

ACCESS & INCLUSION: THE 'GATEWAY DRUGS' FOR OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS?

MALAVIKA JAYARAM

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL ASIA HUB, HONG KONG

FACULTY ASSOCIATE, BERKMAN KLEIN CENTER FOR INTERNET & SOCIETY AT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

@MalJayaram



**YOU KEEP USING THAT
WORD**

**I DON'T THINK YOU KNOW WHAT
IT MEANS**

ACCESS & INCLUSION 101 * (A.K.A. OBVIOUS THINGS I WISH OUR COMMUNITY NEVER HAD TO MENTION AGAIN):

1: USERS ARE NOT THE PROBLEM.

2: THEY'RE NOT THE (SOLE) SOLUTION EITHER.

3: THE BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND INCLUSION DO NOT DERIVE FROM A SINGLE SOURCE.

4: THE SOLUTIONS WILL ALSO COME FROM MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES/COMMUNITIES/REGIONS.

5: ACCESS ISN'T AN END GOAL, IT'S THE GATEWAY TO MANY OTHERS.

6: INCLUSION CAN (SHOULD?) NEVER BE "SOLVED", IT'S AN ONGOING PROCESS.

7: ALL OF THIS UNDERLINES THAT THERE *IS* NO "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" APPROACH. (TIP: ASKING "WHY?", "FOR WHOM?" AND "WHAT FOR?" HELPS).

8: MARGINALISED USERS ARE NOT FOOLS. WANT THE BEST DATA PLAN? ASK A POOR PERSON.

9. DRIVING ACCESS/INCLUSION THROUGH OTHER (OFTEN NEOLIBERAL) PROGRAMS CAN WORK, BUT ISN'T ALWAYS TO THE BENEFIT OF THE CONSUMER. BUSINESS MODELS MATTER.

10. TRY ASKING USERS WHAT THEY WANT AND NEED, HOW THEY USE THE INTERNET, WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T. YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED.

11. PSA: POOR PEOPLE WANT TO WATCH PORN AND PLAY VIDEO GAMES AS MUCH AS RICH PEOPLE DO. THEY DON'T ALL WANT INTERNET ACCESS JUST SO THEY CAN EDIT WIKIPEDIA ARTICLES. YES, REALLY.

SOME PROVOCATIONS:

SEEING ACCESS AND INCLUSION THROUGH THE LENS OF “DIGITAL ECONOMY” INVOLVES CERTAIN PATH DEPENDENCIES. THE BUSINESS CASE USUALLY WINS.

IT PRESUPPOSES ACCESS AND INCLUSION ARE ALWAYS GOOD THINGS. IT LEAVES LITTLE ROOM FOR QUESTIONING BASICS. DISCONNECTION IS NOT AN OPTION.

GENUINE ACCESS (AS OPPOSED TO PROVIDING PIPES AND INFRASTRUCTURE) IS HARD ENOUGH TO MEASURE: HOW DO WE MEASURE TRUE INCLUSION? ARE WE DOING ENOUGH TO GO BEYOND THE (QUANTITATIVE) HARD DATA, AND INVESTIGATE THE (QUALITATIVE) “SOFT” STORIES?

THE COST OF ACCESS IS UNEQUALLY DISTRIBUTED. SO TOO ARE THE COSTS OF NOT BEING CONNECTED. NETWORK EFFECTS AFFECT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES DIFFERENTLY.

ACCESS USUALLY INVOLVES A TRADE-OFF FOR POOR PEOPLE & MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES. THEY PAY WITH THEIR DATA (SURPRISE, SURPRISE - MORE SURVEILLANCE!) OR WITH CONSTRAINTS (HELLO, WALLED GARDENS!). AND THEY DON'T KNOW BETTER. (RICH, SOPHISTICATED PEOPLE BARELY DO, TO BE FAIR)

“Something is better than nothing”

“Good enough for the [developing world] [poor people]”

“Privacy is a luxury”

“[Indians] [Chinese] [...] don’t care about privacy” (it’s a cultural thing)

“But it’s free!”

“The [Internet] [mobile payment systems] [ID card] [RFID chip under their skin] [biometric identifier] [insert favourite techno-utopian dream] will solve [poverty] [inclusion] [access] [insert favourite first world idea of what third world wants]”

“It’s a trade-off”

“On balance...”

But:

If it’s free, you are the product

weakest/poorest bear the highest burden costs and greatest risks

Information asymmetries & negotiating positions are all about power differentials that can’t be overlooked

CHALLENGES?

- USERS SEEN AS THE OBJECT OF PROJECTS TO SOLVE ACCESS/ INCLUSION, NOT AS PARTICIPANTS. ACCESS AND INCLUSION BEGIN WITH SEATS AT THE TABLE AND VOICES GENUINELY BEING HEARD.

- BOTTOMS UP, GRASSROOTS SOLUTIONS MAY WORK AS WELL AS LARGER EFFORTS. CAN THEY SCALE?

- THE “TRUST PARADOX”: POOR USERS DON’T TRUST GOVERNMENTS/ SYSTEMS AND WILL GAME THEM TO FIND CRACKS + EQUALLY, THEY CAN BE TRUSTING AND NEED SAFEGUARDS TO BE BAKED IN

= WE TALK OF PRIVACY BY DESIGN AND ETHICS BY DESIGN, WE NEED TO THINK IN TERMS OF **TRUST BY DESIGN** TOO. (OR, TRUST AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, NOT A COST)