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The Repeal of Net Neutrality and Impact on Consumer Internet Access Rights

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Ashlie Gibbs

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Repeal of Net Neutrality and Impact on Consumer Internet Access Rights

by

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MA, Regent University, 2010

BS, Hampton University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Administration: Law & Public Policy

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February 2024

Abstract

The internet is a communication tool used by millions of people for business, education, fun, and more. However, Congress has debated whether internet regulation is necessary to protect users' and providers' equality. In 2017 the Federal Communications Commission repealed the net neutrality regulations initially enacted under the Obama Administration. Since 2017, Congress has failed to pass new net neutrality policies to promote equal internet access and combat discriminatory practices by providers. This research followed the journey of policymaking to determine any factors preventing the approval of internet regulation policies. This research used the narrative policy framework, a storytelling framework that identifies individuals, procedures, and factors involved in the policy-enacting journey. The study used content analysis to examine transcribed public-facing congressional videos, which contributed to answering the research questions. In addition, the study analyzed transcribed video data to obtain the results. The results revealed that congressional leaders believed the internet should be open and accessible. Still, the results did not show the best way to regulate the internet through government intervention and regulatory policies. Further study is recommended to determine whether change in presidential administration plays a role in Congressional policy enactment. The study's positive social change implications include breaking down the policymaking process within Congress and providing insight into the role of political parties in the limited action of the government for 5 years to regulate the internet market.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, who have been supportive during this entire journey. Thank you to my parents, Albert and Geraldine Gibbs, for supporting me during my decision to embark on obtaining my PhD. Your love and support have molded me into the woman I am today. To my coworkers and friends, thank you for caring for me during stressful moments and all my educational endeavors. You all make me feel valued, and I appreciate each of you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Net Neutrality

In 2015, the Obama Administration enacted a set of net neutrality regulations to protect users' internet access and First Amendment rights. However, in 2017, during the Trump administration, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) repealed these regulations, striking all its principal practices (Gilroy, 2017). Despite the repeal, internet users have increased by over 27% since 2017 (Gerpott, 2018). As Padmaja (2017) noted, Congress has failed multiple times to enact new net neutrality policies that provide regulatory safeguards for internet users.

Background

The internet was initially designed to connect individuals regardless of location and proximity. Initially, internet service providers (ISPs) created and distributed the internet, such as Verizon, Cox Cable Network, AT&T, and more (Padmaja, 2017). Today, the FCC regulates and supervises ISP behaviors and conduct (Zahadat, 2019). While the FCC maintains regulatory orders via federal policies, the ISPs inspire the internet to continue its innovative growth, balancing power (Zahadat, 2019).

According to the net neutrality policy, users could exercise the power and the right to freely roam and access the internet (Austin, 2018). Regardless of their digital locations, all users could surf the internet at the same rates and speeds (Austin, 2018). This provision was an extension of what the FCC signaled in 2010 when it issued an open market order consisting of regulations to prevent ISPs from blocking user access on the internet to different services and websites, as Zahadat (2019) observed. The open market

order prohibited ISPs from targeting groups of internet traffic and delivering content more slowly than other groups of traffic (Zahadat, 2019).

Since the repeal of net neutrality by FCC chairman Ajit Pai under the Trump administration, the internet market has been left open. No regulatory oversight is in place. Moreover, since the repeal, Congress has disagreed on whether internet supervision and regulation are necessary (Zahadat, 2019). There is limited evidence from the literature explaining why the FCC chairman repealed net neutrality regulations when the Trump administration took office or why Congress cannot enact new policies to provide regulatory oversight (Gilroy, 2017).

Congress's failure to enact new safeguard policies for users is detrimental to Americans using the internet. For instance, Padmaja (2017) noted that this failure limits free market fairness. The repealing of net neutrality and the failure of Congress to formulate new safeguard policies have left the door open for the private sector to monopolize and prioritize users' internet searches (Collins, 2018). Lack of internet regulation restricts users' equal broadband access. This go-slow continues to enlarge the space between user equality and broadband services (Gilroy, 2017).

Although Congress has attempted to enact new internet policies, cracks have been experienced in policymaking (King, 2019). For instance, when congressional representatives suggested new internet regulation laws, including net neutrality, to provide safeguards to users, the proposed laws were met with a lack of senatorial support (Gerpott, 2018). It is thus critical to discuss the purpose and significance of new internet policies, which inform this study's basis and problem statement. Specifically, this chapter

is guided by the research question behind the study, the theoretical framework, assumptions, and limitations that directly correlate to and impact the analysis.

Problem Statement

The problem that guided this study was that the FCC and Congress have failed to enact new internet regulatory policies that provide equality-driven safeguards to internet users and government oversight. This failure to act has increasingly limited internet users' First Amendment rights, according to Gilroy (2017). A close analysis of the scholarly literature finds a significant gap. Because of the extensive gap, it is challenging to understand the congressional policymaking process that may have led to the failure to enact internet policies and safeguards (Gilroy, 2017).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover why Congress has failed to formulate new policies to replace net neutrality following its repeal in 2017. The study fulfilled this purpose by exploring the policymaking process, including congressional meetings and discussions, that led to the failure to enact new policies that protect internet users' First Amendment rights, which Gilroy (2017) endorses. Notably, it was expected that the research results would reveal that the repeal of net neutrality had no impact on internet equality or internet users' First Amendment rights.

Research Question

The central research question that guided this study was as follows: Why did the federal government and FCC fail to enact new policies that provide safeguards protecting users' equal internet access and First Amendment rights? The research question focused

on the notion that although some members of the House of Representatives presented internet regulation policies, those policies did not achieve sufficient votes to move them forward (Gilroy, 2017). This issue was worth discussing; as the internet grows and becomes more innovative, policies fail to receive the support and votes needed to protect internet users. The results of this study have implications for the FCC, the government's intentions, and the policy enactment process.

Theoretical Framework

The narrative policy framework (NPF) utilizes policy narratives to understand processes within groups and organizations. According to Ertas and McKnight (2020), the NPF creates a storytelling model that considers the individuals, policies, and additional predictable factors that help understand a policy framework. Michael D. Jones and Marc McBeth made NPF to integrate narratives behind policy scholarship and policy enactment within academia (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The framework consists of several levels, including the meso and macro.

While the meso-level spotlights policy narratives as they are created and circulated, the macro-level focuses on larger groups and develops reports that include a policy's level of stability and capability to make a change (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The present study used macro-level analysis to analyze the causes of net neutrality repeal and failures to enact new policy consumer safeguards. The research question targets the FCC and Congress, two government bodies in charge of regulating the internet. Through the NPF, this study also analyzed the possible impact of repealing net neutrality on internet users.

The Nature of the Study

This research was qualitative. I selected this methodology to engage in content analysis guided by NPF. A qualitative analysis was the best method for this study because of its focus on understanding experiences and providing alternative perspectives, as Rudestam and Newton (2015) suggested, adding that qualitative analysis allows data to express itself through words and contextual content. In this qualitative analysis, I examined the events that occurred. The analysis focused on the subjective factors through textual analysis to explain what transpired in the FCC's repealing of net neutrality and Congress's failure to formulate new policies (Newton, 2015).

Secondary data analysis was also conducted on several sources, including videos with congressional members discussing internet regulation and the repeal of net neutrality to the congressional committee and a video with former President Obama discussing the importance of net neutrality. Each video was accessed from the congressional members public-facing YouTube page and website(s). The video of former President Barack Obama was accessed from the public-facing White House historical data website.

I used both qualitative video analysis and content analysis to convert video footage to text using an online program called Happy Scribe, and I conducted further analysis using NVivo. In that process, I employed content analysis, which is the research approach that counts the frequency of words to analyze documentation, and which relies on coding and categorizing during the data collection phase (Stemler, 2001). This approach helped discover the most frequently used words, which tend to have the most significant meaning, thus informing the topic of interest (Stemler, 2001).

Lastly, I conducted a content analysis focusing on different document trends and patterns. Content analysis was chosen as the approach because it utilized methods such as word frequency counts to analyze documentation and relied on coding and categorizing during the data collection phase (Stemler, 2001). Since content analysis examines transcribed documents, it helps discover the most frequently used words, which tend to have the greatest meaning relative to a topic of interest.

Definitions

Net neutrality: Net neutrality is the theory that internet users have the right to freely navigate online and that no matter what websites they are trying to access, they should be able to do so at the same speeds as other users and with equal access (Austin, 2018).

Internet regulation: The internet is considered a public good monitored by the FCC (Padmaja, 2017). The FCC created the open internet rules in 2015, designed to protect free expression (Padmaja, 2017).

Internet: A web of basic computer networks that include the World Wide Web, messenger systems, downloads, uploads, and file sharing (Padmaja, 2017).

Safeguards: Non-discriminatory protective policies that require broadband providers to serve everyone equally (Ford, 2018).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this research was that all the data collected were meaningful to the study. Chenail (2012) stated that qualitative data analysis helps decide whether the data collected is meaningful. The second assumption was that any

congressional transcript and documentation collected expressed the true and honest thoughts of congressional representatives regarding internet regulation, as Stemler (2001) argues. The third assumption then follows—namely, that any thoughts shared by congressional representatives regarding internet policies were based on facts and logic rather than personal beliefs (Stemler, 2001).

Additionally, assumptions can be categorized based on the amount of data collected. Hence, another assumption was that some of the most content-heavy government data about internet regulation are public, making these data easily accessible. Another assumption was that the amount of publicly accessible data collected is sufficient to conduct proper research and yield valid results, or that attempting to determine what was enough video footage to produce formidable results. Lastly, it was assumed that the policy data collected would include many perspectives that could contribute to future research regarding public policy and internet regulation.

Scope and Delimitations

Research that relies on public access and government documentation undeniably presents significant delimitations. The net neutrality repeal was covered in mainstream media, social media, and other outlets, which limits access to credible, nonbiased sources. Therefore, locating government transcripts, congressional meetings, and court documents presented a profound challenge that may result in limited data collection.

Limitations

Since I conducted the current study as a single researcher, limitations regarding reliability were expected. Studies by single researchers typically yield biased and inflated

results, according Stemler (2001). Therefore, my goal was to protect the validity and reliability of the research results.

Despite the limitations noted above, the validity and reliability of the current research were achieved. First, the study achieved validity and reliability by creating explicit coding instructions to follow when analyzing the data, as Stemler (2001) advises. The study also adhered to what Chenail (2012) suggests, having textual data read aloud and internally to avoid misinterpretation of data. Finally, I achieved validity and reliability by using multiple data sources during the data collection phase.

Significance

The current research is highly beneficial because it provides insights into the impact of removing the federal net neutrality regulation, which provides safeguards for the people it serves. Since the internet is essential and versatile and since its code is constantly being reviewed and debated by administrative personnel (Gautier & Somogyi, 2018), this study can have an impact on policy enactment by examining policymakers' communication, themes, and agendas. Ultimately, the research can positively affect social change by revealing weak areas in the bridge of communication between the federal government and the FCC during the repeal of net neutrality and during the struggles to enact new policies that protect its consumers.

Summary

The need for internet regulation is an evolving debate within Congress as it determines the best ways to protect internet users' equal access rights (Austin, 2018). Peer-reviewed articles and government documents were found during this research using

keywords such as “net neutrality repeal” and “Trump administration.” The issue behind this study is that the FCC repealed net neutrality in 2017, followed by Congress’s multiple failed attempts to enact new internet regulation policies for an evolving internet market (Gilroy, 2017). Therefore, this study adopted the goal of understanding why Congress has been unable to enact new internet policies, thus filling a research gap. The research question guided this aim: Why did the federal government and FCC fail to enact new policies that provide safeguards protecting users’ equal internet access rights and First Amendment rights? The results from this study provide an understanding of the congressional policymaking process and what variables play a crucial role.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I review past literature to provide further understanding and background on the study topic. The literature consulted supplies examples of the problems that arise in Congress when policies are brought to vote. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and the methodology used to analyze the collected data and to explain the journey of a policy from the moment it is created. In Chapter 4, I discuss the data collected and the study findings. The conclusion answers the research question. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the research and of the findings, sharing gaps that could inspire future research to impact internet regulation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem is that the FCC within the Trump administration dissolved net neutrality regulations without enacting new policies ensuring equal access rights for users accessing the internet (Gilroy, 2017). The repeal of net neutrality removed all safeguards to protect users' First Amendment rights when accessing internet resources (Gilroy, 2018). Those previous safeguards protected users from discriminatory practices by ISPs (Gilroy, 2017). The FCC detailed the intention behind removing net neutrality—namely, to make room for ISPs' innovation within their companies (Gilroy, 2017). Since the repeal, politicians, such as Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, attempted to present new policies, like net neutrality theories; however, those drafted policies did not receive enough votes to pass the House of Representatives (Gilroy, 2017).

This chapter breaks down the strategy implemented to gather information regarding the repeal of net neutrality. The theoretical framework used for this research was NPF, which is discussed in this chapter in more detail, including why this framework was the best choice. Following the literature review section is an analysis of previous studies on net neutrality, the congressional policy implementation process, and internet regulation. The chapter ends with a summary.

The FCC did not detail why the Trump administration intended to repeal net neutrality concepts, except to provide room for innovation in the internet market (Gilroy, 2017). However, FCC follow-up interviews and discussions need to detail what the word “innovation” means and its impact on people (Gilroy, 2017). Since the repeal, politicians have attempted to present new policies, like net neutrality theories (Gilroy, 2017).

However, such legislation needs more votes to become a solidified policy and law (Gilroy, 2017).

The present chapter lays out the research strategies, terms, and resources that were used to find scholarly works that contributed to the research. In addition, the chapter breaks down the theoretical framework and explores how such frameworks were applied in previous studies. Finally, the chapter details literature reviews and scholarly sources that contribute to the overall research and their importance in answering the research question. This research dives into the creation of net neutrality and explains why it was implemented. The policy journey follows the change in administrations and the repeal of net neutrality and identifies the gaps in the literature—namely, the reasons for the dissolution of the net neutrality policy.

Literature Search Strategy

The research strategy included use of the Walden Library database, Google Scholar, and Lexis Nexis to gather scholarly sources. Lexis Nexis provided case sources, briefings, and administrative documentation that gave insight into some of the legal ramifications of net neutrality and the repeal process. The Walden library provided peer-reviewed journals discussing the research topic as well as any other research on the subject matter. Google Scholar helped fill gaps that may have been lacking in the Lexis Nexis and Walden Library databases, casting a wider net to find scholarly journals on the subject matter. Key terms used to search for academic information properly were *net neutrality*, *equal access*, *internet regulation*, *net neutrality repeal*, *net neutrality 2017*, and *Trump administration*.

Collecting data on net neutrality presented some challenges because there needs to be more information on the subject matter regarding internet equality and equal access rights. The repeal of net neutrality and equal internet access rights are still debated today. Net neutrality is a current issue, yet the FCC repealed the policy in 2017. These limitations included locating information discussing its implementation and repeal. However, the House of Representatives members debated whether equal internet access is necessary and, if so, to determine the government's role in regulating such access (Gilroy, 2017).

In the past, Supreme Court cases sought to define broadband services to determine the reach of the FCC's regulation over internet services (Gilroy, 2017). For example, *USTA v. FCC* (2016) ruled to define internet broadband services as a utility and not a luxury. This determination further contributed to the congressional debate of whether internet broadband service regulation is necessary since the court ruled it is a public utility (*USTA v. FCC*, 2016).

To select high-quality and valid sources, I read the synopsis and reviewed the key terms. I also used one source to lead to others that fell within a 5-year window, as suggested by Ravitch (2016). There remains many gaps behind the research on Net Neutrality policy (Ravitch, 2016). For example, Lexis Nexis helped find legal documentation that defines net neutrality in a court of law to better understand the implementation of net neutrality in a regulatory setting. Information was collected using a literary chart, to organize the sources categorically. This approach helped me navigate the scholarly material and find articles to help fill any gaps in the current research.

Theoretical Framework

NPF was selected to utilize conceptual storytelling to break down the policymaking and implementation process (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). NPF encompasses a storyteller who identifies, describes, and explains the roles of key characters who contribute to the results of something impactful to society (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The approach is used in content analysis, where documentation is examined to extract and break down a journey leading to executing something for societal needs (Ertas and McKnight, 2020).

Michael D. Jones created NPF, and Marc McBeth found a way to utilize the concept of narratives better to understand policy enactment (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). NPF focuses on the narrative behind the policymaking process (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The objective is to tell a story so readers can follow along and identify key players to better understand the impact on society (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). NPF finds overlapping themes that detail the steps within a policymaking process and its inability to enact policy that may impact a larger group, such as citizens or, in the case of this research, users (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). NPF relies on four key elements to make a policy narrative: setting, characters, plot, and morals (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). These elements formulate a story, allowing readers to follow the journey of the policy process and the key players involved (Ertas and McKnight, 2020, p. 8). Policy narratives must consist of an entire plot, which has a beginning, middle, and end (Ertas and McKnight, 2020, p. 8).

Like any storyline, the policy narrative consists of heroes, villains, and victims (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). Policy implementation failures impact different community groups (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). However, a policy narrative aims to explain policy problems, enactment delays, and possible solutions (Ertas and McKnight, 2020, p. 8). A technique used to describe policy problems is a “story decline,” which offers an emotional rather than logical response to policy issues found during the policy process (Ertas and McKnight, 2020).

Theory Application

NPF is designed to help researchers understand the policy process using different levels of analysis (Jones & McBeth, 2020). The two levels used are the meso-level and macro-level (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). This research used macro-level analysis to examine a larger group and create narratives that analyze the policy’s potential for stability (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The analysis includes variables such as the environment and the conditions under which the policy process developed (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). In addition, as NPF creates the story-telling model mentioned above, it includes predictability factors, such as political ideologies and different belief systems (Ertas and McKnight, 2020, p. 5).

The idea behind using a narrative story-telling model is that human beings use narratives to better understand themselves and the world around them (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Thus, the goal of NPF is for readers to better understand, describe, and explain the public policy process, providing predictable factors based on such information (Jones & McBeth, 2020, p. 92).

NPF embraces different aspects of science to determine whether the study of policy through narratives can also hold risks of inaccuracy (Jones & McBeth, 2020). NPF assumes that story narratives are objects that are broken down into countable parts (Jones & McBeth, 2020). In addition, NPF relies on the foundational belief that humans want to think and communicate in narrative form to understand themselves better, or, in this case, the policy process (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

Structure

As stated above, NPF consists of four key elements: setting, characters, a plot, and a moral to the story (Jones & McBeth, 2020). First, the location explains where the story takes place and describes the environment in which the characters perform and evolve (Jones & McBeth, 2020). In this case, the setting can include geography, laws, evidence, and other policy-driven factors not considered by other elements within the process (Jones & McBeth, 2020, p. 96). Characters are the key players during the policy process (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Each character plays a role in the policy process and is identified as part of the problem, as someone impacted by the policy, or as a part of the solution (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Characters are victims who are potentially harmed by the policy delay or process (Jones & McBeth, 2020). In addition, characters include villains who seek to harm, intentionally or unintentionally, as well as heroes who bring hope by trying to alleviate the harm (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Fourth, plots set the foundation for the story and help the reader formulate an idea of what is happening (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Finally, schemes place characters relative to the setting and

how they correlate across time, or, in this case, the policy process (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

The moral of essential narrative stories is the takeaway or lesson (Jones & McBeth, 2020). However, for NPF, the moral of the story is the solution or call to action needed to improve the situation found in the policy process (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

NPF uses two approaches to collect narrative content: belief systems and strategies (Jones & McBeth, 2020). First, in belief systems, researchers or scholars depend on concepts such as ideology to contain systematic content within the policy process (Jones, 2020). The second approach is strategies, where researchers or scholars uncover goal-seeking patterns within the policy process (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

NPF executes research at the micro-level or meso-level (Jones & McBeth, 2020). The meso-level analysis, which occurs through “options,” states that there are winners and losers during a policy process (Jones & McBeth, 2020, p. 100). Narrative storylines share a perspective from the position of the losers, potentially focusing primarily on the conflict rather than the perspective of the winning side, which may attempt to contain or minimize the conflict (Jones & McBeth, 2020, p. 100). NPF can also relate to a cost-benefit analysis once it reaches the place where it analyzes the content on one of the levels presented above (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

Previous Application of the Narrative Policy Framework

I have yet to identify previous research that similarly uses NPF. However, one previous study used NPF to lay out the narratives behind policy debates on charter schools (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The focus involved educational policy

implementation and its impact on charter schools at a local level (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). NPF was used to understand the cause behind the lack of legislation supporting charter schools, thereby identifying oppressors and victims (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The research also analyzed legislative members who were pro-charter and anti-charter, which led to trying to understand why (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). Though that study used NPF and content analysis, its focus was not internet regulation and net neutrality.

The Rationale for Narrative Policy Framework

I chose NPF for its ability to help readers and researchers make sense of the policy process on multiple levels (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Multiple characters exist within the policymaking process, including the FCC administration, House of Representatives members, and members of the Senate (Jones & McBeth, 2020). The objective is to go beyond sharing stories about public policy to understand different characters' involvement in the policymaking process (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Understanding the policymaking process using NPF also helps readers identify variables contributing to the failure to pass new policies in internet regulation (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

Literature Review

This section presents a literature review that conveys concepts related to this study. One of the key events is the repeal of net neutrality in 2017, resulting in a lack of internet regulation for 5 years (Gilroy, 2017). The repeal led to multiple failed attempts by Congress to enact new policies that include pieces of net neutrality, provide equal internet access rights for users, and protect First Amendment rights (Gilroy, 2017). First,

the study must examine the concept of net neutrality and its purpose. Second, it must explore how federal courts define the internet regarding internet regulation. Finally, the study must investigate members of the House of Representatives. They presented new legislation on internet regulation, including net neutrality policies, but it failed to pass the Senate within the last 5 years (Gilroy, 2017).

The Internet

Padmaja (2017) described the foundation of the internet, its origin, and its importance to consumers' rights. It was created as a communication tool for people across multiple locations. Collins (2018) detailed how removing previous net neutrality policies can negatively impact consumers' internet access rights, such as the net neutrality policy that prohibited ISPs from using discriminatory practices when providing internet access to users. King (2019), in a peer-reviewed journal, described the attempts of the government and FCC to revive parts of the net neutrality policy to enact new policies that ensure the protection of consumers' equal access. Finally, Gerpott (2018) discussed consumers' increased use of technology over the last few years and the need for internet regulation to protect consumers' equal access rights.

Policymakers have indulged in the debate over internet regulation for many years and have failed to arrive at a conclusion that results in policy enactment (Padmaja, 2017). Limited information is available to provide comprehensive insight for researchers looking to approach the problem of internet regulation and to protect consumers' equal access rights (Gerpott, 2018). The repeal of net neutrality has opened the door for debate about what having no policy means for people and for internet access (Collins, 2018). As a

result, this has become a national issue placed in the hands of lawmakers (Collins, 2018). Debates have ensued within congressional groups, such as the energy and commerce subcommittee, surrounding internet policy enactment and regulation (Collins, 2018). Policymakers have attempted to enact new policies, pulling from past policies, such as net neutrality. However, they have failed to push such legislation through Congress (King, 2019). As a result, internet regulatory policies have reached the House but failed in the Senate, leaving no resolution to the issue of protecting consumer rights within internet markets (King, 2019).

Past research mentions the removal of past internet policies and attempts to pass new legislation that reinstates critical outcomes, such as protecting consumers' equal rights to the internet (Gilroy, 2017). However, the literature needs to share details about the reason for removing net neutrality and why new policy attempts fail to pass in Congress (Gilroy, 2017). Finally, the literature needs to detail why the FCC and the government cannot align on the need for internet regulation and protecting consumer equal access rights alongside First Amendment rights (Gilroy, 2017).

The following section presents scholarly sources that provide insight into the gaps in the literature, thus supporting the research question stated previously in the chapter. In addition, the following academic journals attempt to answer why the government failed to align with the need for internet regulation and protecting consumers' equal access rights.

Net Neutrality

The internet is an ever-growing resource comprised of multiple computer networks, allowing people to stay connected (Padmaja, 2017). Those computer networks include the World Wide Web, Messenger, downloads, uploads, file sharing, and more (Padmaja, 2017). The internet connects in many ways, including dial-up, copper, fiber-optic, and satellite links (Padmaja, 2017, p. 70). There are many uses for the internet, such as moving computerized information or data from one source to another (Padmaja, 2017). For this to happen, the data transferred is broken down into smaller pieces and then reassembled once it reaches its destination (Padmaja, 2017). This single process makes the internet efficient and helpful to consumers (Padmaja, 2017). The internet plays a vital role in the economy by providing jobs, productivity growth, and cost savings (Padmaja, 2017). It creates a single line of communication and a foundation for consumers to always be connected, regardless of location (Padmaja, 2017). Consumers' internet use increased by 13% within households between 2012 and 2017 and is predicted to continue to grow over the next few years (Padmaja, 2017). The internet is as an essential tool because it plays a role in everyday life by contributing to economic, political, and social justice (Padmaja, 2017). The internet provides additional channels for businesses, education, and more (Padmaja, 2017).

Despite the internet being a public tool, it was created by the private sector (Padmaja, 2017). The FCC regulates the internet in the United States, while the private sector is responsible for its creation (Padmaja, 2017). In recent years, the private sector has followed “open internet” rules designed to protect free expression and innovation and

to promote investment in the nation's broadband networks (Padmaja, 2017, p. 70). Broadband (a tool to connect to the internet) access is a telecommunication service (Padmaja, 2017). These open internet rules fell under the original net neutrality policy, which applied limitations to mobile broadband services, such as no blocking, no throttling, and no paid prioritization (Padmaja, 2017). Such actions (if performed) limit an individual's access to the internet (Padmaja, 2017).

The net neutrality debate stems from the government, the corporate conglomerates that created the internet communication infrastructure, and public users (Pickard, 2019). Net neutrality utilizes two theories to attack the issue of regulation: corporate libertarianism and social democracy (Pickard, 2019). Corporate libertarianism assumes that corporate conglomerates that create the internet hold individual freedoms, such as First Amendment free speech rights, to protect them from government oversight (Pickard, 2019). Variables of corporate libertarianism view corporate conglomerates as the winners of the free market and the driving force behind economic growth (Pickard, 2019). Therefore, minimal government oversight contributes to the space for corporate conglomerates to innovate and drive the market (Pickard, 2019).

However, social democratic theory treats basic information as a public good (Pickard, 2019). Therefore, markets treat the internet as a non-excludable tool that prevents free riders from being excluded (Pickard, 2019). Pickard (2019) states that one person accessing information should not detract from another's use. This requires users to have equal access to reliable information, which is expensive to produce and requires large amounts of physical capital (Pickard, 2019).

Therefore, corporate conglomerates produce the amount of information the market dictates rather than what democracy requires, which impacts user's rights (Pickard, 2019). The government's job is to protect public goods and place safeguards to prevent corporate conglomerates from corrupting them. Still, social democratic and corporate libertarianism paradigms clash on how to regulate internet telecommunication, all of which set the foundation for net neutrality (Pickard, 2019).

The general principle of net neutrality is that all essential services should be offered to everyone on equal terms to prevent corporate conglomerates from abusing their powers by setting up discriminatory practices to profit from privilege (Pickard, 2019). Following the decline of the open internet, net neutrality emerged as ISPs created tiers of pay-to-play internet services; this caused a "double dip" in that ISPs were charging both subscribers and internet content providers (Pickard, 2019, p.12). Such actions not only impact the basic user but also internet content providers, such as Amazon and Google (Pickard, 2019).

Net neutrality focuses on providing individuals with equal, unrestricted access to the internet because the internet is a means to access content in real-time, as well as a means to free speech (Padmaja, 2017). However, ISPs challenge courts on the foundation and application of net neutrality (Hanna, 2018). For example, the court case between Netflix and Comcast uncovered the issue of content providers pushing out content to individuals beyond the provided bandwidth of the broadband providers (Padmaja, 2017). The problem was that content providers refused to pay additional money to broadband service providers for the quality of service (Padmaja, 2017). The court case raised the

debate of how best to define the internet and whether actions by companies such as Comcast fall under the regulatory jurisdiction of the FCC (Zahadat, 2018).

Court Cases

Senator Jim Mint shared his concerns regarding the lack of support for protecting the internet against threats to internet freedom, with the initial thought of dismissing them as unimportant (Padmaja, 2017, p. 71). However, Congress does not define the internet as a public good because its use is excludable (Padmaja, 2017); a public good is any good that is non-rivalrous and non-excludable (Padmaja, 2017). As a result of conflicting definitions, federal court cases questioned the meaning of ISPs' broadband services (internet; *U.S. Telecomm Assoc. v. FCC*, 2016). In *United States Telecomm Assoc. v. FCC*, the telecommunications service challenged the FCC's classification of broadband services, which ultimately changed how such services are defined (*U.S. Telecomm Assoc. v. FCC*, 2016). This change can impact internet access and the content one receives (*U.S. Telecomm Assoc. v. FCC*, 2016). The case leaned on a federal statute that sought to define internet services as a good provided by ISPs to consumers upon request (47 U.S.C. § 201). However, some scholars question whether the internet serves the public's interest (Padmaja, 2017). The answer is that, yes, it does serve the public interest: It benefits the public by providing entertainment, education, medical consultations, stock trading, banking, and more (Padmaja, 2017).

In *Mozilla Corp. v. FCC* (2018), the courts upheld the Restoring Internet Freedom Order in part, vacated in part, and remanded in part. The court found that the FCC held the authority to reclassify cable broadband internet as an "information service" instead of

a “telecommunications service.” The court’s ruling in favor of the FCC allowed the government to declare the internet a public utility (like a public good) without allocating the means to take complete control of its infrastructure (Padmaja, 2017).

Therefore, the FCC’s sole responsibility is to regulate the internet to ensure equality and fairness (Padmaja, 2017). The government did not build the internet, and its entire infrastructure network was created and built by the private sector (Padmaja, 2017). This infrastructure network is controlled by contractual agreements between users and private companies, despite being regulated by the government (Padmaja, 2017). As a result, the content piece has multiple players, including content providers, ISPs, and more (Padmaja, 2017).

The concern among scholars is the evolution of the internet into an economic and social enabler in the center of a world that is always connected (Padmaja, 2017). The risks of minimizing internet access limit the possibilities of taking advantage of existing human rights (Padmaja, 2017). Human rights include social and economic freedoms, including free speech (Padmaja, 2017). In this context, removing the net neutrality policy opened the door for ISPs to block, slow down, or even prioritize internet access and content (Fiegerman, 2018). Such actions impact an individual’s equal access rights to content—that is, one’s internet plan positively or negatively impacts one’s access (Fiegerman, 2018). The removal of policies with no replacement policy means companies control what consumers see, how fast they see it, and how they participate (Fiegerman, 2018).

Legislation

The FCC is responsible for maintaining balance within the internet market and for preventing inequality among providers and individuals (Padmaja, 2017). Setting guidelines and prices means sliding into the economics of the internet (Padmaja, 2017). Therefore, creating policies that maintain such market balance would better serve the people and their equal access rights (Padmaja, 2017). Policymakers continuously debate the best approach to internet regulation and to protecting equal access rights (Gilroy, 2017). Initially, net neutrality provided equal access to the internet and blocked discriminatory practices that would limit one's access (Gilroy, 2017). Previously, the FCC adopted open internet practices under the Obama administration in a 3-2 vote (Gilroy, 2017). Such open internet practices prevent ISPs and broadband service providers from blocking users' access to their competitor's services and websites (Zahadat, 2018). However, on December 14, 2017, in another 3-2 vote, the FCC reversed those practices adopted under the Obama administration in 2015 (Gilroy, 2017).

The original order in 2015 under the Obama administration adopted practices that protected citizens' access rights to the internet and their First Amendment rights (Gilroy, 2017). However, once the FCC removed its net neutrality policy practices, no other policies were put in its place for five years (Gilroy, 2017). The body overseeing internet regulation shifted from the FCC to the Federal Trade Commission, which provided less regulatory insight and opened the door for new policy debates on citizens' rights to access the internet (Gilroy, 2017). Since the reversal, no new policies have passed through Congress, putting regulatory stability and guidance at risk (Gilroy, 2017).

It did not deter congressional representatives from introducing new legislation. Representative Blackburn introduced H.R. 4682 alongside Senator Kennedy, who introduced S. 2510, both of which brought forth policy practices that prevented behaviors that would block a citizen's equal access to the internet and First Amendment rights (Gilroy. 2017). Such methods included throttling and blocking broadband access (Gilroy. 2017). In addition, the legislation also reclassified broadband internet access as an information service, which would alter who can access it and how it is accessed (Gilroy. 2017). The classification of broadband internet is essential because it determines who can access it and through what means (Gilroy. 2017).

Following Senator Kennedy and Congressman Blackburn, Senator King introduced the Save the Internet Act, which ensured the internet remained open and accessible and which prevented practices that would hinder one's equal access rights (King, 2019). The new legislation would prohibit discriminatory practices that could limit one's First Amendment rights and equal access to the internet (King, 2019). If the bill were approved, it would mean reversing the 2017 repeal of net neutrality practices and reinstating three fundamental net neutrality principles (King, 2019). Those principles include no blocking, no throttling, and no paid prioritization (King, 2019). In addition, the legislation would place regulatory oversight back in the hands of the FCC and empower the commission to investigate discriminatory practices (King, 2019). Senator King's goal in passing this legislation is to protect the internet and maintain its equal access for all (King, 2019). However, this would have been the third piece of legislation to be presented in Congress and fail to pass (King, 2019). The back and forth regarding

policy and legislation implementation showcases the importance of placing protective safeguards on internet access and blocking discriminatory practices (Ford, 2018). It would force broadband services to revisit their internet package options and to create internet services accessible to all (Ford, 2018). However, the pushback from other legislators is that policies that include net neutrality principles limit business and innovation (Ford, 2018).

Net neutrality principles categorize all online traffic as equal (Zigmund, 2019). Lack of regulation has hindered equal access by providing advantages to individuals in certain social brackets (Zigmund, 2019). Legislators have argued that the internet should remain open because of its importance (Zigmund, 2018). One's ability to pay should not hinder their right to equal access or limit their First Amendment rights (Zigmund, 2019). However, when internet policies were removed in 2017, including net neutrality principles, some Americans reported no change in their internet access (Zigmund, 2019). The debate ensued on whether a lack of internet regulation and policies is an issue (Zigmund, 2019).

Court cases such as *Mozilla Corp. v. FCC* (2019) raised the issue of states that have enacted their own state-level net neutrality policies, and whether such policies have force against broadband service providers under federal jurisdiction (Zigmund, 2018). No federal legislation in place ensures a citizen's equal access to the internet, leaving it to the states to provide protection (Zigmund, 2019). Zigmund (2019) argued that net neutrality policies were an issue to address in the 2020 elections. However, Congress still has not passed the Save the Internet Act (Zigmund, 2019).

Gap in Literature

Previous research has shown no agreement among scholars on whether internet regulation and net neutrality are necessary (Gerpott, 2018). The impact of internet regulation, or lack thereof, impacts users and their daily access to technological devices that use internet services (Gerpott, 2018). The debate among lawyers runs a similar course. Lawmakers have revisited the discussion of defining the internet and how it is accessed and distributed to users nationwide (47 U.S.C. §201). The reclassification of the internet may have impacted the policies used to regulate access and services. However, research has yet to uncover how (47 U.S.C. §201). The removal of net neutrality in 2017 created a gap surrounding government oversight on who is responsible for regulating internet access and distribution (Fiegerman, 2018). Research lacks discussion around how the FCC removed internet regulation policy without providing a substitute, ultimately diminishing its regulatory oversight (Fiegerman, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

Comprehending the failure to enact new policies means uncovering the knowns and unknowns. A fundamental change in time is that the FCC repealed the net neutrality policy in 2017 during the Trump administration. For five years following the repeal, the FCC and Congress failed to enact new policies that provide consumers equal access to the internet and that protect their First Amendment Rights. An unknown in this research is uncovering why these attempts have failed. Many congressional representatives have proposed policies that would include certain variables of net neutrality. However, each approach has failed to pass in the Senate.

It is important to remember that the FCC stated that the repeal of net neutrality was to open the door for ISPs to have more room for innovation. However, no additional research suggests how such policy removal impacts the people who use the internet. One side wants innovation for the conglomerates, while the other wants protective safeguards for the people. The research conducted here provides insight and understanding into the failures to pass policies that deliver safeguards to protect the rights of the people. It does so by applying the NPF theory, which investigated different areas of the policymaking process to uncover weak areas and to provide readers with an understanding of the results. In addition, the research also uncovered additional impacts on the people who access the internet for daily use. Chapter 3 will examine the research method used in this research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter is divided into sections, each explaining the methods used to answer the research question presented in the theoretical framework. The research conducted a qualitative content analysis to explain how the public policy process works and how policies are enacted into law. This study examined the policy process and determined the reasoning behind Congress's failure to act in place of net neutrality and to protect consumers' equal access to the internet.

The FCC regulates the internet market, including consumer access. However, since the repeal of net neutrality in 2017, the FCC and congressional leaders have failed to pass new legislation protecting consumers' internet access rights for five years (Gilroy, 2017). This research aimed to uncover the reasoning behind the repeal of net neutrality and why congressional leaders and the FCC administration still need to pass policies safeguarding their consumers (Gilroy, 2017).

This chapter explains the research method and framework, including how they could be used to answer the research question and how they provide insight to the reader regarding the public policy process. The chapter details how content analysis, video-qualitative analysis, and the NPF helped shape the research structure and contributed to answering the research question.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to establish confidence in the truth and validity of the findings (Dale, 2023). Truth value is a method by which the researcher can establish confidence in the data results by providing evidence that their descriptions and analysis

authentically represent the phenomena discussed in the study. I have done so in the research results by creating data charts and providing a road map for the reader to follow while revealing the data analysis results. It was important to stay open-minded regarding the results because the results had the potential to contradict my personal political affiliation.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question

Why did the federal government and FCC fail to enact new policies that provide safeguards protecting consumers' equal internet access and First Amendment rights?

Qualitative Methodology

The research applied a qualitative policy analysis approach to better understand the policy enactment process and how it impacted consumers' equal internet access rights. Qualitative methodology was the best course of action for this research. While examining the data, the researcher is not necessarily searching for truth but rather an understanding of the subject (Ravitch, 2016). The goal is to answer the research questions while revealing answers that can only share the why behind the subject matter (Ravitch, 2016). The qualitative methodology helps researchers understand how people see, experience, and respond to the world, providing insight instead of just a truth (Ravitch, 2016)—in this case, understanding the policy enactment process within Congress is key (Ravitch, 2016). How do delegates discuss and debate the policy on the table to become a form of law? In addition, the qualitative methodology can help explain the reasons behind failed policy enactments.

The research followed the congressional policy enactment process and the internal discussions behind the policy enactment process. I utilized a narrative storytelling map to help understand the repeal of net neutrality and the failure to enact new policies protecting consumers' equal internet access (see Ravitch, 2016). The following research required studying and understanding the collected data.

Research Design

In the current research, I applied the NPF to the research design. NPF focuses on policy narratives to better understand and analyze the policymaking process (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). NPF creates a storytelling model that examines the individuals, the policy, and additional predictable factors that help better understand the policy framework (Ertas and McKnight, 2020).

Initially, NPF was created by Michael D. Jones and Marc McBeth, who sought to integrate narratives behind policy scholarships and enactment (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). They believed that using a storytelling method to explain certain forms of action and events would help the reader better understand a topic and alleviate confusion (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). Notably, NPF has meso and macro levels consisting of different group sizes; it develops narratives that focus on the stability and capability of positive social change (Ertas and McKnight, 2020).

This research explored the meso-level design to uncover the reasoning behind repealing net neutrality and the failure to enact new policies. The meso-level focuses on options within the policy journey and on identifying winners and losers (Jones & McBeth, 2020). The application of the meso-level is like a cost-benefit analysis because

it determines the benefactors and losers if such a policy is enacted (Jones & McBeth, 2020). It tells the story from the loser's perspective, expanding on any unknown conflict that may not have been identified if told from only the winner's side (Jones & McBeth, 2020). The goal is to contain the competition and find a solution (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

NPF consists of a narrative structure that includes a setting, characters, a plot, and the moral of the story (Jones & McBeth, 2020). For this research, NPF allows the reader to understand the ground upon which policies are discussed and voted on and to determine the key characteristics that impact the success or failure of such a policy passing (Jones & McBeth, 2020). Finally, the reader will understand the plot or foundation of the policy and the moral of the story, or, in this case, the impact of the policy's approval or disapproval on those impacted by the process (Jones & McBeth, 2020).

Rodrigues Neto and Barcelos (2020) applied the NPF to a case study that investigated the role narratives have in policymaking within an organization, such as an academic institution. The case study analyzed the construction of affirmative action policies at a university in Brazil. The Federal University of Pelotas in Brazil is the largest university in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and the institution is made up of 25,000 people, including faculty, students, and staff. The methodology included applying content analysis and qualitative NPF. Data collection included documents and interviews around the affirmative action policy process. Rodrigues Neto and Barcelos concluded that the university's policy process affected and shaped the school's affirmative action policies.

Initially, the university applied their affirmative action policy at an undergrad level by 40% rather than applying the base-level demanded amount.

NPF would help readers understand how congressional leaders need to enact new policies to safeguard internet consumers because NPF focuses on uncovering themes and the impact of the policymaking process (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). The reader could follow the journey of the policy and of all the actors involved in its success or failure (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). Indeed, this factor alone made NPF the best framework for this research on net neutrality repeal and the inability to enact new policies in its place.

Methodology

Data Selection and Instrumentation

A few key steps were important to the data collection process for this research. Each stage provided a step-by-step guide as to how the researcher located and collected documents that contributed to the data collection. The following section breaks down the steps of the data collection process, including the data's validity and reliability, sample size, and role of the researcher.

Before beginning the data collection phase, I had to determine the best form of data to conduct the research (Ravitch, 2016). After I reviewed the timeframe between 2017 and 2020, when Congress introduced three internet regulation policies but failed to move past the congressional committee, I found no transcribable data viable for content analysis. I visited Congress.gov (<http://www.congress.gov>), a public-facing government website where citizens can review policy transcriptions and their approval or disapproval.

However, internet bills such as H.R. 8517 – Net Neutrality & Broadband Justice Act failed to move past the introduction phase.

Therefore, I referenced congressional names associated with each bill and conducted a Google search with the keywords “net neutrality” and “internet regulation.” The objective was to locate links to video footage from congressional members’ government YouTube pages and websites. I hoped to find them discussing net neutrality, internet regulation, and more. Each video collected fell within a criteria category such as Net Neutrality Repeal. Most importantly, the videos could not be from outside of 2017–2022 or before the Obama administration because net neutrality policies were implemented during such terms and repealed during the Trump administration. The benefit of using public-facing video footage of congressional members presenting their stance on internet regulatory policies is the detail they provide regarding debates and conversations behind the policy’s potential approval or disapproval.

Previous research has been conducted using video analysis to conduct a qualitative analysis, such as societal documentary research. In such research, researchers have noted it is about something other than the amount of video footage collected but rather how rich the source is (Borish et al., 2021). The goal was to find videos for this research that included congressional members such as Senator Marsha Blackburn, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, and former President Barack Obama discussing net neutrality, internet regulation, and policy reform. I located five such videos (see Table 1). This is a justifiable sample size because of the limited access to government documents, which could have contributed to answering the research question (Stemler, 2001).

Table 1*Videos Collected*

| Video title | Political figure featured |
|---|------------------------------|
| “Blackburn Blackboard: Net Neutrality” | Senator Majorie Blackburn |
| “Committee Remarks on Net Neutrality” | Congresswoman Debbie Dingell |
| “Blackburn Works to Prevent FCC From Trampling on State’s Rights” | Senator Majorie Blackburn |
| “President Obama’s Statement on Keeping the Internet Open and Free” | President Barack Obama |
| “Blackburn Calls Net Neutrality Vote a Positive Step” | Senator Majorie Blackburn |

I used multimedia options for this research to support video translation to textual form for further content analysis (Craig et al., 2021). I ensured that the video data collected were derived from credible government-based internet outlets and that they included a mixture of political orientations, such as conservative and liberal. For example, Senator Marsha Blackburn is a Republican, while Congresswoman Debbie Dingell is a Democrat. Each congressional member’s YouTube page featured the congressional seal and was verified, meaning the YouTube page account was owned and run by that individual. That information was located on the congressional leaders’ main YouTube page, which consists of a bio, a profile picture, and further information. After collecting the data, I uploaded the video footage to Happy Scribe (<https://www.happyscribe.com>), a video/audio transcribing program, and converted to text for further analysis.

As the researcher, during the transcription, I had to maintain the accuracy and comprehension of the documentation once completed (Craig et al., 2021). Therefore, I used keywords such as *internet regulation*, *net neutrality*, *net neutrality repeal*, *internet policy*, and *equal internet access*. I also confirmed that the data's publication date fell within the last 6 years. In addition, I ensured the data collected were from credible government sources and not news outlets, including biased opinions. The topic is still heavily debated, and the research must alleviate the risks of personal opinions from sources (Stemler, 2001).

The researcher is responsible for protecting the validity of the data collected and analyzed during the research process (Chenail, 2012). It is the role of the researcher to find reliable sources and to determine the reliability of the data to the research (Chenail, 2012). Once the data are collected and vetted, the researcher serves as a transcriber alongside transcription software (Chenail, 2012). Therefore, I organized and categorized the data using a Microsoft Excel chart while maintaining an unbiased approach to the data analysis.

I used multiple columns in the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, including the database, keywords searched, the document found, and a quick synopsis detailing the document's subject matter. I alphabetized information to help with the efficiency of transcription and workflow (see Chenail, 2012). Once enough data were collected, the next step was to use a methodology to analyze the data to determine the findings of the research question.

Data Analysis

As previously stated, I used a multimedia approach to conduct the data analysis to support the use of video footage. The multimedia approach includes converting the video to audio for textual transcription for the final content analysis.

In addition, I used a video-based analysis of the videos collected for this research. The video-based qualitative analysis examines a human's experiences, knowledge, and more found in the visual contexts while creating an audio-visual for storytelling (Borish et al., 2021). This analysis can include either the video and audio or just the video exported to the textual transcript for analysis (Borish et al., 2021).

For this research, I transcribed the videos into textual transcripts. The video sources are available in the reference list. Therefore, I had to consider how best to preserve the authenticity of the videos, from visual to sound to text (Craig et al., 2021). I exported the video to text using Happy Scribe, a software known for being used to transcribe a video to a textual transcript with 100% accuracy. Once the program transcribed the video, I used NVivo software (version 14) to conduct the content analysis.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Transcribing video to text has advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantages relate to accuracy with the recording and the need for additional coding equipment (Craig et al., 2021). Choosing software to transcribe a video means making sure what is transcribed accurately reflects the words said in the video (Craig et al., 2021). In addition, having to utilize additional software in conjunction with transcription coding software can risk overloading the data collected (Craig et al., 2021). However, the advantages

were that I could still conduct line-by-line content analysis by transcribing the video to text and relying on my basic reading comprehension to support further analysis where needed (Craig et al., 2021).

In conjunction with the video-based analysis, I used content analysis as the research approach to further analyze the data once transcribed. Content analysis compresses and transcribes large quantities of words into smaller categories based on coding rules (Stemler, 2001). One of the benefits of content analysis is that it allows the researcher to sift through large amounts of data and break it down for analysis by individual, group, institution, or social attention (Stemler, 2001).

Conducting a content analysis requires that the researcher collect as much data as possible first and minimize returns to data collection later (Stemler, 2001). Once all the data are collected, the researcher can ask the following questions: Which data is being analyzed? How will it be defined? What is the population from which it is drawn? What is the context relative to which the information is being diagnosed? What are the boundaries of the analysis? What is the target inference? Once the researcher asks these questions, they can begin to sift through the data and formulate categories of continuous words and phrases that help contribute to the analysis (Stemler, 2001). The questions above are answered individually as the research categories grow (Stemler, 2001).

Different content analysis methods exist, such as referential or propositional units. Referential units were deemed the best method for this research because they refer to how certain words or phrases represent something or someone (Stemler, 2001). Referential units also enable inferences regarding a group's attitude, values, or preferences toward a

particular topic or subject (Stemler, 2001). Understanding government representatives' values or attitudes toward previous internet policies may help readers understand the failure to enact new policies.

To analyze the data further, one must create a system that collects and categorizes the data into manageable groups via spreadsheet by data source, content, and conclusion (Stemler, 2001). The spreadsheet I made via Microsoft Excel included the categories of document type, keywords, location, and a quick synopsis. In addition, I used NVivo software to sort through and analyze the word content of the data. NVivo is the top analysis software for qualitative analysis, and it explains the research as it transcribes the data collected. It can assist in reviewing the data collected, finding common words or phrases used, and allowing the researcher to catalog those findings. The second spreadsheet was created to categorize the words and phrases pulled from the data that contributed to the final explanation of the research.

The researcher can experience a few issues when conducting a content analysis. The first is collecting enough documents to begin the content analysis (Stemler, 2001). This issue was relevant for this research because of the limited access to documents on internet regulation and net neutrality. The second issue is collecting inappropriate records, or documents that do not match the definition or topic of the analysis (Stemler, 2001). In this respect, government officials discuss internet regulation, but as previously stated, they do so more on the economic side than the policy concerns. The third potential issue is that some documents might need to meet the requirements for analysis or be encodable (Stemler, 2001). If this is the case, it may require two rounds of qualifying

viable data before beginning the content analysis (Stemler, 2001). During the data collection, I had to journey past the congressional website which provided no transcription or documented information on proposed internet policies and gather video presentations instead.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I ensured trustworthiness and credibility of the research results by individually coding each transcript and by comparing the coding analysis to confirm consistency (Ravitch, 2016). To build consistency with the research results, I compared the video dialogue to the transcribed text to ensure accuracy (Ravitch, 2016). Finally, I compared the language and wording from the video with the transcribed text to ensure further accuracy with the data (Ravitch, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

This research and data collection form did not include interviews with media figures. However, following IRB guidelines to protect the validity of the research is critical (Ravitch, 2016). Furthermore, the IRB committee approved the research after it was expressed that during the data collection process, it was essential to remain unbiased and to allow the study to provide the answer(s) to the research question, whether I agree or not. Finally, I made sure not to allow any limitations to taint the data collected.

Summary

Net neutrality and its repeal have sparked great debate among scholars and Congress. However, there needs to be more legislation to replace the net neutrality policy and its theories for protecting equality for internet users. In Chapter 2, I shared previous

literature supporting the multiple debates within Congress. In addition, Chapter 2 shares the gaps in the literature that demonstrate the need for the research questions presented during the research. This chapter focused on the research type and the theories needed to carry out analysis to answer the research questions. It began by explaining the purpose of conducting a qualitative research study and analyzing data collected via NPF. This qualitative study using NPF followed the journey of legislation presented in Congress as well as the role of key players in its failure to pass. Finally, word data from congressional documents was analyzed to determine which data was conducive to the research and which was not.

Chapter 4 presents the data and its analysis, collected from government sources. Following the NPF, Chapter 4 summarizes the word analysis data and how it relates to the research question. Chapter 4 presents the documentation, the study, and the breakdown of the journey of the policy in the proper NPF format that further assists in answering the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine why Congress failed to enact newly proposed internet regulatory policies that would protect user's First Amendment and equal access rights? In this chapter, I present the data collection process and data analysis process while revealing the results of the conducted analysis.

This study aimed to uncover why the FCC repealed net neutrality and why Congress still needs to formulate new policies to replace net neutrality. The study explores presentations made during the policymaking process at congressional meetings, which led to the failure to enact new policies that protect users' First Amendment rights (Gilroy, 2017). The problem is that the FCC and Congress have failed to enact new internet regulatory policies to provide equality-driven safeguards to internet users and government oversight within internet markets. Congress's failure to act has increasingly limited internet users' First Amendment rights (Gilroy, 2017). The current chapter presents the analyzed data and the results of the analysis while revealing the answer to the proposed research question: Why did the federal government and FCC fail to enact new policies that provide safeguards protecting users' equal internet access rights and First Amendment rights?

Data Collection

At the beginning of the data collection process, I realized the policies introduced to the House of Representatives needed transcription or paperwork. Representatives presented three policies to the House but failed to move past the congressional committee. Unfortunately, I did not discover any transcribable data that would contribute

to the content analysis. Therefore, I identified the congressional names associated with each bill and conducted a Google search in combination with the terms “net neutrality” and “internet regulation.” I uncovered video footage of congressional members discussing internet regulation and net neutrality on their YouTube accounts. I ensured that the subject matter of the videos fell within the following categories: net neutrality, net neutrality repeal, internet regulation, and policy reform. Each of the videos I found was public facing.

I located three videos featuring Senator Marsha Blackburn, a Republican from Tennessee, discussing net neutrality and the proposed legislation: “Blackburn Blackboard: Net Neutrality” (Blackburn, 2011), “Blackburn Works to Prevent FCC From Trampling States’ Rights” (Blackburn, 2014), and “Blackburn Calls Net Neutrality Vote Positive Step” (Blackburn, 2017). All three videos were found on Blackburn’s YouTube page. YouTube has a “share” arrow option located under each video. I selected this option to copy the link into Happy Scribe, where I transcribed the videos via an algorithm into text.

I found a fourth video, featuring Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, a Democrat out of Michigan, advocating for net neutrality and its policy traits. This video, found at Dingell’s YouTube page, was titled “Committee Remarks on Net Neutrality,” (Dingell, 2019). I selected the share arrow button option under the video, copied the link, and pasted it into Happy Scribe for text conversion.

The fifth video featuring former president Barack Obama, “President Obama’s Statement on keeping the Internet Open and free” (Obama, 2014) was found on the White

House website (<https://www.whitehouse.gov>) under Archives. The video details Obama discussing the importance of net neutrality, keeping its principles to protect the people, and maintaining an open and free internet market.

Location sources contributed to the authenticity of the content. For example, the video from former President Obama was found on the White House government website under the policy archives. Each of the other videos was found on the congressional member's validated social media page. The validation is signified by a blue check, meaning the account has been authenticated as belonging to the individual indicated. Once each video was found, it was then uploaded to Happy Scribe, where it was converted to a text transcript. Happy Scribe software converts videos found on the web to text, transcribing them via a software algorithm that provides 80% accuracy, or, for an additional cost, via a person, which provides 100% accuracy. For this research, I used only the embedded algorithm in the software to transcribe the videos, and I validated the text by rewatching the videos.

Once each video was converted to text and validated for accuracy, I used NVivo for contextual data analysis. NVivo is the secondary software that helps maneuver through the text using set coding categories to pull out words and phrases that helped identify patterns. Data analysis was the next step following the data collection.

Data Analysis

The topic surrounding net neutrality is limited and the information available for analysis was scarce. However, during the 5-year time frame and prior there were three key policy actors who initiated the passing of net neutrality policy, served on a committee

responsible for passing internet regulatory policies, or presented legislation that would serve as an internet regulatory policy and include key factors from net neutrality policy (see Table 2).

Table 2

Policy Actors

| Policy Actor | Role | Affiliations |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| President Barack Obama | Served as Commander in Chief January 2009–January 2017 | Spearheaded the enactment and maintenance of the Net Neutrality Policy alongside the FCC |
| Senator Marsha Blackburn | Republican senator, Tennessee | Chair of Communications, Technologies, and Internet subcommittee |
| Congresswoman Debbie Dingell | Democrat congresswoman, Michigan | Co-sponsor of the bill Save the Internet (led by the Communications and Technology subcommittee). |

During his tenure, President Barack Obama spearheaded the enactment of the net neutrality policy alongside the administrative head of the FCC. He recorded a video encouraging Congress to pass and protect the net neutrality policy. Senator Marsha Blackburn served as the committee chair over the Communications, Technologies, and Internet subcommittee, which holds jurisdiction over legislation, congressional actions, and any matters relating to forms of communication (Blackburn, 2011). Finally, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell originally co-sponsored legislation led by the Communications and Technology subcommittee called Save the Internet (Dingell, 2019).

The following legislation was designed to protect the net neutrality policy (Dingell, 2019).

Coding

Due to initial software download complications, I had to conduct manual and electronic coding of the video-to-text data. After completing manual coding, I could download NVivo software successfully onto a specific operating system. During the manual coding process, I conducted descriptive coding. Descriptive coding focuses on terms describing a specific excerpt within the text (Saldana, 2014). Descriptive coding treats the codes as identifications of a specific topic, and the topic is what was talked or written about (Saldana, 2014). I used a coding chart to organize the coded data and used quotation marks around specific quotes (Saldana, 2014). Figure 1 is an example from the chart in the appendix of the coding conducted for the data analysis.

Figure 1

Sample Coding Graph

| Character-driven plots | Description | Stories of decline | Description |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| “The administration imposed these rules (net neutrality) without having the authority” (Blackburn Blackboard). | Administration or Congress | “I found it deeply troubling that FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler has repeatedly stated this past year that he intends to preempt states’ rights when it comes to the role of state policy over municipal broadband” (Blackburn Prevents). | State’s rights |

Each excerpt was categorized under a character-driven plot or sharing stories of decline following the impact of net neutrality repeal or potentially enacting new legislation. Both categories derive from the NPF meso-level and are commonly used by policy actors as a story-telling model. For this research, I introduced NPF early to begin the storytelling process as Congressional leaders shared their positions on internet regulation and government intervention to regulate the internet.

Policy actors use rhetorical narratives in policy debates to further emphasize their stance on a particular matter (Weible, 2018). Character-driven plots follow a story where the main characters are at the forefront and play a key role in the conflict (Weible, 2018). Stories of decline concentrate on the downfall of something following a change or removal of something (Weible, 2018). For this research, I chose character-driven plots as the first category because they targeted key players who presented internet policies that failed but could also have been a blocker to the passing of other internet legislation presented by a different key player. In addition, I chose stories of decline as the second category because it identified passages that discuss the decline of user rights following the repeal of net neutrality and the lack of new internet legislation.

In some cases, certain passages fell within both categories, presenting characters that emerged within a decline of something. For example, Dingell's statement, "Today, we're addressing a wrong that was created by Chairman Pi when he abolished net neutrality and he hurt millions of Americans across this country," falls into the categories of Net Neutrality Repeal and Chairman Pi.

Because certain passages fell within both categories, a third column was created to indicate which passages included both forms of storytelling when discussing the removal of net neutrality and/or internet regulation. The data coded do not meet any specific number or frequency of repetition, as coding guidelines specify that there is no fixed formula for an average number of codes per page or a recommended ratio of codes to the text (Saldana, 2014). That is why, for this research, descriptive coding was included to describe a text; though it may have been mentioned once, the language used during the storytelling is paramount (Saldana, 2014).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Building trustworthiness is an important part of the research process and analysis. A researcher can build trustworthiness by collecting data, analyzing them to determine what the data are saying, and then seeking to understand what the results mean (Dale, 2023). This process was used in my research to create trustworthiness and provide readers with an audit trail to follow (Dale, 2023).

Credibility is established when one can find truth in the findings or this case the research results (Dale, 2023). Qualitative research is subjective by nature, which can easily fall under scrutiny of credibility (Dale, 2023). For this research, I ensured all data collected were converted from video to text with 100% accuracy using Happy Scribe software and manual review. In addition, I included videos from both major political parties who directly impacted internet regulation and internet policy reform during the 5-year period, if not before.

In addition, I used triangulation, which contributed to understanding the phenomenon or, in this case, Congress's failure to enact new internet policies to safeguard consumers (Dale, 2023). Triangulation allowed me to analyze multiple video sources (Dale, 2023). Therefore, the reader can trust the process explained in the research and the explanation of the results (Dale 2023).

Dependability relied on whether the findings could be repeated if the study was replicated (Dale, 2023). The internet is a continuously evolving tool and a subject that Congress will continuously have to visit. The findings could be replicated because policy beliefs play a role in Congressional voting and decision-making during the policy process; therefore, whenever Congress does or does not act by passing legislation, one will ask why. Here, Congress disagreed on government intervention in internet regulation. Government intervention to pass legislation to regulate an entity or group will continue to be debated and discussed in Congress.

Confirmability examined whether the research determined the findings and not the researcher's bias or motivation (Dale, 2023). Including data from both political parties involved in the internet regulatory process creates a balance of representation. Furthermore, only including those policy actors affiliated with an internet regulatory policy dictate that the findings fall from the research and not my political affiliation.

Results

The central research question guiding this study was as follows: Why have the federal government and FCC failed to enact new policies that provide safeguards protecting users' equal internet access and First Amendment rights? The research

question focused on why congressional representatives have presented internet regulatory policies that include portions of the former net neutrality policy without successfully obtaining the votes needed to move the legislation forward (Gilroy, 2017).

Immediately, themes emerged as I began the coding process, but I waited until coding was complete to identify and solidify the themes found in the data results. The two major themes derived from the data analysis were (a) free and open internet and (b) no agreement on government intervention.

The debate surrounding internet regulation during the 5-year period went back and forth with only alignment on one specific topic: that the internet should be open and free. Outside of that theme, the two major political parties running Congress failed to align on anything further.

Theme 1: Free and Open Internet

“What you’re going to see is Congress step forward and take some action to put in place some free and open internet rules” (Blackburn, 2017). This is just one of the quotes from the video-to-text data that focused on the objective of keeping the internet open and free. While Blackburn noted that the federal government did not have the authority to enact net neutrality, she does agree with the Democratic party to keep the internet open and free.

Blackburn (2017) presented counterlegislation to block net neutrality, indicating that she opposed net neutrality policy and any form of it. In a second video, Senator Blackburn calls out the negative impacts of net neutrality and refers to keeping the internet open and free, stating, “I think everybody is for a free and open internet. That’s

what we want. The internet was not broken. It did not need federal government interference” (Blackburn, 2017).

Senator Blackburn went further to explain her proposed legislation sought to support an open and free internet by prohibiting, “any taxpayer funds from being used by the Federal Communications Commission, the FCC, to preempt state municipal broadband laws” (Blackburn, 2014). Again, her focus is to reallocate the power to decide broadband internet regulations to the states rather than the federal government and FCC (Blackburn, 2014).

A few of Senator Blackburn’s excerpts describe the government’s overuse of authority by enacting net neutrality and the role of the government in keeping the internet open and free following the repeal of net neutrality by rejecting any new internet legislation that may reinstate net neutrality policy factors.

Furthermore, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell doubled down on that notion, stating, “So today we’re ensuring we have an actual open internet that’s affordable to every American” (Dingell, 2019). Dingell noted that not only should the internet be open and free, but it should be for every American, hinting at the importance of equal access to the internet.

However, Congresswoman Dingell and President Obama’s excerpts described the decline of user rights without net neutrality or any internet regulatory policies. Both key players described moments when the American people expressed their concerns following the repeal of net neutrality and the government’s failure to listen.

The policy actors may align on a free and open internet, but the context reveals their beliefs behind wanting to keep the internet open and free are different. Senator Blackburn believed that keeping the internet open and free required minimal intervention from the government. In contrast, Congresswoman Dingell and President Obama believed government intervention was necessary to protect Americans' rights.

Theme 2: No Agreement on Government Intervention

The second theme identified congressional members' attitudes toward government intervention and whether they supported it in regulating the internet market. In each video, Senator Blackburn disdains government intervention in regulating internet markets.

Senator Blackburn stated, "The internet was not broken. It did not need federal government interference" (Blackburn, 2017). The video-to-text implies that she believes in limited federal government intervention and allocating those rights back to the states. She continues to state that the federal government did not have the authority to initially enact net neutrality, which leads to her saying, "When it comes to the internet, there are some things that we can't agree on" (Blackburn, 2017). Each excerpt describes the government's role in net neutrality and internet regulation.

Senator Blackburn's focus built open no government intervention when she stated, "We are going to forbid the FCC from ever regulating the internet" (Blackburn, 2017). Where her verbiage describes the steps taken to make sure the FCC and the federal government cannot interfere with internet regulation and maintaining the goal of an open and free internet.

However, President Obama believed the only way to protect internet rights was through government intervention and policy enactment. Congresswoman Dingell's policy beliefs align with that theory when she stated,

So today we're breaking with that tradition and listening to people. And instead of ignoring what our constituents have asked us to do, we will do something to protect the internet from the harms the Chairman Pi exposed it to. (Dingell, 2019)

The video-to-text implied that she believes the actions of repealing net neutrality put the American people's rights of equal access and First Amendment rights in harm's way (Dingell, 2019). Congresswoman Dingell's excerpts describe the decline of users' rights following the repeal of net neutrality and the government's role in ignoring the concerns of the American people.

Furthermore, Dingell stated, "in a world with so much inequality, the least we should be doing is making sure that every American, no matter where they live, no matter their income, no matter their education has access to the same internet," (Dingell, 2019). Describes the diminishing of equal internet access when no internet regulatory laws are in place and the internet lacks federal oversight (Dingell, 2019).

Policy Beliefs and Outcome

The video-to-text analysis showed each policy actor's policy beliefs as they spoke out for or against internet regulation and Net neutrality. Senator Blackburn, who is a leader in the Republican party, believed that the federal government does not possess the authority to enact internet regulatory policies for ISPs to follow (Blackburn, 2011). She believes that right is reserved for the states (Blackburn, 2017).

However, President Obama, who served as commander in chief for two terms as a democratic nominee and representative, and Congresswoman Dingell, who is also a leader in the democratic party, believe government intervention is necessary for internet regulation to protect the rights of the American people (Obama, 2014).

The policy outcome of 5 years of back and forth and disagreements was no passing of internet regulation, and the rights of the American people once protected under net neutrality policy were left unguarded; the two political parties could not align on the best way to protect the people's rights. Senator Blackburn agreed that ISP discriminatory practices such as throttling were unacceptable but held back on policies that Congresswoman Dingell would propose to prevent such practices (Dingell, 2019).

Summary

Some key patterns and themes emerged from the data analysis that help explain why Congress has not enacted new internet regulatory policies for five years. Key players in the policymaking process described the downfall of rights following the repeal of net neutrality and the government's failure to listen while others described Congress as overusing its authority to pass internet legislation thus providing context for understanding the legislation failures. The theme of having an open and free internet market appeared in every textual transcription. Interestingly, one side discusses this open market by referencing the people. while the other discusses it by referencing ISPs. In addition, regarding the theme of government intervention, congressional representatives did not agree on the importance of protecting Americans' rights in an open and free

internet market. Chapter 5 will revisit previous studies and examine how the theoretical framework shapes the data analysis results.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to uncover why Congress failed to pass new legislation that would replace safeguards and protection put in place by the previous net neutrality regulation. By exploring the policymaking process through congressional meetings and discussions, the research reveals that Congress supports an open and free internet market but that congressional members disagree on the best way to protect people's access and the First Amendment.

Interpretation of Findings

Knowledge

Previously referenced studies regarding net neutrality and net neutrality repeal are limited; however, discussions about the internet and how it was created, regulated, and distributed are still highly debated. The internet is provided by private sector sources and regulated by the government (Padmaja, 2017). The internet is a means to access content information in real-time and a means to free speech (Padmaja, 2017). Net neutrality states that all the traffic should be equal online (Zigmund, 2019). Therefore, previous scholars such as Zigmund (2019) argued that the internet should remain open and free. However, there are no federal laws during the years 2017–2022 ensuring users equal access protection to the internet.

The Supreme Court system ruled in different cases, calling the internet a public utility, but the FCC stated the government could not take over and run the infrastructure (Padmaja, 2017). No matter how the internet is defined via the court system, it does not change the responsibility of the government to pass legislation to regulate it.

The themes identified in the research analysis correlate with the notion the government has a responsibility to regulate the internet keeping it open and free but also equally accessible and failed to do so because of aligning on the direct involvement of the federal government.

All three key players believe in the innovation of the internet and that it should be open and free. The results revealed that each key player used terms such as “open” and “free” multiple times in their videos, which shows how passionate they are about the status of the internet market.

Unfortunately, while they all believe in an open and free internet market, they fail to align on how best to regulate it. The government’s role is to protect the American people, and this protection includes Americans’ rights when using the internet (Padmaja, 2017). It is unfortunate when the government is unable to align on the best way to protect the American people, leaving them defenseless against discriminatory practices. One of the jobs of Congress is to pass legislation that protects the American people, which in turn requires government intervention.

The research results can build on at least two factors. The first is the need to define broadband services to determine who has regulatory power: the states or the federal government. The second is the decision that internet regulation is necessary. Previous peer-reviewed articles clarify that policymakers have debated internet regulation for years, disagreeing on whether it is necessary (Padmaja, 2017). Unfortunately, limited information is available to uncover flaws in the approach and the cause of the failure to enact internet regulatory policies (Gerpott, 2018). The repeal of net neutrality catalyzed

the door to debate to be reopened and for continued conversation about the need for internet regulation (Collins, 2018). The results of this research affirm that there is an alignment issue in Congress regarding whether government involvement in enacting policies to regulate the internet is needed. Some congressional representatives have agreed that it is essential, while others have disagreed.

Again, the key players in this analysis have differing beliefs regarding the second theme, government intervention. Senator Blackburn shared that government intervention is dangerous and violates states' rights (Blackburn, 2014). Congresswoman Dingell and President Obama stated it is the government's responsibility to regulate the internet and that the government must have some level of involvement (Dingell, 2019).

One can conclude that Senator Blackburn does not support net neutrality and believes in a limited government and reallocating rights back to the states (Blackburn, 2014). Contrarily, Congresswoman Dingell and President Obama believe the opposite and support strong government involvement in the internet market (Obama, 2014).

Hypothetically, if Congress agrees that internet regulations are needed, a new debate would ensue on defining broadband services determining whether the states or federal government can regulate those services. Previous court cases, such as *USTA v. FCC* (2016), ruled to define broadband services as a utility, therefore granting authority to the federal government to regulate the internet market. There is, thus, potential for future court cases to be filed as the internet continues to grow and evolve and as the government continues to push policies for regulation.

Theoretical Framework

The NPF was the theoretical framework applied in this research. NPF helped construct a plot with a beginning, middle, and end while also identifying the key players directly impacting the outcomes (Ertas and McKnight, 2020). In addition, NPF identified themes during the policymaking process that determined whether the proposed legislation advanced or failed.

The data results identified three key players: former President Obama, Senator Blackburn, and Congresswoman Dingell. Each member, though of the executive and legislative branches, played a key role in proposing legislation and possibly in its failure to pass. The story begins with the Obama administration's enactment of net neutrality to provide safeguards for consumers, including equal access and First Amendment rights, in 2015. Then, in 2017, the Trump administration repealed net neutrality without proposing any new legislation to continue the protection of consumer rights. The middle of the story examines the failure to enact any new internet regulatory policies for five years despite legislation being proposed by key players in Congress, such as Congresswoman Dingell. The story ends with Congress failing to enact new internet legislation because they disagreed on the need for internet regulation and the government's involvement in providing legislation to protect consumers' internet rights.

One's political alignment (i.e., Republican, Democrat, or other) would determine who one believes is the hero, villain, and victim in this story. Many could agree that the consumer is the victim in this story, as they went 5 years without internet safeguards. One could argue that the heroes proposed and presented internet legislation and that the

villains stood in the way of passing such legislation. For example, I have more liberal political views and tend to align with democratically proposed policies. Therefore, I look at the research results and believe Senator Blackburn is the villain because of her position against government intervention to regulate the internet markets. When she referred to government intervention, she stated how the government initially “imposed legislation [net neutrality] without authority” and that it set a “dangerous precedent” (Blackburn, 2011). However, if a reader has opposing political views, they may disagree. The internet is a continuously innovative tool, and while Congress debated whether regulation was necessary, the internet continued to evolve and expand as a communicative, creative tool for consumers.

Limitations of the Study

I conducted this study, trying not to allow any of my political affiliations to influence the data collection and results. However, limitations regarding reliability and trustworthiness are expected. I am the only person who conducted this research for this study; therefore, there is a risk of bias and inflated results (Stemler, 2001). However, I used both political party affiliations for data collection and results to ensure trustworthiness and reliability. In addition, I used highly recommended software for video-to-text conversion to ensure accuracy and the removal of bias. Finally, I manually coded the text by uploading the software to my computer’s operating system. However, once the software was successfully installed, I used NVivo software to go back and conduct a second coding of the text.

Finally, access to data presented limitations during the research, and though the key policymakers may have presented internet legislation, no transcriptions were initially available to examine. Additionally, there was a need to gather video data and convert it to text for content analysis. Locating videos over a 5-year timeframe or prior also presented limitations because select congressional discussions and presentations are shared with the public, providing limited options.

Recommendations

After reviewing my research results, I recommend a researcher build on this qualitative study by investigating whether presidential administration changes impact the majority voting on legislation within Congress. A key factor in this research was that net neutrality was proposed and passed during the Obama administration but repealed during the Trump administration. In addition, I recommend further research on the type of impact the repeal of net neutrality had on American people across different demographics.

Implications

The research impacts positive social change because of its approach to analyzing the words and phrases used by congressional leaders in a forum for proposing and debating controversial legislation. In this research, the topic was net neutrality, but the research approach could be used in other areas where policies deemed important failed to pass. This approach provides context behind the why, helps people further understand Congress, and provides a mirror for Congress to identify problems behind the failure to enact essential policies. In addition, the American people want to believe their voices and

concerns are heard by their elected officials, as stated by Congresswoman Dingell, “[Congress] ignored the outpour of comments against the proposal that took away net neutrality” (Dingell, 2019). One would hope that, when the American people voice their concerns regarding repealing a policy or lack thereof that could threaten their equal and First Amendment rights, elected officials are doing everything they can to protect those rights.

Conclusion

The internet is an advanced tool that many use to communicate, research, and educate worldwide (Padmaja, 2017). While the private sector designed the internet, the regulatory responsibility falls to the government (Padmaja, 2017). However, for many years, there has been a debate among legislators about whether internet regulation is necessary and whether it cripples the private sector’s innovation. However, this research asks why Congress could not enact new legislation after the repeal of net neutrality in 2017. The data showed that while congressional representatives agreed that the internet is a market that should be open and free, they failed to agree upon government intervention in regulation.

Further assessment showed that congressional representatives who support government intervention only wanted regulation to protect consumers’ equal access rights and First Amendment rights (Dingell, 2019). However, the representatives who disagreed with government intervention did not mention consumers’ equal access rights. This further expands upon the notion that Congress cannot align on protecting consumers’ equal access and First Amendment rights in an open and free internet market.

Ultimately, this lack of alignment reveals the need to examine whether congressional leaders fail to align on specific policies. Is this disagreement due to the nature of the policy itself or to varying beliefs on how best to protect people's rights? The internet will continue to evolve, advance, and grow, and one can only hope the government will continue to move forward in a way that protects the American people.

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Appendix: Coding Chart

| Character driven plots | Description | Stories of decline | Description | Both categories | |
|--|------------------------------|--|---------------------|---|---|
| “The administration imposed these rules (net neutrality) without having the authority,” (Blackburn Blackboard) | Administration or Government | “I found it deeply troubling that FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler has repeatedly stated this past year that he intends to preempt states rights when it comes to the role of state policy over municipal broadband.” (Blackburn Prevents) | State’s Rights | “So today we’re ensuring we have an actual open internet that’s affordable to every American.” (Dingell) | Open Internet and equal access & Congress |
| “We are going to...forbid the FCC from ever regulating the internet,” (Blackburn Blackboard) | Government | “There have been some successes and also some spectacular failures that have left taxpayers on the hook.” (Blackburn Prevents) | Success and Failure | “Today, we’re addressing a wrong that was created by Chairman Pi when he abolished net neutrality and he hurt millions of Americans across this country.” (Dingell) | Net Neutrality Repeal & Chairman Pi |
| “We want to keep it open, free, and prosperous,” (Blackburn Blackboard) | Government | | | | |
| “My amendment seeks to prohibit any taxpayer funds from being used by the Federal Communications Commission, the FCC, to preempt state municipal broadband laws.” (Blackburn Prevents) | Taxpayers | “Ignoring the outpouring of comments against the proposal that took away the net neutrality, ignoring the thousands of fake comments, ignoring the evidence when he falsely claimed not only put the public, but to this committee, to myself” (Dingell) | Ignoring comments | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| <p>“Ever since the internet was created, it’s been organized around basic principles of openness, fairness and freedom.” (Obama)</p> | <p>Internet</p> | <p>“So today we’re breaking with that tradition and listening to people. And instead of ignoring what our constituents have asked us to do, we’re going to do something to protect the internet from the harms the Chairman Pi exposed it to.” (Dingell)</p> | <p>Internet protection</p> | | |
| <p>“There are no gatekeepers deciding which sites you get to access.” (Obama)</p> | <p>Gatekeepers</p> | <p>“We’re marking up this bill because in a world with so much inequality, the least we should be doing is making sure that every American, no matter where they live, no matter what their income, no matter what their education is, has access to the same internet and is free from digital redlining.” (Dingell)</p> | <p>Equal Access</p> | | |
| <p>“That’s why I’m laying out a plan to keep the internet free and open.” (Obama)</p> | <p>Administration</p> | <p>“Abandoning these principles would threaten to end the internet as we know it.” (Obama)</p> | <p>Internet</p> | | |
| <p>“And that’s why I’m urging the Federal Communications Commission to do everything they can to protect net neutrality for everyone.” (Obama)</p> | <p>FCC</p> | <p>“...but what we have to realize is that the obama era net neutrality rules putting the internet under the title two regulations that are intended for telephones the 1930s mabel regulation. What that does is to open the internet up to rate regulation and allow the federal government to actually be at the head of that pipe...” (Blackburn Calls)</p> | <p>Net Neutrality</p> | | |

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|---|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <p>“But the public has already commented nearly 4 million times, asking the FCC to make sure that consumers, not the cable company, gets to decide which sites they use.” (Obama)</p> | <p>Users</p> | <p>“The internet was not broken. It did not need federal government interference.” (Blackburn Calls)</p> | <p>Government Intervention</p> | | |
| <p>“Americans are making their voices heard and stand standing up for the principles that make the internet a powerful force for change.” (Obama)</p> | <p>American People or Users</p> | | | | |
| <p>“When it comes to the internet, there are some things that we can’t agree on.” (Blackburn Calls)</p> | <p>Congress</p> | | | | |
| <p>“I think everybody is for a free and open internet. That’s what we want.” (Blackburn Calls)</p> | <p>Congress</p> | | | | |
| <p>“What you’re going to see is Congress step forward and take some action to put in place some free and open internet rules.” (Blackburn Calls)</p> | <p>Congress</p> | | | | |