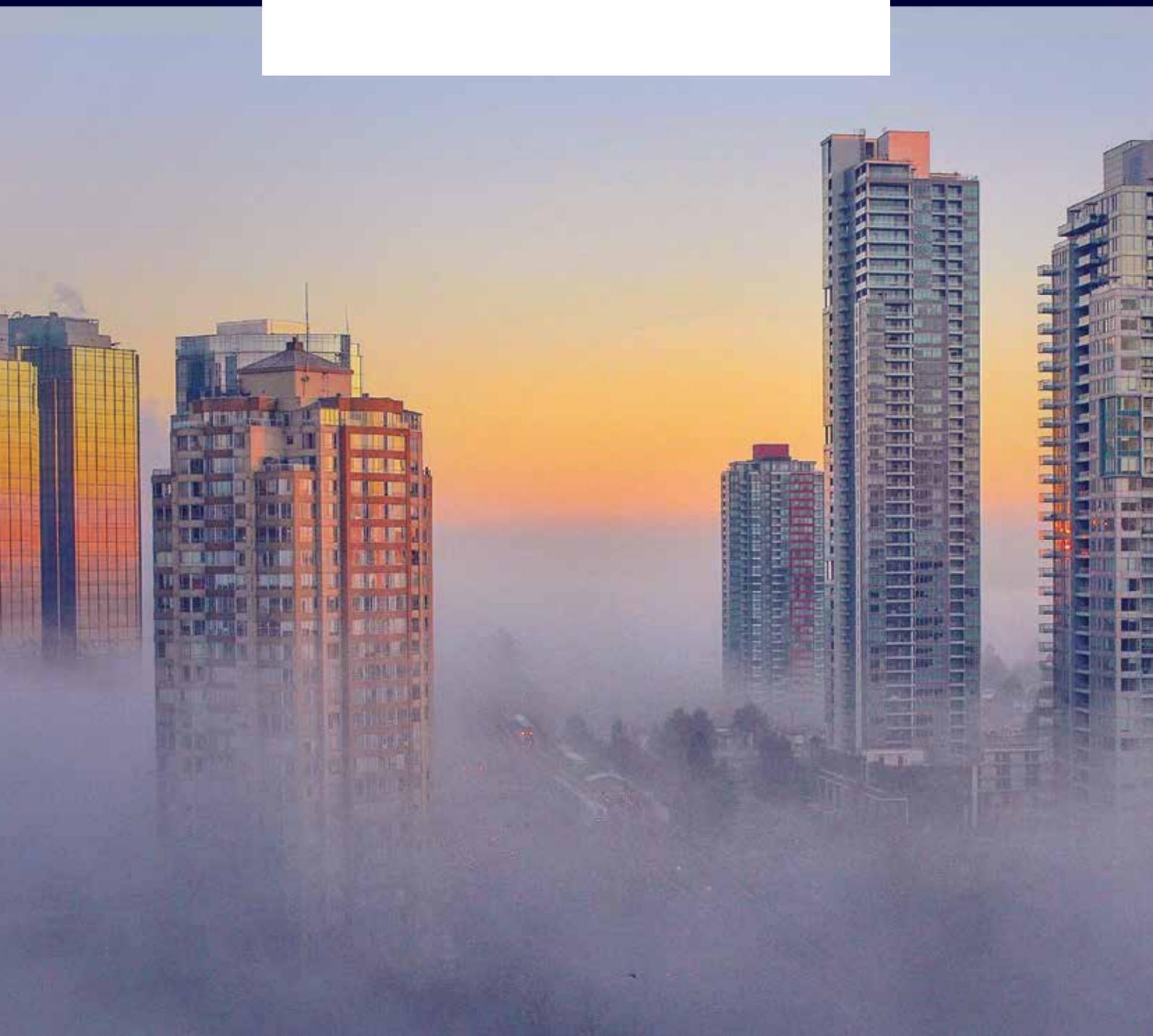


# 3

## Introduction



# Introduction

No one can predict the Internet's future, but it is too important to ignore. Most believe the Internet will continue to shape our societies, cultures and economies, and define the world for generations to come. But there are no assurances of what lies ahead for the Internet. The choices we make today will impact the Internet we are creating for tomorrow.

From its earliest beginnings, the Internet evolved from a set of fundamental principles based on openness, inclusivity, collaboration, and transparency. While its original premise was the voluntary exchange of data across a network of networks, its social, technological, economic and political impact has been profound.

The future Internet promises social development, economic prosperity, and new technologies that can amplify the best of humanity. But it also brings about daunting challenges and questions.

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It is difficult to predict, especially the future.

Niels Bohr

The Internet Society launched an initiative in 2016 to identify the uncertainties and factors that will shape the future of the Internet. Distinct from other Internet industry research initiatives, this has been a community-based endeavor to draw from the expertise and diverse experiences of stakeholders across our global community. Through a series of interviews, surveys and consultations with key stakeholders over an 18-month period, a picture of the future has emerged. This picture suggests that while technology will permeate virtually all aspects of society in ways we have yet to fully imagine, the foundational values of the Internet will remain as important in 5-7 years as they did 25 years ago.

Our goal for this report was to explore the hopes and fears for the future of the Internet guided by a central question: *How do we ensure the continued development of an Internet at the service of all people?* What became evident throughout this work is that, while the Internet Society community is rooted in a deep commitment to the core technical properties of the Internet, there is a clear need to

focus on both the technical development of the Internet as well as the opportunities for human empowerment that it enables.

The observations we collected are fascinating, reflecting the vast diversity of our global community and the Internet. Many young people described the Internet as “life”. In emerging economies, we heard great optimism about the hopeful prospects that the Internet holds for them. Others expressed disillusionment and questioned how cyber threats, the Internet of Things and government interventions might reshape the Internet and society.

While there were differing views on some topics, we found many common threads. Six dominant forces emerged as the greatest Drivers of Change and concern for our global community. Looking at the effect of these drivers on individuals, we explored them through the lens of three important Areas of Impact: the Digital Divide; Personal Freedoms and Rights; and Media and Society.

The totality of such dynamic processes is impossible to capture in one report, but by describing the interlinkages among these different Drivers, and the relationship to the three Areas of Impact, we aim to provide the reader with valuable insights to the scope of the challenge before us.

As we envision what may lie ahead, the report offers an eye-opening collection of “What if” vignettes. These fictional stories provide a peek into how the Internet might evolve. Finally, as an outcome of this extensive research, the Global Internet Report provides an actionable set of recommendations to encourage our community, stakeholders, activists, and influencers toward positive actions.

We cannot take the Internet for granted. The path to our digital future rests in our hands. We can start today by taking actions that will preserve the underlying values of the Internet and keep it on course to remain open, globally connected and secure.

We hope that this glimpse into the future will inspire readers to get engaged and to join us as we work to ensure a future Internet that reaches everyone, everywhere and expands opportunity for all.