

Chapter 10

The Better Part of Valor: Meeting Current Human Needs Online without Compromising Future Selves

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ABSTRACT

The pervasiveness of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in the modern world makes it near impossible to conduct the living of daily life without these technologies. People go online to meet a variety of human needs—for work, shopping, security, socializing and intercommunications, self-worth, entertainment, and personal life goals. In the framework of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, online spaces often provide for the meeting of physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, and yet, their every action, search, information sharing, social interchange, and digital thought is recorded into digital perpetuity. Law enforcement has tools to profile and track individuals in the Webosphere and even deep into the Invisible or Hidden Web. This chapter explores how people may meet their many current human needs in the present without shortchanging their options for the future. In particular, the human rights risks that are discussed include security and well-being, privacy, reputation (freedom from defamation), and the flexibility of future choices.

INTRODUCTION

“The better part of valor is discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life.”
-- William Shakespeare, *Henry the Fourth, Part 1, Act 5, Scene 4, Line: 121*

With the ever-growing functionalities of the WWW and Internet, people go online to meet a range of human needs. According to A. Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943), people function based on five levels of needs. The foundational needs have to be met first in order for people to progress to the higher stages of achievement. At the base level of this hierarchy involves physiological

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needs—for food and water, sleep, and other basics. At the next level is the need for safety. This is described as physical safety and employment; others add issues of property rights (that help secure safety). Next is love/belonging, which involves meaningful relationships with others through family, friendships, collegial relationships, and various types of human-to-human intimacy. Esteem, the next level, requires self-confidence and the respect by and for others. Lastly, and at the pinnacle of the human hierarchy of needs, is self-actualization—which involves the achievement of creativity and the full expression of the self. These terms are necessarily vague and interpretive, but this will serve as a basic scaffold for the inquiry.

So what are some ways that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is used to meet human needs? Table 1 highlights some of these factors.

Phrased in the context of the Hierarchy of Needs, Figure 1 showcases how people go to the WWW and Internet to fulfill a range of human needs.

ICT manifests in complex ways. In terms of so-called lean communications, people engage in text-messaging using a range of mobile devices. They instant-message each other on desktop computers. They micro-blog and can spark “flash mob” actions. They post queries to electronic mailing lists and communities in order to crowd-source information. They use email to exchange

information and electronic documents. On the Web, people share a range of information packaged through web sites, blogs, and wikis. People congregate at social networking sites. While much online information seems ephemeral and transitory, much digital information lives on in unintended ways (Lucas & Borisov, 2008); it’s fungible, transferable, portable, and moves around the world in micro-seconds. In the parlance of the day, information wants to be “free.” People interact in a synchronous rich way using web conferencing tools. They use avatars to interact with others in immersive virtual worlds. To learn and to entertain themselves, they go into various digital simulations. Devices capture real-time locations of individuals through Global Positioning System (GPS) capabilities. Smart physical environments embed location-specific 3D overlays and information. With the rich opportunities of ubiquitous ICT in modern life, there emerge a range of risks, many of them invisible to common users. Said another way, many e-services are physically intangible, and as such, skew people’s perceptions of various types of risks: performance, financial, privacy, time, psychological, and social risks (Featherman & Wells, 2010). More cognitive effort has to be expended for clearer understandings. Not only are people socializing more in online spaces, but more and more information is being made available online, through federal laws that make information available and through

Table 1. Ways that information and communications technology is used for meeting human needs

Levels in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	Ways that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is Used for Meeting Human Needs
Self Actualization	Learning; crowd-sourcing; changing the human (info) ecosystem; innovation and creativity; self-identity exploration
Esteem	Self-expression; garnering publicity and electronic adoration; support for others’ (endeavors, ideologies, and ways of being)
Love/Belonging	Socializing; intercommunications (lean and multimedia-rich); dating; relationship maintenance; social networking and “friending”
Safety	Employment and work; trade; job hunting; fund-raising; sales; tools for financial planning; finding housing; information-seeking for decision-making (the elimination of some information asymmetries)
Physiological	The purchasing of groceries and resources; “hooking up”; arranging for physical care

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