

Net Neutrality

For Prelims: Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), Internet Service Providers.

For Mains: Net Neutrality.

Why in News?

The <u>Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI)</u>, which represents **Bharti Airtel**, **Vodafone Idea**, and **Reliance Jio**, the three major <u>telecom operators in India</u>, has been demanding that platforms such as **YouTube and WhatsApp** pay a share of revenue to make up for the network costs.

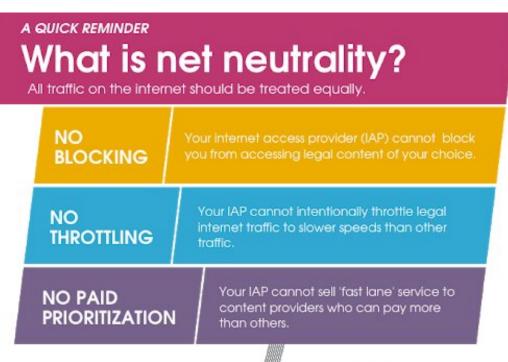
This has reignited the debate around <u>net neutrality.</u>

What are the Arguments and Recent Developments on the Issue?

- Telecom operators are demanding payment for enormous usage on their networks.
 - **Telecom operators in the** <u>European Union</u> are also demanding similar usage fees from content providers.
 - Content providers argue that imposing such a fee, even on a limited number of large players, was a distortion of the internet's architecture.
- In 2016, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) ruled in favour of net neutrality.
- In 2018, the **Department of Telecommunications** embedded the net neutrality concept into the Unified Licence, whose conditions all telecom operators and internet providers are bound by.

What is Net Neutrality?

- Net neutrality is the principle that all internet traffic should be treated equally, without discrimination or preference given to any particular website, service, or application.
- Net neutrality ensures that everyone has equal access to information and services on the internet, regardless of their financial resources or the size and power of the websites they use.
 - It is an important principle that helps to ensure a **level playing field** on the internet, and to **protect the free flow of information and ideas.**
- Without net neutrality, <u>Internet Service Providers</u> could potentially use their market power to steer users towards certain websites and services, or to limit access to others.







Who are the Different Stakeholders in the Internet Space? • The stakeholders in the internet space are: • The consumers of are:

- - The Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) or Internet Service Providers (ISPs),
 - The Over-the-top (OTT) service providers (those who provide internet access services such as websites and applications),
 - The government, who may regulate and define relationships between these players.
 - Also, TRAI is an independent regulator in the telecom sector, which mainly regulates TSPs and their licensing conditions, etc.

How is Net Neutrality Regulated?

- Until now, net neutrality has not directly been regulated in India by any law or policy framework.
- Over the last year, there have been some developments with respect to the formulation of a net neutrality policy.
 - TRAI is working on Differential Pricing for Data Services as well as Regulatory Framework for Over-The-Top Services (OTT).
 - A Committee set up by the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** has also examined the issue of net neutrality.
- Also, Internationally, countries like the **USA**, **Japan**, **Brazil**, **Chile**, **Norway**, etc. have some form of law, order or regulatory framework in place that affects net neutrality.

What Will Happen if There is No Net Neutrality?

- Monopolizing Internet:
 - Without net neutrality, ISPs would have the ability to shape internet traffic to derive extra benefits from it.

- This would give them the power to charge companies like YouTube and Netflix for services that consume more bandwidth compared to a normal website.
- Discourage Innovation:
 - Lack of net neutrality could spell doom for innovation on the web. Startups would be at a disadvantage compared to established players who have the resources to pay for faster access.
 - This could lead to a web that is dominated by a few large players, rather than an open and diverse ecosystem.
- Package Plans for Consumers:
 - The lack of net neutrality would also mean that instead of free access, there could be "package plans" for consumers.
 - For example, users may have to pay more to access international websites compared to websites based in their own country. This would create a tiered internet system where users who **pay more get better access to content.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Which of the following is/are the aims/aims of the "Digital India" Plan of the Government of India? (2018)

- 1. Formation of India's own Internet companies like China did.
- 2. Establish a policy framework to encourage overseas multinational corporations that collect Big Data to build their large data centres within our national geographical boundaries.
- 3. Connect many of our villages to the Internet and bring Wi-Fi to many of our schools, public places and major tourist centres.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- **(b)** 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Source: TH

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