

# A problem of net neutrality



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\*Net Neutrality\* is the concept that internet traffic, at the ISP level, is all treated equally. This means that, regardless of what I'm doing, one can expect that their ISP is not actively effecting the speed at which that data is being sent to them. The ISP has no baring on the usage of one site for one purpose or another. In a non-neutral environment, ISPs can decide to speed up traffic at websites and throttle speeds at others e. g. if Sasktel, a popular ISP in Regina, had deals with video service \*DailyMotion\*, then it's very likely that traffic with popular competitor \*YouTube\* would suddenly be slower. Network Neutrality is an ethical issue, because the internet is an important conduit for information and communication, and with online video, speed is more important than it has ever been. ISPs are strongly against Net Neutrality, as there are strong financial benefits for them if they don't uphold it. The ability for ISPs, whom generally have limited competition in most of the locations they serve, are able to control traffic by limiting speed, then there's no reason that ability wouldn't not be mishandled by ISPs. not just at the expense of the user's convenience, but politically as well.

In a non-neutral environment, it's likely that politicians would want to start using this to their advantage. If an ISP want to affect law in it's favor, then it would be prudent for the ISP to talk to make deals with the politicians in power. Since they would then become invested in that politician continuing to hold power, they would be actively invested in their campaign, and against their opponent. It would be in their best interests to throttle traffic for the opposition and speed up traffic for the politician they made a deal with. This would effectively silence the online presence of the opposition in the areas that these ISPs serve, which creates a massively anti-democratic

environment online. Another, even more insidious scenario would involve politicians actively bidding massive amounts of their campaign budget to convince ISPs to throttle the traffic speeds of their competitors if those ISPs serve their constituents, most of whom would not have a choice if they objected to this practice other than simply disconnecting from the internet. It effectively creates a new form of gerrymandering, ensuring political opponents do not reach a politician's constituents and thus maintaining the status quo. Users will only be able to see ads from the politicians whom they already expect to vote for them, thus maintaining the status quo, allowing the political landscape to further stagnate.

ISPs already have their own desires to monopolize the ways in which users consume content on the internet. In Canada, our primary ISPs, Rogers, Bell and Shaw, all own cable television networks as well, and offer their own on demand streaming services [1][2][3]. It makes sense then that, since they all exclusively provide capped broadband packages, that they would want to penalize users of online video provider \*Netflix\* whilst serving their streaming video packages to their customers without working against their data cap. This gives online video absolutely no advantages over the current television plans and even heavily limits the selection of shows a user can watch depending on their locations. It also limits a user's ability to participate in online gaming. Certain US ISPs own stock in large gaming companies like \*Blizzard\*, and in an environment without Net-Neutrality, such a company could throttle the speeds of online games while making Blizzard games significantly faster. Customers who live in rural environments

with only one ISP are thus limited to playing only \*Blizzard\* games online, destroying any competition in that sector for that area.

However, a purely neutral network does have throwbacks. Currently, most ISPs offer some filtering that is beneficial to the customer, or even legally required. Spam is actively filtered at the ISP level, for example. Also, illegal content like child pornography can be blocked at the ISP level, limiting a customer's access to such content, which serves a major societal benefit. ISPs could also block the ability for users to access hate-sites or known terrorist web forums. These societal benefits are hard to ignore, so what can be done?

Up until recently [4], in the United States, the FCC was in control of maintaining a neutral internet. If an ISP wanted to start blocking access to certain sites, they would have to talk to the FCC and justify their claims. A similar system could be implemented in Canada, with the CRTC managing as a barrier between ISPs and the content they would be allowed to filter. This way, as long as the CRTC remains impartial, an ISP would have to justify their desire to start filtering content before an external committee before being legally allowed to implement the filter. This would keep the ISP from doing any filtering for anti-competitive reasons, but it could still lead to political problems. An entirely new committee could be created specifically to maintain a primarily neutral network among Canadian ISPs instead, one that would be effectively immune from corporate or government bias.

A Neutral web, with some beneficial filtering, helps us maintain the internet as it was meant to be from its inception. An open, rapidly evolving

marketplace of ideas and services with strong societal benefit. Cable companies have a strong desire to be able to control this space to their benefit, destroying the strongly competitive abilities of the internet, and opening it up to even greater political manipulation than is currently able. Thus, the problem of Net Neutrality is an ethical one, and there are strong ethical, political, and economic problems to not maintaining it.

### **Citations**

- \*Shaw streaming\* [www.shaw.ca/television/shaw-go/](http://www.shaw.ca/television/shaw-go/)
- \*CTV go, Owned by Bell\* [www.ctv.ca/ctvgo](http://www.ctv.ca/ctvgo)
- \*rogers on demand streaming\* [www.rogersondemand.com](http://www.rogersondemand.com)
- GROSS, GRANT \*Net neutrality ruling complicates U. S. transition to IP networks\* <https://www.pcworld.com/article/2144660/net-neutrality-ruling-complicates-us-transition-to-ip-networks.html>