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Persuasive Paper

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Net Neutrality

Net neutrality is a standard that supports government regulation of Internet service providers, preventing them from restricting consumers to what they have access to on the internet. Not only just speed alone, but can be access and censorship all together. So to be more specific, network neutrality prevents restrictions on sites, content, the equipment that can be attached, platforms, and modes of communication. Internet service providers are not allowed to change the content, applications, services, or devices that the user choses to use and the internet must remain open to all users and uses. [1] There are a few different classifications of net neutrality, Absolute non-discrimination, Limited discrimination without QoS tiering, Limited discrimination and tiering, and First come first served.

People that tend to argue for net neutrality claim that telecom companies are trying to impose a tiered service model in order to control the flow of services and then eliminate competition. An alarming amount of people believe that net neutrality is just an important as preserving current freedoms. [2] Vinton Cerf and Tim Berners-Lee are only two of the major voices that have spoken out for network neutrality.

A good argument for net neutrality states that it is needed to keep the principle of end-to-end networking. Lawrence Lessig and Robert W. McChesney stated: “Net neutrality means simply that all like Internet content must be treated alike and move at the same speed over the network. The owners of the Internet’s wires cannot discriminate. This is the simple but brilliant “end-to-end” design of the Internet that has made it such a powerful force for economic and social good.” [6]

Another good argument for net neutrality supports a legal mandate that would ensure cable companies to allow internet service providers free access to their cable lines, they call this a common carriage agreement, and it is basically the same thing as the model that was used for dial-up internet. What they are really trying to enforce here is that without a court order, cable companies will not be allowed to screen, interrupt, or filter the data the is being sent through their lines. Vinton Cerf supported the idea of network neutrality legislation by stating “Allowing broadband carriers to control what people see and do online would fundamentally undermine the principles that have made the Internet such a success.” [3]

People that argue against net neutrality tend to claim that the internet service providers don’t have any plans of blocking or slowing down network speeds and/or performance. Although even after making that claim, Comcast, got caught red handed intentionally slowing down peer-to-peer communications. [4] All while other companies have also started to use a thing called deep packet inspection to try and fight against P2P, FTP, and online games, creating a cellular providers style of billing with overages, fees, and all sorts of extra bundling options. Some of them will also argue that the best solution to this neutrality problem can be solved by creating greater competition among each other.

Another reason people tend to argue against network neutrality is that it makes extremely hard for the government to maintain meaningful regulation that prevents the spread of Denial of Service attacks, filtering email span, and even preventing the spread of malicious viruses. To quote Bram Cohen, the creator of BitTorrent, “I most definitely do not want the Internet to become like television where there’s actual censorship… however it is very difficult to actually create network neutrality laws which don’t result in an absurdity like making it so that internet service providers can’t drop spam or stop… attacks.” [5] Government officials will need to be extremely careful when writing this piece of legislature. It would have to be very carefully, and precisely, written.

One last little argument people that are against network neutrality is a simple property rights argument. The way they are looking at things is that if they produce and own access to the Internet then they should also have control over what they allow or charge people for access to. This is definitely the business perspective.

My position on net neutrality is that I am absolutely for it. I think that allowing corporations to continue to grow into what we see and get from our internet access will further ruin what they have already done to television and every other media outlet. In my opinion the Internet is about the only totally free thing we have left anymore. Free of censorship, free of annoying ads (for the most part), even anonymity if we know how to work our way around it. We just don’t get that with anything else anymore. And if we allow the higher powers to start deciding what we can access based upon what we pay them or even what the businesses are paying them is no different than how the media and everything else is being controlled.

The first major point I will support about this is that net neutrality benefits everyone by allowing free competition of independent content and services. The Internet is by far the most level playing field for getting news or information out to everyone. It is free speech to the core. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have revolutionized the way we communicate. All of these sites started from nothing paying exactly what anyone else would have paid and have managed to work their way to multi-billion dollar businesses.

There’s no doubt that net neutrality is highly consumer based. It's all about the little guy still having a voice and not being shut out by all the insanely rich businesses out there. If it were something that only the rich were able to run then no one other than them (Google, YouTube, Etc.) would be able to control. There is no way any up and comer could compete with a multi-billion dollar business.

My other big problem with not doing something about this is the ability to “inadvertently” start censoring certain material. I say that the way I do because by no means will a business or anyone else admit to actually discriminating against something or someone else’s beliefs, but they may use any excuse they can come up with to try and make it look like it was not intentionally done. Think about it in a way that media or most mass communication devices work, the more they pay out, the more the consumer will see of their own material. And if you’re a no body just trying to get into the game, or maybe you just have a point of view the very few people may agree with, you may be shut out by the big spenders. Leaving your voice never to be heard, and the cooperation’s that spent millions feeding the general public whatever garbage they want to.

A major argument that everyone seems to use is that all they are trying to do is prevent illegal activity. Obviously every internet service provider wants to prevent illegal file sharing over their networks, not only for legal issues but for bandwidth reasons as well. I will argue this by simply stating some privacy thoughts. Why is okay for someone to be scanning everything I do online? Illegal or not, these are things that are happening inside my own personal home, on my own personal computer, over my own personal internet, which I paid for. Where does it become okay for someone to invade my own personal property and activities and make sure that I’m not doing something illegal? This almost feels like a police state of some sort where we are all being surveillance 24/7. I’m not okay with that in “the land of the free”, and personally feel like that is a complete violation of my privacy rights. Just like the quote before, by no means am I for some sort of completely censored internet, but there definitely should be something in place to keep some sort of control. I completely disagree with the idea that this involves watching what everyone does but learning certain habits and going off reports. There is ways around this that do not completely censor the internet and still block attacks and/or email spam.

A major problem to me is level of difficulty it would be for the to write a piece of legislation that is specific and able to do exactly what it’s supposed to is actually kind of tricky. The ability to give them the power to do something but without going too far almost becomes an ethical and personal responsibility issue. Personally, I’m not even sure if it’s possible for our government officials to do this.

To refute claims that because a site or business that uses a superb amount of bandwidth compared to the other guy is a little ridiculous. Yes it is legitimate to argue that everyone uses more now than they did ten or even five years ago, the evolution and speed that technology is growing is faster than anyone ever imagined. Of course we’re not living like The Jetson's yet, but I can see it in the future. So to say that, just because we use more then we use to, or because a specific business uses more than they did in the past just doesn’t make sense. Technology and the speed of the Internet itself are continuing to grow, this will never stop. And if a company can’t keep up then they should just back off. It’s all about money and greed to the major corporations that allow access to the internet at this point.

I believe this my argument falls into the Utilitarianism theory because I think net neutrality really is in place for the common good. Without it certain people get privileges that others don’t and therefor the Internet wouldn’t be a level playing ground that everyone can enjoy. Making some sort of legislation that would deter the use of corporations to use their money as power would definitely be a step in the right direction to build some sort of internet harmony.

So to conclude my argument, I’m going to stick with my original statement and say that I am all for net neutrality being inforced at a government level. This legislation would have to be very carefully written and very specific with the words chosen in it. I am completely against something being wrote up that would create some sort of censorship, that’s a whole other topic.

1. “A Guide to Net Neutrality for Google Users”. Google. August 12, 2010.
2. Lawrence Lessig & Robert W. McChesney (8 June 2006). “No Tolls on The Internet”. *Washington Post.*
3. Cerf, Vinton (7 February 2006). “The Testimony of Mr. Vinton Cerf, Vice President and Chief Internet Evangelist, Google” (PDF). P. 8. Retrieved 23 September 2012.
4. Peter Svensson (19 October 2007). “Comcast Blocks some Subscriber Internet Traffic, AP Testing shows”. Associated Press. Retrieved 25 September 2012.
5. Lvingstone, Adam (30 May 2006). “News.bbc.co.uk”. News.bbc.co.uk Retrieved 24-September 2012.
6. Lawrence Lessig & Robert W. McChesney (8 June 3006). “No Tolls on The Internet”. *Washington Post.*