NR02 / Protecting Human Rights in Digital Spaces: Governance Challenges and Opportunities in Developing Economies

Topic : Research

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

General Objectives: The research aim is to examine the frameworks that govern the protection of human rights against the backdrop of digitalization in developing countries. Among the research objectives include the identification of challenges that include, but are not limited to, challenges such as state surveillance, protection of data, as well as the divide, while on the other hand, opportunities that include, but are not limited to, policy reforms, as well as partnerships, with the aim of providing a framework that incorporates human rights due diligence in digital policymakers.

Research Questions: Key questions include: How are inequalities in developing economies further exacerbated by digital technologies, specifically with regard to bias in algorithms, as well as a lack of accessibility? How are existing regulations formulated to address the need to pursue freedoms of expression and assembly while still securing safety?. Follow-up questions examine potential avenues: In what manner might globally recognized norms of ethics be used to further inclusive accessibility for all people? Are existing regulations sufficient in precluding the authoritarian use of technologies?.

Scientific Relevance: This research is necessary as it helps close the many existing knowledge gaps in the application of human rights in developing countries, where such challenges are even more pronounced, such as in the current economic challenges that increase risks such as the digital divide. It helps inform existing health/public policy frameworks, such as ensuring equal rights to use health technology online, similar to the e-governance initiative that India is undertaking.

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The rapid expansion of digital technologies in developing countries is laying dramatically new contours as to how individuals exercise and experience their basic human rights. The paper examines the new challenges and opportunities that arise in human rights protection in digital spaces, in the realms of governance, policy frameworks and digital inclusivity. Embedded within a large broader theme of governance in developing contexts, the study synthesizes recent scholarly debates around digital privacy, freedom of expression and digital divide, highlighting gaps in regulatory mechanisms and the imperative need for a solution that are the context-specific in nature.

Central research questions include: How do digital governance policies affect the safeguarding of human rights in digitally connected communities in developing countries? What role do legal and technological frameworks play in mitigating digital exclusion and rights violations? Additionally, the paper explores methodological challenges in documenting and addressing human rights concerns online, advocating for interdisciplinary approaches that combine legal analysis, empirical data, and participatory research.

The paper situates itself in the socio-political realities of developing economies, where infrastructural constraints, socio-economic inequalities, and evolving legal landscapes heighten vulnerabilities of marginalized groups in digital environments. This context underscores the urgency of rethinking human rights protections that are adaptable to local digital ecosystems without sacrificing global normative standards.

This study contributes empirically grounded insights and proposes theoretical refinements to the concept of digital human rights governance. It also introduces methodological innovations for assessing digital rights impacts at multiple governance levels, aiming to inform policymakers, civil society, and technology developers about inclusive and equitable digital governance.