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# EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITION GLOBALLY

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## INTRODUCTION

*“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity...”*

**Nelson Mandela.**

Human Rights are moral norms or principles that tend to describe certain standards of human behavior. These rights are very well known and universal in nature which means they are applicable everywhere at every time all over the world, and strengthens the fact that each and every person around the world truly deserves to be treated with dignity and equality. These are thereby protected as natural and legal rights on levels of international as well as municipal law. The milestone document in the very history of human rights is **UDHR** or **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. Its declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948. It has 30 Articles and it sets out all the fundamental human rights to be universally protected for the very first time. Since that time due to the rise of digital era, more awareness has been created in this regard. The UDHR itself has been translated into over 500 languages to make it known and understood all over the world to each and every person. As rightly quoted by **John F. Kennedy**, *“The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man is threatened...”* It is thereby explained in the very beginning of the preamble of the document that recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family is the very foundation of justice, peace and freedom in the world. Technology can be a powerful tool for human rights. The increased access to internet and rapid social media development had enabled activists to organize and spread their message to broader audiences. We keep learning about new human rights activists or groups or social propaganda on daily basis, and we get to put forth our opinions in support or objection to those. There is no more filter as we can on our own do our research and make ourselves aware about the current situation and changes regarding human rights. In the current digital age these rights are either being violated or increasingly fulfilled in the online environment and in current time even though the context of human rights is slightly changed, the agenda however remains the same...

## WHAT IS DIGITAL AGE AND ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNOLOGY?

The digital age began early in the year 1939 with the very first construction of digital computer, since the time the digital influence has grown more and more on our daily lives and right now it is greater than any time since its inception. There is a real fear that increased machine autonomy will somehow undermine the status of humans, however these ideas and assumptions have different sides. Today organizations, states and political parties already hold powerful and remarkably detailed information about everyone. The potential threat of computational technologies to human rights and to political, physical and digital security was highlighted in recently published study on malicious use of artificial intelligence.<sup>1</sup> Data has now become a ubiquitous yet almost imperceptible part of our day to day life. It has made access to help and assistance faster and more reliable, as correctly stated by **Martin L. King jr.** that a right delayed is a right denied. Emergence of technology has with no doubt played great role in availability of options and quality of data upon which informed decisions could be made for benefit of society and mankind. It has in fact increased efficiency, unleashed new opportunities and maximized human potential. As a technological revolution,<sup>2</sup> the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution is changing our ways to live, interact and work and has full potential to uphold and challenge human rights. There are some technological trends impacting these rights for example internet and the right to freedom of expression, right to privacy, automation and right to decent and fair work, etc. The digital technologies fragment and control the whole process by which the judgments are made that play pivotal role in bearing of freedom. Digital impact on human rights has dark side as well however many of them are still unknown, human rights organizations are exploring ways to ensure that these digital advancements do not exacerbate injustice or inequality and can be beneficial for all. The General Assembly affirmed that the rights held by people offline must for sure also be protected online and it is called upon all the states to protect and respect the right of privacy along with other rights in digital communication.

## WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS AND ITS COEXISTENCE WITH DIGITAL AGE?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://theconversation.com/why-technology-puts-human-rights-at-risk-92087>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.webforum.org/agenda/2017/12/how-are-today-s-biggest-tech-trends-affecting-human-rights/>

As very rightly said by **Pope Francis**, “*Human rights are not only violated by terrorism, repression or assassination, but also by unfair economic structures that create huge inequalities.*” These are such fundamental rights which are inalienable and person happens to be entitled to them inherently as they are human beings, without any regard to their origin, gender, language, ethnicity, religion or any other personal status. The complex relationship between human rights and digital age is relatively new in literature<sup>3</sup>. Its greatly unquestionable perks do not cancel out its remarkable risks as they both go hand in hand. On one hand Digital technology delivers many benefits, as we can inform, investigate and empower any cause we want to, we can communicate and connect around the world as never before, we can use AI or artificial intelligence to predict and head of human rights violation that happens anywhere around the globe, while on the other hand it comes down with some challenges that can’t be ignored. There can be lethal consequences if there is failure to take action such as cyberspace being an ungoverned space which can be a human rights black hole, the freedom of expression can very well cause incitement to violence and hatred, there are risk of trolling campaigns, cyber bullying, hacking and online harassment. These can furthermore even lead to enhanced discrimination, riots, shrinking of civic space, brainwashing, real world targeting and even ethnic cleansing or alleged genocide. The role of digital tech in the construction of new human rights standards and norms are creating new challenges and opportunities and hence demonstrate the extent of the digital revolution. It also defy existing human rights standards and norms. We can protect these rights in the face of ethical dilemma and technological advancements by being responsible and good citizens, the digital era has given everyone a power and responsibility to decide what to say on social sites and decide if it creates a positive or negative impact on the mind of readers. There are ways in which technology can protect Human rights, for example, by implementing online learning and the right to education and protecting human rights in supply chain. We have the power to use encrypted communications, data streams, media and satellite imagery to directly promote and defend human rights. We are in mid of profound social change brought by the exponential adoption of digital technology and rapid expansion of digital communication infrastructure. As quoted by **Michelle Bachelet**, “*The respect for human rights is nowadays not so much a matter of having international standards, but rather questions of compliance with those standards. Human rights are egalitarian as they are same for everyone.*”

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.odi.org/publications/11490-human-rights-digital-age>

The internet has become an indispensable tool for accelerating economic development and realization of a range of human rights however there are various examples of technology undermining them like, the requirement that internet users need to supply real names to Chinese service providers or the death sentence posted on Facebook in Iran or PM banning twitter in Turkey or a court ruling on the right to be forgotten in Google searches in Europe or bulk electronic surveillance of American citizens by the NSA. It is rightly said by **Jimmy Carter** that for this generation, life is nuclear survival, liberty is human rights, and the pursuit of happiness is a planet whose resources are devoted to the physical and spiritual nourishment of its inhabitants. There are some practical steps through which human rights movement can catch up to the digital reality:

- By creation of a special Rapporteur (essentially an human rights law expert) mandate on the right to privacy at the United Nations Human Rights Council, the inherent idea is that when everything one says can be intercepted or tracked, it will have a vital effect on what we feel free to say and these concerns go to the heart of the work of defenders and human rights activists around the world.
- By reinforcement of conceptualization of human rights protection as a national security priority, there is a need to solidify the international understanding that adherence to the rule of law in digital realm is needed for the protection of global and national security rather than antithetical to it.
- By contribution to development of Multi stakeholder internet governance, rather than to allow retrenchment toward a multilateral, state based “westphalian” model of governance.

## CONCLUSION:

*“Human rights is the soul of our foreign policy, because human rights is the very soul of our sense of nationhood...”*

**Jimmy Carter**

The doctrine of Human rights has been highly influential within global and regional institutions as well as international law. The duty of government to protect, promote, fulfil and respect these rights is the foundation of Human Rights framework. Regulation and intervention is now more necessary than it ever was, as there is a need of accountability, oversight and responsibility. As the advancement of technology has paced up, it is only natural that world

had to deal with both positive as well as negative consequences, and naturally it will affect the arena of human rights, as on one hand people are becoming more aware of their rights and see and judge for themselves of any wrong done to them or other people on any criteria or status and hence can raise voice against it and ask for assistance, whereas on other hand, there is always a risk of its misuse and hamper of privacy of people. We are hence at a critical moment for the protection of human rights in the digital context. All such global workers whose actions tend to impact the human right's enjoyment must for sure lead in the reaffirmation of international human rights framework as the central pillar and the base of development, freedom and security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's digital era...