

Term Paper

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CSC 300: Professional Responsibilities

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May 29, 2017

Abstract

On June 13, 2015, new FCC regulations came into place that solidified US government policy on Net Neutrality. The stated goal was to treat the Internet as a public good; keeping it open and fair to all users.[6] Many question the government's role in this regulation; whether it is a help or hinderance is unclear. President Trump promoted Ajit Pai, a representative that is openly against most types of government regulation, to the position of chairman of the FCC.[1][2] Questions about the future of the Internet and the ethical obligations for both Internet users and designers are pertinent.

Since assuming his new position, Chairman Pai has made moves that challenge pre-established Net Neutrality issues, such as curtailing affordable high-speed internet for low-income users.[3] Ethical investigations make it clear that Chairman Pai and the related businesses should be held responsible for protection of Net Neutrality because of the responsibility to moderate for the protection of public good.

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1 Facts

The FCC is the US governmental organization that oversees the regulation of public communication.[6] The FCC has become increasingly partisan over time, and the current Chairman, Ajit Pai, has shown that he wishes to continue the Trump administration's tactic of reversing any Obama-era policy possible.[3] Among those policies are the Net Neutrality regulations approved in 2015. Pai specifically called the 2015 rulings a "mistake," and seeks to cut back on the government regulation that allows the Internet to have protection from exploitation by large businesses (including ISPs).[4] Internet usage is correlated with economic improvement and growth.[?] Chairman Pai has not only expressed favor toward big businesses (against the tenets of Net Neutrality); he has also actively prevented low-income individuals from getting quality Internet connection.[3]

2 Research Question

Are Ajit Pai's actions as Chairman of the FCC ethical?

3 Social Implications

A change of policy regarding Net Neutrality could change the shape of the Internet, taking agency away from small businesses and allowing wealth to control the

exchange and dissemination of information.

4 Extant arguments

4.1 Arguments For

It is ethical for Chairman Pai to deregulate the Internet:

- Allowing ISPs to have free reign enables the free market to decide rights and wrongs on the Internet.
- Government regulation on ISPs may have a negative effect on both the businesses and the consumers.[6]

4.2 Arguments Against

It is unethical for Chairman Pai to cut back on and possibly remove Net Neutrality as the United States' policy:

- Any Internet user should have equal access to any legal part of the Internet.
- Deregulation allows ISPs to play favorites with websites and services.[6]
- The ability of ISPs to change Internet access speeds can be used to hurt small, competing businesses.

4.3 Arguments Summary

5.2 SE Code 1.02

5 Analysis

5.2.1 Code Tenet

5.1 Why the SE Code Applies

“Moderate the interests of the software engineer, the employer, the client, and the users with the public good.” [5]

5.1.1 Where the SE Code Applies

5.1.1.1 What is a Software Engineer

“Software engineers are those who contribute, by direct participation or by teaching, to the analysis, specification, design, development, certification, maintenance, and testing of software systems.”

5.1.1.2 What is a Software System

5.1.2 How the SE Code Applies

5.1.2.1 The Internet is a Software System

5.1.2.2 Ajit Pai is a Software Engineer

As someone who “contribute[s], by direct participation...to the maintenance...of software systems” (i.e., the Internet), Chairman Pai can herein be considered a Software Engineer and is thus responsible for upholding the SE Code.[5]

5.2.2 Definitions

SE Code 1.02 addresses the software engineer’s, in this case Chairman Pai’s, responsibility to consider the public interest and act in its favor.

“The employer,” referenced would, in this case, could be considered the FCC as an organization or even the entire US government.

“The client,” refers most directly to ISPs who must adhere to FCC regulations, while “the users” are regular internet users who access the Internet through ISPs.

“Interests,” in this case, refers to “participation in advantage and responsibility.”[?] This participation refers to the usage of the Internet. Advantage can be considered favor (e.g. more accessibility) in the usage of the Internet. Thus, the interests of the aforementioned parties refers to usage of the Internet in agreeable conditions.

The two relevant parties in this tenet are Chairman Pai, the software engineer, and public individuals who access the Internet, the “users.”

“Public good” is a contentious term, especially since good, defined as “of a favorable character or tendency,” is a subjective state of being.[?] Public can be defined as “of, relating to, or affecting all the people or the whole area of a nation or state.”[?] Since the nation in question is the USA (with the FCC being a US organization), the public in reference is the American people. Therefore public good, in this context, is Internet policy that is favorable to the American people – especially those that use the Internet.

5.2.3 Domain Specific 1.02

It is the responsibility of Chairman Pai (the software engineer) to moderate the participation, in advantage and responsibility, of himself, the US government, American ISPs, and public individuals who access the internet with Internet policy that is favorable to the American people.

5.2.4 Analysis

The onus of this rule is for Chairman Pai to moderate Internet participation in different ways for different parties. Advantage generally refers to the ISPs, as they can greatly benefit from different policies at the disadvantage of others. Responsibility falls on the government to make sure that the policy is indeed favorable to the American people. With Chairman Pai actively cutting down the regulations

that keep these parties in check, he is breaking this rule by lessening the moderation he is obligated to provide.

5.3 SE Code 4.03

“Maintain professional objectivity with respect to any software or related documents they are asked to evaluate.”[5]

5.4 SE Code 6.01

“Help develop an organizational environment favorable to acting ethically.”[5]

6 Abstract of Expected Analysis

1. Allowing ISPs to attack their competition by restricting consumers’ Internet access is unethical.
2. Enabling affordable, high-speed Internet to all Americans increases economic mobility and the spread of knowledge and information.
 - (a) Internet users are able to enrich themselves through many resources available online.
 - (b) Many modern jobs require online applications, online resources, or knowledge of online systems. Good Internet connection is required for all of these.

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