

Dear FCC,

My name is Devin Parker and I live in Riverside, CA.

Net neutrality, the principle that Internet service providers (ISPs) treat all data that travels over their networks equally, is important to me because without it ISPs could have too much power to determine my Internet experience by providing better access to some services but not others.

A pay-to-play Internet worries me because ISPs could act as the gatekeepers to their subscribers.

I'm a comics creator. The Internet has become an important facet of my education as a human being and my interactions with other people. I've learned a great deal about the experiences and thoughts of people different from myself - and learned to be more compassionate and shape my creative works as a result - that I might never have known without the Internet as it exists today. One could argue that I might have learned the same things from reading books, but I would not have found them as easily and readily, since writing books requires more effort than making posts on a blog or in a forum, and once the book is written, it still has to get through the process of publishing and distribution, which often acts as a gatekeeping mechanism as well.

The Internet I've grown up with has allowed me to hear from people of color, people of other religions, people who self-identify as LGBT, all of whom share my hobbies and interests but whose lives and experiences differ greatly from my own. Thanks to the Internet as it exists today, I've learned about women's experiences in the geek subculture I enjoy, and how they often face misogyny, sexism and threats of rape and violence from other fans and even some creators whose works I've enjoyed in the past; I've learned about how a Black girl the same age as me grew up being drawn to the same creative works and cultural phenomena (Star Trek, Star Wars, etc.), but had a radically different experience as a fan because all of these works were about White people, while people like her were rarely, if ever, portrayed at all, much less as protagonists; I've learned that while our core doctrines are at odds with each other, I share a great deal in common with an Islamic girl than I ever thought I would as a Christian male, and that her identity as she chose to present it online was far, far different than the caricature I've received of Muslims from mainstream news and entertainment media; I've learned that I am able to relate to and understand someone who identifies themselves as gay, or a transwoman, or asexual, and connect with them on an interpersonal level that I don't think would ever have happened if I had been forced to rely solely upon my daily offline experiences and interactions with others. All of these things might not have happened if my online browsing experiences were shaped by some websites being less easily accessed than others.

With Net Neutrality, I am enabled to indulge my curiosity about sites I might not normally visit, and thus, I'm able to learn about other people and better understand them. This has considerable value to me as a creative artist, as a citizen living in a democratic, pluralistic American nation and a human being in a global community, and it absolutely has an impact on my real life.

Another personal anecdote: as ridiculous as this may sound on the surface and without context, I feel as though my life might have been saved by the discovery of a simple video game on the Internet. I was suffering from depression and contemplating suicide when I happened by chance to discover an independent video game (a "visual novel") collaboratively created by a number of people who met on an online forum. This game was life-affirming, with a story and characters that inspired me to want to be a better person and to live my life despite adversity with more passion and thankfulness. If there were no Net Neutrality, is it possible that I would have ever discovered this game? If my browsing experience had been determined by EA, Microsoft, Sony, or any of the other big name game companies, would I have found anything other than first person shooters and sports games? Despite its high quality, the game of which I'm speaking has never really become

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well-known enough to have been featured in mainstream video game review sites; it's remained kind of an underground cult classic sort of thing, which has generated a kind and encouraging community around it, but remains well below the radar. And this game was made by volunteers and is given away for free. Monetary investment and profit are not necessarily indicators of quality, but in an Internet without Net Neutrality, such a thing would go unnoticed in favor of yet another Modern Warfare, Call of Duty or Madden clone.

Pertaining to my profession as a comics creator, webcomics appear to be a strong future, if not *the* future, of my chosen industry. Increasingly readers are turning to the digital format to read their comics. As things stand now, individual creators can create their own, wholly self-owned works, and post them on the Internet for anyone to see. This doesn't guarantee that they will earn a large audience, as the creator must still do a great deal of work to promote themselves, but as a consumer I can just as easily choose to look at Creator X's comics website as I can, say, King Features Syndicate's or DC Comics' websites with no difference in browsing experience. Many independent artists can create and have created a sustaining income revenue from their online comics, but that firmly relies on being noticed in the first place, and in the cases I've heard about, it usually took about 10 years of self-publishing this way before their comics-based income grew to the degree that they could sustain themselves with it.

Without Net Neutrality, Creator X's comic has far less of a chance of being noticed by readers in the first place, since preference will be given to the moneyed corporate entity over the independent creator. Such a model seems to me to be hostile toward an open marketplace of ideas, which I believe is one of the most important aspects of the Internet. Take that level playing field away and you end up with with a bland, corporate-driven organ that obscures and steamrolls over the individual and their ideas, innovations and creations.

Sincerely,

Devlin Parker