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Fears over regulation linger

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The Hindu File photo of Union Minister for Communication and Information Technology Kapil Sibal.

Lack of a public debate has muddied the waters

One thing that is now clear, since Union Communications and Information Technology Minister Kapil Sibal entered the social media scene with his controversial announcement, is that there will be no pre-screening of content.

Mr. Sibal clarified, in a recent interview to a news channel, that he had only pointed out to representative media organisations communally and religiously insensitive comments that could be incendiary. This would be taken down, he said.

Going to court every time to take down such commentary would be long and arduous, and he was examining an easier way out was possible. He had met with representatives of Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Yahoo to discuss the Ministry's position.

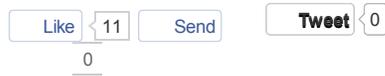
While the initial furore in social media circles against what was believed to be a move to pre-screen user-generated content certainly died down, suspicion lurks in the corners as users still fear a threat to the freedom of expression through the regulation of the Internet. It was also said that owing to the highly controversial nature of the comments, the issue was being discussed behind closed doors. The lack of a public debate is probably the main reason for the waters being muddied. Apar Gupta, a litigator who has published a commentary on the IT Act, 2000, says in a post on his Law and Technology blog: "Though the consultation happened in the Minister's office, the debate on Internet content regulation and the framework for Internet content regulation has seen broad public participation over the past week. It is to be hoped that the Minister picks up on the sentiment on twitter, facebook and orkut and involve all stakeholders in a formal consultation on Internet content regulation."

The possibility of screening online user-generated content, apart from its incursions on the freedom of expression, is another issue to be contended with, according to experts. Already, some of the social media company representatives have pointed out that regulating what users say online is a mammoth task, given the number of users online.

certainly one they were not inclined to pre-screen.

While the nation awaits the outcome of this move, it does not remain a silent spectator. Users on social networks watch out for an attack on their freedom of expression; networks are abuzz with comments and criticism. The question is whether the government is paying heed to the voice of the public, even as it seeks to fulfil its tasks in administrative and security realms.

Keywords: [Kapil Sibal](#), [social media](#), [pre-screening of content](#)



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