

Topic of the week for discussion: 16<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2015

## Topic: Net Neutrality

**Net neutrality** (also **network neutrality**, **Internet neutrality**, or **net equality**) 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, or mode of communication.

Net Neutrality is the Internet's guiding principle: It preserves our right to communicate freely online. This is the definition of an open Internet.

Net Neutrality means an Internet that enables and protects free speech. It means that Internet service providers should provide us with open networks — and should not block or discriminate against any applications or content that ride over those networks. Just as your phone company shouldn't decide who you can call and what you say on that call, your ISP shouldn't be concerned with the content you view or post online.

Without Net Neutrality, cable and phone companies could carve the Internet into fast and slow lanes. An ISP could slow down its competitors' content or block political opinions it disagreed with. ISPs could charge extra fees to the few content companies that could afford to pay for preferential treatment — relegating everyone else to a slower tier of service. This would destroy the open Internet.

### **The Recent Furore:**

In India, the uproar kicked off when **Flipkart** started talking with **Airtel** about **Airtel Zero** (splitting India's Internet into many Internets). The debate took a u-turn when Flipkart backed out of the deal and stood by net neutrality. They released a statement saying,

*"We at Flipkart have always strongly believed in the concept of net neutrality, for we exist because of the Internet."*

Alongside, Sachin Bansal, co-founder of Flipkart openly spoke about other giants like Facebook that have been violating net neutrality in India with initiatives like Internet.org. Cleartrip, one of the partners for **Internet.org** backed out of it today.

While online activists and even big Internet companies in India like Cleartrip, Flipkart, have come out to support Net Neutrality, the debate isn't really as simple when it comes to India.

Neither the Information Technology Act, 2000 nor any rules and regulations made thereunder, have any reference to net neutrality. It is in this context that the entire issue of net neutrality becomes more significant.

Topic  
Introduction

### **The Debate:**

For starters, in a country like India, Net Neutrality has vast implications, especially for small business owners, startups and entrepreneurs, who rely on the open Internet to launch their businesses, create a market, advertise their products and services, and distribute products to customers. We need the open Internet to foster job growth, competition and innovation.

Net Neutrality lowers the barriers of entry for entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses by ensuring the Web is a fair and level playing field. It's because of Net Neutrality that small businesses and entrepreneurs have been able to thrive on the Internet. They use the Internet to reach new customers and showcase their goods, applications and services.

No company should be able to interfere with this open marketplace. ISPs are by definition the gatekeepers to the Internet, and without Net Neutrality, they would seize every possible opportunity to profit from that gatekeeper control.

***Without Net Neutrality, the next Google would never get off the ground.***

But there is counter-argument to the whole Net Neutrality debate. It states that in a country like India many still don't have access to data or mobile Internet because it is expensive and that zero-ratings could be a possible solution.

**Mark Zuckerberg's** argument in context of the recent debate on Internet.org sums it all:

*"I believe everyone in the world deserves access to Internet opportunities as Internet is the most powerful tool for economic and social progress. In many countries there are obstacles to connectivity. The internet isn't accessible to everyone, and in many places awareness of it remains low. Women and poor are most likely to be excluded. This is why Internet.org is created to connect the whole world. By partnering with the mobile operators and governments in different countries, it offers free access in regional languages to basic Internet services in areas like jobs, health, education and messaging.*

*We, at Facebook strongly support Net neutrality. We want to keep Internet open. But net neutrality is not in conflict with working to get more people connected. These Two principles- Net Neutrality and Universal Connectivity –can and must coexist."*

### **Read further:**

<http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2015/04/16/how-india-is-breaking-the-internet-while-trying-to-savetheinternet/>

[http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/flipkartairtel-zero-debate-calm-down-india-shouldnt-jump-the-gun-on-net-neutrality-263311.html?utm\\_source=related\\_stories](http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/flipkartairtel-zero-debate-calm-down-india-shouldnt-jump-the-gun-on-net-neutrality-263311.html?utm_source=related_stories)

<http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/social/net-neutrality-in-india-licensing-to-zero-ratings-its-a-complicated-debate/>