BSR

Human Rights in a Wired World

How Information & Communications Technology Impacts Human Rights

A Special BSR Series

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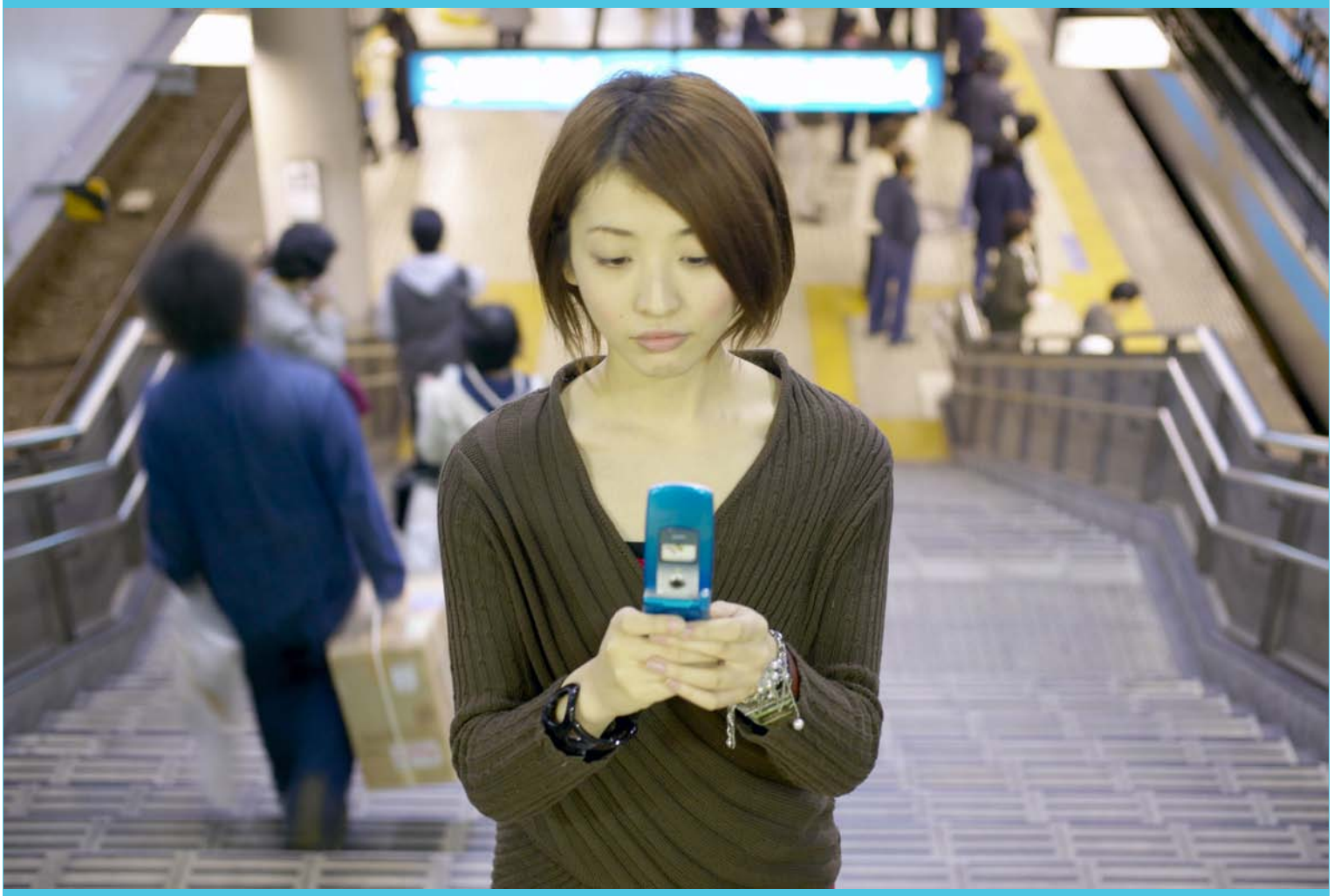

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About BSR

A leader in corporate responsibility since 1992, Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) works with its global network of more than 250 member companies to develop sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. With six offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR uses its expertise in environment, human rights, economic development, and governance and accountability to guide global companies toward creating a just and sustainable world.

Contributors

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Introduction

Sixty years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the world finds itself in a very different place, where almost anyone, anywhere, has the potential to access an endless source of information and communicate directly with the rest of the world. Information and communications technology (ICT) has been one of the most powerful drivers of change in our global society and has greatly shaped how we protect and advance human rights today.

ICT provides opportunities to advance human rights (for instance, by raising public awareness of human rights violations) and generates new risks as well (by allowing people to track the location of and target a potential victim). In many cases, an attribute of technology may pose benefits and problems at the same time—for example, while the anonymity of the internet may enable individuals to express themselves more freely, the same anonymity may facilitate cyber hate crimes. The complex nature and rapid evolution of technology make understanding its human rights implications a challenge.

Technology can move faster than the law, and for this reason, ICT companies have a critical role to play in evolving ICT and its use in a way that protects and promotes human rights. The human rights implications of ICT for a company can be considered from three perspectives:

1. Companies creating ICT: How can companies design, develop, and promote the use of their ICT products in a manner that is aligned with human rights?
2. Companies using ICT: How can companies use ICT in a way that protects and advances human rights?
3. Companies responding to a society that uses ICT: How can companies operate in a society that is evolving its use of ICT while considering the human rights implications?

Each article in this “Human Rights in a Wired World” series presents a snapshot on ICT impacts on one article in the UDHR, highlighting examples of companies and organizations that have acted in this space. The series covers select rights in the UDHR that are particularly relevant for companies and their role in developing and/or using ICT. Freedom of expression, the right to education, freedom from torture, the right to privacy—these are just a few of the many human rights recognized internationally and impacted by today’s businesses and technologies.

We hope this series helps companies and organizations better understand the potential role of technology in protecting and advancing human rights. The lessons from these articles can be a starting point for developing more robust practices to promote human rights.

Article 2
Freedom from Discrimination

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional, or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing, or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) can promote freedom from discrimination by providing a valuable virtual resource to support various human rights—such as freedom of expression and right to health—irrespective of any factors such as personal beliefs or physical attributes. However, personal online content can also be viewed and used as fodder for discrimination.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies support individuals and their use of ICT to encourage human rights for all?
- How can companies ensure they consistently support human rights irrespective of the location of the user or the business?
- How can companies improve access to ICT in order to reduce discrimination and disadvantage against people who do not have access?

Opportunities

- ICT allows people with internet access to exercise their right to associate, express themselves, educate themselves, and more, irrespective of personal attributes or beliefs.
- The virtual world allows for potential privacy and anonymity among those who fear intolerance or interference of their religious and political beliefs or gender.
- Individuals who are unable to speak out and pursue their interests due to language barriers can use website translation services to access information in other languages.
- By providing users exposure to people and ideas from all over the world, the internet can foster greater understanding of differences, which can lead to a more accepting world view.

Risks

- Because the internet can be anonymous and open to anyone, individuals who discriminate against a particular ethnic or religious group can easily go to specific websites to attack that online community.
- Personal information—including race, gender, or political and religious beliefs—found on social networking services and other websites can be used as a basis for discrimination, such as during the hiring process.
- While users may think they are anonymous, their personal information and online activity could be tracked and used for discrimination if accessed by a third party, such as the government.
- Only individuals with access to ICT can take advantage of its ability to promote many human rights, essentially discriminating against those who cannot afford it or are not in locations that support ICT.

Example

World Pulse (http://worldpulse.com/)

World Pulse uses its global presence as an online forum and print magazine to support women's voices to collaborate and address global problems, including discrimination and crimes against humanity. World Pulse also features PulseWire, which provides online tools enabling women from any race, religion, or social origin to support each other across borders by telling their stories, exchanging resources, and sharing solutions.

By Nicki Weston, Business for Social Responsibility, June 2009

Article 4 Freedom from Slavery

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Overview

According to the NGO Free the Slaves, approximately 27 million people are held in slavery today, and up to 900,000 people are trafficked across borders each day for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and work in agriculture, mining, and other sectors. On the one hand, information and communications technology (ICT) has made it easier for those involved in slavery to traffic human beings globally, and it has increased the market for pornography and prostitution (especially via the internet). On the other hand, ICT also provides important tools to combat and prevent trafficking and slavery.

Opportunities

- ICT can help law enforcement stop human trafficking and slavery. Police have uncovered trafficking schemes by posing on the internet as potential clients or workers, and by using cell phone and email surveillance.
- ICT, in particular video, helps NGOs uncover and document cases of slavery or trafficking.
- Websites, emails, and online videos are low-cost tools for raising awareness of slavery and forced labor across borders.
- Companies can use ICT to more effectively train suppliers in detecting and avoiding slavery or forced labor.

Risks

- Traffickers use the internet to advertise and communicate easily across borders. This is one of the factors contributing to the rapid growth of human trafficking and slavery.
- By providing an anonymous venue, online classified ad services and social networking sites have reduced barriers to access to prostitution. This has increased the market for prostitution, making trafficking for sexual exploitation more profitable.
- ICT—including websites, file-transfer protocols, and DVDs—has increased the market for both legal and illegal pornography, both of which may be linked to sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies use ICT to detect slavery or forced labor in their supply chains?
- How can relevant ICT companies support governments, law enforcement agencies, and NGOs to develop and implement innovative uses of technology to combat trafficking and slavery?
- How can internet service providers prevent their services from being used to facilitate human trafficking and slavery?
- How can ICT companies balance the need to combat slavery and trafficking with users' rights to privacy and free expression?
- How can companies put in place safeguards to prevent use of their computers and cell phones in child exploitation or prostitution sites?

Example

Human Trafficking Search (www.humantraffickingsearch.net)

This website, by the National MultiCultural Institute, serves as an information and data clearinghouse for advocates, service providers, law enforcement personnel, and others working to eliminate human trafficking. Searchable in many languages by keyword, country, and theme, the website provides information on such topics as human trafficking, child labor, forced labor, and sex slavery. The portal offers a vast amount of information, updated regularly, on more than 120 countries through a broad range of articles, research studies, policy documents, case studies, brief videos, data maps, and a daily news service.

By Faris Natour, Business for Social Responsibility February 2009

Article 5
Freedom from Torture & Cruelty

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Overview

Information and communication technology (ICT) has proven to be a powerful tool in raising awareness and providing evidence of torture and cruel treatment around the world. Online campaigns have helped mobilize the public against situations where individuals have been subject to degrading punishment by repressive regimes. However, as with any empowering tool, ICT also can be used by groups to plan and execute acts of violence.

Opportunities

- Videos and photographs can be posted online instantly as evidence of torture and cruelty in order to raise public awareness and instigate campaigns to address these conditions (see www.witness.org).
- Anonymity and broad accessibility are characteristics of ICT that enable victims to communicate their own experiences of degrading treatment. Users can learn about these incidents directly from the source rather than being limited to media reports.
- People can educate themselves on cruelty around the world by using the web to search government policies regarding torture and historical accounts of violence in various regions.
- Acts of torture and cruelty are often the result of intolerance and misunderstanding of different groups. The internet facilitates the exchange of different perspectives, which may, in the long term, lead to more acceptance of diversity globally.

Risks

- Government, law enforcement, and military groups who have the power to control online content and access user data can use the information to inflict cruel punishment on dissidents.
- Terrorist and hate crime groups can use ICT to facilitate communication and carry out torturous acts, such as broadcasting executions online.
- ICT can be used to identify and track individuals who are potential targets for cruel acts.
- The internet can be a resource for ideas and guidance on how to torture others.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies become better aware of who their customers are (such as those in defense, national security, and aerospace) and how their ICT products are used in order to ensure that they are not complicit in cruel acts?
- Should companies have operations and technical infrastructure in countries where there are regular acts of torture and inhuman treatment? What if their business provides a service that can help reduce oppression?
- If companies are conducting business in regions with repressive regimes, what precautions should companies take to avoid situations where their ICT systems may be tapped (through surveillance or demands for user data) by authorities to identify individuals who will be subject to cruel punishment?

Example

Ushahidi (www.ushahidi.com)

Ushahidi enables individuals to submit crisis reports via mobile phones, email, or the web. The site then creates a mash-up of this information and plots the data onto an online map (provided by another party such as Google or Microsoft). Viewers can see the aggregation of crisis information to obtain a real-time account of where torturous incidents are taking place. Recent projects include strikes on Gaza and conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

By Rina Horiuchi, Business for Social Responsibility, March 2009

Article 12 Right to Privacy

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) has created new ways for people to impart and access information, but what if that information is private? ICT is enabling more people to access (via stored user data, surveillance technology) and expose (by posting private content) more information about each other. ICT also allows people to remain anonymous and thereby retain their privacy.

Opportunities

- With many ICT services, users can communicate their ideas without disclosing their identity or location. This is helpful when exposing their identity could risk harm to themselves or their families. (The flip side is that crimes can also be committed anonymously.)
- Digital storage of personal information arguably can be more secure than traditional paper storage, depending on the level of encryption and other safeguards.
- Online services can be designed to give people control over their "privacy preferences."

Risks

- When a user creates an account online, their personal information can be accessed by a third party. For example, the company could sell this information, or a government could demand this information. Even if the user submits fake information, their computer's IP address could be tracked and reveal their location.
- Through surveillance technologies, a user's actions and words may be monitored without their knowledge.
- The internet can instantly reveal an individual's private information (true or false) to millions of viewers.
- Online aerial photographs, such as map services, can visually expose private and sensitive information.
- One person's right to privacy may conflict with another's freedom of expression (Article 19).

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies help users become more aware of their online privacy risks and opportunities?
- How can companies balance the value of customer information databases with the right to privacy?
- How can companies minimize the risk of outside parties accessing or exposing users' personal information?
- How can companies know whether a government's request for a user's personal information will be used to help or harm human rights?
- How can companies understand the risks and opportunities of surveillance in a range of situations (e.g. parental control or law enforcement) and attempt to prevent surveillance when it infringes human rights?
- How can companies draw the line between one user's right to privacy and another's freedom of expression?

Example

Global Network Initiative (www.globalnetworkinitaitive.org)

In October 2008, a multi-stakeholder group of companies, human rights organizations, academics, and investors launched a set of principles, implementation guidelines, and a governance framework to help the ICT sector promote and protect the right to privacy and freedom of expression. The initiative addresses situations where companies are pressured by governments to provide users' personal information, censor content, or monitor communications via surveillance systems in a manner that poses risk to these human rights.

By Rina Horiuchi, Business for Social Responsibility January 2009

Article 16
Right to Marriage & Family

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Overview

The internet can promote marriage by facilitating campaigns for the right to marriage, providing a new channel for meeting a potential partner, and offering services that support various marriage and family situations. However, the internet also can allow people to oppose the right to marriage in some situations or easily sell individuals into forced marriage.

Opportunities

- Online campaigns can promote the right to marry and found a family and create awareness of forced marriage incidents or situations where the right to marriage is violated.
- Internet dating sites and arranged marriage services can help individuals find potential spouses.
- People can find marriage information on the internet, such as learning where their union is recognized and supported.
- Online communities can provide marriage and family support. For example, people who feel their marriage is not supported in their society may find encouragement and advice online.
- New forms of communications can help people balance work and family, such as by allowing individuals to work from home, or use webcams and other channels to maintain contact when working away from home.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies use ICT to promote marriage rights for everyone, particularly when they are operating in locations that are not supportive of these rights?
- How can companies promote the use of technologies in ways that support rather than encroach on family time for their employees and users?
- How can businesses make sure that they are not inadvertently promoting services associated with forced marriage—such as by hosting advertisements for services where users can buy spouses or displaying their own company ads on such services' websites?

Risks

- Online services where users can buy a spouse may result in forced marriage situations.
- Internet "mail-order" arrangements can lead to trafficking and abusive marriage situations, where the individual agrees to be with another person without knowing his or her intentions.
- The internet can be used to promote campaigns against the right to marriage.
- ICT can allow people to work all the time, anywhere, potentially distracting them from family life.

Example

Join the Impact (http://jointheimpact.com/)

Join the Impact uses a range of social media service providers to promote equal rights for individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. They use Twitter to distribute immediate announcements (often via mobile phone), Facebook to build and tap into supporting networks, and WetPaint to enhance the interactive section of their website, which hosts wikis and discussion groups. The group enables people around the world to collaborate online on common causes, such as organizing nationwide rallies in the United States to promote the right to marriage for all.

By Rina Horiuchi, Business for Social Responsibility April 2009

Article 18
Freedom of Thought & Religion

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) can promote the freedom of thought and religion by allowing people from any part of the globe to come together and share different beliefs and religions. The internet provides a resource for connecting those with similar beliefs and in doing so advances other human rights, such as the freedom of expression. However, some governments forbid certain types of thoughts, religious or otherwise, and online content that is outside of what is sanctioned can incite retaliation.

Opportunities

- ICT can help accommodate and expand religious practices by facilitating the right to worship across borders and communities. By providing a supplemental means of interaction, ICT allows people to keep in touch with their religious communities when far from home.
- Groups with similar beliefs can form an internet congregation or community. This allows those who fear intolerance of their ideological or religious practices to have privacy and anonymity, also encouraging freedom of expression.
- The internet can foster freedom of thought by providing a vehicle for information and education, allowing people to research different beliefs and religions and further their intellectual and spiritual development.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies use ICT to accommodate the need for workers to exercise this right in countries that do not support religious freedom?
- How can companies address cases online where one individual's right to religion conflicts with another person's freedom of thought? (Hate speech against a religious group can arguably be considered freedom of expression.)
- How can companies prevent others from using ICT in a way that violates freedom of thought and religion?

Risks

- ICT allows authorities to censor certain ideological practices that are outside of what is socially acceptable, thereby limiting further education on different beliefs and religions.
- By tracking email, web postings, and mobile communications, governments in countries where a particular set of ideologies are prescribed and enforced could threaten those who subscribe to alternative beliefs.
- The internet can be used for scams with religious messages that exploit vulnerable populations for monetary gains.

Example

LifeChurch TV (internet.lifechurch.tv)

With an increasing number of people using the internet to share and develop their beliefs and to access spiritual or religious information, the number of online churches and religious websites has grown. LifeChurch TV creates a virtual platform where online religious services, religious materials, and online bible study groups are offered. Furthermore, the organization offers an opportunity to connect those with similar beliefs from all over the world, enabling the development of a religious community online.

By Nicki Weston, Business for Social Responsibility March 2009

Article 19 Freedom of Expression

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Overview

Freedom of expression is at the heart of how information and communications technology (ICT) promotes human rights. The potential for anyone— regardless of location or identity—to communicate and access information enables more people to communicate their thoughts to the world than ever before. Like many of the articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, freedom of expression is a right that enables other human rights. Indeed, many of the examples of ICT supporting human rights are based on the ability of individuals to express themselves freely in the first place.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies work with civil society to provide online forums and resources that encourage freedom of expression or promote human rights?
- How can companies take measures to prevent censorship in areas that suppress the right to freedom of expression? (Look for more on the Global Network Initiative, www.globalnetworkinitiative.org, in our piece on Article 12.)
- How can companies allow freedom of expression while tackling hate crimes and cyber-bullying?

Opportunities

- Any individual with access to the internet is empowered to communicate and share opinions with the rest of the world—regardless of political or geographic borders—via blogs, individual websites, posting on social networking sites, adding comments, and more. As a result, the internet can be used to promote awareness of human rights abuses that may be otherwise unknown.
- The internet enables individuals to access a wide range of information—provided it is not censored—to better inform their decisions and actions.

Risks

- While the technology enables freedom of expression, those who have control over the technology, such as businesses and governments, have the ability to stop or censor information along the way.
- Taken to the extreme, freedom of expression can conflict with the right to privacy (Article 12). The internet allows for rapid and broad distribution of data, and one's personal information could be easily exposed to the rest of the world.
- As ICT easily allows for expression to a broader audience and often under anonymity, it also facilitates human perpetration of hate crimes and cyber-bullying. Hate crimes can infringe on an individual's dignity, another human right (Article 1).

Example

Global Voices Online (www.globalvoicesonline.org)
The internet age has democratized news reporting with the emergence of blogs, which allows people worldwide to publicize their account of current events rather than just mass media companies. Global Voices Online aggregates and highlights postings from bloggers around the world to provide a more balanced and nuanced view of global events. This project also houses Global Voices Advocacy, a network of bloggers and advocates focused on protecting freedom of expression online.

By Rina Horiuchi, Business for Social Responsibility March 2009

Article 20 Freedom of Association

Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) can promote freedom of association by allowing people with common interests from any part of the globe to communicate with each other. For instance, the internet can provide a resource for trade unions and workers to organize and to vote. On the other hand, companies and governments can also use ICT to monitor union activity.

Opportunities

- The internet—and social networking websites in particular—enables people around the world to form many types of associations, such as political parties, religious societies, and trade unions.
- The internet also allows workers to inform themselves about unions, letting them anonymously and privately share best practices about working conditions and other benefits. This communication can help elevate and standardize expectations among workers.
- ICT can help unions recruit workers and hold private elections.
- ICT also can provide a means for people to instantly report harassment or other violations of their right to the freedom of association, such as through text messages or blog postings.

Risks

- Companies and governments may use ICT to monitor the formation and communication of trade unions and political parties.
- The anonymity of the internet can make it easier for people to infiltrate associations.
- Use of ICT for union or political elections may provide opportunities for manipulation.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies ensure that they support their workers' ability to use technology in support of their freedom to associate?
- How can companies use their leverage with business partners, including suppliers and governments, to ensure access to ICT for workers in their supply chain?
- How can companies use ICT to educate and support workers about their right to associate and form trade unions?
- To what extent should companies speak out publicly or privately against violations by authorities in countries where the freedom of association, especially via the internet, has been restricted?
- How can companies use ICT to more effectively engage with associations formed by its stakeholders?

Example

Service Employees International Union (www.seiu.org)

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), whose 2 million members comprise one of the fastest-growing unions in North America, unites workers in health care, property services, and public services. This labor union is not tied to a particular work site, nor is it dependent on employer recognition, and it uses grassroots activism, the general public, and technology to create new platforms for association. The SEIU does this by encouraging members to use its website to request more information about the SEIU's agenda in support of specific initiatives and by having members engage in blogging, videos, and online campaigns to draw attention to corporate or other actions that impact workers. By using the internet, millions of people are able to connect, organize, and exercise their right to associate.

By Nicki Weston, Business for Social Responsibility, January 2009

Article 21 Right to Participate in Government

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) provides a new channel for individuals to take part in government, potentially increasing one's understanding of government practices, improving engagement in policy making, and facilitating voting. However, ICT could also endanger individuals who use the web to criticize governments in regions where doing so is considered a crime.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies conduct research and innovate to develop ICT systems that enable greater participation in government and the election process?
- How can companies protect ICT users who may be censored, prosecuted, or physically harmed for criticizing the government in repressive regions?
- How can companies use ICT to encourage their employees to be more involved in government?
- How can companies use the web to be more transparent about their own participation in public policy and government?

Opportunities

- ICT provides a new channel for voter registration and voting, potentially increasing voter attendance.
- Online forums and video messages facilitate personal interaction between citizens and government.
- The internet helps open societies with repressive governments by increasing information access (leading to an informed citizenship) and by enabling individuals to reach outside their borders for support.
- Particularly in regions where the government controls major media sources, user-generated news, disseminated via blogs and text messages, provides an alternative—and in some cases more accurate—perspective on government behavior. (See cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/internetdemocracy.)
- Grassroots online political campaigns enable individuals with fewer political connections and financial resources to gain popular support and run for office.

Risks

- Groups can use ICT to establish fake online campaigns or political movements based on false information.
- Repressive governments can censor online content containing conflicting political views (see Freedom of Expression).
- In regions where it is considered a crime to criticize the government, law enforcement could demand email records or personal data of political dissidents (see Right to Privacy).
- If ICT becomes the primary channel for voting and engaging with government, then citizens without access may be at a disadvantage.
- In an online voting system, data manipulation and hacking could pose security risks.
- If online voting takes place in locations that do not provide voters with complete privacy, there is the risk that others can bully or influence their choice.

Example

Video Your Vote (www.youtube.com/videoyourvote)

This project, by PBS and YouTube, collected more than 2,000 videos of individuals who documented their voting experience in the 2008 U.S. presidential election. The viewer can sort by different types of content such as "polling problems," "voter intimidation," or "early voting," and comment on videos for discussion. The project aims to engage citizens to take part in the voting process and add transparency to the system.

By Rina Horiuchi, Business for Social Responsibility, February 2009

Article 23 Right to Work

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment.

2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration, ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) enables people to find work and research the market to ensure equal pay. In addition, ICT allows people access to work, regardless of location, through remote-access technology and ecommerce. However, the necessity for people to have ICT skills may limit who can participate in this new market.

Opportunities

- ICT can foster entrepreneurship and create self-employment opportunities for those who are in remote areas where they otherwise would not be able to participate in urban business centers.
- Employees can use ICT to work remotely, allowing them to spend more time with their families and provide special care.
- ICT can be used to monitor and evaluate factories to ensure favorable working conditions.
- People are able to find information online regarding available job positions, what others are being paid in the field, and services in cases of unemployment. (Article 25)

Challenges for Companies

- How can ICT companies work with unions both abroad and domestically to create a favorable agreement for employees, companies, and governments?
- How can companies foster employee engagement, leadership positions in teams, and common company culture when employees are working remotely via the internet?
- How do companies address the ICT skills gaps and factor in investments that need to be made for technical skill strengthening of all their employees?
- Given that many ICT companies operate and have employees remotely working in various countries, how can they determine equal pay while accounting for purchasing power?

Risks

- While ICT gives people the flexibility to connect from anywhere, it may also foster the expectation that an employee must always be online and prepared to work, affecting one's health and family life.
- As ICT becomes more prevalent in the workplace and more jobs are created within the sector, people who lack the education or experience using these technologies may be at a disadvantage.
- Many ICT companies do not support trade unions; therefore, the right to form unions is less likely to be promoted in these companies and their supply chains.

Example

E-TASC (www.e-tasc.com)

E-TASC is a web-based information system providing a uniform approach to workplace best practices that was developed in collaboration with Global e-Sustainability Initiative and Electronic Industry Implementation Group. This efficient management tool focuses on high standards, collaboration, and fostering a culture of social responsibility within the global electronics supply chain.

By Kimberly Murphy, Business for Social Responsibility, April 2009

Article 25
Right to Health & Standard of Living

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) can enhance the access, quality, and delivery of health and social services that benefit all citizens. However, it may be difficult for communities lacking electricity and connectivity to use ICT to enable adequate living standards. The proliferation of ICT has also resulted in electronic waste (e-waste), and its harmful effects can jeopardize the health of individuals and communities where the toxic substances are handled.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies create public-private partnerships to ensure the delivery of health and wellness services?
- How can companies manage their electronic waste programs to ensure that the disposal process does not pollute the environment or harm human health?
- How can companies help increase the rate of adoption and ensure the continuity of ICT projects in regions that lack support and finances?
- How can companies create ICT solutions while keeping the cultural and economic differences of emerging markets in mind?

Opportunities

- Campaigns using the internet and mobile technologies can educate the public on particular issues important to their community such as housing and disability rights.
- Medical, private, government, and community organizations can track the risk of emerging threats such as infectious diseases through web searches and notify the public through mobile phone alerts.
- Telecommunications that provide medical information and services expand access to consultation, emergency care, and prevention in areas that lack properly funded health services.
- Online social networks can help less mobile people—including new mothers, the elderly, and individuals with physical disabilities—connect with others, stay informed, and receive support.
- Citizens are able to access information and apply for social services such as housing, disability, childcare, and health services efficiently via ICT-enabled government services.

Risks

- People who employ online sources to diagnose ailments may pursue improper treatment due to the lack of medical advice quality.
- Electronic waste is often disposed and disassembled with little oversight in many developing economies, releasing toxic substances into the environment and damaging human health.
- As more social services are offered online, people without ICT access and literacy may be at a disadvantage.
- While ICT can enhance living standards, it cannot be effective without adequate government social services and infrastructure.

Example

EpiSurveyor (www.datadyne.org/projects/EpiSurveyor_Rollout/)

The UN Foundation, the Vodafone Group Foundation, and the NGO DataDyne formed a partnership to provide free, open-source software that allows anyone to collect health-related data using handheld computers and smart phones. The objective of EpiSurveyor is to leverage growing mobile computing to change the nature of public health practices in developing countries. Public-health workers in 22 sub-Saharan nations are using the software and there are plans to expand in Asia.

By Kimberly Murphy, Business for Social Responsibility, March 2009

Article 26 Right to Education

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial, or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) provides tremendous opportunities to enhance the human right to education through remote learning and the provision of innovative, interactive tools. ICT also enables wider access to education about human rights, particularly via the internet. However, just as the industrial society made a level of literacy and numeracy a must, the technology revolution has made digital proficiency a standard expectation today. As ICT becomes ubiquitous in education, its cost and connectivity requirements represent potential barriers to quality digital education for people in poor and remote communities.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies help remote and poor communities afford and logistically gain access to use ICT for educational purposes?
- How can companies and the public sector improve ICT access for educational purposes while balancing the harmful environmental impacts that may result in locations lacking infrastructure?

Opportunities

- ICT provides children with an educational system that is adaptable and accommodates different learning styles—an important development, especially when there are low teacher-to-student ratios.
- ICT promotes cross-cultural understanding by enabling users to access content created by diverse groups and to communicate directly with them.
- The internet provides an important platform for education about human rights, helping raise awareness about individuals' rights and responsibilities.
- Education is a right and an important means in fulfilling other human rights, such as the right to work (Article 23), magnifying the positive impact ICT can have on human rights.

Risks

- ICT's physical infrastructure requirements could limit poor and remote peoples' access to digital education.
- The digital divide creates challenges for those who did not have access to ICT during primary education but must have computer experience to pursue higher education.
- Due to students' increased exposure to mainstream culture via the internet, ICT may threaten traditional cultures, languages, and forms of education in some parts of the world.
- Due to the openness of the internet and the generational gap in technology use, it can be challenging for parents in some cultures to understand and have a choice in their child's education.

Example

Microsoft's Unlimited Potential (www.microsoft.com/unlimitedpotential)

Microsoft's global Unlimited Potential initiative promotes workforce development and IT skills training programs in underserved communities. The Partners in Learning program, which is part of Unlimited Potential, works with individuals and academic organizations to support 21st century learning, digital inclusion, and education reform. Microsoft has partners in 101 countries and has equipped more than 4 million teachers and reached more than 90 million students with digital learning tools and training.

By Kimberly Murphy, Business for Social Responsibility, January 2009

Article 27
Right to Participate in Cultural Life

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary, or artistic production of which he is the author.

Overview

Information and communications technology (ICT) can have both positive and negative impacts on the multiple components of this human right. ICT increases access to culture and the arts, but it may threaten traditional, local cultures. Open-source software development projects facilitate broader collaboration and sharing in scientific advancement, but file-sharing applications on the internet threaten intellectual property (IP) rights of authors.

Opportunities

- The internet can help make culture, including music, art, and literature, more accessible.
- Artists can reach a bigger audience cheaply via the internet, through social networking services like MySpace or user-generated content sites like YouTube, creating a venue for arts.
- Open source software projects facilitate the sharing and collective advancement of scientific discovery and development.
- ICT databases can help identify and catalogue IP rights holders, furthering IP protection.

Risks

- The internet's culture of collaborative content creation through wikis and other platforms can change the notion of protecting authorship since there is no longer a single, or in some cases identifiable, creator.
- The anonymity of the internet and peer-to-peer file-sharing technologies (where computers directly share files with other computers instead of accessing them from a centralized provider) make it difficult to protect copyrights for authors and artists for work distributed online.
- High-cost and -energy and connectivity requirements of ICT represent barriers for poor communities to enjoy the technology and scientific advancements provided by ICT.

Challenges for Companies

- How can companies develop new products and services using ICT to increase public access to scientific developments? And how can they promote this while protecting their own and others' IP?
- How can companies that currently depend on their IP conduct business profitably despite the growth of free services and information offered on the internet?
- How can companies ensure that their ICT equipment is not used to infringe on the IP of others, such as through plagiarism and illegal downloading of copyrighted content?
- How can companies use ICT to enable their employees to participate in cultural life in their communities?

Example

Creative Commons (www.creativecommons.org)

Creative Commons is a nonprofit corporation that makes it easier for people to share and build upon the work of others within copyright rules. The organization provides free licenses and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom and attribution the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix, use commercially, or any combination thereof.

By Faris Natour, Business for Social Responsibility, June 2009