

A merger between Comcast and General Electric's NBC Universal will result in higher cable prices, a monopoly on TV programming and broadband, and an erosion of net neutrality.

As a result of the takeover, other cable providers will have to buy the rights to carry NBC content from a competitor, resulting in price hikes for customers. As both a producer and distributor of media content, the conglomerate is poised to eliminate competition in favor of consolidating most of America's media under its control. Comcast has asserted that the merger will remain separate from its cable service, but remember when NBC urged the FCC to drop its FYN-SYN rules, which barred networks from owning most of their own programming. NBC promised that the dissolution of FYN-SYN would not lead the network to favor its own content, yet by 1992, it had become the largest producer of its own primetime programming. This fact was emphasized during the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing by Senator Al Franken, himself a former NBC employee during his stint with Saturday Night Live. And while Comcast CEO Brian Roberts reassures that FCC regulations would prevent Comcast from owning most of NBC's shows, his lawyers have argued that such regulations are unconstitutional. Left unfettered, the merger's control over America's television content will also make it that much harder for independent programmers and producers.

Further evidence of Comcast's monopolistic tendencies lie in its ownership of Philadelphia's local team, cable system, arena, and sports network. DISH Network claims that Comcast has denied it of must-have sports programming. Yet this is just a microcosm of what is to come through the Comcast-NBC Universal merger, as one company will have overwhelming control over the nation's media.

Comcast is notorious for its lack of net neutrality. In 2008, it was disciplined by the FCC for slowing peer-to-peer programs like BitTorrent without notifying the consumers who were affected. Such manipulation of broadband may be used to discourage non-NBC content. For example, NBC.com may load faster than Disney-owned ESPN.com. NBC had also up until now competed for both Comcast and non-Comcast customers through Hulu, which sold videos without cable. Through the merger, the content will become available only to Comcast customers, further promoting anticompetitive spirit. Underlining this point is the fact that NBC Universal now owns just 32% of Hulu in a non-management position.

Comcast will also have the power to eliminate competition from stand-alone video service providers like Direct Broadcast Satellite. Because these companies do not offer broadband, their customers must obtain it through companies like Comcast. And because these service providers often offer videos on demand via Internet, Comcast could manipulate the broadband to slow connections to such videos and prioritize NBC content instead.

I do not like the prospect of having so little choice in my Internet and cable. I'm wary of what price I will have to pay for these services under the merger, and I am even more concerned that my service provider will decide which online media will be accessible and which will be slowed. I'm not happy with this manipulation of what has traditionally been a free media. This is not to mention an inevitable loss of jobs that will come from the takeover and the resulting lessening of diversity within broadcasting. I would like to consume media without the filters from corporate monoliths like Comcast.