

The Last Free Form of Free Speech

The internet is the last remaining broadly available medium in which individuals or groups are truly and completely free to express themselves without inhibition. And, most importantly, they are largely free from financial restraints.

The large corporations which fund the various radio and television stations, newspapers and magazines effectively control the bias of all information which is publicly released. The personalities and authors behind anything that you see on a commercially owned/funded television station, or anything that you read in a commercially owned/funded newspaper is all, in the end, controlled by their respective sponsors. Some sponsors may be more concerned with free speech than others, but too many are more concerned about their own image.

The internet is the only place in which an individual, without large sums of money or a sponsor to back them, can express their opinion to a wide audience without censorship and without restraint. Taking away this freedom would be taking away the average citizen's last hope to be heard on a broad scale.

Also, in the economic environment that we live in, a company's success is largely controlled by the amount of money that is spent on a product's or service's advertisements and marketing approach. The internet is the only medium through which a small company (which may even have superior products, or at least a cheaper price) can compete with a large, multi-national corporation in terms of potential for exposure and availability. If this means of communication also came under financial control, it would only empower monopolies and deprive a smaller company of its ability to compete. As I've read before, why should a local library or small mom & pop bookstore have to compete with Barnes & Noble just to have visitors access their website?

All of this freedom of expression applies to politicians as well. It is a commonly recognized notion that money controls the elections. Money buys advertisements and funds campaigns. More and more political candidates are looking at blogs and personal websites to spread their message and to gain exposure. It would only further empower the rich if the poor could not even compete in exposure on the internet. Politicians should not be selected based demographics, and that is something we are still struggling with in regards to female and non-Caucasian candidates. Further limiting those who are not the "super rich" or backed by a lot of those who are would only lead to even more discrimination.

Allowing any entity, especially one with an interest in power or money, to control the flow of information on the internet is not only non-constitutional, it is just plain unnecessary. Subscribers already pay their monthly internet subscription fees and individuals or groups who own a website already pay their web hosting fees. No entity should have to pay an internet service provider a fee to

allow the ISP's users to access the respective entity's site. This is an underhanded act which should be classified as extortion and discrimination.