

As transparency is integrally linked to trust and accountability, an IT system should help users understand how it is designed and how it works by making its inner logics and functions visible.

- Find technological and social mechanisms to share the inner-workings of your system with users and those being served by its use.
- Help users understand the inner logics and functions of your system, including the classification systems, taxonomy, access controls, etc.
- Make users and how users interact with an IT system visible.

Further information

Transparency may have contradictory meanings. In computer science and IT studies, it can refer to a condition of invisibility, namely that a system can be used without question or need to think about the processes within. In ethics, transparency means to have the inner workings of a process visible so that anyone using it can understand the steps involved and their implications.

Rather than an ethical principle, some theorists argue that transparency is a key ethically “impairing” or “enabling” factor than impacts on principles such as accountability, consent, privacy, anonymity hence allowing more control over our data (Turilli and Floridi 2009). Others argue that regardless of its presence in data regulations, transparency is often naively treated as a panacea for ethical issues arising from new technologies (Crawford 2016; Neyland 2016; Raymond 2014).

According to the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), transparency is one of the essential elements for developing responsible and sustainable data-driven technologies urging that “individuals must be given clear information on what data are processed, including data observed or inferred about them; better informed on how and for what purposes their information is used, including the logic used in algorithms to determine assumptions and predictions about them.” (EDPS 2015). It is widely claimed that the GDPR is putting transparency via a ‘right to explanation’ clause at the heart of data protection. However, doubts are raised about the legal basis and feasibility of such a right highlighting the limitations of the GDPR’s mandate (see Wachter et al 2017a,b; Edwards and Veale 2017).

Sources

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