Why net neutrality is important

The Internet is one of the most used, if not the most used, technologies in our daily life. We use it through computers, smartphones or tablets and often don’t even think about it. It’s so common for us, most people don’t know how it works - they just use it on a daily base. For these people, this is not a problem, but the Internet like we know it today is in great danger.

The Internet started as a pendant of the phone lines: Connect customers through wired cables and enable a remote communication between both parties. All parties were handled equally and without any restrictions. Initially used for viewing text based websites, it’s now also used for web based services like Facebook and video entertainment platforms like Netflix. The amount of consumed web traffic increased over the last year and the Internet provider had to invest in better and faster infrastructure.

Due the infrastructure investment, Internet provider started to complain about the higher traffic - Netflix for example causes around one third of the whole traffic in Switzerland at a Sunday evening. Additionally, our society became more connected and more international. Governments now have to deal with unwanted or illegal content from other countries, so they are unable to take it down based on a law violation.

The ideal solution for Internet providers and governments looked like charging more money for higher traffic and block unwanted or illegal content completely. But the last few year showed, that such restrictions harm our society. Internet providers and governments are now the gatekeepers or the bouncers of the Internet. The society has to rely on the right doing of their government.

It’s obvious that this is not always the case. Internet censorship like in Russia or China now even starts to become the de facto standard in Switzerland and providers start to throttle the traffic for video services like Netflix. Your Netflix session on a Sunday evening will most likely result in a buffering video.

Now we have to recover the original state of the Internet: An Internet based on the core principles of net neutrality. This means to not prefer specific content over other content and handle all content equally. Additionally only block content if it’s illegal based on the local law regulation. This thinking goes against the one of the big Internet providers. They can change more money for daily services and advertise their own services - and of course block the other ones. But it’s necessary if we want to grow and improve as a society and want to enable a growing economy. Everything else will only last short and will create problems for the future.

Sources:

1. European Digital Rights (EDRi): Net Neutrality; <https://edri.org/files/EDRi_NetNeutrality.pdf>; EDRi papers issue 08; Access date 15.04.2016