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| **Title:** | | Difficulties to access communication and information services on Internet | | | |
| **Purpose:** | | Discussion | | | |
| **Contact:** | | BATTU Daniel ECTI consultant France | | | Tel: +336 82 21 90 26 E-mail:daniel.battu@wanadoo.fr |

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| **Keywords:** | Acoustic chock; electronic directory; terminal operating manual; PwD; elderly people; accessibility |
| **Abstract:** | This document raises issues on difficulties in the access to information and communication applications for people with disabilities and vulnerable population, because of weakness in operational management and in regulation process. |

# Introduction

Several aspects of the Internet usages are presently hindering the widespread adoption of new information and communication technologies, particularly in the case of requests from people with disabilities and from elderly people.

Three examples are given here. These are the phenomenon of acoustic shock, the difficulty of accessing the telephone directory service on the Internet and the difficulty of obtaining instructions for use from a mobile telephone terminal.

# Discussion

2.1 - Acoustic shock phenomenon -

In the arrangement for a wired voice communication, two telephone sets A and B connected in parallel at one end of the link allow the remote correspondent R to receive the call correctly. But if user A speaks in a normal way, the sound power perceived by B is too high. As a consequence, the acoustic shock caused is very painful and causes hearing loss that may be irreversible (tonic tensor tympanic syndrome).

Wikipedia, in its English version, indicates that a high reception power of a signal in the auditory spectrum causes an acoustic shock. This can be caused by feedback oscillations, fax tones or signal tones. Telemarketers and call centre employees are considered to be the most at risk. In France, the phenomenon seems to have appeared since 2008, when it has since affected many call centres. Nearly 600 cases have been recorded in three years. This syndrome could affect other trades or other sources, but these facts are not yet documented. This is therefore a danger for phones that cause pain and potential hearing loss. It seems that the new terminals do not protect users from this phenomenon. Several devices attempt to eliminate potentially dangerous sound signals by digital signal processing. None of these arrangements have yet proved to be fully effective. The possibility of non-compliance with terminal standards is also raised, but it is difficult for the user to know which of the two parallel terminals does not comply with the standards. The prohibition of connecting two voice telephony terminals in the same private facility to avoid the risk has never been communicated to users.

2.2 - Difficulty accessing the telephone directory service on the Internet

The Internet is increasingly used, because until recent months, its use has been easy and effective. Today, this availability is no longer available due to the multiplication of commercial offers that are better "referenced" and are offered in the first line to users, even by renewing demand.

On the other hand, the regulation has not followed the level of offers and, on the contrary, it is opposed to the operation of the simplest services. Access to the electronic telephone directory now gives priority to responses in premium rate services (services surtaxés), even if the number requested is no longer in service (and without refund).

This unlawful procedure is not subject to any prohibition or sanction by the regulatory authorities, so users tend to consider that they support the principle of these criminal acts. It would seem necessary to protect vulnerable audiences from these illegal practices. The distribution of the Free Tariff Information Message, made at the beginning of each call, does not change the offence of fraud when the provision of the requested call number concerns an unassigned number.

2.3 - Provision of an instruction manual for a mobile telephone terminal.

Helping isolated seniors to access digital communication tools is the opportunity for us to discover surprizing situations that can affect vulnerable people with limited financial resources.

A small mobile phone terminal of the "phablet" type was offered to an elderly woman to help her maintain social contacts and access to information. Unfortunately, the operating instructions manual for this device is very short and the printouts are too thin to be easily readable. In order to find a more readable notice, a search is carried out on the Internet and we learn that this PDF notice is not free (two euros) and that payment must be made by credit card from France to Bulgaria.

[Sofia 1142, Region of Sofia, Sofia Municipality, district Sredets, 16 Patriarh Evtimiy Blvd., 5, Sofia,BG].

Is it normal that it is necessary to BUY an instruction manual for a mobile phone device registered as an "EU" stamped equipment? The question arises as to what the promised notice actually contains and whether the transaction carried out on the credit card will be carried out correctly without risk of prejudice. We expect within ten days (!) an answer to this question from the ec.europa.eu (\*) specialist service

(\*) https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/consumers/resolve-your-consumer-complaint/european-consumer-centres-network\_en

In addition, an Internet search for this terminal (DANEW K 601) reports some network connection difficulties and specific procedures for transferring JPEG photographs using the MTP protocol.

In conclusion, it does not seem recommended for seniors to use very cheap terminals to access mobile phone and Internet access applications.

# Conclusion / Proposal /Proposals

It seems that at the minimum:

* That the Acoustic shock could be reduced by a prohibition of connecting two voice telephony terminals in the same private facility line (a regulation matter);
* An over charging should not be applied when a valid answer is not given to the user;
* Type approval terminal should include the availability on Internet of an operating document in PDF without any payment.

Generally speaking, it appears that ICT evolution forget the basic rules applied to the delivery to every clients of an honest service at minimum cost and in correlation with an easy access to all. The present standardisation process and its corresponding regulation framework are not in line with the needs of the users. A global one stop shopping point would be necessary for all countries would be necessary for the quality follow-up of ICT services.

I would be grateful to the JCA-AHF group to consider these examples of recent difficulties and to give some guidance and advice to the vulnerable Internet customers and their assistants.

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