I2Web Ethics Handbook

Deliverable 4.2 :: Public

Keywords: ethics, research with humans, privacy, confidentiality, security, user profiles

Inclusive Future Internet Web Services

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Contractual Date of Delivery to the EC:		31st July 2011 + 60 days	
Actual Date of Delivery to the EC:		26th September 2011	
Editor:		Helen Petrie (York)	
Contributors:		Sam Collin (FAST); Bláithin Gallagher (NCBI)	
DOCUMENT HISTORY			
Version	Version date	Responsible	Description
0.9	25 July 2011	York	First draft for comment by partners
1.0	18 August 2011	York	Final draft incorporating comments from partners

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Executive Summary

This deliverable presents the I2Web Ethics Handbook, which will guide the ethics of all the work within the I2Web Project.

The area of ethical concern which has so far been identified is the work with a range of human participants: disabled and older web users, web commissioners and developers and web accessibility experts. Information will be gathered from people from these groups via surveys, interviews and observation of individuals undertaking tasks on the web with a variety of devices.

This work with human participants will be governed by appropriate ethical principles that are detailed in the deliverable and are divided into the following areas:

- Recruitment
- Briefing
- Informed Consent
- During the study
- Withdrawing from the study
- Debriefing
- Signing off the informed consent form

No other areas of ethical concern have yet been identified in the I2Web Project. If additional issues arise, this document will be amended to deal with them.

1 Introduction

This deliverable presents the I2Web Ethics Handbook, which will guide the ethics of all work within the I2Web Project.

After discussion of possible ethical issues within the I2Web project, only one area of ethical concern has been raised. This issue is the ethics of work with a range of human participants: disabled and older web users, web commissioners and developers and web accessibility experts. Information will be gathered from people from these groups via surveys, interviews and observation of individuals undertaking tasks on the web with a variety of devices.

This work with human participants will be governed by appropriate ethical principles that are detailed in the deliverable and are divided into the following areas:

- Recruitment
- Briefing
- Informed Consent
- During the study
- Withdrawing from the study
- Debriefing
- Signing off the informed consent form
- Treatment of data

The ethical guidance is based on best and ethical practice for research with human participants developed by the British Psychological Society (BPS)[2] (Code of Ethics and Conduct) and the American Psychological Association[3] (Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct). The work with human participants in I2Web is directed by Professor Helen Petrie, a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the BPS, bound by the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the BPS.

No other areas of ethical concern have yet been identified in the I2Web Project. If additional issues arise, this document will be amended to deal with them.

1.1 Terminology

In this document, study will mean any questionnaire (online or paper, etc), interview, focus group, experimental or quasi-experimental investigation, and any collection of data from a participant (e.g. monitoring of computer behaviour for collection of strategies or user modelling data).

[2] http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/ethics-standards/ethics-standards
[3] http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx

2 Ethical aspects of stages of work with human participants

2.1 Recruitment

During the recruitment process, the researchers must start to build towards informed consent in the participants. In recruitment, sufficient accurate information must be provided about the study so that a potential participant can make a sensible decision about whether they wish to be part of the study. This will include providing them with a fact sheet about the project and the particular study in which they are being asked to participate. This fact sheet will be sent with an appropriate letter of invitation.

Potential participants will not have undue psychological pressure placed on them to be part of a study. For example, it should not be suggested that it is part of a course or that it would be beneficial for a course.

Potential participants may be offered reimbursement, but will not be offered reimbursement (in money or in kind) that is not commensurate with the effort involved in the study. In particular, they will not be offered reimbursement that may cause them to act against their better judgement.

2.2 Briefing

Before they give consent, potential participants should be properly briefed about the study. This should include:

- What they will be asked to do
- How long will it take
- Who will be conducting the study, whether anyone else will be present
- Whether they will be audio or video recorded and what exactly will be recorded (for example in the case of video recording, typically the screen and keyboard are recorded, often not the participant's face)
- A reasonable estimation of whether it will be boring, difficult, stressful etc
- What they should do if they wish to withdraw, with information that this is their right and won't have negative consequences, particularly on their reimbursement
- Who will have access to their data, where and how long it will be stored, with appropriate information about anonymity and confidentiality (see section 3.8 Treatment of Data for further information on this topic)
- How will the results be disseminated

Potential participants should be given adequate opportunity to ask questions about the study during the briefing process.

All information about the study (not only during recruitment, but at all stages of the study) should be provided in formats suitable for the particular participants. This might include braille materials for blind participants, large print materials for partially sighted participants and appropriately formatted materials for dyslexic participants.

2.3 Informed consent

Once the participant has been briefed, and given an appropriate time to consider the situation, they should be asked to give their consent. They can either sign an appropriate form (see Appendix A, Part A of the Informed Consent Form) or if that is not appropriate alternative means for given consent will be provided. For example, in some cases visually impaired people may not wish to sign a form if they cannot see what the form. One alternative is to allow the visually impaired person to read the form on the computer (for example with a screen reader or magnifier), print the form themselves and then sign it. Another alternative, suitable for both visually impaired participants and those with severe physical disabilities, is to video a verbal consent statement.

2.4 During the study

During the study, participants will be treated with respect and common sense. They should not be asked to undertake activities for unreasonable periods without comfort and refreshment breaks, in conditions that are uncomfortable etc.

They should feel that they can ask for breaks, refreshments, etc. as reasonable.

Participants will be given access to appropriate hardware and software and support in using that equipment so that they can complete the study in an appropriate and comfortable manner.

2.5 Withdrawing from the study

Participants must be clear that they can withdraw from a study at any point and how they should do this.

They should also be made aware whether any parts of a study are optional.

2.6 Debriefing

When the study is complete, participants should be given as full an explanation of the rationale for the study, how their participation fitted into the complete study and how the data will be analysed.

The debriefing should be an interesting and educational experience for the participant and they should leave the study feeling their participation was worthwhile.

They should be given adequate opportunity to ask questions.

The debriefing is often an excellent opportunity to collect a little more data, and very useful data. You can find out whether the participant misunderstood anything about the study that might be important, etc.

2.7 Signing off the informed consent form

Once the debriefing is over, the participant should be asked to complete Section B of the Informed Consent Form.

2.8 Treatment of data

Considerable careful must be taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants' data. Treatment of data is governed not only by professional ethics, but by the data protection legislation and directives of the partner countries and the EU.

In all computer files, participants should only be referred to by a code that cannot identify them. For example, codes including the participants' initials should be avoided. One researcher should retain the mapping from codes to participant names, but this information should not be stored on a computer and should be kept in a secure place.

All computer files should be stored only on secure machines. Particular care should be taken on security issues if files are transferred between partners for analysis. This should be undertaken using secure means.

Audio and video files should not be shown beyond the immediate research team without the explicit permission of the participants. For example, if an excerpt from a videoed session is to be used at a public presentation such as a conference, explicit permission should be obtained from the participant/s involved.

When data are reported in project deliverables or in public documents, attention must be paid to the anonymity of data. Data should mainly be reported in an aggregate manner, so that information from individual participants cannot be identified. If individual information is included, for example, comments from individual participants, it should be reported in ways that does not identify or embarrass the individual.

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

I2Web Project

Before you participate in this interview/focus group/study, please complete Section A, printing your name in the first space and then sign at the end.

Once the interview/focus group/study is over and you have been debriefed, you will be asked to initial the three statements in Section B, to indicate your agreement.

Section A

I, _____, voluntarily give my consent to participate in this interview/focus group/study for the I2Web Project. I have been informed about, and feel that I understand the basic nature of the project. I understand that I may withdraw from the interview/focus group at any time without prejudice. I also understand that my information is confidential. Only [named researchers] will have access to the data collected today in its original format and it will only be shared with other project members in an anonymised format.

_____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date

Section B

Please initial each of the following statements when the interview/focus group/study has been completed and you have been debriefed.

I have been adequately debriefed	Your initials: _____
I was not forced to complete the interview/focus group/study	Your initials: _____
All my questions have been answered	Your initials: _____

