


Chapter 3

Digital Ethics, Morality, and Law in the Age of Emerging Technologies

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ABSTRACT

The accelerated digitalisation and deployment of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data and blockchain, have radically transformed modern society. Nonetheless, technological progress has also given rise to new ethical, legal and social dilemmas, which have challenged traditional legal frameworks for the protection of human rights. This paper examines the tensions between technological innovation and fundamental rights, proposing an integrated approach that articulates digital ethics, social morality and the law. It proposes the comparative analysis of various theoretical and ethical frameworks, assessing their effectiveness and projecting a comprehensive governance model that combines laws, industry standards, and ethical principles to safeguard human dignity in the digital age. The research concludes with normative and ethical recommendations to address the current challenges of digital technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has radically transformed modern society, reshaping economic systems, political processes and cultural interactions at an unprecedented pace. Emerging technologies — from artificial intelligence (AI) and big data to blockchain and the Internet of Things (IoT) — have created extraordinary opportunities for

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-8510-5.ch003

innovation, efficiency and global connectivity. However, this accelerated digitalisation has also created profound ethical, moral and legal dilemmas that challenge the traditional frameworks for the protection of human rights.

The foundations of the digital society are built upon data flows, algorithmic governance, and interconnected systems that challenge the traditional boundaries of space, time, and jurisdiction. In this new landscape, digital ethics, morality, and the law must adapt to strike a balance between innovation and accountability, speed and security, efficiency and justice.

At the heart of the paradox of our digital age lies the tension between technological progress and its social consequences. While AI-driven automation promises economic growth, it also threatens to displace jobs and exacerbate labour precariousness (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Social media platforms facilitate global communication, but also amplify misinformation, hate speech and mental health crises (Citron, 2014; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Governments deploy surveillance technologies in the name of national security, often at the cost of privacy and civil liberties, as evidenced by the Snowden case (Greenwald, 2014). These contradictions highlight the urgent need to reconcile technological advancement with ethical governance, ensuring that digitalisation serves human dignity rather than undermining it.

This paper argues that existing legal and ethical frameworks have failed to keep pace with technological change. Reactive and sectoral regulations — such as the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) or the Algorithmic Accountability Act proposed in the United States (115th Congress, H.R.2231) — address symptoms rather than systemic issues. As we have analogously proposed in our previous work on the cyber-subject in the context of artificial intelligence (Banchio, 2022), this field also requires a comprehensive approach that integrates digital ethics (normative principles for technological design), morality (social values in digital spaces) and law (enforceable protections) within a human rights-based framework.

As articulated by the Digital Ethics programme of the Master's in Digitalisation and Human Rights at the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), this framework must be interdisciplinary, preventive and oriented towards social justice.

Therefore, the theoretical and conceptual framework of this paper is based on a multidimensional approach to understanding digital ethics and its intersection with human rights in the context of emerging technologies. The main aim is to establish a comprehensive understanding of key ethical principles, legal constructs and social implications arising from the use of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, blockchain and the Internet of Things (IoT), *ex multis*.

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