Netiquette, Rules, Rights or Law, what suits best for the Citizen of the Digital Community

With regard to current efforts for users rights in the internet it makes sense to have a look on given historical roots. In this respect the Confederation of European Computer Users Associations (CECUA) has also been very early active and had continuously a look at updating them. Many issues have a long-term meaning.

The name NETIQUETTE was created in 1982 the same year when the word INTERNET was used first. The forum NetworkEtiquette.net registered the domain and began publishing the netiquette, written or unwritten rules that govern online interaction between internet users. The digital world of internet users can learn from the analogue world with regard to behaviour concerning communication with each other. Watching the principle of polite behaviour is always the best way to achieve your goals because one has to consider it is a mutual success by reciprocity of influence. This means a person who helps someone will receive help. It has been recognized throughout the history as a rule that governs societal actions is, treat others the way you want to be treated. Even a rudely transmitted should not get an impolite answer. On the other hand the netiquette does not include sanctions. But let your answer show how politeness could work. There are a few easy rules to be followed;

- clarity, unambiguous massage is not open for interpretation,
- brevity, will be received well because brevity is the soul of wisdom,
- ethics, truth is a quality for effectiveness of communication.

In this way netiquette supports effective communication. These principles should work because public opinion is in line with the standard. To follow these principles is important for a trouble-free digital communication and therefore requested.

In addition to the netiquette the user of the internet needs some framework of rules and guidelines to be followed by all stakeholders including the providers of services and Governments. There are early roots for related considerations. Thus in 1995 starting from a very well received conference organized by the Confederation of European Computer Users Associations (CECUA) with support of the European Commission in Brussels the recently deceased president Jón Thorhallsson from Island was convinced that users, vendors and even governmental organizations should have a mutual advantage by following specific guidelines. Former president of CECUA and Secretary General Stuart Goold from UK as well as CECUA Director Media and Public Relations Friedrich Dittmer from Germany have drafted “The Bill of Rights for the Digital-Community” as an early compilation of guidelines supporting an internet use without frictions. Later on CECUA and its Partners have proposed a drafted set of these basic rights in order to make policy makers and politicians aware of the issues so that they are able to address fears and concerns of internet-users.
These “The Bill of Rights for the Digital-Community” consist of 9 articles.

• Article 1 DIGNITY
The Citizen of the Global Information Society will take care of and guard this as a basic right of this Society. (Personal Privacy and Copyright are protected by separate legislation).

• Article 2 – FREEDOM of PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:
The Citizen has the right to develop his own talents so long as he is not violating the basic rights of fellow citizens and is not violating the basic rights of his government or the laws of morality.

• Art. 3 - FREEDOM of COMMUNICATION:
Freedom of speech and self-expression, freedom of universal access and distribution of information and the right of knowledge to conduct this are fundamental rights to the Citizen of the Global Information Society.

• Art. 4- CULTURAL PRESERVATION:
The Citizen shall have the right to communicate in his native tongue, and to work and conduct official business in an Official Language of the sovereign state of his residence.

• Art. 5 - RIGHT OF ACCESS:
The Citizen shall have the right of access to public information in a timely manner and shall not be excluded by lack of access for geographical or affordability reasons, lack of usability or lack of functionality.

• Art. 6 - RIGHT for RELIABLE and FUNCTIONING SERVICES:
The Citizen shall have the right to access services and facilities, which have a stable user interface requiring basic skills that the facilities are secure, and with that data and information which is accurate and timely.

• Art. 7 - NETIQUETTE
The Citizen, Government and all other organisations have the responsibility to abide by and act in accordance with the rules of the Netiquette

• Art. 8 - RIGHT for ACCURATE and UNDERSTANDABLE CHARGING:
The Citizen shall have the right to accurate, understandable and timely billing for Internet services and facilities.

• Art. 9 - RIGHT FOR REDRESS
The Citizen shall have access to protection and redress for acts of fraud, corruption of personal data, loss of privacy, and consequential costs arising from errors, bugs or failures of Internet services and facilities.
After dealing with these topics even before 1995 CECUA has considered continuously these 9 articles during the last 20 years with regard to update and adjustment to the changes of the digital world. These efforts were supported through CECUA Vice President Alain Moscowitz in France and CECUA Partner and former Head of ISPO from the Commission in Brussels Henry Haglund from Finland and furthermore in early years the CECUA Working Group Standards (chaired by present CECUA Director Technology Dr. Bruno Vogel, Germany) covered successful some related issues. The last interinstitutional scrutiny has taken place at the Conference > Colloque sur l'internet citoyen " Tous anim 'acteurs" nommage multilinguisme et sécurité < at October 17 2015 at LIEGE Belgium with major contribution of CECUA Interim President Didier Carré from France.

For the citizens of the digital community the above 9 articles guarantee important rights for an appropriate life in the internet world if their provider of services and the governmental organisations act accordingly. Already 1998 this Bill of Rights were proposed as a guideline by the Committee of the Regions of the European Commission for using by large companies.

Concerning the LAW portion it is to say that already in 1996 the first attempt was made by some European political parties to construct a sort of conventional framework for the digital community with approximately the content of the BoR. This was at that time deeply discussed and widely reported. After a short time a major rejection of these proposals emerged, especially from the political side.

Just now a group of journalists and politicians including some members of the European Parliament in co-operation with the German magazine “Die Zeit” (more precisely the Zeit foundation) is taking care of the issue under the headline “Charter of the Digital Fundamental Rights of the European Union”. Publicity for digital rights is always useful. But CECUA has some critical remarks. It is questionable whether we should dream of an European “Constitutional Convention”. Many basics already. A similar charter published in 2014 by the European Council already exists (see “European Charter of Fundamental Rights” http://www.coe.int/en/web/internet-users-rights/guide). Furthermore essential parts of a possible convention have been provided by our-old-analogue world and cover many necessary agreements and are also valid at our digital world that are valid for instance the laws for abuse and violations in the digital world. We read related news very often e.g. when e.g. hackers are punished by normal courts after violating large databases. Additional and completely independent laws and conventional constructions might confuse rather than help.

Great efforts are required to meet the challenges of our digital future and, of course, new thinking and new solutions are required, but some topics should also be based on given frameworks of the analogue world and useful historical roots in the digital world.

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