

A BOOK REVIEW ON SUSAN PERRY & CLAUDIA RODA'S
"HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY"

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Abstract

In the Pandemic times, one thing that has proved to be of utmost relevance has been technology and internet. However, rarely does it find a place in conversations regarding the Human Rights. This book on Human Rights and Digital Technology has tried to highlight this untapped space involving an interplay of the rights of people and the impact of advancing technological developments on it. The increased availability of devices, better data storage mechanism as well as ubiquitous connectivity are the fad guiding technological development. The authors have covered aspects on freedom, environmental impact, along with cases of countries like China and France with respect to internet rights and censorship. In 2014, post the terrorist attack against the Charlie Hebdo satirical review, a law was promulgated by France to censor online jihadi's recruitment however state used the law, in the garb of state emergency to curtail individual liberty. As per the authors, the Internet censorship has been believed to be more of a threat for society, for the ones critical of the governmental officials, than countering danger to the state. Either specific sites like Youtube, Facebook's access is withdrawn, or the state deeply inspects the websites available for netizens. This book review strives to bring out the essence of what the author has cited in the book, highlights its positive and negative aspects, along with its impact on the readers.

Keywords: Data, Internet, Technology, Human Rights, Censorship.

An Interplay of Human rights in the Digital world

We must start seeing data protection as a human right issue and not merely a compliance concern. Data minimization is the envisaged vision wherein only that much information is fetched as it is necessary. The author in this book engages reader's attention with the fact that 83% of internet users believe that access to internet must be acknowledged as a primary human right, in a survey conducted by the Internet society. The book aims at maintaining balance between technological progression and rights of the citizens. The rise of technology was happening at the time the scope of international human rights framework was broadening in the era of globalization. The authors are maestros in from the field of technology and that gives a certain authenticity in reading this book. This book is a must-read for technology and law enthusiasts, and could be also highly insightful for the teenagers, who happen to be the most targeted user of the Digital world.

The author discusses that to foster democratic values in the world of rising digital technology, the world must be viewed as a complex human and machine interplay of digital cause and effect. Furthermore, technology emerged as a savior as it was seen for the greater common good however now time has come when the individual's rights are safeguarded from the of the digital revolution's negative consequences. The introduction of the book also covers historical overview of digital technology skimming through the period wise development in terms of technology as well as internet across the globe in a fashion that gives the readers an idea about the immense paradigm shifts towards this advancement. The book throws light on the positive side of digital technology towards human rights as the author talks about how massive amount of information and awareness about the human rights violations can be accessed with Internet search engines, through social media platforms, emails, cellular phones, video cameras, etc. The book also strives to cover state, corporate as well as individual driven human rights violations in the digital realm. It also attempts to elicit deliberations and academic responses from the young generation on exigency of optimizing the use of digital technology.

Another segment of the book focuses in depth on the challenges that the data stored in the digital technological set ups pose. Even though the advancement in digital technology has been assistive in human right's protection, the unacceptable data use could still overpower the positive aspects

of digital advancements. Prism program has been mentioned where the National security Agency of the United States of America gathers data from the internet service providers in the US. It is cited by the author how Internet has now become subject to human right protection as well as breach, with state censorship being the most contentious topic. The objective of the entity called internet is to render freedom to express or innovate, ubiquitous access and unbridled cooperation across the globe. However, it is also the government's duty to safeguard fairness and basic liberties of citizens. In the garb of security, the privacy rights of individuals are infringed by the state- or state-run agencies. Censorship is also a grave human right violation as it restricts the freedom of expression. A comparison has been drawn between US' open and global access to internet and China's filtered and state restricted access to internet, also known as the Great Firewall of China. An in-depth analysis of the political, social, and ethical consequences of state censorship as well as surveillance practice has been done by the author. The book aims to inform the audience about online censorship in two situations, to safeguard the vulnerable section like the minors from the violent, offensive, pornographic content. The first setting is that of China with closed internet mechanism and the second being Europe, with open internet system. Certain political or social topics are inaccessible for Chinese citizens and any possibility of collection action emerging from social connections that has the potential of emerging as a movement is aimed to be suppressed in its nascent stage. Had rule of law been efficiently implemented in China, this rigorous online censorship could have been dealt with democratically. The precedents of European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have been relied on to decipher what 'hate speech' means, in order to further target such content by the European state's government¹.

The overall words of expression used in the book were reader friendly with slight reference to technical terms and it had also coherently covered the relevant topics with respect to Digital technology and Human Rights. The book is one of a kind as it attempts to inform the readers about a concern which holds massive relevance in today's date and its awareness shall be conducive for the readers in the future, as internet accessibility is also anticipated as among the 17 sustainable development goals. The authors were articulative on the aspect of censorship by state, leaving the readers with a comprehensive understanding of its pros and cons. Nevertheless,

¹ Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2015) 'State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe: a shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe' (Strasbourg: Council of Europe), p. 10.

there were a few concerns that were either omitted or not taken up in length by the author. Primarily, apart from Europe and China's scenario, the book could have captured region wise human rights violations or advancements happening due to the Digital technology in other parts of the world as well. For instance, the increasing menace of mob lynching could have been discussed succinctly. Various other concerns like phishing attacks, manipulation of election results (voter's rights being infringed) could have been deliberated over. Perhaps there are prevalent laws against trolling, voyeurism, stalking and that is why the author consciously did not discuss over it in details however a connection could have been drawn, demonstrating how such concerns violate human rights of netizens. Few case studies like that of Facebook-Cambridge analytical data scandal, concerning information leak, could have been talked about at length, giving the reader a more close and relevant point of reference. Another important aspect that was missing in the book was a precise deliberation over the negative impact of artificial intelligence driven robots and situations where state fails to bring laws to regulate the negative consequences of replacing the human force and the alternative employment opportunities that must be rendered to such replaced workforce, especially to the more vulnerable workforce in the unorganized manufacturing and service sector. It would have been interesting to also read about the positive impact of robots, that holds the potential to improve the human rights in dire straits by replacing workforce in manual scavenging, mining, mineral quarries, and coal extraction with machines.

However, the author takes us through the present infrastructure globally from the hardware driven to software driven interconnected world. Furthermore, the author had explored how internet facilitates human rights for the vulnerable section of the society, like the disabled, underprivileged, elderly people, etc. The author had discussed about the possibility of successful transition from the traditional approach towards education to a technology driven virtual mode of education, considering education being an influential human right. The author tells the reader how with the advancement of MOOC (open online courses), freedom towards academics, i.e., the liberty to learn and access online courses is encouraged, further minimizing social differences in the spirit of gaining knowledge. However, the challenges and efficiency of virtual mode of education have also been discussed as to if it will be able to replace the traditional classroom-based education. These aspects of the book make it a good read, and enriches knowledge in the domain of Technology and Digital space. The author, nonetheless, fails to

discuss how expensive gadgets like mobile phones, tablets, laptops are still inaccessible for most of the third world countries and how this concern could be dealt with.

In spite of it all, the book was extremely informative and insightful in throwing light on this untapped area of Human Rights and casts a spell on readers with various thought-provoking questions as to what lies ahead if this area of Human Rights is not taken into serious consideration globally and promptly.

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