



# Ethical Issues in Internet Use

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# Outline

## ◆ What is covered?

- National and International policies related to ethics in IT
- Ethical Issues in reproducing information available on Internet in personal research and education work
- Ethical Issues involved while using Internet as a platform for collecting data
- Ethical Issues involved while researching on topics being discussed in discussion forums, bulletin boards, list serves etc.
- Ethical Issues in publishing on the Internet

## ◆ What is not covered?

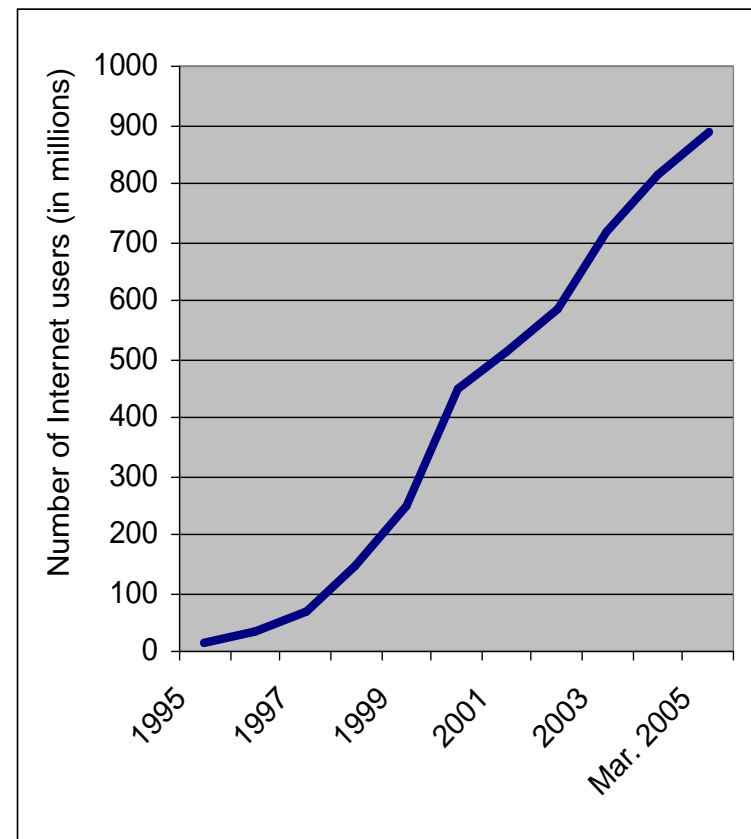
- Ethical issues in using Information Technology for patient care system, medical informatics etc.
- Software piracy and hacking

# Growth of Internet

"When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the World Wide Web ... Now even my cat has it's own page."

*Bill Clinton*

*Former US President*



# Internet Usage in Asia

<u>ASIA REGION</u>	Population ( 2005 Est. )	Internet Users, Latest Data	Use Growth (2000-2005)
<u>Total for Asia</u>	3,612,363,165	<b>302,257,003</b>	164.4 %
<u>Rest of the World</u>	2,799,704,020	<b>586,424,128</b>	137.7 %
<u>India</u>	1,094,870,677	<b>39,200,000</b>	684.0%
<b>WORLD TOTAL</b>	6,412,067,185	<b>888,681,131</b>	146.2 %



# Need for Ethical Issues

- ◆ The Internet blurs traditional categories like "professional" versus "amateur," "published" versus "unpublished," and "public" versus "private." Existing rules for the ethical conduct of human subjects research that rely on these categories are thus difficult to extend to this new medium.
- ◆ Health portals are most popular sites visited by users
- ◆ Exponential growth of health information on Internet
- ◆ Possibilities of finding unauthenticated, inaccurate, misleading and at times dangerous information on Internet
- ◆ Ethical Guidelines can ensure that people take full benefit of Internet to improve their health without risk



# International Rules and Guidelines

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- ◆ **Ethics standards and guidelines for Internet health sites are being developed and promoted by several organizations and quasi government agencies.**
- ◆ **The EU announced the adoption of a directive on the protection of individuals' personal data and on the free movement of such data. The directive requires all companies conducting business in the EU to meet certain minimum standards of data protection.**
- ◆ **Any institution accepting federal funds to support research on human subjects in the United States is required to have an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that monitors compliance with human subjects regulations (as expressed in US Federal Code Title 45 regulations (Protection of Human Subjects, 2001)). Many universities require IRB review for all studies, even if they do not receive such funds**

# International Rules and Guidelines

- Internet Healthcare Coalition

(<http://www.ihealthcoalition.org/ethics/code0524.pdf> )

eHealth Ethics Initiative introduced an International Code of Ethics for health care sites and services on the Internet.

- Hi-Ethics Alliance ([www.hiethics.org](http://www.hiethics.org))
- AMA - American Medical Association ([www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org))
- HON – Health on the Net Foundation ([www.hon.ch](http://www.hon.ch))

*Cont...*

# Indian Information Technology Act - 2000

- ◆ National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM)
  - Partner the Government of India and State Governments in formulating IT policies and legislation
  - Strive to uphold Intellectual Property Rights of its members
  - Taking effective steps to campaign against software piracy
- ◆ Internet Privacy
  - India does not have any specific law governing privacy. Analogies to the Internet will, therefore, have to be drawn from cases that the court has actually dealt with. The Constitution of India does not patently grant the fundamental right to privacy.
- ◆ Indian Copyright Act applies to Information Technology



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# Issues involved in Internet Ethics

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- ◆ Internet is a relatively new research tool which provides a unique research environment
- ◆ It is difficult to make out which is private and which is public space
- ◆ It is easy to screen and collect data without obtaining consent from the author
- ◆ The participants and the researcher can easily fake identities

# Using Web for Data Collection

## ◆ Privacy issue:

- On Internet privacy in decreasing order is provided by private e-mail; chat rooms; mailing lists; newsgroups; and Web sites
- The fact that the access to web is public does not always mean that the information available in such domain is also public.
- The technical and administrative rules of the site should be studied carefully
- Are rights and responsibilities of authors defined?
- Are there any restrictions for accessing the information available on the Internet?
- Read before pressing “I agree”

*Cont...*

# Using Web for Data Collection

## Consent Issue:

- When is it necessary to take consent for using information available on the Internet?
  - Data are collected from research participants through any form of communication, interaction, or intervention.
  - Research participant is unaware of any observation or reporting is taking place
- How to obtain consent?
  - By sending e-mails, by pasting notices on list-serve, discussion forum etc., by declaring on the website
- From whom to obtain consent?
  - Depending upon the case may be, the consent should be obtained from authors of posting on the Internet, Administrators of list-serves/discussion forum etc., Webmaster



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# Using Web for Data Collection

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## Anonymity Issue:

- This applies mainly to the case when research is conducted using discussion forum, user groups, list forums etc.
- In case of several sensitive issues, participants are very particular for anonymity
- The anonymity can be maintained by removing the identity elements such as message header, name of the list etc.
- Care should be taken to remove references of place, people and events in demographic data



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# Using Web for Data Collection

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## Accuracy of Information

- Most of the information available on the Internet is not peer reviewed
- Information published by authentic agencies only should be used
- As there is no face to face contact between the researchers and participants, possibility of miscreants providing incorrect information to mislead the study can not be ruled out



# Ethical issues in disseminating information on the Internet

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- ◆ Information about the owner of the site and purpose of the site should be clearly indicated
- ◆ Information should be truthful and unbiased
- ◆ Information should be accurate, easy to understand and up to date
- ◆ Consent from participants must be obtained before publishing any personal data
- ◆ Provide meaningful opportunity for users to give feedback to the site
- ◆ Copyright notice should be pasted on the site



# Conclusions

- ◆ Learn to differentiate between public and private, when in doubt, play safe and obtain consent
- ◆ Respect privacy of participants of online studies
- ◆ Anonymity comes at the cost of accuracy, so learn to balance between the two
- ◆ Copyrights and plagiarism apply to Internet as much as to print publications
- ◆ Ethical issues should not kill creativity on Internet
- ◆ It is our moral duty to publish truthful, unbiased information on Internet