ETSI EG 203 499 V3.1.2 (2025-12)

Human Factors (HF);
User-centred terminology for existing and upcoming ICT devices, services and applications

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Foreword

This ETSI Guide (EG) has been produced by ETSI Technical Committee Human Factors (HF).

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The work has been conducted in an open collaboration with industry, user and consumer representatives, and other relevant stakeholders. The present document is based upon desk research (documents and online sources), best practices, expert knowledge, and an industry-wide consultation and consensus process, aimed at consensus building and a quick uptake and the largest possible support in future product implementations.

Intended readers of the present document include, but are not limited to:

- device designers, developers, and manufacturers;
- application developers;
- service providers;
- network operators;
- technical writers and developers of marketing materials; and
- national and international standards bodies and regulatory institutions.

The terminologies contained in the present document are accessible in machine-readable format under https://labs.etsi.org/rep/HF/eg203499/-/tree/v2.1.2.

Modal verbs terminology

In the present document "**should**", "**should not**", "**may**", "**need not**", "**will**", "**will not**", "**can**" and "**cannot**" are to be interpreted as described in clause 3.2 of the ETSI Drafting Rules (Verbal forms for the expression of provisions).

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Introduction

The terms (words, labels) used in the User Interface (UI) of a device, service or application may present an obstacle for their users if they are not familiar with those terms or if they are unsure as to their meaning. While some terms are introduced by manufacturers to denote a new class of features or to distinguish own features from those offered by competitors, most other terms denoting device or service features are not necessarily intended for differentiation. However, in the absence of a harmonized or recommended terminology, the use of those terms may differ considerably among manufacturers and service providers, thereby introducing ambiguity for end users.

The alternative to a confusing plethora of terms is some degree of harmonization among devices, services, and applications, at least for terms not intended to convey a certain brand feature or image. A harmonized terminology can be employed to help prevent the negative effects of an uncontrolled expansion of terms and the resulting ambiguity of the terms. Those negative effects include:

- increased user difficulties in understanding complex, ambiguous, and inconsistently-used terms, leading to unnecessary confusion;
- increased efforts in user education (user guides);
- increased costs for user support (hotline calls and call agent training);
- limited feature discovery and unclear user expectations (customers who do not understand certain features may not use them, hence some revenue may be missed);
- limited uptake (users may be reluctant to use a feature as they are not sure whether it has the expected effect);
- increase of cognitive complexity and subsequent learning effort; and
- abuse in the use of proprietary terms and lack of consistent use of terms.

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The need for a harmonized terminology of device, service, and application features increases as new features and functionalities are being developed. Device software, services, and applications are frequently updated, often without even providing an update of the associated documentation to the users.

ETSI EG 202 132 [i.1] claims that in order to aid users' learning procedures and to enable and simplify transfer and reuse of knowledge between devices, applications and services, it is relevant to support harmonized vocabularies for the most common and generic mobile ICT functions.

Consistency across basic interactive elements increases the ease and transfer of learning and improves the overall usability of complex mobile ICT environments. Such a transfer becomes even more important when older users or people with cognitive functional limitations are addressed and expected to use smartphones, mobile services and Internet applications in most segments of everyday life, such as: sending an email, transferring a call, or setting an alarm, etc.

A harmonized terminology can also be fed into terminology management systems used within a company to ensure the consistent use of terms across products and the internal and external documentation (e.g. design documents, user guides and promotional materials), see clause 4.

ETSI EG 202 132 [i.1] contains harmonized English-language terms for a number of areas including user interfaces for hardware and software, configuration of messaging and data services, call features, and terminal functionality. ETSI TR 102 972 [i.2] extends the work done in ETSI EG 202 132 [i.1] towards 3G devices, mobile services, and applications. This extended list of proposed terms forms the initial basis for the terms considered. However, ETSI EG 202 132 [i.1] and ETSI TR 102 972 [i.2] were published a long time ago and require updating, inter alia to cover the many features and services evolved or not available at that time, and to cover other main European languages in addition to English.

The present document addresses this need on the basic level, covering 27 official EU and EFTA languages: Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Rhaeto Romance, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish. In addition, given the speed of change in the mobile ICT landscape, it will naturally require updating to ensure continuing relevance. Furthermore, expansion to cover additional European languages and other languages used in Europe will further increase the usefulness and applicability of the present document.

The selection and validation process of the terms applied throughout their development, performed in collaboration with stakeholders is expected to add a quality dimension to the recommended vocabulary that would be difficult to achieve through an individual effort and is expected to contribute to the use and uptake of this freely available, public resource.

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