Net Neutrality: Good or Bad?

The internet has always been free and open. In 2010, the original Net Neutrality bill was passed. The bill made it so that internet service providers (ISPs) couldn’t block any website or applications. In January 2014, a court overturned the original bill on the basis that the bill’s “legal framework” was flawed. In May 2014, Tom Wheeler, Chairman of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), stated that he thought a new bill should be proposed. This new bill would be the exact opposite of the previous Net Neutrality bill. Due to a large outcry from a large percent of the internet’s regular users, Wheeler changed his decision on the matter. On February 26, 2015 the FCC approved Wheeler’s proposal of a new Net Neutrality bill. This new bill contained laws to better protect internet users from their ISPs. Some people argue that these laws should be removed so that the ISPs can better control what people do and say on the internet. The net neutrality laws should stay in place because they allow smaller companies to compete with the larger ones, provide more room for innovation, and prevent ISPs from being able to throttle or block any website they wish.

Net neutrality prevents limiting the ability of new companies to become part of the market. If net neutrality laws weren’t passed, ISPs could open up “fast lanes.” These fast lanes would be open to any company that could afford to pay the fee to use them. Any company not using fast lanes would have their service slowed down by the ISP. New business would suffer to
the point that they couldn’t compete with any company that could afford to use the fast lanes. If that was the case, the bigger company would have a monopoly since they would have no competition. “The rules are also likely to eventually raise prices as the likes of Disney and Netflix pass on to customers whatever they pay for the speedier lanes, which are the digital equivalent of an uncongested carpool lane on a busy freeway” (Wyatt). For example, if these fast lanes were implemented, then Netflix could pay the extra fee for the fast lane and they would have normal speeds while companies like Hulu would get their service slowed down.

Net neutrality forces companies to innovate and upgrade their infrastructure as opposed to simply sitting on their existing infrastructure indefinitely. The average internet speed in the United States is 35.53 MB/s, which is about half of South Korea’s average (Ookla). Internet today is the fastest it’s ever been, and it hasn’t improved very much in recent years. Now that net neutrality laws are in place there is a chance new companies can come in and offer faster speeds for a lower cost. On December 12, 2012 Google announced Google Fiber is entering the market as a new internet service. Google Fiber is gigabit (1000MB/s) internet that is planned to be nationwide. Once it is available nationwide other ISPs will have to offer gigabit internet at a competitive price or they will lose a substantial amount of business. If that happens gigabit internet will become the industry standard. Gigabit internet is already offered nationwide in South Korea. When companies don’t innovate they should lose customers. However, without competition, customers are stuck with slower speeds.

Net neutrality prevents internet service providers from throttling or blocking particular websites for political, financial, or any other reason the deem necessary. Without net neutrality, if an ISP disagreed with a particular political group, they could block customers from viewing
their website’s content. ISPs can also prevent people from viewing websites if the owner doesn’t pay extra money to the ISP. Netflix, as a television provider, could be charged ridiculous amounts of money because of the fact that they are a direct competitor with a lot of ISPs that double as cable television providers. According to aclu.org, internet service providers have the technology to look through every bit of data that we interact with, and they could make it so that any company they like could get their service sped up while companies they dislike could have their service slowed down (ACLU). This is similar to the fast lanes, except they would have free reign to slow someone down who the just simply don’t like. The internet was designed with freedom in mind. It is one of the greatest educational resources available, and it isn’t right to give anyone the ability to limit what goes on the internet other than the content that breaks a given country’s laws.

While there are ample reasons to support net neutrality, there are still some people that have differing views. The two big opposing views are that net neutrality will stop ISPs from innovating and upgrading their infrastructure, and that the government isn’t a good candidate to regulate the internet. Jeb Bush, former governor of Florida, believes that net neutrality will stifle innovation (Miller). That statement may be true to the extent that ISPs will not have as much money to innovate and upgrade to provide faster speeds. ISPs haven’t upgraded in a while, and even if net neutrality laws weren’t in place, they would have no reason to upgrade. What happens if they don’t innovate? Their customers have no other providers to go to because there are 3 major providers that offer almost exactly the same service for the same price. The other point that the government can’t do anything right, so why let them regulate the internet? According to Ted Cruz, “net neutrality is Obamacare for the internet” (Bump). The NY Times stated, most of
the promises in the Affordable care act have been met (Sanger-Katz, et al.). Looking at how successful The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) has been, how would it be bad if net neutrality turned out like that?

Even after the bill has been passed, the debate keeps going. There is still an abundance of support for net neutrality. Net neutrality is a great thing for so many reasons, but the best ones are that it allows smaller companies to compete with the larger ones, provides more room for innovation, and prevents ISPs from being able to throttle or block any website they wish. It’s difficult to argue with all the benefits when the downsides are few and far between.
Works Cited


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