Short Comment on Internet Universality: Basic Interoperability as a Prior Principle

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Abstract

A short but very important principle to apply in relation to the notion of "Internet Universality."

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Basic Interoperability as a Prior Principle

by Seth Johnson

UNESCO proposes a catchphrase of "Internet Universality" as an Internet Principle[1], presenting the term as encapsulating and representing the interdependent way the concerns of Rights, Openness, Accessibility and Multistakeholderism interact with each other in addressing issues. Another contribution from UNESCO proposes to study Internet-related issues with reference to the same rubric[2].

I offer this comment simply to encourage understanding that a simple general appeal to the notion of universality should be considered with great care. Implementing "universal" policy solutions by establishing rules that apply between networks can easily interfere with the flexibility of the Internet platform.

This is particularly important given that the WSIS project fails to distinguish between the Internet and other IP-based networks, including Next-generation networks[3]. The ITU's proceedings instead refer to ICT applications, supported by IP-based networks, as means for addressing various public policy concerns. If we are speaking of the universality of IP addresses for designating endpoints, the term Internet Universality presents few problems. But if universality is seen to be something that more greatly supports a policy purpose and that may be implemented by means of particular policies that apply between autonomous networks, the notion will serve to undermine the flexibility and openness of the Internet.

It is far better to stress a principle of first recognizing how the great flexibility and interoperability of the Internet derives from the way the Internet Protocol enables interoperability between autonomous networks, and then to consider various functions proposed to be implemented as "universal" principles in terms of their impact on the Internet platform.

1http://content.netmundial.br/contribution/internet-universality-a-means-towards-building-

knowledge-societies-and-the-post-2015-sustainable-development-agenda/151

2http://content.netmundial.br/contribution/unesco-comprehensive-study-on-internet-related-issues-draft-concept-paper-proposed-by-the-secretariat-for-consultations/149 and http://content.netmundial.br/contribution/unesco-comprehensive-study-on-internet-related-issues-draft-concept-paper-proposed-by-the-secretariat-for-consultations/155

3See http://internetdistinction.com/wsisimpacts/2013/11/25/cybersecurity-ict-applications-ip-based-impacts-on-the-internet/#Intro and http://internetdistinction.com/wsisimpacts/2013/11/25/cybersecurity-ict-applications-ip-based-impacts-on-the-internet/#ITUInternet