



Technology for Good Spotlights Human Security at the Consumer Electronics Show

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Abstract

This article discusses how the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) held in January 2024 highlighted the growing connection between technology and human security. CES, held annually in Las Vegas, is one of the largest technology conferences in the world. In recent years, the organizers recognized the role of technology in addressing major social challenges and partnered with the World Academy of Art and Science and the UN Trust Fund for Human Security to promote the theme of “Human Security For All.” At CES 2024, there were over 135,000 attendees from around the globe witnessing innovations in areas like AI, smart cities, health tech, and more that have implications for human well-being and security. The event reflects how technology is increasingly shaping all sectors of society. It also serves as a platform for policymakers, industry leaders, and academics to discuss opportunities and challenges related to ensuring technology benefits humanity. The article also provides examples of new partnerships between diverse companies enabled by technological convergence. In conclusion, CES has become an important forum for moving the agenda of human security and technology forward in a collaborative way.

The lines between the physical and digital worlds will blur in the not-so-distant future. The fusion of advanced technology and the evolving needs of humanity has already begun a paradigm shift, which will further highlight the intricate relationship between human security and innovation.

At the heart of this eruption of innovation is the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) produced by the Consumer Technology Association (CTA) and held in Las Vegas, Nevada. CES is a global showcase of cutting-edge technologies that, for the past 50 years, have played a pivotal role in shaping the world around us. This year, as more than 135,000 attendees from around the globe gathered, it was evident that the convergence of technological advancements had become inseparable from the very fabric of ensuring human well-being. The number of attendees is remarkable, considering the event is not open to the public.

Gary Shapiro, CEO of CTA, framed the future we can expect perfectly during his keynote address when he said, “One day, all companies will be tech companies.” This profound comment should be taken seriously by CEOs, governments, scientists, and academics alike, as future competitiveness and innovation across all sectors of society will be determined by the quality and understanding of the tech tools available to us. One must look to technology to understand the future of almost every discipline today.

1. Global Events That Shift the World

To grasp the profound impact of CES, one must delve into the historical relevance of this event and the origins of other ambitious global events of more than two centuries ago. Originating in the late 1960s, CES was initially a modest gathering of tech enthusiasts. Over the years, it has transformed into a colossal platform, reflecting the pulse of the tech industry. In the past two years, as concerns about the role of technology and human well-being became more evident and complex, CES recognized the role of technology in promoting human security and how it can address some of the most significant social and environmental challenges we see today.

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CES can be likened to the World Fairs and expositions popular in Europe in the 1800s and stretching back to the world’s first industrial fair in Prague in 1791. The Great Exhibition in London in 1851 set the benchmark for future world fairs and was organized by members of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce. The Great Exhibition sought to provide the world with the hope of a better future after two brutal decades of political and social upheaval. Britain hoped to show that technology was the key to a better future. Attendees included Queen Victoria, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Michael Faraday, Samuel Colt, and writers Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, George Eliot, Alfred Tennyson, and William Makepeace Thackeray. The event’s official sponsor was the world’s first soft drink, Schweppes.

Likewise, CES 2024 attracted celebrities, musicians, creatives, and a slate of senior international trade officials and CEOs from some of the world’s most innovative companies. The event in January attracted tech entrepreneur Mark Cuban, musician Will.i.am, actor Robert Downey Junior, Dimitri Kusnezov, US Under Secretary for Science and Technology, Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, and many renowned captains of industry.

CES and The Great Exhibition are both events that showcased the cutting-edge technological advancements of their respective times. In the 19th century, The Great Exhibition exhibited inventions that marked the Industrial Revolution’s progress, introducing attendees to innovations like the telegraph, steam engines, steel manufacturing, the world’s first voting machine, and instruments that allowed tunneling and the understanding of our place in the universe with astronomical observation instruments.

Similarly, CES has become a contemporary hub for unveiling the latest consumer technologies. CES mirrors the digital age’s rapid evolution. Exhibitors at CES 2024 showcased futuristic gadgets, including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, flying cars, smart cities, robotics, and the Internet of Things, capturing the essence of our modern technological era.

CES 2024 saw 4,300 exhibitors and 1,400 startups from around the world present the future across 2.5 million square feet of exhibition space. That's the equivalent of 45 American football fields or the entire exhibition space of the Louvre Museum in Paris. In addition, sixty percent of Fortune 500 companies were represented at the week-long event.

2. The Convergence of Unrelated Brands, Aided by Technology

Beauty company L'Oréal was a surprise addition to CES 2024, further confirming the spread of technology into sectors previously not considered tech. Elon Musk's Tesla announced a partnership with Samsung. Amazon announced partnerships with Panasonic, BMW, and Siemens—completely unrelated brands that would have had no reason to collaborate in the past if it were not for one unifying ingredient today—technology. We will see increased opportunities for business and academia as technology weaves together previously unrelated disciplines and offers fresh solutions to business and societal problems.

World Fairs of history, and CES today, share a common goal of fostering global collaboration and innovation, providing a platform for nations to showcase their technological prowess, and promoting international dialogue. CES continues this tradition, attracting tech enthusiasts, industry professionals, and innovators from around the globe. CES has played a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions of technology and driving forward the march of progress.

The narrative at CES 2024 was not solely about gadgets and gizmos; it was a narrative of empowerment. Wearable devices equipped with health monitoring features and emergency response mechanisms have become integral to personal safety. These devices seamlessly integrate with broader ecosystems, connecting individuals to emergency services, healthcare providers, and each other in times of need. The once passive role of technology has evolved into an active guardian, enhancing human security in ways previously unimaginable.

3. World's Largest Tech Event Adopts Human Security

The World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS), as the implementing partner of the Human Security For All (HS4A) campaign, together with the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), was responsible for convincing CTA that human security was a cross-cutting theme throughout the 45 product categories represented at the show. There was hesitation at first, because the idea of human rights and security had never been paired with technology before. The case for technology and human security was made by WAAS Board Trustee Walton Stinson, who convinced CTA's CEO and its board that technological solutions are required to address the world's most pressing problems and to close the SDG gaps. CTA recognized the imperative to galvanize the industry around the concept of ethical technology as an essential tool to reinforce all dimensions of human security.

The founding of WAAS was used to illustrate the urgency of putting ethical guidelines in place from the very beginning of any significant scientific discoveries, to avoid any regrets in the future. In 1960, WAAS was concerned about the misuse of nuclear energy and weaponry, which had the potential to end all life on Earth. Scientists were no longer anonymous figures hidden in laboratories but found themselves holding the world's fate in their hands.

Similarly, today, the developers of AI and technology hold equal power in their hands. Calls are already being made to pause the rollout of AI until its full significance for humanity can be reviewed. Some are even asking if AI is the new nuclear bomb. The results of the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan are well known, with deaths estimated at up to 210,000. However, AI is not a localized phenomenon; it's global by nature and carried worldwide in seconds by millions of kilometers of Internet infrastructure, undersea cables, and satellites that deliver information to an estimated 15 billion mobile phones today. Mobile phones have transformed from simple communication tools to sophisticated delivery devices that raise many security concerns in their wake. Our energy security, financial security, pensions, health information, and modes of transport are all woven into the vast tapestry of the Internet. Should we unquestioningly trust that technological systems will keep us safe? Or should we actively create safeguards that ensure that technological developments are ethically and responsibly implemented?

By the Spring of 2022, CTA was an official partner in the campaign. At CES 2023, they themed the entire event around Human Security For All. With the WAAS brand closely aligned with the campaign, it also benefitted from this exposure, with many attendees wanting to hear more about the work of the 63-year-old organization and opening new opportunities for collaboration.

4. Policymakers Meet the Tech Creators

One of the guests of honor at CES 2024 was UN Secretary-General Tech Envoy Amandeep Singh Gill, who WAAS invited to see firsthand the manifestations of the technology policies he works with daily. A thought leader on digital technology, Gill's mandate is to leverage digital transformation responsibly and inclusively for progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. He has helped secure high-impact international consensus recommendations on regulating AI in lethal autonomous weapon systems, helped draft AI ethics recommendations for UNESCO, and helped plan a new global platform on digital health and AI.

Gill appeared alongside WAAS President Garry Jacobs at the UN in September 2023 to announce access to technology as the eighth pillar of Human Security.

Gill delivered an address at the exclusive CES Leaders in Tech Dinner—to 1,000 top leaders in technology. He called on industry leaders to embrace the Global Digital Compact, support AI governance, and help deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. He shared how the UN is working to expand access to technology as a fundamental right to pursuing human security. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, said, "Looking to the future, two seismic shifts will shape the 21st century: the climate crisis and digital transformation." In the same way international cooperation is critical to protecting the health of our planet, international efforts are also needed to pursue the benefits of digital technologies while mitigating their risks.

"The future of work will be radically altered with technology," says Gill, "So we need to urgently focus on the current deficit between ordinary people and the highly advanced

technology we see around us today. Many assume technology will spread organically and deliver good to the world by default. But this process will not happen automatically; it can't be left to market forces alone. Planning and collaboration within sectors are needed to ensure positive outcomes."

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"A superior world with technology is possible, but only with development and investment in people, education, health, and economic systems," says Gill. "My office at the UN is encouraging governments to explore how other countries integrate AI and tech into their problem-solving and how they can adapt these solutions to their unique situation. What struck me most at CES 2024 was how technology has embraced sustainability, the circular economy, and the energy transition," says Gill of his time spent on the exhibition floor.

United Nations Member States adopted a Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations in 2020, which contains this pledge:

"We will improve digital cooperation. Digital technologies have profoundly transformed society. They offer unprecedented opportunities and new challenges. When improperly or maliciously used, they can fuel divisions within and between countries, increase insecurity, undermine human rights, and exacerbate inequality. Shaping a shared vision of digital cooperation and a digital future that shows the full potential for beneficial technology usage and addressing digital trust and security must continue to be a priority as our world is now more than ever relying on digital tools for connectivity and social-economic prosperity. Digital technologies have the potential to accelerate the realization of the 2030 Agenda. We must ensure safe and affordable digital access for all. The United Nations can provide a platform for all stakeholders to participate in such deliberations."

The ideas, innovations, business deals, and collaborations to help realize these ideals can all be found at CES.

5. A Visionary Supporter With a 250 Year Business Plan

One of the leading exhibitors at CES 2024 was the Japanese electronics company Panasonic, founded in Osaka in 1918 by Kōnosuke Matsushita. He was a unique entrepreneur who crafted the company's vision 250 years into the future. This created a natural affinity between WAAS and Panasonic, who share a reflective and holistic approach to solving problems. Panasonic North America's Chairwoman and CEO, Megan Lee, joined WAAS President Garry Jacobs at a Great Minds session at CES 2024 to discuss how thinking like an innovator can help change the world.

“Our founder had a strong conviction 105 years ago that business should exist in the service of society,” says Lee. “If you’re not adding value to society, you will not be successful as a business.” Matsushita never finished elementary school and was sickly as a young man. He was told he wouldn’t live past the age of 20. These circumstances forced him to rely on a network of people to get things done and to find new ways of collecting wisdom to apply to his growing business. It was a textbook example of innovation emerging from a dire need.

“Our strategy today is to look at environmental problems and other pressing societal issues and ask how we respond as a company,” says Lee. “Profit is a reward from customers recognizing that you’re doing something right.” Part of Panasonic’s commitment to society is to work with community colleges in Kansas, USA, to train students in skills that would guarantee them employment at the company’s new electric vehicle battery plant in the area. The Panasonic Foundation, founded in 1984, promotes STEM training for young people.

“My background is art,” says Lee. “Sometimes we must stop, procrastinate, and allow ourselves to daydream about what’s possible. Not everything is a mathematical equation. That’s why we created the idea of STEAM at the Panasonic Foundation: Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics. We need to understand better why we do what we do and the purpose of what we do,” concludes Lee.

6. Technology for Good Report Delivers Actionable Steps

Each year, London-based organization Force For Good releases its “Technology as a Force For Good” report, compiled by WAAS Trustee Ketan Patel. The 2024 report was released at CES 2024 and highlights ten technology solutions that can substantially contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, 19 core technologies have also been identified as the focus of the top 100 tech companies competing for the future.

“Today, we stand with one foot still in the 20th Century with its conflicts and challenges and another in the 21st Century with its rapidly emerging information age,” says Patel. “The transition ahead is harrowing, given that it requires us to let go of one for the other. This change is of the magnitude of the industrial revolution over the agricultural one, promising to change everything from our politics, economies, societies, communities, families, and the values running through these.”

Launched at a Research Summit at CES, the report outlines the journey ahead—the technologies that are set to shape our future, the companies that are investing to do so, and the countries that are competing for power over the future. It highlights the role technology can play in a civilizational shift to the information age in a secure and sustainable way and how technology can help close the US \$135 trillion SDG funding gap.

“Only one-third of the world has substantially benefitted from the Industrial Age,” says Patel. “The Information Age now allows for broader inclusion.”

7. Technology and Human Security are Inseparable Partners

The story of human security and technology is intertwined with the emergence of intelligent systems designed to safeguard individuals in an interconnected world. At CES,

breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and cybersecurity have become a driving force behind ensuring the safety and privacy of individuals. Smart cities equipped with sensors, predictive analytics, and autonomous systems have emerged as a response to the pressing need for resilient urban environments. Satellite surveillance for understanding and caring for our planet has spawned hundreds of new business ideas that protect and increase agricultural yields for a hungry world. Millions of monitored data points in our oceans deliver crucial information on weather patterns and the health of one of our primary food sources.

CES has emerged as a beacon of progress in the grand tapestry of human security and technology, represented by WAAS and the HS4A campaign. It showcases the relentless march of innovation and the conscious efforts to channel these advancements for the greater good. As the effects of this successful partnership unfold, it symbolizes a commitment to a future where technology and human security are inseparable partners, working hand in hand to create a safer, more connected world.

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