

NET NEUTRALITY

Student's Name

INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION



 SUPREME-THESIS.COM



INTRODUCTION

Net neutrality (also Internet neutrality or network neutrality) is the principle that implies that the government and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should treat all data on the web impartially and equally, without giving preferences to any type of communication, platform, user, content, or web resource. An equal approach to all web data ensures that private users can access any lawful content they wish on equal terms regardless of the type of content. Equal treatment of data also implies that new businesses and startups have the same opportunity to present their content to the general public and deliver their information to potential customers on equal terms with mature, established companies. Nevertheless, opponents of net neutrality argue that special arrangements for managing online data by the ISPs will serve to improve quality of their services and foster development of communications and Internet industries. The analysis of the net neutrality concept and its impact on the Internet industry, as well as evaluation of possible consequences of violating the principle of net neutrality indicate that limiting net neutrality will stunt development of the Internet industry by negatively impacting the industry's competitive environment and violating rights of web users to access information of their choice.

DEFINITION OF NET NEUTRALITY

The term 'net neutrality' is used to describe the principle that the government and the ISPs should treat all Internet content equally and in a non-discriminatory manner, without giving preferences to any particular user, communication medium, content, or platform. Scott Jordan (2014) from the Department of Computer Science, University of California, defines net neutrality as the idea

that all Internet users should be entitled to receiving services that do not discriminate on the basis of ownership, destination, or source of Internet traffic. The author argues that although the Internet space should remain open, neither con nor pro neutrality arguments reflect the dynamic of the Internet architecture. However, according to Jordan (2014), legal policies can serve well to regulate the issue of net neutrality by utilizing technology convergence to satisfy needs of both small and large Internet industry players.

Kramer, Wiewiorra, and Weinhardt (2012) offer strict and broad definitions of net neutrality. According to the authors, the concept of strict net neutrality prohibits the ISPs from blocking, slowing down, or speeding up Internet traffic depending on its destination, ownership, or source. The broader and less strict definition of the net neutrality principle is described as the context where the ISPs do not charge content providers for transferring data via broadband lines to end users, do not give preferences to some content providers over others, and charge consumers only once for the Internet access (Kramer, Wiewiorra, & Weinhardt, 2012).

Therefore, although there is no single agreed upon approach to defining net neutrality, a strict definition appears to be more straightforward and such that can better ensure equal rights of players and consumers of the Internet market.

KEY POSITIONS CONCERNING NET NEUTRALITY

Analysis of current opinions indicates that there are two general approaches regarding net neutrality. The first approach reflects strict understanding of net neutrality and implies that the ISPs should not be permitted to (a) block access to any website or service that offers legal content or (b) 'throttle' any content by

intentionally speeding up some content while slowing down others. Furthermore, within the framework of strict net neutrality, connections between the ISP and the rest of the Internet should be transparent and leave no place for giving preferential treatment to any site. Lastly, no paid prioritization should be allowed whereby those who pay extra fees get 'faster' lanes (The White House, 2014; The Economist, 2014).

Another position reflects a broader and less strict definition of net neutrality and implies that the ISPs can offer different services to different consumers, provide faster access lanes to customers for an additional fee, and practice other forms of paid-for priority arrangements. In support of the latter position, Jordan (2014) and McMillan (2014) argue that offering special connections to some companies is acceptable as long as these special fast connections are available to other companies and businesses that might get interested in paying for and obtaining 'fast' lanes. Authors claim that such arrangements will benefit consumers most of all and increase healthy competition among the ISPs. Besides, McMillan (2014) explains that although it is true that large companies such as Google do have an edge over others, the vast majority of companies do not need that edge due to much lower volumes of Internet traffic they generate.

THE IMPACT OF A NEW NET NEUTRALITY DEAL ON THE US AND GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS CONSUMERS

It seems that positions of different authors differ significantly when it comes to evaluating the impact of new net neutrality-related arrangements developed by the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on consumers both within the United States and abroad. The position of the White House (2014) and experts from The Economist (2014) newspaper regarding the new net neutrality deal is that the government should be closely involved

in monitoring and regulating the issue of net neutrality. Furthermore, they argue that the strongest possible rules should be implemented to protect net neutrality in order to maintain free and open Internet. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (n.d.) argues that maintaining net neutrality is vital to protecting rights of consumers to access information they want and how they want. Moreover, American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) claims that without net neutrality telecom companies will be able to manipulate consumers' data and scrutinize information consumers send and receive online. Dismissing the net neutrality principle will permit the ISPs to charge consumers more for services and Internet access, making it harder for consumers to communicate online and enabling the ISPs to censor what consumers share online (FreePress, 2014). Finally, failure to maintain net neutrality will deprive consumers of equal access to the web content of their choice and will enable the ISPs to influence the quality of the consumers' connection depending on what content consumers choose to access.

THE IMPACT OF A NEW NET NEUTRALITY DEAL ON COMPETITORS IN THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

As any industry, development of the communications industry is contingent on healthy competition, openness of the market, and equal opportunities for entering the market by new industry players. Opinions of professionals are split as to what impact new rules proposed by the FCC on how the ISPs should treat traffic will have on competitors in the communications industry. Belli (2014) argues that net neutrality plays a pivotal role in fostering healthy and equal competition among those who use Internet for business purposes. American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) claims that since there are relatively few big ISPs on the US market, absence of net neutrality would give them an opportunity to charge more

for fast lanes and block services without consumers having an opportunity to switch easily to alternative ISPs. Thus, low competition on communications market gives the ISPs the possibility to charge consumers more without being afraid that their clients will choose competitors' services (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). Furthermore, besides affecting competition among the ISPs, absence of net neutrality will affect competition among consumers who use their web resources/services to claim market share. Thus, those who can pay additional fees for faster traffic or preferential treatment of their data will have better web presence, be more accessible online, and enjoy greater exposure to potential customers (McMillan, 2014).

PERSONAL POSITION AND CONCERNS REGARDING THE ISSUE OF NET NEUTRALITY

From my personal viewpoint, the fact that the Internet remains a free, open, easily and equally accessible platform and source of information for all has accounted for unprecedented development of Internet-based, Internet-related, or Internet-dependent industries and sectors of economy. It does seem that abolishing or limiting the principle of net neutrality will give the ISPs freedom to institute and apply a variety of discriminatory pricing schemes and foster the environment where rights of consumers to access information of their choice may be violated. Furthermore, if few large ISPs are allowed to disregard net neutrality, it will give them the legal right to inflate costs of their services and create unfavorable environment for nonprofits, small Internet businesses, business startups, and any other consumers unable to pay for premium broadband services. Notably, since the Internet has been developed with significant public investments, it should not be handed to large corporations to manage as they see fit. All pursuits to bypass net neutrality

seem to be efforts of large ISPs such as Comcast and Verizon that try to monopolize communications market, increase their profits, and make online space serve their narrow corporate interests. Moreover, limiting net neutrality would potentially foster an environment where rights of millions of private Internet users could be violated by limiting choices of what they can find and access online.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of possible implications of abdicating net neutrality shows that a failure to enforce and abide by net neutrality principles will have significant negative repercussions. In particular, development of the Internet industry and related sectors of economy will be stunted, competitive environment will not be based on equal opportunities for all market players, and the right of web users to access information of their choice will be violated. Therefore, maintaining net neutrality is of a great benefit to the American economy and society as a whole.

References

- American Civil Liberties Union. (n.d.). What is net neutrality? Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/net-neutrality>
- Belli, L. (2014). No. 172 network neutrality: A roadmap for infrastructure enhancement. Retrieved from http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/wks2014/index.php/proposal/view_public/172
- FreePress. (2014). Net neutrality. Retrieved from <http://www.savetheinternet.com/net-neutrality>
- Jordan, S. (2014). Net neutrality. Retrieved from <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~sjordan/research/net%20neutrality.html>
- Kramer, J., Wiewiorra, L., & Weinhardt, C. (2012, September 25). Net neutrality: A progress report. *Telecommunications Policy*, 1-39. Retrieved from <http://www.im.uni-karlsruhe.de/Upload/Publications/336c39b3-7a62-4159-bb1a-483f39dd5b24.pdf>
- McMillan, R. (2014). What everyone gets wrong in the debate about net neutrality. Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/2014/06/net_neutrality_missing/
- The Economist. (2014). Not neutral about net neutrality. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21632511-barack-Obama-jumps-debate-about-how-regulate-broadband-not-neutral-about-net>
- The White House. (2014). Net neutrality: President Obama's plan for a free and open Internet. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/net-neutrality>