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Report: Labels and Certifications for the Digital World – Mapping the International Landscape

More than 50 initiatives worldwide are working to develop rules for the ethical use of digital technology. The most relevant initiatives were identified by the Swiss Digital Initiative (SDI) in Geneva, which is developing a "Digital Trust Label" for digital services. SDI aims to leverage the impact of the various initiatives by fostering the collaboration of the international "digital trust ecosystem." Switzerland is predestined to act as a hub for this emerging new ecosystem and to help shape the international debate.

Geneva, 6 May 2021 – Trust in digital technologies is of ever-increasing importance as is now once more demonstrated during the Covid pandemic with the discussions surrounding contact tracing apps and vaccination passports. Already since 2019, the Swiss Digital Initiative is working on promoting digital trust. One initiative is the creation of a "Digital trust Label" (DTL). As Doris Leuthard, President SDI explains: «Among other activities, a label can be one very concrete measure to build digital trust. We need to give users more information and transparency so they can make decisions to opt-in or out for a particular digital service.»

The label is intended to provide information in an easy-to-understand language for users about whether, for example, data protection is being observed or whether an algorithm is making decisions in the background.

Report on the international labelling initiatives: Instead of fragmentation, more cooperation is needed
Since the beginning of the project in 2019, the SDI has monitored international developments in this field and has been in active exchanges with like-minded organizations. With the growing awareness of the importance of digital trust, more than 50 national and international initiatives are dealing with certification, the development of criteria and labels for the responsible use of new technologies. A new report by the SDI now provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamic digital trust ecosystem. The compiled knowledge should form the basis for better cooperation and knowledge sharing. Instead of fragmentation, more cooperation is needed to define internationally valid labels and standards.

Key Findings from the Report "Labels for the Digital World – Mapping the International Digital Trust Landscape"
The SDI report focuses on initiatives and projects that propose some kind of auditing and/or certification mechanism for promoting as well as certifying responsible and ethical digital tools and services, in particular those initiatives taking the form of a label.
SDI took a closer look at 12 of the most relevant initiatives and analyzed success factors as well as similarities and differences compared to the Swiss Digital Trust Label.

The following factors were identified as relevant to success:

- The label has to be known by its target users;
- It should be supported by a strong and well known organization;
- It has to convey a general message, with details and complexity being handled in the background;
- The governance of the labeling body has to be legitimate;
- The way the label organization is funded needs to be transparent and understandable for outsiders.

A comparison with other initiatives furthermore revealed three major types of challenges:
1. **Challenges linked to the nature of digital services**: most digital services rely on a complex architecture and evolve in very dynamic environments. It proves complex to track these changes and keep pace with public expectations.
2. **Challenges linked to the business model of the labeling process (funding the project, without setting bad incentives in place):** labelling organizations must be able to rely on adequate resources for providing the necessary infrastructure and services beyond label development without impairing their impartiality.
3. **Challenges linked to the missing traction among actors behind initiatives, companies and consumers/users:** developing a trustmark is a multiyear investment, that requires setting standards and creating a sustainable audit system resulting in a brand that gathers users trust. Efforts in this regard must remain continuous beyond the development phase and ties with potential users and companies interested in having products labeled must be strong.

Leveraging the "Digital Trust Ecosystem" in Geneva
To address these challenges, better cooperation and exchange between these initiatives is needed. To this end, SDI aims to formalize ties with like-minded organizations. Being based in Geneva, with its international organizations, human rights and international governance tradition, SDI is the ideal place to bring together the initiatives to realize their shared vision, exchange best practices and learnings. Plans include intensified collaboration throughout the year, a common communications platform, and a larger event at the end of the year with all initiatives to go beyond declarations about ethical values and principles and focus on how to make them become tangible in society.

About the Digital Trust Label
The Swiss Digital Initiative is working together with EPFL on a first, world leading Digital Trust Label that denotes the trustworthiness of a digital service in clear, visual, and plain non-technical language.

The Digital Trust Label will be a combination of a bio label and nutritional value table for the digital world: it shows that mandatory criteria are fulfilled by a digital service, while at the same time giving users more information and transparency about four dimensions of the digital service: Security, Data Protection, Reliability of a service and Fair User Management.

Eight test partners from the public and private sector are involved in the project to pilot the criteria: Axa, Canton Vaud, SBB, Swiss Re, Credit Suisse, Booking.com, IBM Switzerland and Swisscom.

Digital Trust cannot be defined by one actor alone but can only be the result of the close collaboration of all relevant actors: academia, civil society, consumer protection, the private and public sector. Therefore, the SDI involved all relevant stakeholders in the development and made the criteria and development process as transparent as possible. The Label is understood as an ongoing and collaborative effort for strengthening transparency, trustworthiness, and the understanding of digital applications.

Details about the Report
The Report was elaborated by the Swiss Digital Initiative in collaboration with ethix - Lab for Innovation Ethics, as part of the National Strategy for Protection of Switzerland against cyber-risks.

The following initiatives were mapped in detail:
1. Data Ethics Framework (AI Ethics Impact Group, Bertelsmann Stiftung)
2. The Digital Standard (Collective effort: Consumer Reports; Disconnect; Ranking Digital Rights, The Cyber Independent Testing Lab)
3. The Ethics Certification Program for Autonomous and Intelligent Systems (ECPAIS), (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers IEEE)
4. Fair Data Economy Score (part of Human Driven Data Economy IHAN, Sitra)
5. Trustmark for the Internet (EU Next Generation Internet Initiative)
6. Trustable Technology Mark (Mozilla OpenIoT Studio + ThingsCon)
7. A Trustworthy Tech Mark (doteveryone)
8. D-seal, Seal for Data Ethics and IT Security (Public Private Partnership)
9. AI Certification (Fraunhofer Institute for Intelligent Analysis and Information Systems IAIS)
10. Independent Audit of AI Systems (For Humanity)
11. Label Numérique Responsable (NR) (Institut Numérique Responsable)
12. Apple's App Privacy Label

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About Swiss Digital Initiative
The Swiss Digital Initiative aims at bringing ethical principles and values into technologies through concrete projects. It brings together representatives from the private and public sector, as well as academia, civil society organizations and international institutions. The Foundation is headquartered in Geneva.