Position Paper on HCI Public Policy Work

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As use of computer technology continues to expand in new areas (e.g. financial services, government operations, distance learning, voting), it is critical to have public policy efforts for educating the general public and government leaders on issues regarding Human Computer Interaction. Usability is one of several vital computer quality aspects in establishing user trust of computer technology. Other computer quality aspects include security, reliability, availability, safety, and privacy. Public policy efforts in HCI will be valuable in improving productivity in using computer technology, especially as computer technology use continues to become more pervasive in our lives. HCI public policy work should include establishing and promoting HCI best practices through agencies such as National Institute of Standards and Technology and other agencies under the Department of Commerce. HCI public policy work should also coordinate and promote technology standardization work in areas such as telecommunications, voting technology, and Internet technology. As a part of supporting additional research in HCI, the public policy effort should champion use of measurements and metrics in this area and for the data to be shared in order to establish best practices. HCI public policies should also address issues that involve various languages, cultures, and customs. This is increasingly important for the United States, which has more citizens for whom English is not their first language.

I am a graduate student in computer science at the George Washington University in Washington DC. While I have no direct experience working on public policy issues, in the past I worked for more than two decades in the cellular telephone technology industry, and I was active in the development of cellular telephony standards in the United States, Europe, and Japan. My firsthand experience educated me in the importance of usability in consumer electronics and for product acceptance by the general public. The best technology is almost useless if users are not able to accomplish the simplest tasks (e.g. updating an entry in a cellphone address book) without referring to a product instruction manual. HCI public policy efforts should help establish and promote best practices where usability will aid rather than hinder users in accomplishing a desired task while using computer technology. To increase user productivity and education, HCI best practices that support expanding computer-based activities among the general populace will be critical. In my dissertation work I will be examining the importance of the aforementioned computer quality factors, including usability, in establishing user trust of computer technology.