

## Chapter 7

# Do High School Students Benefit from the Children's Internet Protection Act?

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA; 2000) requires an Internet filtering and public awareness strategy to protect children under 17 from harmful visual Internet depictions and has been implemented nationwide since 2001. However, little literature is available documenting its impacts on children's Internet safety. This chapter first reviews CIPA as well as other existing regulations in protecting children on the Internet. It then presents empirical evidence that CIPA is associated with a decrease in high school students' Internet use at school but does not appear to have a beneficial effect on their knowledge of Internet safety or opportunities for Internet safety education.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) was signed into federal law on December 21, 2000 and became effective on April 20, 2001. Under CIPA, public schools and public libraries receiving E-rate funds are required both to use filtering and blocking programs to protect children under 17 from harmful visual depictions on the Internet and to provide public notices and public hearings to increase public awareness of Internet safety. In the United States, almost 100% of public schools

have implemented CIPA (Wells & Lewis, 2006), while approximately 60% of public libraries have done so (Jaeger, McClure, Bertot, & Langa, 2005). Thus, it is important to assess the impacts of CIPA on young Internet users and to determine whether they benefit from CIPA. However, few empirical studies have been conducted to assess the impacts of CIPA on young Internet users. The objectives of this chapter are twofold: (a) To provide a broad conceptual context of the issue of children's Internet safety by reviewing federal regulations on Internet safety of children and (b) to demonstrate the complexity of children's Internet safety in the real-life world by presenting a specific case in assessing the

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impacts of CIPA on children and adolescents in public schools.

## **INTERNET SAFETY PROTECTION STRATEGIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

Among a wide variety of mass media (e.g., telephone, radio, movies, television, and Internet), only television and the Internet have caused widespread concerns specifically related to children, resulting in regulation at the federal level.

For television, there is one federal regulation entitled the Children Television Act of 1990 (CTA). The primary goals of CTA are to restrict advertising during children's television and to increase educational and informational television programs for children. Specifically, based on rules made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), television stations must (a) air the core programs that is specifically designed to serve the educational and informational needs of children ages 16 for at least 30 minutes in length between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. with a regularly scheduled weekly program; b) identify the core programs by displaying the "E/I" icon denoting that the program is "educational and/or informational." and (c) limit the amount of commercial matter that may be aired in certain children's television programming to 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays. Starting in 2007, FCC further required that at least three hours per week of the core programs must be provided on the main programming stream. CTA as well as FCC's rules have been implemented nationwide for nearly two decades to help children to learn important knowledge and values from television and to protect children from overcommercialization on television.

In contrast to television, there are six federal regulations concerning children and the Internet: (a) the Child Online Protection Act of 1998, (b) the

Neighborhood Children's Internet Protection Act of 1999, (c) the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 2000, (d) the Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000, (e) the Deleting Online Predators Act of 2006, and (f) Internet Safety Education Act of 2007. These Internet-related regulations are unprecedented in the human history, signifying the serious societal concerns about the negative consequences of the Internet on children. These concerns about children's safety on the Internet (e.g., exposing to pornography and being online victimization) are much more worrisome than those about impacts of commercialization and lack of learning on the television. As a result, these concerns lead to a series of federal regulation efforts to protect children on the Internet.

Among the six regulations concerning children and the Internet, CIPA is particularly important for several reasons: (a) It has been considered constitutional and implemented the most widely in the United States (despite that the American Library Association and other free speech advocates have been challenging it for violating the first amendment), compared to the Child Online Protection Act of 1998 that the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional. (b) It is the typical strategy using by all the five Internet-children regulations in restricting Internet access for children, compared to the Children's Television Act that primarily requires offering educational programs for children. (c) It represents the latest federal strategy to be adopted, given that the Deleting Online Predators Act of 2006 and the Internet Safety Education Act of 2007 are both still in the debating stage. (d) It has drawn the largest amount of public attention and has become the focal point of legal issues related to the Internet and children among parents, policy makers, researchers, and other concerned parties. Thus, CIPA can be considered as the most representative and best known federal policy among the Internet-related regulations and is the primary focus of the present chapter.

CIPA consists of nine sections, including five major sections specifying two major strategies

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