FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: KEY ISSUES

Information technology has provided amazing new ways to communicate with people around the world. With these new methods come responsibilities and new ethical problems.

Some of the key issues are: controlling access to information on the
Internet, anonymity, defamation, hate speech , and pornography.

CONTROLLING ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

One of the main reasons to support control of access to information in the internet is the children's capability of accessing the Internet.

Here are some of the sections that address this issue.

The Communications Decency Act(CDA)

This act aimed at protecting children from online pornography. The CDA imposed $250,000 fines and prison terms of up to two years for the transmission of "indecent" material over the Internet.

Controlling Access to Information on the Internet

The Child Online Protection Act(COPA)

In October 1998, the COPA was signed into law. The law states that "whoever knowingly and with knowledge of the character of the material, in interstate or foreign commerce by means of the World Wide Web, makes any communication for commercial purposes that is available to any minor and that includes any material that is harmful to minors shall be fined not more than $50,000, imprisoned not more than 6 months, or both".

CONTROLLING ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

Internet Filtering

An internet filter is software that can be installed with a Web browser to block access to certain web sites that contain inappropriate or offensive material.

The best internet filters use a combination of URL filtering, keyword filtering, and dynamic content filtering.

URL filtering- is filtering a particular URL or domain name identified as an objectionable site.

Keyword filtering- uses keywords or phrases such as sex, Satan, f***, b*tch, and gambling to trigger the blocking of web sites.

Dynamic content filtering- each website's content is evaluated immediately before it is displayed by using image recognition and object analysis.

ANONYMITY

The principle of anonymous expression allows people to state their opinions without revealing their identity. The freedom to express an opinion without fear of reprisal is an important right of a democratic society. Anonymity is even more important in countries that don't allow free speech. However, in the wrong hands, anonymous communication can be used as a tool to commit illegal or unethical activities.

ANONYMITY: WAYS FOR BEING ANONYMOUS:

Anonymous Remailers

Maintaining anonymity is a legitimate need for some Internet activities. Internet users who want to remain anonymous can send e-mail to an anonymous remailer service, where a computer program strips the originating address from the message. It then forwards the message to its intended recipient.

John Doe Lawsuit

in a John Doe Lawsuit, the identity of the defendant is temporarily unknown. Such suits are common in the internet libel cases, where the defendant communicates using a pseudonym or anonymously.

NATIONAL SECURITY LETTER (NSL)

A NSL requires financial institutions to turn over electronic records about finances, telephone calls, e-mail, and other personal information of suspected terrorists or spies. Recent developments have expanded the scope and power of NSLs to the point that some believe they now represent a threat to freedom of speech.