

FA(I)R: Feeling all Rights in Digital World: Participatory approaches to address harmful behavior in digital environments

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Legal norms are commonly absorbed and reproduced in daily life through physical cues such as: barriers and walls, people's stories, and observing others' behavior, among other things. In digital environments, this bodily notion of law is limited, giving the impression that it is a place of disorder and lawlessness. To raise awareness of rights and create a safer space for users, we use the Digital Services Act, and its protection on fundamental rights as a base for our research goal: create a multimodal AI-based prototype to warn users about a potential right violation and enable them to respond and take action. For this, the research is based on an interdisciplinary team from computer science, law, and design, and aims to use a transdisciplinary participatory design approach with communities in Linz, Austria.

CCS COEPTS • •Human-centered computing~Interaction design~Empirical studies in interaction design~Human-centered computing~Human computer interaction (HCI)~Empirical studies in HCI•Human-centered computing~Interaction design~Interaction design process and methods~Participatory design

1 INTRODUCTION

Although laws are written down, most people do not actually read them in daily life. Instead, people follow the law by picking up on things they see (like how public spaces' architecture is different from private properties) and physical clues (like barriers that make you leave a supermarket through the checkout). People also learn what is legal by copying others' behaviors, hearing stories, and getting feedback from those around them. People are always shaping and keeping up with what is legal in their everyday lives [4, 10]. Digital platforms do not have these ways for people to see and learn the law. If there are any barriers, they cannot be crossed (like the checkout process in online shopping), and while social media has some social feedback, the main way rules are enforced is by removing or blocking content [5]. This gives all the power to the companies that run the platforms and usually hides any rule-breaking, so people cannot learn from it. Recently, two big platform companies (X and Meta) even chose to cut back a lot on their rule enforcement, which makes people wrongly think that digital platforms have no rules [9]. If people make sense of the law through real-world actions and situations, then digital spaces need to give them social and physical clues to help them understand what is allowed [2, 6].

Taking this into consideration, and with a particular focus on amplifying the voices of minorities in digital participation, we began the Fa(I)r project in January 2026. Our aim is to develop a multimodal interaction artifact that responds dynamically to user behavior, translating abstract legal concepts into tangible, experiential encounters. Recognizing that the harm to fundamental rights in digital spaces disproportionately affects minority groups, we are committed to ensuring our design foregrounds their perspectives and experiences. We consider diverse sensory modalities—including voice, haptic feedback, and visual representation—so that our artifact can render legal dimensions of online activity perceptible and comprehensible to all users, especially those whose rights are often marginalized or overlooked. The design challenge centers on making the decisions more participatory and engaging through the whole process with a defined community, institution, or organization. More than a consultant, we want the people to own this prototype/artefact, and that will make sense for them. As a long-term goal, build a collective strategy to deal with harmful content in digital environments and bring it to public advisors and policymakers. In this sense, we are also committed to not overlooking asymmetries in the process, and open spaces for different voices.

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2 CHALLENGE

In the EU, digital platforms are governed by two regulatory frameworks: The Digital Services Act (DSA) [12] and the Digital Market Act (DMA)[11]. One of their goals is “to create a safer digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected” [12]. To achieve this, the DSA enumerates systemic risks in Article 34, including “any actual or foreseeable negative effects for the exercise of fundamental rights,” with explicit references to the EU Charter: human dignity (Art. 1), respect for private and family life (Art. 7), protection of personal data (Art. 8), freedom of expression and information (Art. 11), non-discrimination (Art. 21), rights of the child (Art. 24), and consumer protection (Art. 38). This is complemented by fundamental values beyond the Charter: civic discourse and electoral processes, public security, gender-based violence, public health, minors, and physical and mental well-being.

To ensure that interventions addressing fundamental rights in digital spaces are both impactful and sustainable, our approach centers on participatory and inclusive methodologies. We prioritize co-design processes in which minority communities and other stakeholders are not only consulted but actively engaged as decision-makers throughout the project lifecycle. This means that the identification of relevant issues, the development of solutions, and the mechanisms for implementation and evaluation are all shaped by those most affected by digital rights challenges.

Our central challenge is to create a process of building with people, by making an intervention in a certain context, and seeing how the strategies are built upon it. We aim to foster a sense of ownership and collective agency within the community or institution, increasing the likelihood that interventions will remain relevant and effective over time. We also commit to transparent, iterative feedback loops—ensuring that community voices guide adaptations and improvements. Ultimately, our goal is to create frameworks and tools that are not only inclusive in design but also empower communities to sustain and advocate for their rights in digital environments long after the project’s initial phase concludes.

3 METHODOLOGY

To safeguard against technocratic imposition and follow a sense of collective making, we will adopt participatory design as a foundational principle. The construction of taxonomies, in particular classifications of harmful content, poses significant risks of marginalizing minority perspectives and reproducing dominant power structures [1]. Therefore, we want the design process democratized from inception, incorporating community stakeholders not merely as research subjects but as co-designers with epistemic authority [3, 7, 8]. By building a connection with the affected community, we will collaboratively determine which fundamental rights warrant prioritization and which dimensions of the online experience demand intervention. Crucially, participants will also shape the materiality and modality of the intervention itself, suggesting which artifact forms, whether physical objects, digital interfaces, or hybrid configurations, and which sensory modalities prove most useful and contextually appropriate for their specific needs and practices. This approach recognizes that communities possess situated knowledge not only about the rights violations they encounter but also about the most effective and culturally resonant means of intervention, ensuring that meaningful protection requires centering these experiential insights rather than imposing externally defined frameworks.

4 DESIRED OUTCOMES

Through our research, we are primarily interested in the process of fostering collective action and building shared strategies around fundamental rights in digital spaces. Rather than focusing solely on end results, we emphasize the importance of engaging communities in ongoing dialogue, co-creation, and participatory intervention. Our approach involves introducing interventions and structured discussions both as a means to raise awareness and as opportunities for communities to collaboratively prototype responses to harmful content.

We aim to move beyond passive or reactive behaviors by equipping participants with tools and frameworks that enable them to actively identify, deliberate, and respond to harmful digital content. We view the process of prototyping and discussion to be equally as valuable as the technological solutions themselves, as these processes cultivate collective agency, critical reflection, and sustainable practices for rights protection. Ultimately, our desired outcome is to spark a shift from individual reaction to proactive, community-driven engagement, ensuring that strategies and interventions are both relevant and enduring.

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