

Net Neutrality

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Today if you are to connect to the internet you are connecting through a company who owns a big network that connects you to the rest of the world. These companies are called Internet Service Providers or ISPs. This has been the norm since the commercial start of the internet from the 90’s. ISPs would charge their customers based on how fast you would like to surf the internet. Currently the fastest connection you could achieve is a gigabit connection. The more money you pay per month the faster the internet is for you and your home. “Net neutrality, or open Internet, is the principle that Internet service providers should give consumers access to all legal content and applications on an equal basis, without favoring some sources or blocking others” [1].

There’s many issues that can arise when we start differentiating packets as different entities when they come from different websites and services. The ISP’s want to allow their customers to choose what services they want to run faster and what services they don’t want to use to run slower. With this model, new websites will have a throttle wall they cannot move past without already having large following services like Netflix. ISP’s could also try categorizing their traffic into certain groups of fast connection and slow connection. They could put websites or services of companies they do not like, conflict with their views/ideologies, or are competitors with their own services into the slow traffic group and reduce their quality of service. No service should be stuck in a “slow lane” because it does not pay a fee [2].

In Rule Utilitarianism with the rule, “All ISPs will treat all packets the same”, ISPs and the internet today will not change. This is the current model and it is currently working. Individual small companies are given the same opportunities to become a successful business. No individual business will be given benefits because they can pay for it. The internet is constantly growing and becoming more advanced that there is no need to prioritize certain packets because in a few years there will be faster and faster mediums to connect worldwide. Thus, this rule only sees more pros than cons and is ruled ethical.

As a Kantian, we will need to look at the categorical imperatives to see whether it is ethical to maintain Net Neutrality. Under the first imperative we must consider if it is ok for one ISP to consider Net Neutrality as ethical then it should be ethical for all ISPs follow with Net Neutrality. If all ISPs are following net Neutrality, there are no conflicts of interests in their business practices. There will be a level playing field for business and consumers around the globe and all companies can spread their influence without the thought of being oppressed or throttled. Under the second formulation, ISPs cannot use anyone as a means to an end. Maintaining Net Neutrality prevents the ISPs from abusing their power to push their own products at the expense of the quality of service of other companies. This would then be considered unethical. So, because they are maintaining Net Neutrality then a Kantian will consider this ethical, otherwise it would be unethical.

Under Social contract theory we can assume that in order to maintain a competitive and fair free market we would have to keep the rules fair. In a competition, the rules cannot favor one or more teams over the other. In a competitive market, we should maintain a level playing ground for all companies on the internet and Net Neutrality is doing just that. Net Neutrality wants to let every company have equal opportunities while at the same time allowing competition flourish for the benefits of the consumer. Quality of service will rise with competing companies as they must fight to have the best service around so that people purchase their goods and services. To be against Net Neutrality is to be against the competitive market and that would be considered unfair and unethical.

In Rule Utilitarianism with the rule, “All ISPs will individualize and throttle/boost packets based on their specified categories”, we will see most small startup companies fall apart as they cannot meet the demands of ISPs for having their services on the boost categories. There will be an increase of paid services from big companies pushing their products more on the internet and a major lack of free services or open source services. With Rule Utilitarianism, the cons outweigh the pros and is considered unethical.

“If an ISP blocks Netflix because of the bandwidth it requires, consumers who want Netflix will take their business elsewhere” [3]. “With enough bandwidth, all packets travel at the speed of light. But if regulation discourages investment, packets share congested pipes and all regulators can do is ration a scarce resource” [4]. Both arguments against net neutrality come from the uninformed. For one the majority of internet consumers don’t have another ISP to switch to if they want to take their business elsewhere. ISPs typically control a monopoly in most areas. Secondly, when google announced they were stepping into the ISP business we noticed an increase of bandwidth in almost all areas from 20mb/s to 200+mb/s! Obviously without the competition in the IPS market they will maintain high costs and low bandwidths. If the ISPs want to say that Net Neutrality is going to hurt the market then their argument is hypocritical in itself as they themselves hold back when it comes to a noncompetitive market.

Net Neutrality keeps these companies in check from manipulating the internet from what it is today into something much more sinister and commercial. The World Wide Web is a right for all people to access and view. To maintain this right there needs to be legislation placed to prevent companies from manipulating the web to their advantage.

Works Cited

[1] Mike Snider , Roger Yu, and Emily Brown. "What Is Net Neutrality and What Does It Mean for Me?" USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, 27 Feb. 2015. Web. 06 Dec. 2016.

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[3] Dorfman, Jeffery. "Net Neutrality Is A Bad Idea Supported By Poor Analogies." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, n.d. Web. 06 Dec. 2016.

[4] @streamdotorg. "Controlling the Internet | The Stream." The Stream. N.p., 15 Aug. 2016. Web. 06 Dec. 2016.