**What did you read/watch?**

The topic I researched for HW1 was net neutrality. I looked at a handful of sources to learn more about net neutrality, and the different perspectives surrounding it. Some of the sources I visited included the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and Northeastern Global News.

**Describe the controversy/issue raised in the articles/film**

What is net neutrality? Net neutrality is a set of principles set by the Federal Communications Commission that forced Internet Service Providers to enable equal access to all websites, material, and apps under equal conditions without restricting or favoring any content. The technology being examined in this issue is the internet backbone. The stakeholders in this situation are the ISP companies, content providers on the internet, and internet users.

Back in 2017, Ajit Pai, the then leader of the FCC, headed a repeal of the recently instituted net neutrality principles of the Obama Administration. These principles made it so that internet providers did not affect the delivery of the content provided to consumers, they only provided access to the content on the internet. This restricted ISPs from charging certain content providers more to access the same internet speeds as others. It also restricted ISPs from charging consumers based on what content they were viewing on the internet, or allowing higher paying customers privilege to prioritized speeds. With net neutrality repealed, these restrictions were no longer in place.

Advocates of the repeal believe that giving the ISPs more power to decide pricing of services will allow for economic growth and innovations that will improve customer experience. Certain websites soak up considerably more bandwidth than others (such as Netflix), and it's thought that the repeal of net neutrality will lead to increased pricing of services of this nature. This removes a former disincentive in the industry, potentially fueling growth among internet providers.

Advocates of the repeal also believe that consumers will have more ability to choose what services they want to pay for with their internet. If a consumer only uses services that require minimal bandwidth usage, like email, they could have the option to pay less for a plan and only have access to what they choose.

Those in favor of net neutrality believe this is more of a con than it is a pro, though. They believe that ISPs charging for direct access to services online will prove to be much more expensive and troublesome for consumers than it will be helpful. Instead of paying for access to everything in one payment, you will have to pay directly for access to content providers like netflix, youtube, etc, which could potentially prove to be more expensive in the long run.

Another critique of the repeal is the potential for foul play. ISPs will have the ability to provide lower speeds (AKA throttling) to websites they wish, including competitors. This provides a path for ISPs to give unfair advantages to their own content services or services of companies that they have a close relationship with. This can also lead to censorship of certain viewpoints, seeing as these ISPs can price gouge certain websites (especially smaller companies) into poorer internet speeds, or possibly no internet at all.

Those in favor of the repeal argue that competition will kill any foul play by the ISPs. If one company is adopting practices deemed unethical by the consumer, the consumer will find another ISP to spend their money at.

Advocates of net neutrality reject this idea though. They believe that the expenses of starting up a new ISP are so high that very few companies are capable of competing with the big dogs of the industry (Verizon, T-mobile, Comcast, Charter, etc.). Why don’t we see any of these competitors now then? Is net neutrality *that* much of a disincentive? Or is it an industry that is biased towards the few already established companies?

Although much of the discussion surrounding the repeal of net neutrality has died down since 2017, it is still a large player in the shape of our current internet experience. Legal proceedings are still continuing to change the status of ISP guidelines, and deserve to be monitored seeing how largely they impact us as a whole.

**Analyze the controversy**

Net neutrality seems to be much more complex than I remember. Originally in 2017, I believed this to be a cut-and-dry issue of who you prioritized more: corporations or consumers. I was firmly in the pro net neutrality camp, as most of the U.S. was. With time and more research into opposing viewpoints, it appears to be more complicated. I still hold skepticism about whether competition will extinguish all foul play, but the opposing argument is quite interesting.

If competition’s effect is as impactful as some believe it would be, I can see a world where the opposing perspective is sensible. Consumers will control the market with their money, and shady practices will result in short lived businesses. It also seems plausible that the ability to control pricing will add to the power and fuel of this industry, resulting in a better product for consumers.

I still lean to the pro net neutrality side of things even considering all of this though. I am skeptical that competition will arise after these changes are made. There seems to be an alarming lack of competition as is, largely due to the high startup costs of creating an ISP. I don’t see that changing with the reduced regulation provided by the FCC’s repeal.

This controversy will be difficult to resolve. In the five years since the repeal of net neutrality, we have not seen any drastic changes, but that could be due to the lack of monitoring administered to the ISPs. An effect of the net neutrality repeal was that ISPs no longer were going to be monitored for throttling or blocking access to websites, considering they were allowed to do so. Limited research has shown that throttling has been applied by IDPs, but to what extent is unknown.

State level laws regarding net neutrality also play a role in the difficulty of evaluating its repeal. It was decided recently that individual states have the right to administer their own policy regarding net neutrality, adding another layer of complexity to this evaluation.

The regulation of the internet was inevitably going to become a point of focus at some point. It is both new and continually evolving, making it require regular attention from lawmakers.

I do believe that the internet will continue to be a hot topic in regards to lawmaking for years to come.

**Sources**

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