LmunA 2022

Research report

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Protecting individual rights to privacy in the
                    digital age

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Introduction

In the last few decades, major technological advancements have brought modern societies into the digital age. This has propelled societies forward in terms of productivity, but also development happening faster than ever before. However, although the digital age has enabled these major booms in developments, societies and their population have suffered in regard to privacy.

With such a quickly developing world subsequent to the digital age it is crucial to establish a basis regarding the rights individuals have to privacy. This is why the Human Rights Council of 2022's LmunA tasks their delegates to collaborate and propose solutions to and successfully address individuals rights to privacy in the digital age.

Definitions of key terms

Digital age[1]
The time frame from when digital technology started being prevalent throughout the world, resulting in information being spread quickly and freely.

Artificial intelligence[2]
The simulation of human brain processes by machinery, such as computers.

State surveillance[3]
The monitoring of things such as activities for such reasons of having data on people in order to influence, manage or direct the population.

General overview[4]

As we have reached deeper into the digital age, developments in technologies such as artificial intelligence have created a digital environment in which individuals are more and more prone to tracking, and being analyzed, by businesses and governments.

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[1] "What Is Digital Age | IGI Global." *Igi-Global.com*, 2022, www.igi-global.com/dictionary/resource-sharing/7562. Accessed 28 Aug. 2022.

[2] Burns, Ed, et al. "What Is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?" *SearchEnterpriseAI*, TechTarget, 2022, www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/definition/AI-Artificial-Intelligence. Accessed 28 Aug. 2022.

[3] Wikipedia Contributors. "Surveillance." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 28 Aug. 2022, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surveillance. Accessed 28 Aug. 2022.

[4] "ODS HOME PAGE." *Documents-Dds-Ny.un.org*, documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/239/58/PDF/G1823958.pdf?OpenElement.

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Privacy is legally recognized as a human right in article 12 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and many more around the world. It is important that the use of AI does not breach this right of privacy, as to protect human dignity, and protect identity.

Increased dependency on personal data

With the digital age still being a relatively new age, the digital footprint of people has seemed to grow at exponential rates, with people being tracked on almost all the technology they own, mostly without them knowing. This includes biometric data, such as facial geometry and fingerprints, which may be used by both businesses and governments for reasons such as surveillance and identification. Some governments have recently embarked on massive biometric data projects without the sufficient safeguards being assumed.

It is also important to note that vast amounts of data are exchanged between businesses and governments, between sources and databases. This renders it almost impossible to know which enterprises and governments have what information and on who, making the regulation of privacy within the digital age even more complicated.

With the growth of artificial intelligence systems and big data analytics, parties involved now have access to immense amounts of analytical power, allowing large amounts of data about people to be stored, and used to create personal profiles, making predictions about mental and physical characteristics. This leaves a massive risk on the population as large data breaches pose a large threat and leave people easily open to identity theft and the false disclosure of private information.

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Major parties involved

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights[5]

As the leading entity in the. Field of human rights for the United Nations the OHCHR have had to turn their head to the right to privacy in the digital age. The entity serves as the Secretariat of HRC.

People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China has taken advantage of AI's usefulness for state surveillance. China has now started to use mass surveillance systems and are using these systems to create "social credit systems" used to rank citizens. Furthermore, China has been known to further monitor activity online, block websites from people, and prohibit certain forms of freedom of expression.

Enterprises

Enterprises are known for collecting large amounts of data on people using big data and artificial intelligence systems and have seen limited regulation seeing as the digital age is relatively new.

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[5] "OHCHR | What We Do: An Overview." *OHCHR*, 2014,
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Timeline of Key Events[6]

1980s   The start of data collection for data based personalization in marketing

1995   The European Data Protection Directive is initiated

2001   Following 9/11 the United States of America starts development towards gathering, analyzing, and locally storing data

2012   The first ever UN resolution that affirms that human rights in the digital age must be protected

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Attempts to tackle this issue began in 2012 as can be seen in the timeline, where the first UN resolution concerning the issue was made. HRC's most recent resolution in 2019 makes sure to affirm that the same rights people have offline must also be present online. And acknowledges that developing technologies can have very large impacts on human rights and privacy. The resolution makes further recommendations regarding state surveillance and businesses. Resolutions on the right to privacy in the digital age have been developed both in HRC and the General Assembly.

Possible solutions

When looking at possible solutions, it is crucial to look at previous attempts especially in this case because solutions will tend to be mostly along the same concrete ideas. However, it is extremely important to understand that technologies will continue developing at exponential rates and that predicting how data collection may be in 5 years is incredibly hard, however, the future must be kept in mind for the development of solutions and establishment of a concrete basis to what should or should not be allowed.

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[6] "The Complete Data Privacy Timeline : AE." *AE*, 19 Feb. 2020, get.theappreciationengine.com/2020/02/19/data-privacy-timeline/. Accessed 28 Aug. 2022.

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