

2018

What Do YOU Think About Net Neutrality?

Meredith Bruno

Xavier University - Cincinnati, brunom@xavier.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/undergrad_communication

Recommended Citation

Bruno, Meredith, "What Do YOU Think About Net Neutrality?" (2018). *Communication*. 1.
https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/undergrad_communication/1

This Blog is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate at Exhibit. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication by an authorized administrator of Exhibit. For more information, please contact exhibit@xavier.edu.

Meredith Bruno
Digital Media Senior Seminar
Dr. Hinck
2/5/18

What Do YOU Think About Net Neutrality?

[Net neutrality](#). These two words have been at the center of one of the biggest political debates since the Trump administration began work a little over a year ago. Net neutrality refers to policies put in place that require internet service providers, such as Comcast, Verizon, and AT&T, to allow their users to access all online content regardless of its source. [The Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\)](#) recently voted to repeal this legislation and aims to open the door for corporations to control what we can see and do online.

As a frequent internet user, and a student majoring in Digital Media at a Jesuit university, I not only wanted to understand what this debate means for me, personally, but more so how this debate will affect the online platforms and communities we have come to know and love. That's why I chose to embark on a journey to understand the public discourse surrounding this debate.

Let's first look at the difference between public discourse and knowledge. Public discourse can be described as instances of public reason. A discourse is a group of messages that draw on a moral code people come to accept as members of society. This refers to things like news articles, opinion pieces, tweets, townhall meetings, and protests. Knowledge refers to the ideas we come to know based off what we have learned and experienced. This refers to organization's official documents, and laws of math and science.

I want to propose that we are looking at the net neutrality debate from the wrong angle. Instead of listening to public discourse surrounding the topic and taking that as the end-all-be-all, we should be questioning our knowledge of the topic and working to fill in the gaps. Doing so may allow us to find other ways to protect our online experiences.

[Quail and Larabie's](#) research attempted to make a link between public discourse and knowledge regarding the net neutrality debate. They argue that public discourse is often confused with knowledge due to the way information is presented. As a result, instead of forming our own ideas on how we think we should react and acting on these ideas, we just join in the conversation without taking a stand.

Here's some proof. Following the FCC's decision to repeal net neutrality and the slew of news articles that were published thereafter, people were convinced that the fight for net neutrality was over. This happened although the U.S. Senate had, and still has, the authority to repeal the decision and is currently working to do so. Here are just some of the thousands of tweets from people who thought the battle for net neutrality was over based off the information they had received:



I'm sorry, net neutrality can't come to the phone right now. Why? Cause it's dead. #ughh

1:29 PM - Dec 14, 2017 · Los Angeles, CA

6 ❤️ See Jonathan's other Tweets



Net neutrality is dead, looks like im sending memes via mailbox

1:35 PM - Dec 14, 2017



First vine, now net neutrality. When will the horrors end?!

1:34 PM - Dec 14, 2017



2 ❤️ See Waluigi Fanfiction's other Tweets



net neutrality is gone. this is my last tweet as a free person. rip internet

1:26 PM - Dec 14, 2017

77 ❤️ 27 people are talking about this

Agreeing with public discourse blindly is living life without being able to make decisions based off your opinions. Would you jump off a bridge because someone told you to? If your answer is no, this is most likely due you KNOWing what would happen if you chose to jump off a bridge. It is in this same way we cannot let public discourse dictate the way we look at net neutrality.

In our day-to-day lives we are inundated with constant streams of information. Much of which is biased in some way. When we segment our information, or choose what it is we want to see, it is difficult to understand all aspects of the political issues we face in this digital age.

Now that I've given you all this information, you're probably wondering how we can take steps to become more informed and test public discourse. Lucky for us, [Lloyd F. Bitzer](#) did the heavy lifting in his article "Rhetoric and Public Knowledge." Here, he gives us four ways to put public knowledge to the test:

1. First, we must look for evidence to back up the authors' claims.
2. Even when we find evidence to back up the authors' claims we must be aware that their personal bias may interfere with the overall tone of their work.
3. We must also look at the knowledge we've inherited and work to understand why we think the way that we do, so we can open ourselves up to new ideas.
4. Finally, we must understand that public discourse is constantly moving and shifting to remain current.

In a world where information runs rampant, it is sometimes difficult to remember to look for pieces of work that aren't a summary of the public conversation. It is our job to educate ourselves and recognize how much public discourse dictates our decisions, and to be able to separate that from the knowledge we gather on a topic. So, let me ask you this. What do YOU think about net neutrality, and what are YOU going to do about it?