



IMMANUEL KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE AND THE NIGERIA'S DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM: TOWARDS ACHIEVING DIGITAL RESPONSIBILITY

Anthony Uzochukwu Ufearoh, PhD

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,

au.ufearoh@unizik.edu.ng ; tonito2006@yahoo.co.uk

Phone/whatsapp: +2348037425925 ; ORCID: 0000-0003-2617-6808.

and

Chinedu S. Ifeakor, PhD.

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

cs.ifeakor@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

Though Nigeria has one of the fastest-growing digital economy in African continent, a digital boom so to say, there is a dire ethical challenge in data privacy, surveillance, and online misinformation. The present paper explores the possibility of using the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant as a framework for creating digital responsibility in the Nigerian digital arena. The approach is analytical. The focus is on how Kantian ethics can be employed to fecundate modern and responsible digital citizenship through an analysis and evaluation of already existing digital laws, enforcement procedures, and online habits. The discovery finds the existing procedures or practices ethically wanting insofar as human beings, the digital citizens are treated as means rather end in the Nigerian digital world. The positive elements of intrinsic worth, sense of duty, universalizability principle, and autonomy as found in Kantian ethics are indispensable ingredients in achieving humane and responsible digital ecosystem. It is the thesis of the paper that baring its absolutist tendency, a good application of Kantian categorical imperative can serve to fecundate responsible digital citizenship thereby curbing the above ethical deficiency.

Keywords: digital responsibility, Nigeria, Kant's categorical imperative, human dignity, universalizability, and digital ecosystem.

Introduction

The present digital transformation and boom in Nigeria have some attendant ethical challenges. In real life situations, legal and ethical boundaries are clearly known and respected in relationships. Encroachment can easily be detected and defaulters held accountable for their actions or wrong doings. Conversely, in on-line situations there is a tendency for people to hide behind the keyboard and commit crimes or abuses believing that the online ecosystem is a *no-man's-land* and a world of unfettered freedom. There are abuses in the areas of data privacy protection, surveillance and control of misinformation. This is evidenced in the high rate of cybercrimes, cyber bullying, dissemination of fake news, cyber threats, etc. The Guardian Newspaper (26 November 2025), as reported by Adamu Abuh, et al, states that "digital abuse in Nigeria is a major crisis, with an estimated 68.9 million people, particularly women and girls, facing online harassment, including cyberbullying, impersonation, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, sextortion, and deep fake abuse." How can the above ugly situation be morally addressed? This is the task before us.

The present work explores Kant's deontological ethics which builds on rationality, intrinsic value, and sense of duty. This is built on the ethical principle of universalizability. Deontological ethics is often contrasted with utilitarian ethics. It is the conviction of the researchers that the best form of healing or solution for a moral decadence is one rooted in the intrinsic principles that under-



gird peoples actions and inactions - *sanatio in radice*. This anchors on the fundamental reason that the human person is a rational being imbued with freedom and knowledge and whose rights and freedom ought to be respected as a matter of duty. This serves as the motivation for the choice of Kant's ethics.

The methodology is analytical. The philosophical tool of analysis helps to bring out the meanings embedded in the terms, concepts and symbols in the work. It is also a method known to dissect the whole into parts so as to bring out their latent meanings. The work is generally divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction. The second section highlights the surge in digital transformation in Nigeria, the attendant ethical challenge and the imperative of a proper ethical framework. The motif here is informed by the fact that development without morality is no development. The third section is an exposé on Kant's deontological ethics with a focus on his Categorical Imperative. The fourth section applies Kant's categorical imperative to the Nigerian digital ecosystem in view of determining the possibility of its fecundating responsible and ethical digital operations. The focus here is on data privacy, surveillance and online misinformation. The fifth section serves as the evaluation, recommendation and conclusion.

The Digital Transformation in Nigeria and the Imperative of Proper Ethical Framework

Nigeria is unarguably experiencing an unprecedented digital transformation. The Honourable Minister for Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr Bosun Tijani (no date) in his welcome address on the Ministry's website unequivocally affirms this fact in these clear terms:

As we stand on the cusp of a new era, characterised by rapid technological advancements, I believe it is our collective responsibility to harness the transformative power of innovation and technology, coupled with the ingenuity of the Nigerian people – young and old – to accelerate our development and position ourselves at the forefront of the global digital discourse.

Data and facts on the ground further attest to the truth of the above claim. At the second quarters of 2025, the digital economy contributed N7.37 trillion (14.4%) to the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Fagbemi, 2025). Emma Okonji, echoing the statistics released by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), reports in *Thisday Newspaper* (11th Dec., 2025) that Nigeria today boasts of over 142 million active internet subscribers and social media users. With the above boom comes various digital challenges such as cybercrimes as exemplified in the popular 419 scams, love scams, internet fraud, infringement on privacy, cyberbully etc. The available instruments for combating the above challenges such as Cybercrime Prohibition Prevention Act (2024); Nigeria Data Protection Act (2023), etc, notwithstanding, the rate of the above crimes, fraud and abuse continues to escalate at geometric progression thus calling for urgent attention. There is therefore a dire need for proper ethical framework to guide interactions in the Nigerian digital space. The traditional approaches and instruments hitherto employed are more inclined to positive administration of laws and acts. There is need for an ethical ground-norm upon which can be anchored principles and inner motivations that propel the human will, in collaboration with rationality towards doing what is good and desirable both in the real world and the digital world. It is the human person that operates in both worlds.

Kant's Categorical Imperative: A Brief Exposé

Immanuel Kant is a German philosopher born in Konigsberg on April 22nd 1724. He is said to have been "always sensitive to the longings of the heart that cannot be met by the cold dictates of theoretical reason" (William F. Lawhead 2015). Two of Kant's works *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1787) were devoted to his moral philosophy. In line with the rationalist philosophers, Kant agreed that anything that deserves to be called knowledge must be universal, necessary, and certain (Lawhead 2015). This is epitomized in his transcendental method or approach to knowledge which gives universalizability and necessity as fundamental conditions of knowledge. In a similar way a proper ethical



formulation, should have the essential ingredients of universalizability and necessity. For Kant, morality applies to human beings on account of their rationality (reason) which places them on a special position amongst the created order. 'The lawgiver' for Kant is reason itself. A rational rule is one that is universal and consistent. It is universal in that it is a rule that applies to all people, at all times, and in all circumstances. It is consistent in that it does not lead to any contradictions (Lawhead 2015). On another note, Kantian ethics places emphasis on duties, respect of the dignity and worth of persons. Sense of duty as well as reason are the two factors upon which he anchored his moral law.

Categorical imperative is quite different from hypothetical imperative. While hypothetical imperative is premised on any possible certain conditions, desire or ulterior motif, categorical imperative is absolutely unconditional. Kant's Categorical Imperative is expressed in the catchy expression: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Immanuel Kant 1993 (Original work published 1785)). This is rationally justifiable. Kant equally expressed it morally in another formula: "So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in another, always as an end and never as only a means" (Kant 1993). The idea of autonomy is highly pivotal to Kant's categorical imperative. The word 'autonomy' is derived from two Greek words *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law), a combination of the two words means "self-legislation". This simply refers to the inbuilt characteristic of the human will to serve as a law to itself; unencumbered by or independent of any objects of desire, inclinations. The categorical imperative demands that one employs the principle of autonomy by stating that one acts only in accordance with that maxim through which one can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law. Autonomy contrasts with heteronomous. This is the case where the will is influenced by extraneous factors such as appetites and emotions. The human reason or rationality plays significant role here. For Kant the autonomy of the will is the "supreme principle of morality" (G 4:440). Autonomy goes in tandem with freedom. An autonomous action is one done deliberately and self-consciously. The concept of autonomy has become a key issue in philosophy, medicine and law.

Finally, the intrinsic worth or value as well as the dignity and respect accorded to humans all anchor on the human autonomy. It is on the basis of this that Kant insists that the human being should be treated not as a means but an end-in-itself. In the light of the above exposé, one can now evaluate the practices in Nigerian digital environment vis-à-vis Kant's categorical imperative.

Kant's Categorical Imperative vis-à-vis Nigerian Digital Ecosystem

The deontological ethics as exemplified in Kant's categorical imperative calls for duty and respect of the human person as an end in itself and not as a means. This is a simple moral standard to be applied when analyzing the data collection, surveillance systems and the integrity of information (Johnson & Cureton, 2022). Unlike the consequentialist ethics or approach which believes that the outcomes alone define the actions, the Kantian ethics refers to the intentions and focuses on the principles of the technological and digital practices and further considers whether these practices place human dignity in proper perspective that can be generalized without contradiction.

The present work will dwell on three areas of Nigeria online space that are salient such as coverage of data privacy protection, surveillance and control of misinformation. The human autonomy and dignity is questioned in all these areas and must be evaluated in terms of morality. The research questions that will inform the research will take the following form: (1) How does the practices in the Nigerian digital spaces adhere to the Kantian moral principle? (2) What are some of the systematic violations of human dignity due to the application of data and surveillance? (3) How can the categorical imperative fecundate change of policy to safeguard the digital rights and at the same time permit technological progress?

The significance of the present work lies in the growing current of interest on the ethical dimension of digital practices among Nigerians. Recent occurrences attest to the above claim. In the area of data protection, the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) has started conducting investigations of over 1,000 entities on compliance breach nay a sign of heightened awareness



regarding digital rights (Wolfenden, 2025). Simultaneously, the 2023 elections demonstrated that the misinformation campaigns can negatively affect the democratic process and the voter turnout dropped to 26.72% part of which can be attributed to the manipulation of the media (MDIF, 2024). These tendencies indicate that there is an immediate need of ethical frameworks beyond regulatory compliance, which will give ethical grounds of digital citizenship. The imperative of balancing technological and digital innovation with respect for human dignity is a noble idea that calls for not only a positive legal but also adequate ethical framework.

Digital Autonomy and Human Dignity

Remarkably, Kant's concept of autonomy is echoed in the famous Onora O'Neill's principled autonomy (2002). O'Neill advocated for autonomy that is bound by duties and principles, rather than just subjective preferences (2002). This is autonomy that operates within the framework of shared obligations; which is the capacity to act on the grounds that can be intelligible to another in a communicative, rational dialogue. It aligns with transparency, informed consent and meaningful choice requirements in digital contexts as far as the collection and use of personal data is concerned. Users are expected to be in a position to understand words, terms and conditions on which they engage digital services and judge them rationally.

Kant's ethics is concerned with human dignity in which people possess intrinsic values that cannot be instrumentalized (O'Neill, 2002). This ideal has enormous implication for the present digital culture in which user information is largely regarded as a valuable resources to be traded commercially, as opposed to a declaration of self-agency. Such assumptions that human experience could be transformed into data sets that could be worked with the help of algorithms raises serious doubts whether digital technologies could respect or violate the dignity that Kant describes as the main part of the humanity of the human and a core factor in moral philosophy.

The aspect of autonomy has particular problems with the digital environment in Nigeria. The digital divide with the 45.5% internet penetration rate creates a situation where internet access is already a prerequisite to the freedom of choice in an already digital society (Freedom House, 2024). The unconnected are systematically excluded from belonging and participating in existing opportunities as almost all basic services are migrated from analog to digital arena. In addition to this, some websites and platforms also pose big challenges to their users. People can be exploited by way of cognitive biases as well as unduly manipulated. This rather vitiates rational decisions as required by Kantian autonomy.

Respect for human dignity also requires that the digital systems must be designed to enhance rather than diminish the human abilities. When algorithms provide consequential determinations of persons, e.g. as over creditworthy or not employed or on social services, without giving the notion of how it was determined or with any meaningful appeal, it does not treat persons as beings capable of understanding and challenging decision-making that affects their lives but as objects to be processed by an algorithm instead. Even the most accurate and efficient of these systems sometimes fail to pass test of the most basic Kantian standards.

Kantian Evaluation of Nigerian Digital Practices

Data Privacy: Instrumentalization versus Respect for Persons

A cursory look at the Nigerian digital ecosystem shows that much needs to be done as far as data privacy management or data protection is concerned. Understandably, measures for protection of data are enshrined in the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023, such as enhanced data protection regarding sensitive personal data and a requirement of registration of major processors (ICLG, 2025). Nonetheless, evidence of lack of compliance abound such as the case of the NDPC examining more than 1,000 entities and fining them massively, including N766.2 million on Multichoice Nigeria (ICLG, 2025).

Exploitative surveillance cultures, commodification of personal information and even outright forceful and illegal extraction of information from victims are rampant. Most times a lot of



personal information are collected without seeking the consent of the people. The practice goes against the respect for humanity formulation as the process takes users more as a source of valuable data but not as autonomous agents worthy of respect (Gwadi and Igbashangev, 2025). The legal requirements of informed consent processes often lack the needed transparency and are not rationally determined since the legal texts they describe appear incomprehensible to an average Nigerian user.

Instrumentalization occurs when the human person is directly or indirectly used as a means to an end such as using a person's data without his or her consent to achieve a purpose. In the Nigeria's digital ecosystem, one's data are often tracked, collected and used by companies, governments, politicians etc. Though such data can be used positively for planning and developmental projects, consent and respect of human dignity should be applied where and when necessary. Ethical issues arise when tech companies, data-driven businesses and institutions exploit or treat users as mere data and not as human persons endowed with rationality and freewill. These are most often for profiteering without any due consideration on the rights, freedom and privacy of the victims who may not fully understand how much of their information is being stored, sold, or used for purposes like targeted advertising or behavior prediction. When this happens without clear permission or awareness, individuals are no longer treated as rational agents with dignity. They become tools in a system built to make profit or control a behavior.

Nevertheless, there are those who justify the present day manipulative practices and further argue that Kantian moral principles are not feasible in the digital world given that they are absolute and as such fail to account for the uniqueness of particular situations. Similarly, terms of services are voluntarily accepted by the users who are free to choose autonomously despite the complexity of the terms. Simple wisdom demands that one halts further action when in doubt. Moreover, full disclosure of the intricacies of data practices may overload users with information which can be counter-productive to free decision making instead of reinforcing it.

However, the above defense fails to appreciate properly Kantian demands of meaningful autonomy. Consent that is made with terms that are intentionally obscure or a design pattern that is exploitative do not find a rational basis that is required of Kantian ethics. According to O'Neill (2002), real freedom imply that people have access to information about the principles applicable in their treatment and can properly analyze them. By devising consent systems that deliberately aim to maximize profits via cryptic and deceptive presentation of vital details, digital platforms are driven to achieve strategic, but not communicative, objectives, which is a breach of the respect of the rational agency upon which the of Kantian ethical theory rests.

Surveillance: State Power and Individual Dignity

The prying surveillance and other spying practices especially on the social media by the security agencies in Nigeria raise serious moral concerns (Stegen, 2025). The Cybercrimes Act permits electronic surveillance on the pretext of national security, but the routine monitoring of computer-mediated interactions where individuals do not know or consent to it disregards the imperative to handle persons as ends in themselves (Oghogho et al., 2024).

A further examination of the phenomenon of surveillance in the light of Kant's universalizability test could be quite informative. Would we tolerate a society in which we have government's surveillance of all the digital communications? This type of ominous surveillance would essentially change the very essence of communication as a free process, taking away the trust and authenticity without which no meaningful discourse can be held. Under the close monitoring of the population, the autonomy and freedom that Kant regards as crucial aspects of human dignity is denied to them.

Surveillance systems also view citizens as potential dangers that need to be closely monitored and not as individuals who are independent and can operate freely. Such instrumental orientation does not synchronize with the Kantian ethics since it tells negatively on the dignity of the larger majority that do not constitute any form of threat or harm to the society. However, this makes the whole nation to become victims of surveillance on account of a few that are guilty of crimes. The



advocates of surveillance may argue that security threats such as terrorism, cyber-crimes and political instabilities generate valid demands of surveillance. The need to defend citizens can be used to justify surveillance to avoid grave harms. In addition, the citizens who are involved in the open digital environments possess lower expectations about their privacy and therefore surveillance is not as invasive as a physical search. They think that the consequentialist advantages of such prevention of attack or crime supersede any abstract interests in dignity.

This defense, however, cannot succeed on the Kantian grounds since it considers dignity as something that can be exchanged or traded on security benefits. In the ethics of Kant, human dignity is treated as absolute and inviolable. Categorical imperative prohibits use of the innocent to achieve security goals irrespective of the scale of returns attained. Individuals are ethically obligated to uphold their informational privacy, and the states cannot subjugate such obligations just because of the need of security.

Moreover, consequentialist calculation presented by the defenders of surveillance goes against the very framework of Kantian deontological ethics. Although the harms prevented by surveillance may be either major or minor, the question to ask is whether the surveillance treats individuals with the respect to which their dignity deserves. Invasive surveillance that takes place without the awareness of individuals or without significant control does not pass this test. The ethics proposed by Kant allows taking of security measures, though in such a way that they do not interfere with the free agency of others. This is to say that an element of transparency, responsibility and proportion is needed, which is mostly lacking in the existing surveillance procedures in Nigeria.

Misinformation: Truth-Telling and Democratic Discourse

The prevalence of false information on the Nigerian digital ecosystem poses serious moral challenge. Truth-telling and its opposite which is lying are considered as central concepts in the Kantian moral system since lying breaches the principle of universalizability (universal lying would reduce trust to ashes, and people could no longer communicate) as well as the principle of respect to a person (lying would turn other people into objects to be used and not persons).

The 2023 elections in Nigeria painted the image of how misinformation can be corrosive. An example is the use of social media influencers to spread disinformation by the political parties that exploited ethnic and religious differences (Freedom House, 2024). Deepfakes that are produced through artificial intelligence pose a threat to future elections based on more advanced deceptions (Aigbiniode and Goodman, 2025). From Kantian standpoint, such practices are systematic in breaching the rational autonomy required to engage in democracy, and instead of relating to the citizens as rational entities, who can make informed decisions, they relegate citizens to objects which are to be manipulated.

The obligation of truth is not just limited to individual actors, but also to platform operators and policymakers. The social media companies that make their algorithms to encourage engagement instead of accuracy would be against the Kantian principles because they would have established the spaces in which misinformation can flourish. By platforms using cognitive biases to gain the greatest attention of users, the latter objectify them, as objects of advertisement and revenue, but not as independent agents who deserve to be told the truth. The Kantian imperative requires that the design of platforms put the interests of the users and the rational status of the users over the commercial interests. Above all, the gap in the overall artificial intelligence and deepfakes regulations means a lot in terms of guarding the integrity of information. Fact-checking approach such as MyAIFactChecker are good projects, though they need more involvement and spread into digital ecosystems to create an impact.

Critics may argue that the regulation of the free flow of information or censorship runs contrary to freedom of speech which Kant encourages. Understandably, misinformation and legitimate speech may not be always easily distinguished, and the enforcement mechanisms can be directed at the political enemies. These notwithstanding, individuals are obligated to think critically on the



information they are fed. The state obligation to ensure that individuals tell the truth to the letter may lead to infantilism thus making the people to lack the right to make their own judgment.

The above points are important issues that should be considered seriously. Although the ethics of Kant values freedom of expression, it should occur in a manner that respects the autonomy of other individuals. Intentional misinformation violates this need because it seeks to distort, rather than inform. The categorical imperative prohibits random and dehumanizing censorship, but permits and even requires censorship that protects the contents of rational discourse. This can be augmented with fact-checking systems and content moderation so as to guarantee the dissemination of authentic information.

Recommendations

Policy Framework Enhancements

The Kantian ethics demands that the Nigerian digital governance be modeled in such a way that the human dignity is respected and not just on the need to maximize commercial or political gains. First, there should be equal treatment in the area of data protection. The NDPC must ensure not only the technical compliance but also the actual adherence to the user autonomy, the consent mechanisms applied must be made to guarantee actual comprehension and not artificial assent.

Second, transparency and accountability are required in the surveillance programs. Security measures are permitted by Kantian ethics, but only those measures which consider citizens as an end in themselves. This may also involve the inclusion of warrant in the judicial review in order to engage in surveillance, regular publicity on size and performance of the programs, and huge compensations against unsuitable surveillance. Security agencies must have the right to conduct surveillance based on individualized suspicion as opposed to entire populations as the source of potential dangers.

Third, though elaborate systems of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and automated decision systems are most times adopted, Kantian ethics holds that the consequential determinations must be explainable and contestable as these involve rational human beings. This allows autonomous agents to understand and challenge determinations. To provide effective human jurisdiction and authentic mechanisms, decision-making algorithms employed in administering credits, jobs, or government services must be conditioned to adhere to transparent standards that respect human dignity.

Fourth, the regulation of platforms should be more about autonomy of the users. This implies that the use of manipulative design patterns should be banned. Transparency in configuration of algorithms should be a *conditio sine qua non*. Platforms should be subject to legal liability as a way of discouraging the dissemination of misinformation.

Institutional Capacity Building

A broader application the Kantian principles in the Nigerian digital ecosystem requires stronger regulatory power. The NDPC and similar agencies may need resources to keep track of high-level technology, competence in morality structure and skills in technical expertise. Global partnership may also be needed to supplement or complement whatever local efforts that are made. Nigeria needs to encourage strong institutions. Similarly, proper digital governance cannot be achieved without proper communication and synergy between the government, civil societies, business community, and other institutions.

Digital Literacy and Public Education

Kantian autonomy requires rational and well informed citizens. Nigeria should invest in multilevel digital literacy and policy enlightenment which would encompass the privacy rights, discernment of misinformation and informed decision-making process when it comes to digital services. These programs are not meant to be limited to the urban educated individuals but should be extended to the rural and the marginal groups which are most vulnerable.

Education without morality is no education. Accordingly, technology and digital education should incorporate the moral dimension of technology rather than solely technical skills. There



should be mechanisms that enable the citizens to evaluate how digital practices affect their dignity and autonomy so that they can insist that the platforms and policymakers treat them better. Digital ethics and ethical digital citizenship should be introduced in schools and young Nigerians should learn to use the technological and digital spaces without losing their sense of morality.

Balancing Innovation and Human Dignity

Every good innovation is meant to uplift rather than degrade the human dignity. Nigeria has massive and unfolding potential in the development of its digital economy. To maximize these benefits, it is quite necessary to uphold the Kantian imperative of persons never being used as a means to an end alone. It includes the rejection of spurious division between innovation and ethics. Both can be achieved simultaneously. Similarly, sustainable digital economies thrive best when founded on the issues of trust and dignity.

Innovation should not be stifled by inhuman moral principles. The business constructors who take into account the user autonomy and dignity are able to create stable and sustainable businesses. But those who rely on exploitation create poor systems that are not sustainable. The Kantian ethics provides a form of guideline on how to model business that would satisfy the needs of commerce and moral demands. Virtue must stand in the middle.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The present work has examined the Kant's categorical imperative in view of employing it as an ethical framework for Nigerian digital ecosystem. The focus is on data privacy, surveillance and misinformation. At the core of Kantian ethics lies the respect for human dignity and the call for duty. The tenets of universalizability and the submission that persons should be treated as ends in themselves serves as a canon for evaluating common practices in data collection, surveillance and misinformation. These serve as antidote to the practice that subjects citizens to either commercial or political agendas or gains. The test of universalizability exposes the inconsistency of existing practices.

The digital governance in Nigeria has a long way to go as far as achieving adequate protection and justice for Nigerian digital citizens. Although the NDPA 2023 sets significant legal guidelines, their enforcement is still unsatisfactory and some spurious practices therein tend to contradict the Kantian ethical principles. Some data platforms treat users merely as sources of important information, rather than as independent rational agents that should be respected. The surveillance systems are used to monitor whole populations on the premise of arresting possible danger rather than on personal suspicion. Citizens are also exploited via misinformation. The cumulative effects of the above digital malpractices are obvious. They fundamentally show gross lack of strong moral standing.

It is on this basis that the present work presents the Kantian ethical paradigm which provides optimism as well as criticism for the status quo. It offers practical reforms and makes a clarion call to respect human value and yet allow technological advancements by giving straight forward moral ingredients namely: human dignity, autonomy, and universalizability. The recommendations enunciated above show how the Kantian ethics can be applied when framing policies on data privacy, accountability in surveillance, regulation of the platforms, and integrity of information. The issue of implementation is still daunting. The capacity to regulate is constrained by the scarcity of resources. The Kantian individualism can be in conflicts with cultural contexts. Similarly, critics tend to argue that Kant's categorical imperative is too broad and absolute as to properly address the ethical demands of particular situations. Different situations may call for different ethical approach. Most times political forces do oppose reforms that pose threat to their interests. Vulnerable populations are often excluded due to the digital divide occasioned by digital illiteracy and other factors. These are some of the challenges that can militate against the adequate implementation of Kantian ethical model.

These notwithstanding, the status of Nigeria as one of the leading digital economies in Africa demands that proper balance is created between innovation and the human person. The



Kantian approach to digital governance provides a framework that can be used in digital ecosystems, markets and other areas. It further proves that technological advancement does not have to harm human values. The basic ethical lesson from Kant's categorical imperative is that in the realm of the digital as in any other field, individuals are to be treated as ends not means.

References

- Abuh, A., Abogonye, A., Danjuma Michael, and Omolaoye, S. (26 November 2025). '68.9 million Nigerians suffer online abuse'. <https://guardian.ng/technology/68-9-million-nigerians-suffer-online-abuse/>
- Aigbiniode, I., & Goodman, F. (2025, August 28). *Road to 2027: Preparing for Nigerian elections in a world of AI deepfakes*. TechCabal. <https://techcabal.com/2025/08/28/ai-deepfakes-nigeria-2027-elections/>
- Allen, A. (2013). An Ethical Duty to Protect One's Own Information Privacy? *Alabama Law Review*. https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/451/
- Britannica Editors (Invalid Date). *Categorical Imperative*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/categorical-imperative>
- Fagbemi, J. (2025, September 22). *Digital economy contributes 14.4% of Nigeria's GDP growth in Q2 2025*. Technext. <https://technext24.com/2025/09/22/digital-economy-contribute-14-nigeria/>
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2023) The Nigeria Data Protection Act (2023). <https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Nigeria-Data-Protection-Act-2023.pdf>
- Freedom House. (2024). *Nigeria: Freedom on the Net 2024 Country Report*. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-net/2024>
- Future of Privacy Forum. (2023, June 28). *Nigeria's New Data Protection Act, Explained*. <https://fpf.org/blog/nigerias-new-data-protection-act-explained/>
- Gwadi, I. W., & Igbashangev, P. A. (2025). Evaluating the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Fact-Checking Social Media Content in Nigeria. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5015986>
- ICLG. (2025). *Data Protection Laws and Regulations Nigeria 2025*. International Comparative Legal Guides. <https://iclg.com/practice-areas/data-protection-laws-and-regulations/nigeria>
- Johnson, R., & Cureton, A. (2022). *Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/>
- Kant, I. (1993). *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals* (J. W. Ellington, Trans.). Hackett Publishing. (Original work published 1785).
- Kant, Immanuel (1993) [1785]. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Ellington, James W. (3rd ed.). Hackett. p. 30. ISBN 0-87220-166-X.
- Lawhead, F.W. (2015). *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. Cengage.



MDIF. (2024, November 6). "The power of visual evidence is under threat": What do Nigerian elections teach us? MDIF. <https://www.mdif.org/news/the-power-of-visual-evidence-is-under-threat-what-do-nigerian-elections-teach-us/>

O'Neill, O. (2002). *Autonomy and trust in Bioethics*. Cambridge University Press.

Office of the National Security Adviser, Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2024) *Cyber Crime Prohibition Prevention Act*. https://cert.gov.ng/ngcert/resources/CyberCrime__Prohibition_Prevention_etc__Act__2024.pdf

Oghogho, M. Y., Osazuwa, O. M. C., Iyamba, O. D., Ekeng-Ekeng, H., & John, I. G. (2024). Enhancing Security in Nigeria: The Implications of Social Media-Based Crime Reporting. *The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology*, 6(9), 22–39. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajpslc/volume06issue09-05>

Okonji, Emma. "Nigeria's Active Internet Subscribers Hit 142.6M as Mobile GSM Maintains Lead". *Thisday*. 12/ 11/2025. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/2025/12/11/nigerias-active-internet-subscribers-hit-142-6m-as-mobile-gsm-maintains-lead/>

Securiti. (2023). *An Overview of Nigeria's Data Protection Act, 2023*. Securiti. <https://securiti.ai/overview-of-nigeria-data-protection-act/>

Stegen, J. I. (2025). Leveraging social media intelligence (SOCMINT) in the African intelligence context. *Journal of Policing Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 20(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2025.2465529>

Tijani, 'Bosun, (Minister for Communications, Innovation & Digital Economy Federal Republic of Nigeria). "Welcome". <https://fmcide.gov.ng/#down>

Ulgen, O. (2017, October 31). *Kantian Ethics in the Age of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics*. QIL QDI. <https://www.qil-qdi.org/kantian-ethics-age-artificial-intelligence-robotics/>

Wolfenden, K.-L. (2025, August 25). *Nigeria Probes 1,369 Organizations in Major Data Privacy Crackdown*. TechAfrica News. <https://techafricanews.com/2025/08/25/nigeria-probes-1369-organizations-in-major-data-privacy-crackdown/>