

Presenting information for consent and control

When providing information for consent or control options apps, there are different approaches to designing them. These depend not only on the functions of the apps but also on our understanding of usability regarding "Choice architecture". This refers to the way choices are presented to users including aspects of spatial arrangements, number of choices, descriptions and defaults.

Do I convey information, entice a specific action or take options off my customers hands?

- **Concealing or hiding information.** Under the guise of usability meaning quick, the argument is usually that having few options is a relief for users. If a program is deemed "self-explanatory" no further effort is made to make it accessible for others. Traditionally, in UX design, the argument against products with a high degree of control options is that those are supposedly not as usable or not suitable for everyone.
- **Transparency of information.** With reference to the value of transparency - an ostensibly neutral way of presenting information is performed. e.g. general terms and conditions that include very long, legally correct texts. It usually runs into the problem / bias of "too much information". So while this caters to the needs of people who want to know it all it is a problem for people with less resources. In addition offering options is not yet enough for meaningful objections if people are not empowered to make those choices.
- **"Nudging"** - an educational design of options to entice certain attitudes e.g. highlighting agree as opposed to disagree in cookie consent forms. This generally serves the business interests of the providers. It can also be used to create friction ie. only being able to confirm T&Cs after reading them.

To what extent can users be empowered to make their own decisions ?

Above methods show the knowledge and experience advantage of the designing persons over possible users. Whether the intended users want to have a lot or little information displayed, is not a choice they can make but something that is made for them. Interest in different variants of control is also rarely assumed or designed. Instead, the idea that there is one best possible solution for everyone often prevails.

We are thus facing a dilemma situation for consent - or software structures to document consent to data collection and usage - on the one side meaningful consent hardly takes place and control options are usually insufficient. On the other side a granularity of options, more texts to read or more technical options can make being responsible too great of an individual burden and lead to resignation against the technical possibilities.

Educating users could mean working with them in a joint process to develop knowledge and exercise freedom. For an empowering relationship between designers and users, designers have the responsibility to think about their users freedom of choice. Without empowering structures, individual users will not be able to meaningfully consent and control. This raises the question of how designers can create those.

Ideas could include ensuring feedback loops from users to designers, more granularity of options, design of texts according to different modes of learning and on different knowledge levels, context specific presentation or time sensibility and options to be reminded in a specific time frame.

“Taking responsibility does not mean always doing everything right, but asking the right questions and confronting but asking the right questions and confronting the consequences of one's own actions. Make yourself be aware of how much you are not aware of and act accordingly.” (Leena Simon "Digital maturity")

How do we find a balance between too much information or too few options in our project?

How can empowering structures be integrated into our software?

Further reading

- Patrick Skeba and Eric P. S. Baumer. 2020. Informational Friction as a Lens for Studying Algorithmic Aspects of Privacy. Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. 4, CSCW2, Article 101 (October 2020), 22 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3415172>
- Hana Habib, Yixin Zou, Yaxing Yao, Alessandro Acquisti, Lorrie Faith Cranor, Joel R. Reidenberg, Norman Sadeh, and Florian Schaub. 2021. Toggles, Dollar Signs, and Triangles: How to (In)Effectively Convey Privacy Choices with Icons and Link Texts. In CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '21), May 8–13, 2021, Yokohama, Japan. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 25 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445387>
- Christine Utz, Martin Degeling, Sascha Fahl, Florian Schaub, and Thorsten Holz. 2019. (Un)informed Consent: Studying GDPR Consent Notices in the Field. In 2019 ACM SIGSAC Conference on Computer and Communication, Security (CCS '19), November 11–15, 2019, London, United Kingdom. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 18 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3319535.3354212>
- Improving consent in large scale mobile HCI through personalised representations of data; Authors: Alistair Morrison, Donald McMillan, Matthew Chalmers, NordiCHI '14: Proceedings of the 8th Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction: Fun, Fast, Foundational October 2014 Pages 471–480 <https://doi.org/10.1145/2639189.2639239>
- A Design Space for Effective Privacy Notices; Authors: Florian Schaub, Carnegie Mellon University; Rebecca Balebako, RAND Corporation; Adam L. Durity, Google; Lorrie Faith Cranor, Carnegie Mellon University; <https://www.usenix.org/conference/soups2015/proceedings/presentation/schaub>