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# What Facebook Taught Me About Net Neutrality

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**Date:** Dec. 9, 2017

**From:** The New York Times

**Publisher:** The New York Times Company

**Document Type:** Article

**Length:** 807 words

Full Text:

## Article Commentary

"The internet has spurred innovation precisely because it has been an open, level playing field, where barriers to offering new products and services have continually come down over time."

Andrew McCollum, a co-founder of Facebook, is the CEO of the online TV bundle service Philo. In the following viewpoint, McCollum argues that net neutrality should not be repealed because it is essential for continued innovation on the internet. He acknowledges that preserving net neutrality via the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is unlikely but contends that citizens and consumers must continue to fight for net neutrality in Congress and the courts. Repealing net neutrality—rolling back Obama-era protections that prohibited internet service providers (ISPs) from engaging in unfair practices like throttling—would hurt both companies and consumers, McCollum argues. He claims that the largest ISPs are insincere when they say they will voluntarily follow the principles of net neutrality even if protections are repealed, as these companies have proven themselves untrustworthy in the past.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. What arguments do opponents of net neutrality make to support their views and why are they problematic, according to the article?
2. As described by McCollum, how do strong net neutrality rules protect consumers?
3. Do you agree that repealing net neutrality will allow ISPs to put up barriers to access and innovation on the internet? Explain your answer.

My first glimpse of a world without strong protections for net neutrality was in 2004, when I was part of the team that created Facebook. Though it's hard to imagine now, TheFacebook (as it was called at the time) was just a fledgling college social network, growing school by school. Some colleges didn't like Facebook, and because they functioned as their students' internet providers, they would simply block the site.

While those blocks were always rolled back -- often after sustained student outcry -- they acutely demonstrated the power of providers to limit the freedom and openness of the internet at whim. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that had schools had been more aggressive and unrelenting in blocking Facebook in those early days, the company might not exist today.

Today I run a start-up called Philo that recently introduced a streaming live TV service. Because live video requires more bandwidth, a reliable connection and low "latency" (how long it takes information to travel through a system), services like ours are particularly prone to "throttling" and unfair prioritization by internet providers -- tactics that will no longer be prohibited if net neutrality protections are rolled back, as the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Ajit Pai, has announced as his intent. Even worse, because Philo directly competes with all of the largest internet providers, which offer their own live TV services, these providers have a strong incentive to put their thumbs on the scale.

The internet has spurred innovation precisely because it has been an open, level playing field, where barriers to offering new products and services have continually come down over time. In the 1990s, creating a website required first figuring out to how to build and set up a web server -- no small feat. In 2004, we started Facebook on a server we rented for \$85 per month. Today, basic hosting in the cloud can be free for a year or longer, meaning that anyone with an idea has the ability to get it out into the world. However, if we allow internet providers to erect barriers to reaching customers, we risk reversing this trend.

Strong net neutrality rules don't just protect companies -- they also protect you as a consumer and ensure that you're getting the full services you're paying for. If an internet provider slows or blocks a site that you want to look at, it is denying you the right to freely choose the content that's important to you. To see this more clearly, it's crucial to understand that net neutrality concerns the delivery of data only once it reaches your internet provider's network, which is only a small part of the internet as a whole. To create an

invisible "fast lane" for someone else, your provider is slowing your connection to the internet.

Opponents of net neutrality argue that prioritization, blocking and throttling will actually increase innovation. Certain services, they say, require a special channel that can be shielded from congestion. What they fail to mention is that it's already possible to create dedicated internet links that guarantee a highly reliable connection, and that this is commonplace today within the framework of a neutral internet. In fact, we do it at Philo to ensure uninterrupted delivery of television feeds from content providers to our servers.

The truth is that these arguments are a cover -- what internet providers opposed to net neutrality really want is the ability to extract payments from companies that simply want their consumers to have equal access to their services.

Of course, the largest internet providers all claim that they support the principles of net neutrality and will voluntarily follow them, even as they argue that the regulations should be rolled back. Unfortunately, on this count they have proven themselves untrustworthy time and again. Look no further than Comcast, which deleted its pledge not to allow paid prioritization on the very same day that Mr. Pai announced his proposal to repeal the current net neutrality rules, as the news website Ars Technica uncovered.

The repeal seems all but assured. Despite more than three-quarters of Americans supporting the current rules, Mr. Pai and many of the other commissioners of the F.C.C., which is to vote on the proposal on Thursday, seem intent on listening only to Verizon, Comcast, AT&T and other large internet providers.

But we shouldn't stop fighting to make our voices heard. If Mr. Pai's proposal is adopted, we must take the fight to Congress and the courts until we regain a neutral internet that ensures consumer choice without constraint and innovation without barriers. It is a fight we should never concede -- the importance of a free and open internet is too great.

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**Source Citation** (MLA 9th Edition)

Mccollum, Andrew. "What Facebook Taught Me About Net Neutrality." *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 2017, p. (L). *Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A518010884/OVIC?u=mosc00780&sid=bookmark-OVIC&xid=6deb03a5. Accessed 18 July 2022.

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A518010884