

Net Neutrality: Why Worry?

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Who controls the tubes?

Why should you worry about Net Neutrality? It's a complicated concept, even more complex in reality. Yet, for people like [Chris Anderson of Wired](#) it could spell the end of what we know as the free Internet.

At a Polis experts seminar the conclusion was that you should not leave this area of media policy to pure competition. But that still leaves a lot of debate about what how you might interfere to prevent interference with the Web.

We will publish a full report on the seminar later. Email us at polis@lse.ac.uk if you want to be kept informed. We brought together top policy-makers and business people from organisations such as BT, Virgin Media, Yahoo!, and Skype as well as Ofcom, the [Communications Consumers Panel](#) with LSE media and law academics.

It is difficult to put this issue in a nutshell, so we didn't. We took three hours to talk and included Zachery Katz down the line from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington where this issue is a much hotter potato because of the [Google-Verizon](#) case.

On the one side there are a lot of commercial interests who want to be able to offer different levels of online service provision. This would make them more money which they can use to make better services, they argue, for those who want to pay. On the other side, [groups like Free Press](#) argue that the Internet is such an innovative place precisely because the barriers to entry are low and the playing field itself is so level and open from end to end.

In a typically pithy analysis [The Economist](#) (inevitably) argues in its cover story leader this week that competition will solve all these problems. But competition doesn't seem to always work in the classic economic sense with the Internet. Look how hard it is to switch broadband suppliers or ISPs in practice. Look at how brands such as Microsoft or Google achieve market dominance. There is nothing necessarily anti-competitive about regulating to keep a market open.

So what to do? Well, the European Commission will be key for us in this region. But their representative told the seminar that they are in reflective mode, so don't expect anything dramatic out of Brussels anytime soon. In the UK [Ofcom is about to close its consultation](#) (get your submissions in now!). But it has been given clear signals by its political masters at DCMS that in media policy areas, it should take a somewhat less pro-active role.

So it's up to you the public, the business and other groups to work out what, if anything, needs to be done. Are you worried about traffic management online? Do you want more transparency from ISPs? Are you worried about privacy or freedom of expression? Is your broadband as powerful as it should be? Do you object to the idea of 'walled gardens' online? Well, Net Neutrality is at the heart of all those issues.

Watch the video report of the event [here](#)

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