

FREE INTERNET ACCESS SHOULD BE A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT: STUDY

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Internet could be a key way of protecting other basic human rights such as life, liberty, and freedom from torture, says a study by University of Birmingham. | Photo Credit: [iStockphoto](#)

Free internet access should be considered as a basic human right, according to a study which noted that people unable to get online — particularly in developing countries — lack meaningful ways to influence the global players shaping their everyday lives.

Researchers from the University of Birmingham in the U.K. gave the example of Kerala, noting that the [Indian state has declared universal internet access a human right](#) and aims to provide it for its 35 million people by this year.

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They explained that as political engagement increasingly takes place online, basic freedoms that many take for granted including free expression, freedom of information and freedom of assembly are undermined if some citizens have access to the internet and others do not.

The study, published in the Journal of Applied Philosophy, shows that the internet could be a key way of protecting other basic human rights such as life, liberty, and freedom from torture — a means of enabling billions of people to lead ‘minimally decent lives’

“Internet access is no luxury, but instead a moral human right and everyone should have unmonitored and uncensored access to this global medium — provided free of charge for those unable to afford it,” Merten Reglitz, a lecturer at the University of Birmingham, said in a statement.

“Without such access, many people lack a meaningful way to influence and hold accountable supranational rule-makers and institutions,” Reglitz said.

The researchers noted that people without internet access don’t have a say in the making of the rules they must obey and which shape their life chances.

Reglitz added that exercising free speech and obtaining information was now heavily dependent on having internet access.

The researchers said that much of today’s political debate took place online and politically relevant information is shared on the internet — meaning the relative value these freedoms held for people ‘offline’ had decreased.

The study attributes unprecedented possibilities to the internet for protecting basic human rights to life, liberty and bodily integrity, they said.

While the researchers acknowledged that being online does not guarantee these rights, they cite

examples of internet engagement that helped hold governments and institutions to account.

These examples include the 'Arab Spring' which saw new ways of global reporting on government atrocities, the researchers said.

They also gave the example of the #MeToo campaign which helped to 'out' sexual harassment of women by powerful men.

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