**DQ2: Net Neutrality**

Explain the key issues involved in the net neutrality debate and recommend a possible way forward.

1. Introduction
   1. Wikipedia
      1. Net neutrality (also network neutrality or Internet neutrality) is the principle that Internet service providers and governments should treat all data on the Internet equally, not discriminating or charging differentially by user, content, site, platform, application, type of attached equipment, and modes of communication. The term was coined by Columbia media law professor Tim Wu in 2003 as an extension of the longstanding concept of a common carrier.[1][2][3][4] Proponents often see net neutrality as an important component of an open internet, where policies such as equal treatment of data and open web standards allow those on the internet to easily communicate and conduct business without interference from a third party.[5] A "closed internet" refers to the opposite situation, in which established corporations or governments favor certain uses. A closed internet may have restricted access to necessary web standards, artificially degrade some services, or explicitly filter out content.
      2. There has been extensive debate about whether net neutrality should be required by law, particularly in the United States. Debate over the issue of net neutrality predates the coining of the term. Advocates of net neutrality such as Lawrence Lessig have raised concerns about the ability of broadband providers to use their last mile infrastructure to block Internet applications and content (e.g. websites, services, and protocols), and even block out competitors.
   2. Freerepublic
      1. Net Neutrality is the premise that companies shouldn’t be able to differentially allocate bandwidth to different content providers or sources. Thus Comcast (best example since they are the common bogeyman and actually do such restrictions now) couldn’t ratchet down a known torrent site if they felt it was a good idea. Nor could they make a deal with Netflix to give preferential treatment to their network traffic to ensure smoother streaming.
         1. Of course the solution in the mind of the Net Neutrality people is the government which will somehow in its infinite wisdom effectively micro-manage all the network providers to ensure they are perfectly egalitarian in their business practices.
         2. If anyone actually believes the government capable of doing such a job well, I do have a number of bridges to sell you.
      2. “Net neutrality” is simply the idea that massive users of internet bandwidth should or should not pay more than low users. The idea, I suppose, is that the net should be egalitarian. Some advocates claim that imposing higher costs on big users will stifle upstart development and cause the resource to be favored by the Googles and Yahoos of the world. There is something to that.
         1. This really wan’t a big issue until Netflix and many other suppliers of very high bandwidth content, now HD-video and complex videogames started filling up net capacity.
         2. The fact of the matter is that this bandwidth requires buildout which requires capital expenditure. An internet provider has to spend lots of money to provide loads and loads of users with ability to watch their TV shows. That load goes way down in the middle of the night and rises dramatically throughout the day and into the evening as TV viewing increases, aka “prime time”. Email and normal surfing may not require even 1/100th the bandwidth of a TV episode or a movie. Plus it’s no big deal if you get your email ten seconds or ten minutes later. Such anomalies and judder in TV/movie/game reception destroy or degrade the viewer experience if there isn’t a means for buffering the signal stream.
2. Key issue 1
   1. (Joch, 2009)
      1. The controversy about network neutrality—the principle that Internet users should be able to access any Web content or use any applications, without restrictions or limitations from their Internet service provider (ISP)—remains unresolved in the U.S. over who, if anyone, has a legal or commercial right to regulate Internet traffic. Net neutrality proponents advocate for legislation that would keep broadband service providers from controlling Internet content or gaining the ability to impose extra charges for heavy users of the Internet. Opponents argue that existing rules enforced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and others make additional laws unnecessary, or could jeopardize service providers’ First Amendment rights.
3. Key issue 2
   1. From professional issues module:
      1. Net neutrality also has been the subject of some controversy here in the United States. On one hand, the proponents of net neutrality believe that all information on the Internet should be treated equally, which in principle sounds good. It is claimed that ISPs will slow down the service for some customers so that others can continue to have their service, which could potentially lead to discrimination against certain content. The opponents of net neutrality though, say that ISPs should be able to prioritize. E.g., hospitals and police should be given priority over someone merely watching cartoons (Nguyen, 2011). I myself am leery of letting some government agency decide who gets higher priority.
4. Conclusion/possible way forward
   1. Freerepublic
      1. I think it is Activism because I am always suspicious of the government trying to control the Internet.
      2. How much of a barrier was there when there was nothing but a telephone twisted pair system?
      3. Why should those that used their own capital to build what didn’t exist at all have to give freebies to whomever wants them?
      4. The idea of “Net Neutrality” is to prevent Internet Service Providers (“ISP”s) from being able to slow down particular internet traffic or charge more for it, even if that traffic is compromising internet service for the rest of their network’s customers. One definition of Net Neutrality is “the principle that data packets on the Internet should be moved impartially, without regard to content, destination or source.”
         1. And while that sounds oh-so-fair on first glance, what the principle really amounts to is theft.
         2. ISPs like Verizon, Comcast, and AT&T have spent many billions of dollars on Internet infrastructure. In fact, according to James Gattuso who studies telecommunications issues for the Heritage Foundation, AT&T claims to have invested more money into the American economic infrastructure than any other company last year, and plans to invest $18 billion in capital spending in 2009.
      5. Net Neutrality aims to tell these firms how to operate their very valuable assets, under the guise of being “neutral”. So, for example, an ISP will not be allowed to slow down “peer-to-peer” file transfers even if they are disproportionately degrading Internet service for others. Much like our income tax system, it is reported that 10% of internet users consume 80% of bandwidth. And much like our tax system, there are those who want others to foot the bill for their costs. If ISPs can’t have policies which address the fact that bandwidth is limited and that bandwidth hogs need to be restrained so the rest of their customers can maintain adequate service, that puts them in an extremely difficult situation.
      6. Imagine you are a private builder of toll roads who invests a billion dollars in a highway. Then the government tells you that it’s unfair for you to charge 18-wheel tractor-trailers a higher toll than you charge passenger cars despite the fact that the big trucks are responsible for the large majority of your maintenance and repair budget. What would your choices then be? Probably some combination of stopping construction of further roads, raising the prices for everyone (because the government says everyone has to pay the same price), or trying to find legally uncertain ways to game the system. The same choices will apply to ISPs under Net Neutrality.
      7. Some proponents of Net Neutrality argue that the rules are necessary because there isn’t very much competition among ISPs. But beyond the fact that in most cities and suburbs the competition between just the cable company and the phone company is enough to keep the business intensely competitive, Genachowski also proposed applying the new rules to wireless broadband services, possibly the most competitive business in America.

References:

Joch, A. (2009) 'Debating Net Neutrality', *Communications Of The ACM*, 52, 10, pp. 14-15, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, (Accessed: 18 May 2014)

Nguyen, T. (2011) ‘FCC: Your Internet belongs to us’, *The Daily Caller* [Online]. Available from: <http://dailycaller.com/2011/09/23/fcc-your-internet-belongs-to-us/> (Accessed: 18 May 2014)