

Chapter 27

Internet Governance: Definitions, Issues, and Challenges

Lauren Movius
University of Southern California, USA

ABSTRACT

As the Internet has spread globally, and its economic, political, and cultural influences have increased, it is necessary to develop appropriate policy to govern it, in order to manage and protect its presence in our lives. While national governments apply their laws on the Internet, the Internet presents many issues that span national jurisdictions, and therefore requires global governance. Early Internet governance was self-regulatory and involved organizations and a community of users that made decisions through rough consensus. ICANN and the technical issue of domain name and addressing began debates over the issue of Internet governance. Larger issues of Internet governance emerged during the World Summit on the Information Society, whose existence illustrates the shift towards accepting the need for a global, more formal framework of governance. This chapter explores Internet governance and covers the following themes: understanding the challenge of governing the Internet; frameworks and definitions of Internet governance; and the evolution of the Internet governance debate. As there is much disagreement about what Internet governance is, this chapter synthesizes the main issues and debates and provides an overview of Internet governance.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has revolutionized many sectors of our societies and indeed the very fabric of human communication. The Internet is the most important infrastructure of the information age, influencing

politics, economics and culture. As of June 2009, there were 1.7 billion Internet users worldwide (International Telecommunication Union, 2009; see Figure 1 and Table 1). As the Internet has spread globally, and its economic, political, and cultural influences have increased, it is necessary to develop appropriate policy to govern the Internet. Governance of media and communications

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has always been of interest to governments, both internationally and nationally. While national governments apply their laws on the Internet, the Internet is a global network of networks and presents many issues that span national jurisdictions, and therefore requires global governance.

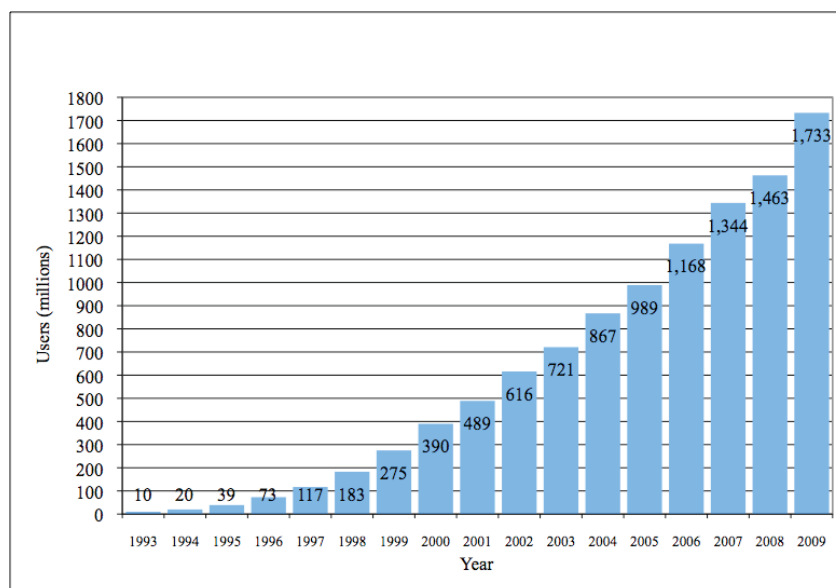
This chapter will explore Internet governance and will engage with the following themes: understanding the challenge of governing the Internet; frameworks and definitions of Internet governance; and the evolution of the Internet governance debate. As there is much disagreement about what Internet governance is, this chapter will synthesize the main issues and debates and will provide an overview of Internet governance, which represents the focus of current policy debates about the Internet.

BACKGROUND

Before we can analyze Internet governance, we must understand the concept of global governance. Global governance has arisen as a concern of both academics and policy makers in the last decade of

the 20th century. In an era of globalization, there has been a rise of international institutions, regimes, multilateral agreements, and international summits. Changes include “the thickening institutional density, expanding jurisdiction, intensifying transnational politics and the deepening impact of suprastrate regulation” (Held & McGrew, 2002, p.8). But do these changes represent a qualitative and structural shift in governance? A debate among scholars focuses on the extent to which this new system represents a break with traditional models of regulating world order through geopolitics. While some argue that global governance is purely rhetoric (Gilpin, 2001), others argue that the new system is an evolution of global governance to a new complex multilateralism (Held & McGrew, 2002). Scholars disagree on the types and amount of change, but it is largely agreed upon that there has been a transformation of the nation-state brought about by globalization (Castells 2007; Held & McGrew, 2007; Keohane & Nye, 2000). The shifting power dynamics in the international arena have brought to the fore the concept of global governance. Much of academic discourse

Figure 1. Internet users 1992 -2009 (ITU, 2009)



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