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Internet Architecture And Innovation (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Today -- following housing bubbles, bank collapses, and high unemployment -- the Internet remains the most reliable mechanism for fostering innovation and creating new wealth. The Internet's remarkable growth has been fueled by innovation. In this pathbreaking book, Barbara van Schewick argues that this explosion of innovation is not an accident, but a consequence of the Internet's architecture -- a consequence of technical choices regarding the Internet's inner structure that were made early in its history. The Internet's original architecture was based on four design principles: modularity, layering, and two versions of the celebrated but often misunderstood end-to-end arguments. But today, the Internet's architecture is changing in ways that deviate from the Internet's original design principles, removing the features that have fostered innovation and threatening the Internet's ability to spur economic growth, to improve democratic discourse, and to provide a decentralized environment for social and cultural interaction in which anyone can participate. If no one intervenes, network providers' interests will drive networks further away from the original design principles. If the Internet's value for society is to be preserved, van Schewick argues, policymakers will have to intervene and protect the features that were at the core of the Internet's success.

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Customer Reviews

This is an important and brilliant book, which I consider required reading for anyone interested in or serious about the Internet or innovation. I have written a review of this book on my blog ([...]) and on

the Huffington Post. As I say there, this book is one of the very few books in the field of Internet policy that is in the same league as Larry Lessig's *Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace, Version 2.0*, in 2000, and Yochai Benkler's *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, in 2006, in terms of its originality, depth, and importance to Internet policy and other disciplines. I expect the book to affect how people think about the Internet; about the interactions between law and technical architectures in all areas of law; about entrepreneurship in general. I also think her insights on innovation economics, which strike me as far more persuasive than lawyers' usual assumptions, should influence "law and economics" thinking for the better. Books this good don't come along every day--or even every year--and I'm already late to the praise-party.

I want to very highly recommend this book. Various authors, advocates, scholars, and businesses have spoken about the economic impacts of the Internet, but to date there hasn't been a detailed economic accounting of what may happen if/when ISPs monitor and control the flow of data across their networks. van Schewick has filled this gap. Her book traces economic impacts associated with changing the Internet's structure from one enabling any innovator to design an application or share content online to a structure where ISPs must first authorize access to content and design key applications (e.g. P2P, email, etc) in house. Barbara draws heavily from Internet history literatures and economic theory to buttress her position that a closed or highly controlled Internet not only constitutes a massive change in the architecture of the 'net, but that this change would be damaging to society's economic, cultural, and political interests. She argues that an increasingly controlled Internet is the future that many ISPs prefer, and supports this conclusion with economic theory and the historical actions of American telecommunications corporations. van Schewick begins by outlining two notions of the end-to-end principle undergirding the 'net, a narrow and broad conception, and argues (successfully, in my mind) that ISPs and their interrogators often rely on different end-to-end understandings in making their respective arguments to the public, regulators, and each other. This reliance on differing notions of end-to-end have led the defenders of these differing shades of the end-to-end principle to speak past one another.

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