

The Importance of Internet Neutrality to Protecting Human Rights Online

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Supporting Documents

The Internet has tremendous capacity to advance human rights, in particular freedom of expression and related rights. To an unprecedented degree, the Internet transcends national borders and reduces barriers to the free flow of information, enabling free expression and association, participation in political and cultural life, and the enjoyment of other rights.

Merely having Internet access, however, is not sufficient to guarantee the full flowering of free expression and the other rights it enables. The Internet's power to transform communications and promote free expression and a pluralistic information environment flows from certain characteristics that have defined the Internet since its inception, but that are increasingly subject to pressure. To maximize the Internet's potential, it must remain decentralized, open, and truly global. Establishing rules to preserve Internet neutrality is one way to prevent the imposition of structural inequalities that would distort this environment.

The paper explores how discriminatory treatment of Internet traffic by access providers threatens Internet users' ability to seek, receive, and impart information of their own choosing, and the ability of entrepreneurs around the world to launch new services that in turn can advance human rights. We argue that fully protecting human rights online therefore requires governments to take steps to prevent access providers from taking actions that may interfere with users' enjoyment of rights. We also offer a set of principles to guide the enactment of rules to protect Internet neutrality.

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