Interfacing with Public Policy

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ISSUES IN PUBLIC POLICY

Information affects the type of legislation that is passed and it also affects the requirements that define user interfaces. The main issues in public policy that face the human-computer interaction community fall under the heading of information policy. Information policy refers to the laws, regulations, and policies that "regulate the creation, use, storage and communication of information" [1]. The information policy values defined in [1] relevant to CHI include the following: access and openness, privacy, and security.

Access and Openness

The amount of access to information such as government information that is provided or defined by information policy affects the extent, scope, and purpose of the user interface. In terms of government information accessibility over the Internet, the SIGCHI Policy Committee could provide guidelines for designing government websites that increase accessiblity and usability.

The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University in New Jersey issued a "report card" scoring the State Government's online interfaces. This report led to a set of policies for the design of websites for the State of New Jersey and the redesign of the State's website. The first author, as a graduate research assistant at Eagleton, conducted a followup study to examine the State's website after these changes by using focus groups consisting of members of the public to examine how they used the State website to answer questions related to government information and services. Based on this analysis, Eagleton developed recommendations to help the State provide a more consistent look and feel for users and improve services and communication with the public. These recommendations could be expanded and generalized for all State Government websites.

Security

The security of information within a system will also dictate certain aspects of a user interface. For example, in New Jersey, state, county, and local election officials defined requirements for the functionality of electronic voting machines. This debate has lead to specific changes to the user interface in order to increase usability, security, and accessibility to people with disabilities.

As a staff member in the New Jersey Senate Majority office, the first author conducted research and prepared comments on pending legislation related to voting reform and worked with legislators in committee meetings and public hearings to explain the purpose, methods of use, and the security of voting technologies. As dictated by the political party organizations in the New Jersey, the majority of the counties chose a specific voting machine based on the layout of the ballot interface, an interface that depicted the full ballot based on the party line, rather than basing their choices on the usability of the interface. The SIGCHI Policy Committee should be aware of political restrictions to interface design and seek to find ways to increase the usability of those designs despite these restrictions.

Privacy

Privacy principles address the collection, storage, sharing, and retention of personal information. Due to industry self-regulation of privacy policies, our group, the CMU Usable Privacy and Security Laboratory, has been developing interfaces for user agents and search engines that inform users of websites that match their privacy preferences, as defined by machine-readable privacy policies based on the Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P) standard. In our work, we seek to create risk communication models and economic models to learn how users understand privacy. We seek to determine better methods to inform individuals about privacy, the risks to their privacy, and to help them adequately define their privacy preferences. The combination of privacy legislation and statutes for industry self-regulation has led to the creation of tools and interfaces that address privacy issues. User interfaces can help users negotiate the areas where legislation neglects to provide concrete assistance.

CONCLUSION

The SIGCHI Public Policy Committee should continue to focus on issues of accessibility, privacy, and security. The committee can provide the community with guidelines and recommendations of "best practices" for designers dealing with political usability constraints.

REFERENCES

1. E. S. Overman and A. G. Cahill. Information Policy: A study of values in the poicy process. *Policy Studies Review*, 9(4):803–818, Summer 1990.