It's Not About the Internet

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ABSTRACT

In the policy realm what we call "Internet issues" are not actually "Internet" issues-they are well-pedigreed social, political, cultural, and economic issues, for which we clever technologists have provided a rich new environment in which to grow and multiply. It follows that the people best prepared to tackle "Internet" issues may be thoughtful professionals in fields such as behavioral psychology, linguistics, sociology, education, history, ethnology, and political science-not (exclusively) "Internet experts".

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Social and professional topics** → **Computing / technology policy**;

KEYWORDS

Internet

1 INTERNET ISSUES

In the policy realm what we call "Internet issues" are not actually "Internet" issues—they are well-pedigreed social, political, cultural, and economic issues, for which we clever technologists have provided a rich new environment in which to grow and multiply.

The Internet has had a profound impact on almost every aspect of life that involves human communication. That impact has often been exhilarating and liberating, but occasionally disturbing and debilitating, enhancing some communication experiences while demeaning others. Ready access to information may frustrate oppression by diminishing the power of tyrants to control what people may know, but its inescapable corrolary is ready access to disinformation that erodes the distinction between facts and their alternatives. New models of intermediated interaction, commonly referred to as "social media," expand the stage on which we build and experience our social selves, but also expand the scale and scope of both innocent and malevolent behavior, blurring the boundary between public and private. "Smart" devices deployed in every conceivable environment, from industrial control systems to residential lighting to medical implants, instrument a brave new world of automated sensing and actuating that combines convenience with cyber-attack vulnerability in perversely equal measure.

Because we encounter these issues so powerfully today in the context of a rapidly ramifying Internet, it is tempting to imagine that they are "Internet" issues, when in fact they are simply the latest manifestation of issues that are rooted in the fundamental social and political nature of mankind. The ownership of resources, including information; the distinction and proper boundary between public and private; and the tradeoff between freedom and security are issues that have been debated for all of human history—they did not suddenly appear at the advent of the Internet.

2 CONCLUSION

It follows that the people best prepared to tackle "Internet" issues may be thoughtful professionals in fields such as behavioral psychology, linguistics, sociology, education, history, ethnology, and political science—not (exclusively) "Internet experts." Yet we continue to convene under the misleading banner of "the Internet," which attracts attention and participation disproportionately from the narrow "Internet community" of people whose focus is the technical, policy, and business dimensions of a current technology rather than the much wider community of people concerned with the past, present, and future of human behavior. A broadly interdisciplinary approach to what have traditionally been considered "Internet" issues may lead to novel and important insights.

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