essential in this as it provide for protection of private conversations such as mails, voice, and messaging and cloud storage. It safeguards the privacy and security necessary for protection of freedom of opinion and expression. But when such data is required by law enforcement authorizers, the paper submits that they misuse and violate human rights the data provided for surveillance. As a first step to protection of digital environment and to combat the challenges brought by digital technology, it is important to focus that human rights are multinational dimensions of virtual reality life of internet. The most delirious context in the modern age technology and advent of cyber terrorism is the no choice between protecting national security and providing for human rights. Strategies for the same remain in a fix as they aim for counter-terrorism or protect rights for privacy as both cannot co-exist especially with technology.

6.0 Conclusion

Cyber security, international security, national security, personal security and human rights protection has become the heart of functioning of internet infrastructure. Reliable working of internet requires faith for global and national security. It is worth for protection of data stored and critical infrastructure to stand on strong pillars for vigilance against hacking or cyber-attack. The Modern Information Technology Companies storing information shall embrace privacy of the consumers as the trust and economic conditions depends on this. With the growth of internet the connectivity expands the efforts to overcome the great divide, digital hygiene and information technology education should be packed with connectivity. Human right activist are enforcing a primacy of laws relating to human rights over other field of international law. Digital world has brought new challenges in cyber security, enjoyment of right to privacy ad access of internet, freedom of speech and expression. The test is whether governments, Modern Information Technology companies and individuals can develop holistic policies necessary for protection of human rights and that they are used in both freedom and security. It is the

⁸ See Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Information) Rules, 2009.



view of this paper that the post corona era is more of digital based and the efforts of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in passing the Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023 is laudable as it regulates the use of personal information and also provides for penalties for misuse of same thereof.