

Fighting for Net Neutrality:

Regaining Digital Freedom

Merrin Keim

Rowan University

The internet is an endless world of vast knowledge and information that is accessible to anyone. A large portion of the news we intake regularly is found on the internet, our leisurely pastimes have become digital, and even our memories are stored on social media. It has seemingly been incorporated into our day to day routines and has become essential to our way of life. However the recent loss of net neutrality has given Internet Service Providers, otherwise known as ISP's, the capability of stripping the general public of their digital freedoms.

The rules that were set in place in 2015 under the Obama administration, in regards to net neutrality, assured a free and fair internet for all. However when Donald Trump was elected into office he shifted the majority of the FCC, which is now primarily republican. The chairman of the FCC, Ajit Pai, opposed net neutrality from it's conception, voting against it in 2015. During this past year, due to his new position and the republican majority, he was able to do away with net neutrality. Pai felt that the rules were stunting the market as well as creativity, however he was reluctant to comment on how these changes would affect everyday people (U.S.

Government Publishing Office, WHY NET NEUTRALITY MATTERS: PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND COMPETITION THROUGH MEANINGFUL OPEN INTERNET RULES).

The web is intended to be a place of freedom and equality. While streaming a show, one would expect minimum lag time and for this delay to correspond to every other individual on the internet. When searching for information it is assumed that articles and other outlets will be

readily available. Net neutrality is what makes these assumptions so commonplace. However now that it has been repealed these presumptions that were once definite have become things that we can only hope will remain. ISP's now have the power over the information we intake and the speed at which we do so. Corporations such as Comcast or Verizon are able to put blocks on any content they deem offensive or inappropriate. They also have the capability of creating fast lanes, which mean that individuals will have to pay more for faster internet and access to specific sites.

Reflecting on times prior to net neutrality gives an extremely accurate depiction of what may be to come. In 2013 Comcast slowed the streaming speed of Netflix until they paid for smoother streaming in 2014 (Net Neutrality Explained, Wall Street Journal). This not only affected Netflix but their viewers. Their content was slowed and prices were raised for no particular reason. Situations such as this one show a lack of regard for the public and an unjustified need to pump money into already established corporations. In 2007 Verizon blocked text messages discussing pro choice due to the fact that they deemed it appropriate (Net Neutrality Explained, Wall Street Journal). Without net neutrality they have the ability to make decisions on what is or isn't acceptable for users to touch upon and or read about. This is a blatant restriction of information which is both ethically not right but can prevent the spread of knowledge on particular subject matters.

In this day in age net neutrality is, in every sense of the word, a necessity as well as something worth fighting for. Although it is impossible to reverse what has already been done, it is within our capabilities to work towards its return. Understanding our power as voting citizens is something that must be taken seriously. In order to make a positive change that reflects our

wants and needs we must elect like-minded individuals who share the same values with issues such as net neutrality. Had Trump not been elected Ajit Pai would not have been made the Chairman of the FCC, the majority would not have been shifted, and net neutrality would have most likely remained untouched. The decisions you make when voting someone into office can directly affect the life you have become accustomed to. Having a deep understanding of the ideals of those running for government positions is pivotal to set forth the motion of change.

The effects of this loss are widespread and have been noticed by several organizations who are fighting to keep net neutrality alive. Groups such as American Civil Liberties Union, The Electronic Frontier Foundation, Green Peace USA, and Media Alliance have all taken steps to allow the public to be heard such as emailing congress, providing information about the importance of net neutrality, and publishing their letters to government higher ups. Supporting these groups in large numbers shows not only the depth of this issue, but the mass amount of individuals who are willing to speak up. There is strength in numbers and organizations willing to put their name at the forefront of this battle should be given endless encouragement.

Possibly the most powerful yet underrated weapon that could be of great use in this fight for net neutrality is your voice. Allowing your beliefs on this topic matter to be heard not only allows those in power to see that the public is not ignorant to injustices that are occurring but may provide others with a deeper understanding of the issue as well as the changes that may be to come. Writing to congress personally on websites like battleforthenet.com, gives you an outlet to express your disdain for what is occurring to individuals who may be able to make a difference. They may attempt to turn a blind eye however they cannot ignore the voices of millions if we all choose to speak up. Today we each have our own personal platform on which

we are able to share to our following. Spreading awareness on the topic of net neutrality on your social media spreads the message to a wider audience. Perhaps a single post may help an individual who is uninformed on the topic understand the depth of the issue and persuade them to want to help as well. You are able to set forth a movement seemingly on your own. You can join and create groups supporting the cause, spread the message further, and make yourself heard.

The digital world today is now hand in hand with our physical world. We live out such large portions of our lives online and have become accustomed to the way in which it is operated. Our digital freedom is crucial in staying informed and being respected as consumers. Net neutrality must return but in order for that to happen the public must act.