

Noah Huber

Dr. Sessions

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Ethics of Net Neutrality

Net Neutrality is a phrase that dawned during the early expansion of modern computing. Net Neutrality refers to the principle that all Internet communications and conduct should be treated equally by all Internet service providers. Net Neutrality is, “the basic principle that prohibits internet service providers like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon from speeding up, slowing down or blocking any content, applications or websites you want to use.” (Free Press) This ensures that users have the freedom to use the internet freely and not infringe on actions conducted online. Net Neutrality is crucial for public opinion and freedom of speech that is posted online. The lack of Net Neutrality could mean ISPs infringing on freedom, speeds, internet access, and censoring posts online. In the ethical landscape of net neutrality, it becomes evident that its preservation is essential not only for protecting individual rights and liberties but also for fostering a fair and equitable digital society. Unfortunately, everything is not free and Net Neutrality negatively impacts the commerce of internet service providers. In 2015, the Federal Communication Commission moved to repeal the Net Neutrality rules. Without Net Neutrality this means that ISPs could censor certain content, throttle or block connections, and unfairly charge for faster access and better services. In turn, this allows the ISP to essentially become a monopoly over certain geographic locations.

Net Neutrality was not a perfect set of rules and was not enforced on very large corporations, which reduced their significance. There are a few logical reasons that a society

should have Net Neutrality rules in place. Namely, preservation of the freedom of expression, price discrimination, and prevention of unethical business practices. Net Neutrality created a sense of transparency for Internet service providers and accountability for large corporations. In 2009 Google came under fire as charges were brought about over cherry-picking and a violation of the Net Neutrality rules. AT&T asked why, “can Google exploit expensive communications networks when it's profitable but refuse neutral service to all customers when it's not?”

(Swanson) Without the protection of Net Neutrality rules, this would allow Google to exploit and discriminate pricing, which is an unethical business practice. The FCC is seeking to reinstate the Net Neutrality rules in hopes of removing “fast lanes” and providing a more equitable online environment for citizens. Steven Kull mentioned that “The implications are significant, as net neutrality regulations place major restrictions on Internet Service Providers (ISPs), prohibiting them from: creating internet “fast lanes” for users that pay more; providing faster speeds to the ISP’s own applications; or blocking or slowing down specific websites or applications.” (Kull) This demonstrates a modern implication and the importance of reinstating the Net Neutrality rules.

There have also been several reasons why Net Neutrality rules should be repealed that could inherently benefit the consumer. Some of the reasons to repeal these rules are the promotion of investments, reduced government regulation, and flexibility of internet service providers. Repealing these rules allows ISPs to invest in critical infrastructure and innovate where the service provider pleases. The reduction in government regulation allows for growth and opportunity without government intervention. One of the largest ethical concerns regarding the free use of the Internet is government regulations. If Net Neutrality rules are implemented, government regulations limit service providers to geographic locations and how services are to

provide internet. Repealing these rules allows the internet service provider to be flexible with their service which could allow providers to make their networks more flexible. This can assist ISPs in balancing server load and speed differential, like amps in a circuit. This ethically allows servicers to have free will with their property and doesn't infringe on corporations' freedoms.

By defining, understanding, and comprehending Net Neutrality, it becomes apparent that while the principle itself is fundamental for safeguarding individual rights and promoting a fair digital society, its implementation has faced challenges and criticisms. While the repeal of Net Neutrality rules might offer benefits such as promoting investments, reducing government regulation, and increasing flexibility for ISPs, it also raises significant ethical concerns. The potential for ISPs to censor content, throttle connections, and engage in unfair business practices threatens the principles of freedom of expression, equal access to information, and fair competition. Moreover, the absence of net neutrality rules could lead to the consolidation of power among ISPs, potentially resulting in monopolistic control over internet access and services. Therefore, despite its imperfections, reinstating and upholding net neutrality rules remains crucial for ensuring a transparent, accountable, and equitable online environment for all users. By preserving net neutrality, society can strive towards an ethical digital landscape where the rights and interests of individuals are protected, innovation is encouraged, and the internet remains a platform for free communication and expression without infringement.

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