

Social Questions And The Internet.

The Net is being buffeted by forces that threaten to destroy the very qualities that fueled its growth. It's being pulled from all sides: by commercial interests eager to make money on it, by veteran users who want to protect it, by governments that want to control it, by pornographers who want to exploit its freedoms, by parents and teachers who want to make it a safe and useful place for kids.

History.

The Genesis of the Internet can be traced back to the ARPANET project of the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Defense Department. The ARPANET became operational in 1969.

The National Science Foundation's NSFNET became the common backbone for all networks that constitute the Internet.

The Internet is heavily commercial, but also supplies other diverse uses such as e-mail and usenet newsgroups, and universal file transfer.

Some inadequacies of the Internet include insufficient mechanisms to guarantee privacy and security.

The Internet is the foundation of the Nation's emerging information superhighway.

Several pressing and vexing social and moral issues are connected to the usage of the Internet. These include the ability to remain anonymous while communicating in cyberspace, the civil liberties question, and the problem of universal access.

Anonymity in cyberspace.

Anonymity can sometimes promote free expression. Unfortunately, this sort of disguised communication can also lead to strange excesses. One can take on a whole different *digital persona* in the realm of cyberspace. It diminishes accountability and responsibility for one's actions.

Services such as "remailers", strip away in the original sender's name and any traces of his or her identity before "remailing" them on the Internet.

The American civil Libertarian's remind critics of "remailers" that the United States anonymity in cyberspace is protected a constitutional right to free speech.

Public policymakers must currently consider how to prevent abuses without imposing oppressive and counterproductive restrictions.

Free Speech in cyberspace

Restrictions on pornography in cyberspace are difficult to implement. How does society deal with this problem?

Libertarian groups are ardently opposed to any form of censorship.

Another school of thought proposes restraint of this material by the government. Critics of the government censorship point out numerous philosophical and practical problems with the solution. (i.e. the global nature of the Internet.)

Another school of thought maintains that offensive material should be restricted by users, organizations, and local communities.

Another issue of free speech in cyberspace entails hate speech.

The First Amendment right of free speech is obviously a fundamental principle of American democracy that should not be unnecessarily compromised.

Universal Access

The Internet is the information superhighway which is stimulating economic growth in our global economy.

Internet technology will give ordinary people more of a voice in politics.

Electronic access to the Internet will soon be as important as having a telephone.

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) took the position that providing some level called "universal service" is both economically feasible and morally responsible. It is required to ensure that society does not become divided into the information-poor and the information-rich.

There is a notable gap between universal access and universal service. The larger question in all of this is the government's role in eliminating the fissure in society between the information "haves" and "have nots".

Should the government explicitly seek to close this gap or shouldn't be left in hands of the free market forces?