

Net Neutrality For The Win

***How Entertainment and the Science of Influence
Can Save Your Internet***

HARMONY
INSTITUTE

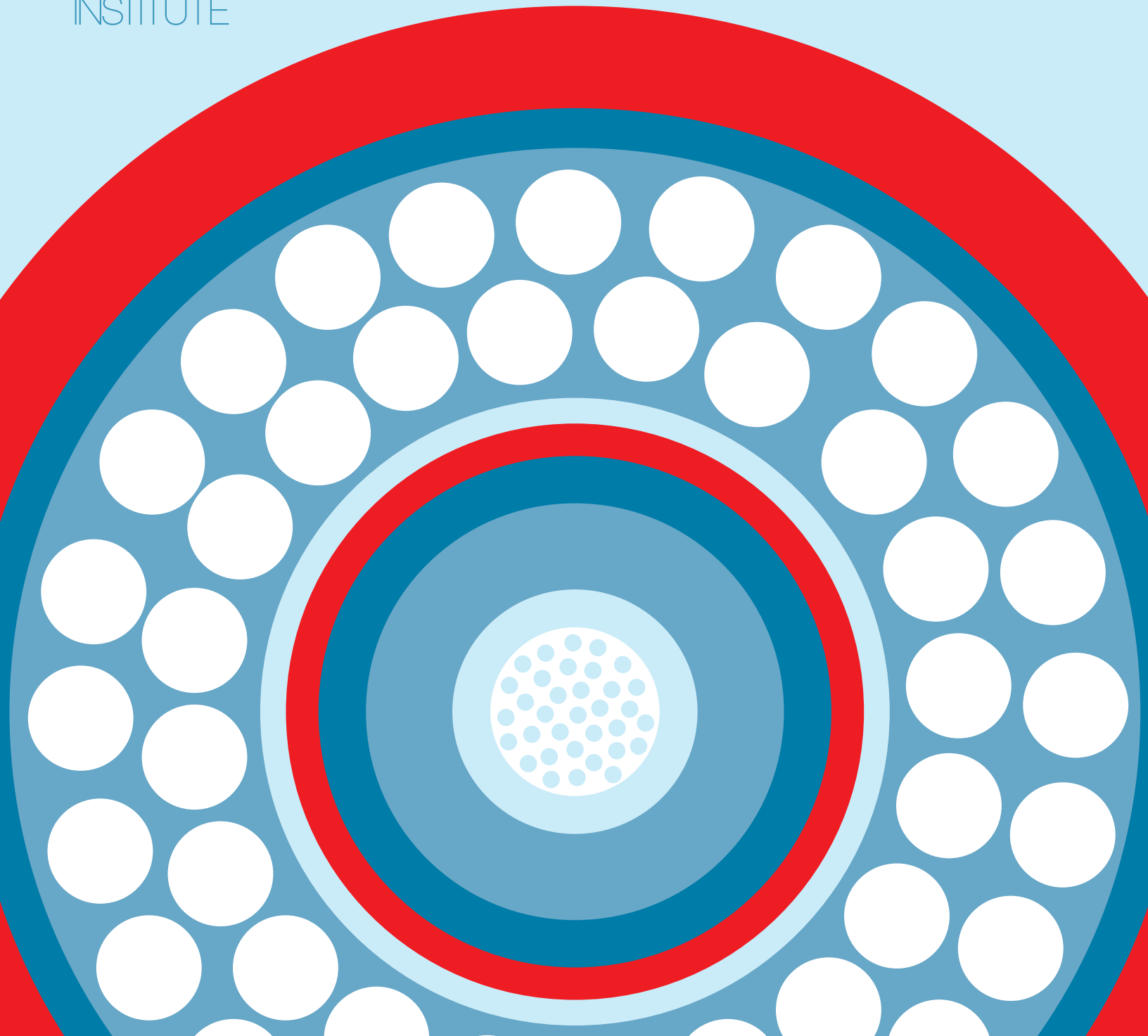


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Introduction

The *New Yorker* calls it “an online community devoted not to last night’s party or to next season’s iPod but to a higher good.”¹ Alternatively, the *National Review* earmarked it as “a stunning example of how the propaganda machine works.”² Whether one is singing its praises or hoping for its demise, it cannot be denied that the 2001 launch of Wikipedia.org left a permanent mark on history. The brainchild of entrepreneur and encyclopedia geek Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia quickly garnered go-to status as the place for information on the Internet, from the useful to the inane. More than half a million English entries cover a diverse range of topics, with searches from “swine influenza” to “Lady Gaga” launching to the top of its page rankings.³ Drawing more than 300 million unique visitors and hundreds of thousands of writers vying for editorial control over postings since its launch, Wikipedia continues to ignite debates on the fundamental nature of the Internet.

Wikipedia’s democratic approach to information exchange reflects the philosophy of the platform it is so intimately associated with. Openness and nondiscrimination, the Internet’s most basic principles, underlie the phenomenal success of

websites like Wikipedia. It is hard to imagine an Internet that looks different from the one that we browse today: an Internet that allows users to load an infinite number of Web pages and grants developers the freedom to create sites and services regardless of their content, source, or user.

Predictably, the few dominant telecommunications companies providing Internet access to Americans today would like to capitalize off of their relationship with users and businesses. Companies such as AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon see an opportunity to become the gatekeepers of Internet content by reserving faster, more preferential space for their own sites, and taxing other Web site owners who would like to continue to see their content reach Internet users.

The repercussions of this business model are already clear: *limited competition and stifled innovation*. If the Internet is not protected from this small but powerful group of telecommunications companies, Internet users will end up paying more for much less. Small Internet businesses will find themselves priced out of the market, and their loss will cause an already stressed economy to shed more jobs. The effects of this business

model would further widen the divide between those who can afford access to the Internet, and those who cannot connect to its wealth of information.

The Harmony Institute wrote *FTW! Net Neutrality For The Win: How to Use Entertainment and the Science of Influence to Save Your Internet* to inform communicators from the worlds of policy, education, advocacy, media, and entertainment on the threat now posed to the open Internet. In addition, *FTW!* aims to help these communicators create powerful public messages about this issue, based on persuasion techniques borrowed from the social sciences. The guide's two complimentary sections empower communicators with not only the knowledge, but also the tools necessary to create public narratives that underscore the urgent need to protect the open Internet.

In Part I, *FTW!* succinctly outlines the debate over the nature of the Internet and the role AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon play as America's largest ISPs. Next, an analysis of recent polling data on the public's perception of the Internet reveals two key audiences for communicators to target. Part I then outlines a basic communications strategy for creating narrative campaigns that should successfully reach these target audiences.

In Part II, we introduce the Harmony Institute methodology for entertainment-education, an effective technique for influencing an audience's un-

derstanding of and attitude toward a social issue. By providing the social science theories behind our recommendations, Part II arms communicators with a deeper understanding of how to truly move and motivate the target audiences.

Regardless of your stance on Wikipedia and the content its users generate, the ability of those surfing the Internet to access and contribute all manner of information is under immediate attack from the nation's largest ISPs. The American

“In trying to figure out who’s right, let’s forget about the Internet and look at KFC. The fast-food chain discriminates. It has an exclusive deal with Pepsi, and that seems fine to pretty much everyone. Now, let’s think about the nation’s highways. How would you feel if I-95 announced an exclusive deal with General Motors to provide a special “rush-hour” lane for GM cars only? That seems intuitively wrong. But what, if anything, is the difference between KFC and I-95? And which is a better model for the Internet?”

TIM WU | SLATE MAGAZINE | MAY 2006⁴

public must act now to ensure that open access to the Internet remains a fundamental right for every citizen. Advocating for net neutrality also means supporting free market competition in one of the nation's largest growth industries. Most importantly, it means protecting the voice of the average citizen, which should not be stifled due to the small size of his or her wallet. Communicators invested in this issue have a responsibility to translate the importance of an open Internet to their audiences. *FTW!* offers them the keys to do so, effectively and with lasting results.



THE FIGHT
for the
OPEN INTERNET



WHAT IS NET NEUTRALITY & WHO CARES?

Today, if you log on to the Internet at work, in your home, or even on your mobile phone, you are immediately entering into a relationship with an Internet service provider (ISP). ISPs maintain the infrastructure that enables computers and mobile phones to connect to the networks that create the Internet. In the days of dial-up, there were many ISPs, including those that operated locally by leasing the right to offer Internet access over telephone lines.

Developments in faster broadband access, the popularity of the Internet with the public, and the deregulation of the Internet under the Bush Administration FCC helped to consolidate the ISPs operating today. Larger telecommunication companies, mainly AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon, lobbied extensively for this deregulation, and the subsequent revised rules reclassified the Internet as an “information service,” enabling these companies to end the leasing of their DSL, cable, wireless, and fiber-optic lines to third parties.⁵

Under the old rules, the Internet was defined as a “telecommunication system,” making telecommunications companies the “common carri-

ers”. Common carriers are private companies that provide invaluable goods or services to the public. For instance, utility companies are generally designated common carriers because they provide heat, electricity, and other fundamental services to the public without discriminating between consumers or varying the quality of that service. Federal and state commissions regulate common carriers to ensure that these anti-discriminatory practices are adhered to. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the lead group that works to protect the interests of the public within the telecommunications industry.

Taking away the designation of common carrier for ISPs greatly reduced competition, leaving only a few local providers in business. AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable and Verizon now hold the lion’s share of the market and continue to lobby extensively for ever-greater control of Internet user and business access to their networks. These companies understand that the Internet, if defined as an information service rather than a public good, offers them a unique opportunity to capitalize off of its content, services, and applications.

The Internet was not always under the thumb

of ISPs; its design was guided by the principles of openness and nondiscrimination summarized in the term *network neutrality*.⁶ Beginning as the brainchild of academics and funded with taxpayer dollars from the National Science Foundation, the Internet of the 1960s served as a network for U.S. military computers. It wasn't until the 1990s that the Internet became popular among the public. An estimated quarter of the world's population is now online.

Net neutrality describes the current culture of the Internet, in which personal interest, not the financial motivations of ISPs, fuels traffic to Web sites. AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and

Verizon want to change this culture and serve as the gatekeepers of the Internet. They would like online businesses to pay for consumers to access their sites. As for consumers, ISPs want to offer tiered service plans much like today's cable subscriptions. A basic Internet service package would reduce access and limit the amount of content one could download/upload. For instance, this structure might allow you to view Facebook, but not your best friend's blog. Or you might have access to YouTube and Blogger, but could only upload a limited amount of content to these sites each subscription month.

ISPs and other net neutrality opponents argue



that the FCC, media reform groups, and concerned citizens have created a solution in search of a problem. Despite deregulation, the Internet has continued to boom both worldwide and, even more so, in the U.S. But the ensuing consolidation of ISPs has opened up the possibility for the major players to participate in anti-competitive practices, such as blocking much of the content offered

rights to all lawful services obsolete.

The FCC must now reposition itself and its relationship to the Internet. The likely result will be a reversal of the Internet as an “information service” to its former definition as a “telecommunications service,” again enabling oversight by the FCC. Although this will protect Internet users from ISPs that interfere with the information they deliver

over their networks, it is not the desired conclusion for AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon. The FCC will need broad public support to counteract the extensive and powerful lobbying campaign these telecommunications companies will wage.

With their eye on growth, ISPs argue that net neutrality regulation will discourage investment in their expanding networks, thus making it difficult for Inter-

net users to gain access. These arguments are unfounded. The FCC, among others, has shown time and again that regulation does more to spur investment than to stifle it.⁸ ISPs also argue that net neutrality rules make it difficult for them to manage basic congestion. As more and more users download larger files, watch TV, and stream movies online, these companies will continue to assert their need to manage consumer access to Internet content.

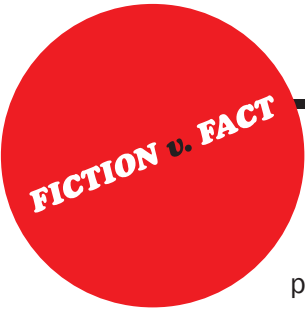
But net neutrality proponents are not trying to prevent ISPs from pursuing reasonable congestion management practices, preventing viruses and

“The remarkable social impact and economic success of the Internet is in many ways directly attributable to the architectural characteristics that were part of its design. The Internet was designed with no gatekeepers over new content or services ... [Just as] telephone companies cannot tell consumers who they can call; network operators should not dictate what people can do online.”

VINT CERF | GOOGLE VICE PRESIDENT & “CHIEF INTERNET EVANGELIST”

today to Internet users. Although deregulation only recently resulted in ISPs blocking sites and restricting content, the widespread reality of these practices is not far off.

In April 2010, the FCC lost a pinnacle court battle with Comcast, the nation’s largest cable-based ISP. The FCC challenged Comcast’s ability to restrict its subscribers’ access to the file-sharing protocol BitTorrent, a service that allows users to transfer large files like movies, music, and applications. The FCC lost because the Internet’s current legal definition as an “information service” made the FCC’s ability to protect Internet user



Fiction: Net neutrality is a solution in search of a problem.

Fact: ISPs have repeatedly stated their intention to violate the principles of the open Internet to reap profits from discrimination.

Fiction: New net neutrality policies would be the first time the government has regulated the Internet.

Fact: Since the birth of the Internet, the FCC has put in place clear rules to ensure fair competition and vibrant innovation.

Fiction: Net neutrality will discourage investment.

Fact: During the years following the Telecommunications Act of 1996, ISP investment rose dramatically as new regulations were implemented.

Fiction: Net neutrality will prevent ISPs from managing web congestion.

Fact: Proponents of net neutrality believe in ISP rights to network management techniques, as long as they are transparent to the public and preserve the openness of the current Internet.

Fiction: Net neutrality will stifle competition and innovation.

Fact: Without net neutrality protections, ISPs have a strong incentive to control the content that flows across their networks in a manner that reduces competition and consumer choice.

Fiction: Internet companies want net neutrality because it makes it free for them to deliver their content and services over other people's networks.

Fact: Today, Internet companies pay billions of dollars to transmit their content and services over the Internet, and consumers spend even more for the ability to access that content.

Fiction: The Obama administration wants the government to become an Internet traffic cop.

Fact: Net neutrality is the First Amendment of the Internet and protects free speech, as well as the consumer's choice of content and applications.

**For more on the misconceptions surrounding the open Internet, download S. Derek Turner's Digital Déjà Vu: Old Myths in the Network Neutrality Debate.⁹*



spam, and cracking down on illegal file sharing and piracy. Net neutrality policies mainly seek to assert the public right to freely access all lawful websites without any interference by an ISP, and provide a venue for inquiries into potential abuses of this right by ISPs.

Today, multiple legislative efforts are underway on both sides of the debate. Senator John McCain has introduced the Internet Freedom Act, legislation that would further deregulate the telecommunications industry and effectively block the FCC from issuing any policies that protect net neutrality.¹⁰ An opposing bill, the Internet Freedom Preservation Act, amends the Communications Act of 1996 to clarify and codify net neutrality principles into law. It also supports the FCC's list of "Internet Freedoms," including the freedom of expression, the lawful use of Internet applications and devices that pose no harm to a network, and policies that protect competition among service providers.¹¹

Unfortunately, ISPs and many of their political supporters are not solely motivated by a desire for greater profits and personal gain. The principles of transparency and free speech are also at stake. Because net neutrality allows all voices on the Internet to be heard, regardless of ideology, some perceive it as a threat, especially to many partisan political campaigns. In 2007, the threat of Internet censorship became a reality when AT&T cut audio during an online broadcast of a rock concert featuring the band Pearl Jam. The "technical error" occurred just as the lead singer began publicly criticizing then President George W. Bush.¹² AT&T stated that its contractors made the technical error; but after pressure from bloggers who cited previous instances of AT&T censorship, the company issued a broader apology.

Already there is a large coalition of people who support net neutrality and work to have it codified into law. Journalists, writers and bloggers, small and large Internet businesses, advocates, academics, and a wide majority of the public see the value of having an open Internet that encourages competition among content creators, service providers, and application developers. Supporters cite the many studies that show how open Internet policies encourage competitive marketplaces, drive innovation, and dramatically lower consumer pricing.

As the U.S. continues to fall behind other nations in terms of Internet speed, access, and price, the urgency of the current situation grows.¹³ While ISP profits exceed billions of dollars per year, there remains a large divide between those who can afford access to the Internet, with its opportunities for employment, education, and civic engagement, and those who cannot. Without net neutrality, this gap would surely widen, exacerbated by stifled innovation, fewer online businesses creating jobs, actively censored news and information sources, and skewed public discourse.

Net neutrality needs active spokespeople who are invested in supporting federal policy-making that will ensure the open Internet remains a reality. Understanding the value of net neutrality is only the first step. Communicators must then transmit this information to the public in a way that motivates understanding and action. Chapter Two will address the public's opinion of the Internet, ISPs, and net neutrality as a principle and a policy. With this information, communicators can define their target audiences, as discussed in Chapter Three, and use the recommendations presented in Chapter Four to create persuasive open Internet campaigns.



WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS

Narrative campaigns that resonate with an audience on a personal level and offer clear, compelling messages make the strongest impression. Therefore, communicators need to understand what motivates their target audience, what people know and don't know, what people believe is true or important. Surveys can help communicators better understand their target population.

In November 2009, the *Free Press National Poll on Internet Usage and Net Neutrality* was commissioned to explore how the American public views the Internet, including both its economic and social function, and the issue of net neutrality. We summarize the results below. Although unfamiliar with the term net neutrality, the majority of polltakers overwhelmingly recognized it as the guiding principle of the Internet and wanted to keep it that way.

INTERNET USAGE

- More than 75% of the public have access to the Internet in their home; some 90% of these connections are high speed.
- Almost 70% of home users access the Internet through a wireless connection and spend over five hours a week online for personal, non-work related activities.
- Of those with Internet at home, 15% spend over 20 hours online per week for personal use. Of the 25% who do not have access to the Internet at home, or who do not have a high-speed connection, the numbers are split: 37% state that they do not desire these services, and 33% state that they want access but cannot afford it.
- Among respondents under 40 years old, 70% reported frequently reading news online, 61% reported frequently watching videos online, 60% reported frequent use of social networking sites, and 60% said they regularly search for jobs online.

VIEWS ON ISPS, COSTS VS. SERVICES, & REGULATION

- As is evident in other national samples, AT&T remains the nation's leading ISP, with 20% of home subscribers saying they are customers of the telecommunications giant. Comcast is the second largest ISP in terms of subscribers.
- Close to 64% of those with Internet in their homes said they get access through one of the big four telecommunications companies (AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable and Verizon), rather than from a local or regional provider.
- The public tends to have a favorable view of their current telephone company, cable or satellite provider, mobile provider, and ISP. AT&T was favored by the majority of respondents, followed closely by Verizon. Of the major ISPs, Comcast rated least favorable with only 35% in support.
- When asked about ISP satisfaction, respondents are most concerned with cost and choice and least concerned with customer support.
- Respondents were not in favor of paying more for faster service. More than 80% of the public stated that even if they had access to faster service than what they currently subscribe to, they would not pay more to secure it.
- Almost 50% believe that the Internet is a public service regulated by the government, with slightly less than 50% stating it is a resource owned by private companies.
- When asked about regulation, more than 50% of the public argued that, as a private resource, the Internet should not be regulated by the federal government.

- Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that all Web sites should be treated the same without interference by ISPs.

NET NEUTRALITY

- More than 80% of the public had neither seen nor heard anything about net neutrality. Yet core net neutrality concerns such as rising costs, the lack of small business protections, consumer restrictions, and the preferential treatment of ISP supported sites all rated as key concerns.
- After learning the definition of net neutrality, public support for it stood at 53% versus 30% opposed. After hearing four positive messages and three negative messages associated with net neutrality, support increased to 67%, while opposition decreased to 24%.

CONCERNS & PRIORITIES

- The public is most concerned with keeping Internet access affordable, ensuring online advantages for small businesses, and expanding Internet access to poor communities.
- The opposition's frequently cited concern that video traffic slows down connection speed for all consumers also resonates, with more than 55% of the public responding they are concerned about this.
- Although respondents supported net neutrality arguments, including treating all Web sites the same, preventing ISPs from slowing down Web sites that don't pay a fee, expanding access to rural areas, allowing international competition, and ensuring fast download speeds, they felt that reliability, privacy, and affordability were paramount.

-
- Privacy issues, such as being spied on online, rated the highest with almost 80% of the public expressing concern.

SUMMARY

Those who responded to the November 2009 poll generally had a favorable view of their ISP, but were split in their view of the government's role with regard to the Internet. Therefore, it is important for communicators to learn the opinion ratings for policy makers and governing bodies before deciding which political personalities, if any, should be associated with an open Internet campaign. For example, although President Obama is an ardent supporter of the open Internet, low approval ratings at the national and local level may make him a problematic spokesperson for the cause.

It is important to remember that although most consumers care about cost and choice, they generally do not want to pay more for better cover-

age than what they now receive. Despite their favorable view of ISPs, Americans overwhelmingly agree that net neutrality should be the guiding principle for the Internet. Although the term is still relatively unfamiliar among Americans, when described in detail, the public believes that their ISP should treat all Internet traffic equally.

In response to the current economic situation, individuals are primarily concerned with the role that the Internet can play in supporting small businesses and creating jobs. Only privacy outranked the importance of reliability and affordability of Internet access, which was paramount to all other service concerns.

Understanding the public's view of the Internet, ISPs, and net neutrality is just the beginning. From there, communicators must determine the scope and funding realities of a campaign. Once a campaign's capacity is established, additional information on core and persuadable audiences can further narrow the narrative needed and help define the appropriate frames for messaging, as we will explore in the next chapter.

3

WHO TO TALK TO & HOW TO TALK TO THEM

Knowing which audiences are most likely to respond increases the potential for effective messaging that can lead to real policy changes. Zeroing in on a target audience for messaging also makes best use of the finite resources of most organizations. Based on the survey and its corresponding demographic information, two groups stand out as most likely to support net neutrality.

We call the first of these two groups “core supporters” because of their comfort and facility with the Internet, belief in its role as a public service, and familiarity with the net neutrality issue. These core supporters are heavy Internet users, spending more than 20 hours a week on personal, rather than professional, use. Between the ages of 18 and 39, predominantly male, Caucasian, and liberal leaning, many core supporters are registered Democrats and have an annual household income of over \$100k per year.

Core supporters should be offered compelling messages about how ISPs seek to change their Internet experience. It should include steps they

can take immediately to prevent these companies from controlling the content, applications, and services they use.

We call the second group “persuadables.” This group did not identify net neutrality as either a problem or solution until exposed to a measured debate on the issue. But after learning about net neutrality and the case for an open Internet, this group responded with full support. Demographically, persuadables tend to be African Americans and/or women, unmarried, and liberal. Many baby boomers, or those 60 years old and over, also fall into the persuadable category. A significant number of those outlined above reside in the southern region of the U.S. or in rural areas. Persuadables make annual household incomes (\$30k-\$50k) that are considerably lower than core supporters.

Both net neutrality advocates and those campaigning for the major ISPs are targeting persuadables. Many persuadables may feel unsure about which camp is truly invested in protecting their interests. Messaging for this group should first

clearly define net neutrality, uncovering who has constructed competing definitions and why. Messages should then focus on publicizing the actions required to save the open Internet.

The following chapter offers concise recommendations for messaging based on the Harmony Institute methodology outlined in Part II of this guide.

4

SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS for NET NEUTRALITY CAMPAIGNS

The following recommendations offer a basic communications strategy for creating narrative campaigns that successfully reach both core and persuadable audiences. Entertainment creators and communicators have successfully used many of these ideas for decades, although we have tailored them to inform U.S. audiences about the crises facing Internet users today. Some are intuitive, and some run counter to innate beliefs about what moves and motivates people. We concisely explain the applied social theory in each recommendation and include an example or suggestion for implementing it within narrative.

These recommendations can be applied to new projects, as well as to existing campaigns. They can serve communications efforts directly related to net neutrality or to the large number of issues that are influenced by having an open discourse and accessible information available online. Communicators should consider the broad range of media platforms for telling the story of net neutrality, from film and television to mobile phones and comic books.

1 DON'T ALLOW ISPS TO SCARE WITH SCARCITY

ISPs currently argue that net neutrality slows down connection speeds and limits access through network congestion. Combat these arguments by reframing them. Narrate the scarcity of content, information, and services that would occur without net neutrality. Arguments for the open Internet should highlight the threat ISP monopolies have on affordability, economic opportunity, and privacy for individual Internet users and businesses.

EXAMPLE

Creating a system that allows ISPs to control the flow of content over the Internet will not make it more affordable for consumers. ISPs already make billions of dollars in profit each year, providing enough capital to expand their networks to many rural and underrepresented communities, and yet they do not. ISPs see no benefit for them in creating affordable access and helping close

the digital divide. In fact, the nation's largest telecommunications companies brought in over \$21 billion in revenue for 2009, while the U.S. fell to 22nd place worldwide in terms of average broadband penetration, just barely ahead of the isolated island countries of Barbados and the Faroe Islands. Today the U.S. ranks 14th in average download speed, 10 times slower than Japan, the international leader. And the monthly cost of broadband in the U.S. is only slightly less expensive than the Internet in Hungary and Poland.¹⁴

What is in their interest? Moving small online businesses to the "slow-lane" of Internet traffic, while charging businesses that can afford ISPs fees to connect consumers to their sites at premium speeds. Eventually smaller businesses, as well as news organizations and other nonprofit content creators, will find themselves priced out of the

Internet market altogether, much like the current state of radio and television. If Google had been conceived under this system, it is unlikely that the mighty search engine that was once a little start-up would have grown to employ the more than 20,000 people that work there today.

When ISPs enjoy free reign to control the content flowing through their pipelines, Internet users will also see an increased threat to their online privacy. AT&T has already met with record and studio executives to discuss developing mechanisms that allow them to monitor users for what they argue is illegal activity.¹⁵ ISPs have developed tools like deep packet inspection, which logs all content, sites, and services Internet users access, to help them discriminate between Web sites, filtering to users what they deem appropriate.

PROMOTION	versus	PREVENTION¹⁶
ideal		careful
attain(ment)		maintenance
maximize gains		minimize losses
hope		cautious
wish		responsibility
advance(ment)		protect(ion)
eager(ness)		vigilant/vigilance
avoid missed opportunities		avoiding mistakes
promote		prevent
aspire/aspiration		obligation
support		defend
nurture		secure
add		must
open		stop

2 DEFEND AGAINST DISASTER

In most situations, persuasive messages are presented in one of two ways. People either look to prevent some future consequence or seek to promote an ideal situation. Currently the public likes the way the Internet works. Internet users and businesses generally have a positive relationship with their ISP and believe they can access what they want, when they want it.

Thus, “prevention” focused words should be at the core of a communications campaign. Messaging should target supporters by asking them to act vigilantly to “prevent” or “minimize” the potential for a centrally controlled Internet. Given that survey respondents did not respond well to government intervention and policymaking, framing legislative activity as a “public responsibility” may persuade more people to contact their legislators.

EXAMPLE

Communicators should carefully choose the wording they use in a narrative. Matching the words to the inclination of your audience toward either a promotion or prevention focus will increase their responsiveness. On the previous page we list the words that will resonate with either an audience inclined to promote the success of the open Internet or one that would simply like to maintain (prevent changes to) the current system.

3 CHALLENGE HOW PEOPLE VIEW THE INTERNET

Most people think of the Internet in terms of

private ownership. The ultimate goal of a narrative campaign should be to update the image of the Internet from a privilege like property ownership, to a public resource like telephone networks. Today, if you subscribe to long distance telephone service through AT&T, the telecommunications giant cannot tell you whom you can or cannot call. Neither should they be allowed to tell you which Web sites you can or cannot access. Reframing how people view the Internet will help preserve this resource under the same laws as those that govern common carriers.

EXAMPLE

Narrative media has helped update our current cultural understanding on many issues, including hot button topics like race and gender equality. In the 1970s, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* greatly influenced the public’s perception of single women. Only a few years prior to the launch of one of television’s most successful sitcoms, it was considered distasteful for a woman to live alone in the city or to compete with men in the workplace. Mary Tyler Moore encouraged a broader understanding of a woman’s role in society, between genders and across multiple generations, simply by exposing the public to a respectable character living a then-alternative lifestyle. Everyday interactions between the characters on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* included discussing gender equality issues, as opposed to communicating them like a public service announcement to viewers.

Illustrating the challenges that a world without net neutrality would pose does not require discussing the topic in direct dialog. Embedding storylines that show the barriers people face without access to the Internet leaves a more lasting

impression. For instance, many rural populations lack access and thus find themselves left out of Internet discussions on policy issues ranging from health care to immigration, digital conversations that greatly influence public debate. Another storyline might show how the un-and-under employed cannot find jobs because they lack Internet access and/or skills. Just as today it would be absurd to argue that roads and other utilities are a private privilege of the elite, narrative entertainment can reframe the Internet as a service that has become integral to basic functioning in our society. The conclusion of such storylines attests to how it is in society's best interest to protect open access to all Websites and services.

4 MAKE IT PERSONAL

The most inspiring stories keep narratives local. Discussing the dominate ISP in an area by name, talking about how lives will be affected by the loss of an open Internet instead of “regulation” and “the government,” and having characters that we already know and trust talk about the issue, are excellent ways to ground the fight for the open Internet in the audience's daily life.

EXAMPLE

Documentaries often succeed at personalizing narrative because they follow the lives of real people and chronicle public struggles with modern institutions and social problems. Unlike most mainstream Hollywood films and television shows, documentaries rely on depicting the nuances of an issue from multiple perspectives. Still, the most effective documentaries of our day have relied heavily on the tradition of storytelling to create

lasting impact. The 2004 documentary *Super Size Me*, which captured filmmaker Morgan Spurlock's personal journey into the fast-food industry, greatly influenced public perception of the American diet because it adhered to the principles outlined above.

The film's narrative worked on multiple levels; it opened up the conversation about illness and obesity by naming a recognizable culprit (McDonald's), featured balanced arguments from cultural personalities to medical experts, and recorded Spurlock, along with his family and friends, as they struggled to stay healthy and sane through the experience. The narrative was so successful that it influenced a radical change to McDonalds' menu and corporate practices (including increased transparency of meat sources and worker's rights).

Creating narratives supporting open Internet policies does not tie a storyteller to the fictional world. Highlighting the real-world supporters of net neutrality can amplify a narrative message and lead to personal relevance for a broad audience. Net neutrality supporters comprise a broad group, including online businesses like Google, Amazon, and Yahoo; politicians and thought-leaders like President Obama, Harvard Law Professor and Creative Commons founder Lawrence Lessig, and Columbia Law Professor and *Slate Magazine* contributor Tim Wu; public interest organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union, Gun Owners of America, and the Parents Television Council; and celebrities like *The Daily Show* host Jon Stewart, the musician Moby, and actor Tim Reid (*That 70's Show*). By showing that net neutrality serves all Americans, regardless of ideology, communicators amplify the message that there is far-reaching support among characters regularly regarded as role models and public leaders.

5 **MAGNIFY YOUR MESSAGE IN GROUPS**

Expanding conversations about net neutrality to a group or discussion with a wide range of knowledge, skill, and personal experience enables people to process difficult or confusing information in a way that exceeds their individual capacity. Bringing people together to discuss the narrative of a communications campaign can help a group develop social cohesion and take concrete steps for advocacy that fit in with immediate needs.

EXAMPLE

The impact of the 2005 drama *North Country* went far beyond the box office, eventually reaching Capitol Hill. At the time of its release, Congress was debating renewal of the Violence Against Women Act, legislation passed in 1994 and labeled by one women's rights group as "the greatest breakthrough in civil rights for women in nearly two decades."¹⁷

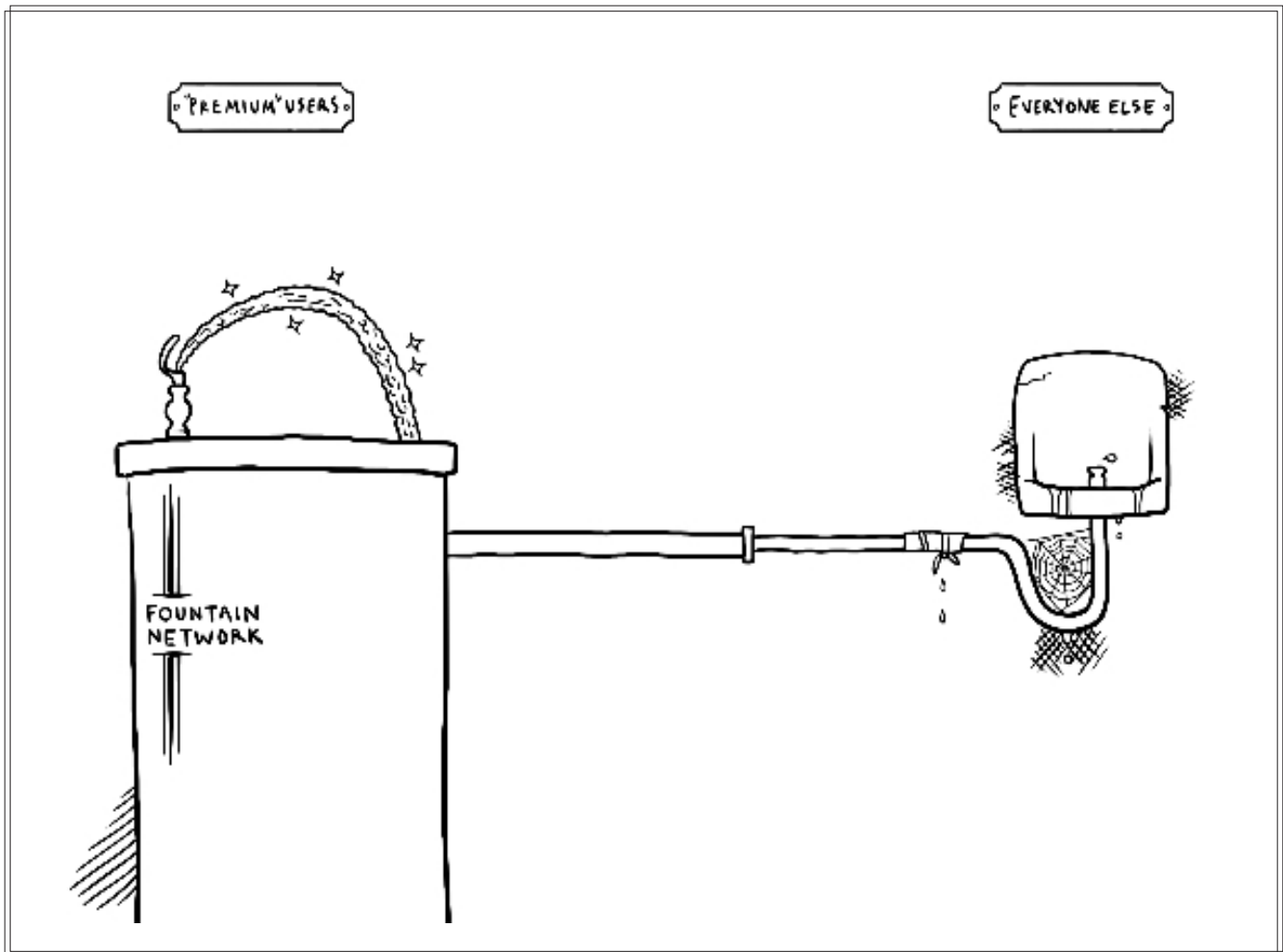
Based on the real-life story of one woman's battle against harassment in a Minnesota mine, the film was credited with impacting the renewal of the Act by spurring a coordinated outreach program. Jeff Skoll, founder of Participant Media, explained, "It was a film that starred Charlize Theron, and it was about women's rights, women's empowerment, domestic violence, and so on. We released the film at the same time that Congress was debating the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act, and with screenings on the Hill, and discussions with our social sector partners like the National Organization of Women, the film was widely credited with influencing the successful renewal of the Act. That to me spoke volumes."¹⁸

North Country's release was effectively timed with a major policy debate in Washington and, in turn, lived up to Participant Media's mission of positively impacting social issues. Today the FCC, along with many of the nation's leading political figures, is debating the merits of legislative efforts that will influence the Internet for years to come. Entertainment projects that illuminate the concerns of today's Internet users and of businesses advocating for net neutrality have the greatest potential to shape the debate if released in the coming year.

6 **ASK FOR A COMMITMENT MORE THAN ONCE**

Entertainment campaigns are effective at changing behavior when they have associated action strategies for their audience. Below is a list of actions the public can take today to preserve the open Internet:

- Join a coalition of supporters, such as SavetheInternet.com
- Call or write state and congressional leaders and explain why they should endorse net neutrality
- Sign petitions directed to Congressional leaders in support of the Internet Freedom Preservation Act
- Spread the word by e-mail/Twitter/Facebook
- Donate money to organizations lobbying for the open Internet
- Support new FCC rules that will ensure net neutrality for all Internet users and businesses at OpenInternet.gov



7 TELL THE STORY

The story of the open Internet is a story about civil liberties and economic justice. Net neutrality is not solely a tech or policy issue, but also encompasses maintaining basic needs and rights. Just as every entertainment writer's target audience will differ, so too must the characters' experiences with access to the open Internet if these narratives are to resonate. Creating narratives about how the Internet impacts people's lives in positive and profound ways will be more effective in build-

ing awareness and instigating action than discussing this critical issue from a cognitive or policy viewpoint.

Although the entertainment examples outlined in this guide constitute mainly television and film, there are countless platforms for storytelling. When considering your target audience for messaging, it is important to think critically about the most effective media platform to reach them. Remember, the most obvious is not always the most effective.

EXAMPLES

- Tell stories of the many children who fall behind in school because they lack access to the Internet in their homes or are unable to use it effectively.
- Narrate the lives of the elderly or underemployed, who find themselves at a disadvantage when the only way to fill out a job application or efficiently request public and private services is by going online.
- Talk about small business owners who risk financial ruin if they cannot reach customers because their Web site is blocked or slowed down.
- Seek out the stories of grassroots campaigners who, if censored online by ISPs, would not be able to connect with their constituencies, threatening their political or social struggles.

We encourage communicators and the concerned public to invest in this conversation by creating entertainment that promotes the open Internet. Generating broad public support for this issue is the only way policy makers will take notice, counteracting the pressure from another powerful constituency—ISPs. At a time when Americans grapple with an unstable economy, violent conflict abroad, and divisive issues such as health care, education, and immigration reform at home, it would be easy to allow concern over net neutrality to take a back seat. But once one understands how the open Internet fundamentally influences every facet of our lives, it is clear net neutrality should become a national priority. We hope that communicators will help voice this opinion through one of the greatest, most prevalent tools at their disposal—narrative entertainment.

Part II of *FTW!* focuses on the Harmony Institute methodology for creating persuasive entertainment-education campaigns, as outlined in Chapter Five. Chapter Six explains the behavioral science theories that inform the above recommendations, and Chapter Seven describes how to measure the impact of a narrative campaign.



“Net neutrality” is neither as intimidating nor as complex as it sounds. The seemingly technical term simply describes the current culture of the Internet, in which personal interest fuels traffic to Web sites. The few dominant telecommunications companies providing Internet access to Americans today would like to change this culture in order to capitalize off of their relationship with the public and online businesses.

Internet service providers (ISPs) like AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon are eager to become the gatekeepers of Internet content; reserving faster, more preferential space for their own sites while taxing other Web site owners who would like to continue seeing their content reach Internet users. ISPs look to offer “tiered” service packages to consumers, much like today’s cable and satellite television. Net neutrality, in principle, protects the public and online businesses from ISPs and other interests that would like to restrict Internet access in this way.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SAVE THE OPEN INTERNET?

Net neutrality is what makes the current Internet “open.” Without net neutrality rules at the federal level, these ISPs have the power to close off certain Web sites and services from Internet users, discriminating between online content as they see fit. A closed Internet structure will lead to limited competition and stifled innovation.

If the Internet is not protected from this small but powerful group of telecommunications companies, Internet users will end up paying more for much less. Small Internet businesses will find themselves priced out of the market, and their loss will cause an already stressed economy to shed more jobs. The effects of this business model would further widen the divide between those who can afford access to the Internet and those who cannot connect to its wealth of information.

Today, multiple policy efforts are underway on both

sides of the debate. The Internet Freedom Preservation Act and a campaign for revisions to current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules would protect and codify net neutrality principles into law. Today these efforts need active spokespeople who are invested in supporting federal policy-making to ensure the open Internet that we all benefit from remains a reality.

WHO SHOULD I TARGET IN A PUBLIC OUTREACH CAMPAIGN?

Already there is a large coalition of people who support net neutrality and are working to codify it into law. Journalists, writers and bloggers, small and large Internet businesses, advocates, academics, and a wide majority of the public see the value of having an open Internet that encourages competition among content creators, service providers, and application developers. Still, “net neutrality” has yet to become a household term; many Internet users and online businesses are unaware that the Internet they access each day is in jeopardy.

After a broad survey of potential audiences, ranging from those unfamiliar with the current debate over the open Internet to those already campaigning, two main groups are most likely to support net neutrality policy-making. We highlight the profiles for “core supporters” and “persuadables” below because marketing and behavioral science research shows that zeroing in on target audiences for communication campaigns increases the potential for effective messaging that can lead to real policy changes.

CORE SUPPORTERS

- Ages 18-39
- Male, Caucasian, and registered Democrat
- Over \$100k yearly household income
- High level of media and Internet literacy
- See the Internet as a public service just like neighborhood utilities or the nation's highways
- Familiar with "net neutrality" as a principle and a term
- Spend more than 20 hours a week online for personal use

PERSUADABLES

- Ages 18-39 or over 60
- Predominantly African American or female
- Self-assign as liberal
- Unmarried
- Live in the U.S. South or rural areas
- Annual household incomes of between \$30k-\$50k
- Unfamiliar with "net neutrality" as a principle and term until exposed to a measured debate

HOW CAN I REACH THEM? SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NARRATIVE COMMUNICATION

The following recommendations offer a basic communications strategy for creating narrative campaigns that successfully reach both core and persuadable audiences. Entertainment creators and communicators have successfully used many of these ideas for decades, although we have tailored them to inform U.S. audiences about the crises facing Internet users today. Some are intuitive, and some run counter to innate beliefs about what moves and motivates people. We concisely explain the applied social theory in each

recommendation and include an example or suggestion for implementing it within narrative.

These recommendations can be applied to new projects, as well as to existing campaigns. They can serve communications efforts directly related to net neutrality or to the large number of issues that are influenced by having an open discourse and accessible information available online. Communicators should consider the broad range of media platforms for telling the story of net neutrality, from film and television to mobile phones and comic books.

1 DON'T ALLOW ISPS TO SCARE WITH SCARCITY

ISPs currently argue that net neutrality slows down connection speeds and limits access through network congestion. Combat these arguments by reframing them. Narrate the scarcity of content, information, and services that would occur without net neutrality. Arguments for the open Internet should highlight the threat ISP monopolies have on affordability, economic opportunity, and privacy for individual Internet users and businesses.

EXAMPLES

- ISPs make billions of dollars in profit each year, but have yet to expand their networks to many rural and underrepresented communities.
 - Without net neutrality policies, the U.S. has fallen to 22nd place worldwide in terms of average broadband penetration, ranks 14th in average download speed (10 times slower than Japan), and experiences broadband prices only slightly less expensive than the cost of Internet access in Hungary and Poland.
 - Without net neutrality policies, small online businesses will find themselves allocated to the "slow-lane" of Internet traffic. If Google had been conceived under this system, it is unlikely that it would have grown to employ the more than 20,000 people that work there today.
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- Privacy is at risk when the Internet is managed by a monopoly of ISPs. Tools that could be widely used without net neutrality rules, like deep packet inspection, log all content, sites, and services Internet users access, and have the potential to lead to content censorship or discrimination.

2 DEFEND AGAINST DISASTER

Today, Internet users and businesses generally have a positive relationship with their ISP and believe they can access what they want, when they want it. Messaging should thus target supporters by asking them to act vigilantly to “prevent”

or “minimize” the potential for a centrally controlled Internet. Included is a list of “prevention” focused words that should be at the core of a communications campaign.

careful
maintenance
minimize losses
cautious
responsibility
protect(ion)
vigilant/vigilance
prevent
obligation
defend
secure
must
stop
avoiding mistakes

3 CHALLENGE HOW PEOPLE VIEW THE INTERNET

Most people think of the Internet in terms of private ownership. The ultimate goal of a narrative campaign should be to update the image of the Internet from a privilege like property ownership to a public resource like telephone networks. Today, if you subscribe to long

distance telephone service through AT&T, the telecommunications giant cannot tell you whom you can or cannot call. Neither should they be allowed to tell you which Web sites you can or cannot access. Internet networks deserve protection under the same laws as other services provided by common carriers.

4 MAKE IT PERSONAL

The most inspiring stories keep narratives local. Discussing the dominate ISP in an area by name, talking about how lives will be affected by the loss of an open Internet instead of “regulation” and “the government,” and having characters that we already know and trust talk about the issue, are excellent ways to ground the fight for the open Internet in the audience’s daily life.

5 MAGNIFY YOUR MESSAGE IN GROUPS

Expanding conversations about net neutrality to a group or discussion with a wide range of knowledge, skill, and personal experience enables people to process difficult or confusing information in a way that exceeds their individual capacity. Public gatherings as well as those mediated through the Internet (including social networking sites and message boards) can serve both small community projects to national outreach programs.

6 ASK FOR A COMMITMENT MORE THAN ONCE

Entertainment campaigns are effective at changing behavior when they have specific action strategies for their audience. Below is a list of actions the public can take today to preserve the open Internet:

- Join a coalition of supporters, such as SavetheInternet.com
 - Call or write state and congressional leaders and explain why they should endorse net neutrality
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- Sign petitions directed to Congressional leaders in support of the Internet Freedom Preservation Act
 - Spread the word by e-mail/Twitter/Facebook
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The story of the open Internet is a story about civil liberties and economic justice. Net neutrality is not solely a tech or policy issue; it's about maintaining basic needs and rights. Every entertainment writer's target audience will differ; and so too must the characters' experiences with access to an open Internet if these narratives are to resonate. Creating narratives about how the Internet impacts people's lives in positive and profound ways will be more effective than taking a cognitive or policy viewpoint.

EXAMPLES

- Tell stories of the many children who fall behind in school because they lack access to the Internet in their homes or are unable to use it effectively.
- Narrate the lives of the elderly or underemployed, who find themselves at a disadvantage when the only way to fill out a job application or efficiently request public and private services is by going online.
- Talk about small business owners who risk financial ruin if they cannot reach customers because their Web site is blocked or slowed down.
- Seek out the stories of grassroots campaigners who, if censored online by ISPs, would not be able to connect with their constituencies, threatening their political or social struggles.

CONCLUSION

There are no limits to how the fight for the open Internet can be incorporated into new and existing entertainment storylines. *FTW! Net Neutrality For The Win: How Entertainment and the Science of Influence Can Save Your Internet* is here to help communicators from policy, education, advocacy, media, and entertainment harness the power of mainstream media, offering U.S. audiences entertainment that educates them on net neutrality and provides concrete ways they can support the cause.

Advertisers regularly take advantage of the reach and influence of entertainment. But net neutrality supporters from a variety of backgrounds have yet to tap its potential for incorporating social messages. Creating entertainment with the Harmony Institute methodology will help communicators connect with viewers on both a conscious and emotional level, providing a channel to significantly influence social change and keeping the Internet open and equal for all.



The Harmony Institute Method for ENTERTAINMENT- EDUCATION

Concern about net neutrality stems from an awareness that supporting fair, open access to the Internet is one of the most powerful ways to foster democracy, nurture innovation, and provide access to services that have the potential to enhance our public and private lives.

By strategically promoting net neutrality among entertainment audiences, communicators are not simply promoting an open Internet, but investing in a rich platform for national debate on issues from domestic health care reform to international energy policy—issues that are greatly influenced by these online conversations.

Part II of *FTW! Net Neutrality For The Win: How to Use Entertainment and the Science of Influence to Save Your Internet* will introduce communicators to a new methodology created by the Harmony Institute for incorporating social issues into entertainment, one that supports dialog and behavior change through narrative entertainment. Illustrating strategies derived from the behavioral sciences, this guide is written for policy makers, educators, advocates, media professionals, and entertainment creators who seek a comprehensive framework for embracing entertainment as an effective advocacy tool.



5

WHAT IS ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION?

Entertainment-education defines a growing number of strategies for incorporating social messages into popular entertainment. This chapter describes how organizations have used mass media to expand their audiences, reinforce positive behaviors, and create more impactful messages.

One such example is the Harvard Alcohol Project, which from 1988-1994 developed one of the most successful entertainment-education campaigns to date by partnering with Hollywood screenwriters from shows like *Cheers*, *L.A. Law*, and *The Cosby Show* to create storylines that included references to “designated drivers.” The campaign garnered support from advocates of the issue, and rapidly began influencing public behavior. During its initial four-

“The [Harvard Alcohol Project] broke new ground when TV writers agreed to insert drunken driving prevention messages, including frequent references to designated drivers, into scripts of top-rated television programs ... Entertainment not only mirrors social reality, but also helps shape it by depicting what constitutes popular opinion, by influencing people’s perceptions of the roles and behaviors that are appropriate to members of a culture, and by modeling specific behaviors. When the campaign began in late 1988, annual alcohol-related traffic fatalities stood at 23,626. By 1994, fatalities had declined by 30%.”

**JAY WINSTEN, PH.D.
DIRECTOR OF HARVARD CENTER
FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATION¹⁸**

year run, annual drunk driving fatalities declined 24%, compared to no change during the three years prior.²⁰

In the last fifteen years, entertainment creators and educators have created sophisticated methods for developing narratives that engage audiences in social issues. The Harmony Institute method sets itself apart from previous efforts by supplementing existing frameworks with behavioral science research. Developed with oversight from a broad network of academics in psychology, sociology, economics, and public policy, this science-based approach uses applied theory to reveal cognitive processes, choice and decision-making models, and, most importantly, ideas for long-term behavior change to assist communicators in creating compelling campaigns.

The use of behavioral science by media makers has been successfully employed in Latin America through telenovas, or Spanish language soap operas. One such example is *Ven Conmigo*, or *Come with Me*, which featured a storyline centered on an elderly man grappling with illiteracy. After struggling to read letters sent from a favorite granddaughter, the grandfather seeks out a public literacy program. Upon graduation he is finally able to, albeit through tearful eyes, pour over her correspondence.

Social modeling and narrative transportation can greatly influence the outcome of an advocacy campaign. Mexico has a national literacy curriculum that at the start of the series had registered 99,000 students. By its finale, 840,000 people had registered for the courses, an increase of 848% from the start of the series.²¹

Unlike previous entertainment-education programs, the method developed at the Harmony Institute focuses on communicating primarily through mass media projects. With a strong belief that popular movies, television shows, and other

entertainment products have great impact on behavior, the Institute supports collaboration with franchises that have existing audiences and are a source of popular discussion.

Lastly, the Institute encourages comprehensive impact evaluation. It is now understood that media with valuable social and environmental messages should present an opportunity for building compelling case studies of the power of applied theory. By setting up modes of evaluation during the brainstorming phase, communicators can chart the successes and failures of messaging and the immediate and long-term impact of narrative. The Harmony Institute specializes in this type of research and looks forward to working with communicators contributing to this emerging field.

HARMONY INSTITUTE'S FOUR STEPS TO INTEGRATING BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE INTO ENTERTAINMENT

STEP ONE:

BACKGROUND RESEARCH begins with a review of the specific social issue to be addressed. It is essential that communicators develop a comprehensive understanding of the issue and examine different perspectives and opinions. Communicators should contact leading organizations working on the issue that can offer goals and incentives for behavior change in the audience. This process also highlights who may be receptive to messaging and the types of media they consume.

STEP TWO:

LOCATE AUDIENCES deals with finding and understanding the people who need to take action for concrete change to happen. The most

effective campaigns target a combination of core and persuadable audiences. Communicators can identify these groups via surveys, focus groups, and information gathered by supporting organizations. Understanding the audience helps communicators select the most appropriate behavioral science models to employ. It also helps determine the preferred media channels (mobile phone, Internet, television, film, print) for transmitting the message to a specific audience.

STEP THREE:

CREATE MESSAGES focuses on developing the narratives that will engage audiences in the issue. Ideas from behavioral science are applied

with a firm understanding of the issue and its audience to maximize the effect of a campaign for change.

STEP FOUR:

EVALUATE is concerned with understanding and documenting the effects of a narrative. Drawing up case studies and best practices illuminates the valuable lessons learned from a media project.

The next chapter explores current behavioral and persuasion theory and how it applies to audiences of entertainment.



INFLUENCING THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT

In 1998 NBC introduced a primetime sitcom about a single woman and her male best friend living together in a Manhattan apartment to its line-up. *Will & Grace* chronicled the comedic escapades of a group of thirty-something, career-oriented friends. It also happened that two of the main characters were homosexual men.

Over a decade later and countless hours of editorializing, homosexual characters on major network television are commonplace, and the effects of *Will & Grace* on the attitudes toward and perceptions of gays in America is widely recognized. In a 2006 study, researchers found that the sitcom had the strongest influence on reducing sexual prejudice among those viewers who had the fewest direct gay contacts, the same group of respondents who reported having the highest feelings of prejudice toward homosexuals before viewing the show. In a balanced pool of respondents, a range consisting of those who reported feeling highly prejudiced toward gays and those reporting little-to-no prejudice, 60% felt that the show encouraged them to think more positively about homosexuals.²²

Even with successes like *Will & Grace*, nar-

rative is still largely untapped in its potential to motivate change and increase awareness. Mainstream entertainment influences our perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, often in the name of consumption. But the extent and quality of the media we consume can also profoundly influence our social attitudes. Social learning theory illustrates that behavior change can be achieved through an individual's connection to vicarious experiences.

The following sections will explore behavioral theories that, when applied to narrative, have the potential to significantly influence the effects of a social issue campaign.

FRAMING

Embedded in the information we receive each day, from newspaper headlines to medical results, are framed messages. Some frames are unconscious, others intentional. Framing is most simply an attempt to achieve a desired interpretation of an issue or event. By contextualizing your message in a way that resonates with a target audience, the

twin goals of defining an issue and motivating a particular group to act become much more likely to succeed.²³

For example, the current debate on net neutrality employs frames that resonate with Americans and their value system. Senator John McCain's bill, the "Internet Freedom Act," frames deregulation as freeing the Internet from the dominant hand of Washington. This frame does not fit the social consequences of the policy, since the Internet Freedom Act would enable major ISPs to centralize Internet content, services, and applications. "Freedom" and its connotations are widely valued by Americans, and its use by opponents of net neutrality distorts the argument. Framing the fight for net neutrality as an issue of "fairness" or of "protecting the middle class" can help re-frame a debate currently centered on partisan definitions of "freedom."

PROMOTION VS. PREVENTION

Determining how one would like an audience to perceive a social issue is just the first step in creating appropriate frames. Communicators must also understand which frames will motivate a particular audience to act. As discussed in Chapter Four, people generally approach their goals in one of two different ways. Prevention-focused people seek to maintain the status quo or to do what ought to be done. Promotion-focused people seek progress, seeing their goal as the ideal result. Research shows that tailoring messages to a person's particular focus increases the likelihood for agreement and response.

Research on net neutrality shows that the public is generally less concerned with gaining faster, more affordable service (a promotion focus). Rather, they prefer maintaining the cost

and connection speeds currently offered by their ISP (a prevention focus). Therefore, a message directed to small businesses owners, for instance, who have a vested stake in the open Internet but are as yet unaware of the net neutrality debate, should discuss the need to "defend" (as opposed to "attain") the open Internet.

Consider the different connotations of the two sentences below:

PROMOTION

Attaining open Internet protections today is the best way to secure long-term financial security for our business.

PREVENTION

Defending our access to the open Internet is the best way to secure long-term financial security for our business.

Prevention wording can be added into a narrative to guide the overarching theme of a storyline. A complete list of promotion and prevention words is available in Part I of *FTW!* on page 14.

ADDRESSING ATTITUDES

Using applied behavioral science theory can help promote controversial issues even among the most skeptical audiences. Much of social psychology looks at how people are prompted to change their attitudes and beliefs, even taking action on an issue through subtle and unconscious routes. The way a message is framed and the terms associated with this frame only scratch the surface of the many things that influence whether or not an

audience will trust and support the position taken in a media campaign.

Persuasion theory has identified two routes that influence how an audience receives a message. One important factor is the strength of the argument. People are more likely to embrace an issue if they clearly understand the justifications for or against it and agree with its solution. Storytellers should strive to insert accurate, intelligible reasons for the given position.

Who communicates a message also has great influence on how it is received by audiences. Messages resonate best when they originate from an “expert” source or attractive personality. Spokespeople are highly effective at promoting brands for just this reason. Research has found that a trusted, admired, or respected messenger is effective at establishing credibility for arguments among audiences that might have been otherwise opposed.²⁴

Neither of these routes should be emphasized more than the other. A careful balance between clearly articulated, logical arguments and the charisma or authority of your spokesperson should produce a longer-lasting effect than total reliance on one or the other.²⁵

NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION

While research shows the power of persuasion by the two routes outlined above, there are ample arguments for the limitation of this strategy if used alone. The main shortcoming remains its long-term impact. Standard models show a steep decline in effect as time passes, resulting in advocacy campaigns that produce only small shifts in the attitudes or behavior of an audience.²⁶ We have identified two ways to remedy this: the first

is to employ narrative as a persuasion tool; the second is to repeat the message.

Research into the effect of fictional narratives on real-world perspectives suggests that belief change not only persists, but also may be magnified over time.²⁷ When audiences enter a fictional world they take a mental journey that allows them to suspend the confines of their traditional beliefs. This allows the storyteller to propose new ideas that would have, under other circumstances, been rejected. Psychologists suggest that the acceptance of these ideas through narrative takes place involuntarily as the brain immerses itself in the fictionalized world. The long-term persuasive power of narrative resides in its “sleeper effect,” i.e., the impact of an idea increases over time when the one discounting cue, that the source of information is a fictional account, is forgotten.²⁸

The effects of repeat exposure have also been readily researched and employed by communicators. Many times, audiences develop a preference for things based purely on familiarity. Repeating an argument and solution for the threat to net neutrality is easier for audiences if embedded in an entertainment series. TV shows, web programs, video games, and book series can restate and reaffirm a position, draw in larger audiences, and provide a more sophisticated dialogue on a social issue than a 30-second public service announcement.

WHY SCARCITY SCARES

The concept of scarcity offers a persuasive frame for social issues. Take note of how the idea of scarcity has infiltrated the debate on immigration. The argument that illegal immigrants place an unfair tax burden on the public plays into concerns about the scarcity of wealth and personal re-

sources. The psychological response that scarcity triggers influences many charged social issues.

Predictably, people are much more likely to take action if they believe that their current way of life is threatened.²⁹ For example, framing the open Internet as interconnected with other social problems, especially those that affect local communities, will keep individuals from ignoring the debate or leaving action for another day. In this instance, keeping narratives local means discussing the dominate Internet service provider in an area by name, talking about regional policy struggles and personalities instead of “the government,” and using characters that could be neighbors or friends.

SOCIAL PROOF

Narrative provides the perfect setting for another theory known to significantly influence our behaviors. Social proof refers to the way people learn through observing and modeling the behaviors around them. Our attitudes and actions are the result of closely monitoring our peers and community leaders. Studies have revealed that the more a peer or leader possesses characteristics that people find appealing, such as talent, intelligence, power, popularity, and physical attractiveness, the more likely people are to model their behavior.³⁰

By creating characters that serve as role mod-

els for the audience, communicators can verbalize powerful messages and exhibit proactive behavior. Entertainment-educators have found that narratives in which positive characters are rewarded and negatives ones are punished create lasting effects in real-world audiences.

MAGNIFY YOUR MESSAGE

Have you ever talked to your friends about the plot

“The possibility that Will & Grace could reduce prejudice against gay men is supported by research investigating parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction simply refers to the phenomenon that viewers form beliefs and attitudes about people they know ... through television, regardless of whether such people are fictional characters or real people. Perhaps, because the human brain typically processes media experiences similarly to how it processes ‘direct’ experience, people often react to televised characters as they would real people.”

SCHIAPPA, GREGG & HEWES³¹

of last night’s episode of *Lost* or maybe he romantic comedy you saw last weekend? Studies show that the more individuals discuss entertainment in groups, the more they internalize its values and themes.³² By opening up conversations to a wide range of knowledge, skill, and personal experience, people access information that far exceeds their individual ability “to know.” By hearing a range of perspectives, people come to more feasi-

ble conclusions that fit into group norms, amplifying social proof.

To initiate broader conversations with audience members who cannot physically gather together, communicators can coordinate both informal and formal discussions online. Social networks, online games, and live events can bridge the gap between fictional narrative and real life, uniting fans of the entertainment with those who are interested in promoting the open Internet.

For example, the award-winning online narrative game *World Without Oil* made use of blogs, web video, voicemail, digital images, and message boards to create a collaborative fictional account of a 32-week global oil crisis. By channeling the “collective imagination,” the game was able to create and disseminate solutions to a crisis before it occurs.

OVERCOMING THE SINGLE ACTION

Offering up multiple solutions counteracts a behavioral problem known as the single-action bias. Although most people realize that complex problems often require more than a single act to fix, humans tend to choose and participate in one action that alleviates feelings of responsibility.

Studies have found that taking any action, even a small or ineffective one, quells negative emotional prompts such as vulnerability, fear, and guilt.³³ Once individuals meet these emotional needs, they are less inclined to engage in other solution-oriented behaviors. The single-action bias can sabotage comprehensive but multi-step solutions.

For maximum effectiveness, narrative campaigns must have an associated action strategy for their audiences. Asking for a commitment to act and providing an immediate outlet for action will engage people. Combating the single-action bias also means following up with your audience, recruiting them to take additional actions and reminding them that acting once is never enough.



MEASURING YOUR IMPACT

One of the biggest challenges to creating effective social and environmental narratives with proven impact is the lack of clear case studies evaluating the power of entertainment-education. Measuring the impact of a message enables organizations to evaluate the success of a project, report to funders, and draw up best practices. Independent research organizations, university-based professionals, or groups like the Harmony Institute generally conduct evaluations for entertainment campaigns.

Measuring impact is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures. To gain quantitative information, communicators should conduct a base-line survey of their audience before the launch of their project to understand their perceptions, knowledge, and behaviors on an issue like net neutrality. This information can then be contrasted with results from one or more post-air surveys. When developing a survey, evaluators consider:

- What is the audience's size and characteristics?

- What does the audience know or think they know about the issue?
- What is the audience's attitude toward the issue? How likely are they to share these opinions with others?
- What is the audience's behavior around this issue?
- What is the audience's belief in their ability to influence the issue? Do they feel they have adequate support to influence the issue? Have they taken any action?
- How has the entertainment influenced the answers to these questions?

Depending on the entertainment medium, online web analytics, broadcast ratings, and ticket sales also supply information about audience size, duration, and number of viewings, as well as how and where the campaign is being shared (i.e., through social media, press, or word-of-mouth). Qualitative evaluations can provide more in-depth understanding of how audiences identify with the issue

after viewing the entertainment. Responses to the media project can be solicited through direct correspondence with viewers as well as mined from public meetings or online discussion boards.

The key questions asked while assessing the impact of entertainment on audiences will help improve the methods entertainment creators and

educators use to support social concerns like net neutrality. Building on previous work, these studies can contribute to a greater understanding of how people understand and why they take action on an issue. Such insights have the capacity to transform the advocacy world as a whole.



The influence mainstream entertainment has on our perceptions, emotions, and behavior is often profound. Mass media permeates the public and private spheres of society, flooding people with messages from a wide-range of sources. *FTW! Net Neutrality For The Win: How to Use Entertainment and the Science of Influence to Save Your Internet* was developed to help communicators from policy, education, advocacy, media, and entertainment harness the power of mainstream media, offering U.S. audiences entertainment that educates them on net neutrality and provides concrete ways they

can support the cause.

Advertisers regularly take advantage of the reach and influence of entertainment. But net neutrality supporters from a variety of backgrounds have yet to tap its potential for incorporating social messages. Creating entertainment with the Harmony Institute methodology will help communicators connect with viewers on both a conscious and emotional level, providing a channel to significantly influence social change and keep the Internet open and equal for all.





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The Harmony Institute is a non-profit research organization that works to harness the power of mainstream media and entertainment within the United States to increase awareness and provide motivation for transformative action within traditional viewing audiences. With a keen understanding of behavioral science, and a wide network of academic and industry supporters, the Institute assists in the production of entertainment that connects with viewers on both a cognitive and emotional level. Accomplishing this goal not only means advising on conceptual projects and existing productions, but also providing key members of the media, advocacy, and public-policy realms with the tools and information they need to develop and market projects that accurately evaluate current concerns and offer empirically-based alternatives.

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