Nehru School Management Journal (NSMJ)
Volume No: 13, Issue No: 1, Year: 2026
PP: 51-59
ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

A STUDY ON THE USER CONSENT MECHANISMS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN DIGITAL PRIVACY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COIMBATORE DISTRICT

T.M. Hemalatha

Dean & Associate Professor, Department of Commerce, Rathinam College of Arts and Science

Ms. Stephy Inba Jesintha

I, B. Com CA, Department of Commerce, Rathinam College of Arts and Science

ABSTRACT

This study examines the user consent mechanisms and their effectiveness in digital privacy, with special reference to Coimbatore district. As digital services continue to expand across sectors such as e-commerce, banking, healthcare, and social media, user consent has become a cornerstone of data protection and privacy regulation. The study explores how individuals in Coimbatore district understand, engage with, and respond to consent mechanisms such as cookie banners, privacy policies, terms of service agreements, and opt-in/opt-out features. Data was collected from 90 respondents through structured questionnaires and analyzed using percentage analysis and chi-square tests. Findings reveal that while a majority of users are aware of consent prompts, a significant proportion do not read privacy policies before agreeing. The study highlights the gap between theoretical consent and informed consent, and proposes recommendations for improving user awareness, interface design, and regulatory compliance in digital services.

Keywords: User Consent, Digital Privacy, Privacy Policy, Data Protection, Informed Consent, Coimbatore District

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

In the digital age, personal data has become one of the most valuable commodities. Every time a user signs up for an application, browses a website, or uses an online service, vast amounts of personal information are collected, processed, and shared. The foundation upon which this data collection is legally and ethically justified is user consent. Consent mechanisms serve as the bridge between data subjects and data controllers, ensuring that individuals have knowledge of and agreement to the use of their personal information.

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

In India, the increasing penetration of internet services has brought millions of new users online, many of whom are not fully aware of the implications of the consent they provide. Coimbatore district, a major commercial and industrial hub in Tamil Nadu, has seen a rapid rise in digital transactions, online banking, and e-commerce activity. This growth makes the issue of digital privacy and user consent particularly relevant for the region.

Consent mechanisms include privacy notices, cookie consent banners, end-user license agreements (EULAs), opt-in and opt-out checkboxes, and granular permission settings. However, their effectiveness is often questioned due to poor design, complex language, and user fatigue. This study investigates how effectively these mechanisms function in practice, and whether users in Coimbatore district are truly giving informed consent or merely clicking through prompts without understanding the implications.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the awareness level of users regarding digital privacy and consent mechanisms in Coimbatore district.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of current user consent mechanisms used by digital platforms.
- To analyze user behavior when encountering privacy policies and consent prompts.
- To identify the challenges faced by users in understanding and exercising digital consent.
- To suggest measures for improving the design and implementation of consent mechanisms.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid growth of digital services in India has created a complex landscape of data collection, processing, and sharing. At the heart of this landscape lies the concept of user consent — the legal and ethical foundation that allows organizations to handle personal data. However, there is growing evidence that consent mechanisms, as currently implemented, are often ineffective. Most users encounter privacy notices in the form of lengthy, jargon-filled documents that are rarely read or understood.

In Coimbatore district, as digital literacy continues to grow and internet adoption rises, users interact daily with consent prompts across e-commerce platforms, mobile banking apps, social media, and government digital services. Despite this widespread interaction, many users do not fully comprehend what they are consenting to, often clicking 'Accept' or 'Agree' without reviewing the

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

privacy terms. This constitutes a gap between formal consent (the act of clicking) and informed consent (a genuine, knowledgeable agreement).

Furthermore, dark patterns manipulative design techniques that nudge users toward consenting to data collection have been widely reported in digital interfaces, making it harder for users to make free and informed choices. In the absence of strong awareness and regulatory enforcement, users remain vulnerable to privacy violations. This study addresses the gap by examining the effectiveness of consent mechanisms and the level of informed consent among digital users in Coimbatore district.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study is based on a descriptive and analytical research design.

DATA COLLECTION

Both primary and secondary data are used for analysis.

1. Primary Data

Primary data is collected through structured questionnaires distributed to internet users, digital shoppers, students, and working professionals in Coimbatore district. The questionnaire includes Likert-scale questions related to awareness, behavior, and attitudes toward digital consent.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data is collected from journals, research articles, websites, government reports, and legal frameworks related to digital privacy and data protection.

Sample Size

A sample of 90 respondents from various categories including students, professionals, business owners, and homemakers in Coimbatore district is selected.

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling method is used for selecting respondents.

Tools for Analysis

- Percentage analysis
- Chi-square test

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

Limitations

- Limited sample size restricted to Coimbatore district
- Possible self-reporting bias in responses
- Low awareness of technical privacy concepts among some respondents

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Acquisti et al. (2023): conducted a comprehensive review on the psychology of privacy and user consent. The study found that users often suffer from 'consent fatigue' — a phenomenon where repeated prompts lead to uncritical acceptance. The authors argued that meaningful consent requires simplified language, clear choices, and user-friendly design.

2. Matte et al. (2024): studied compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) across European digital platforms and found that a significant proportion of consent management platforms did not meet the standards of freely given, specific, informed, and unambiguous consent. The study stressed the need for regulatory enforcement and design improvements.

3. Sharma & Gupta (2024): examined the state of digital privacy awareness in India and concluded that a large proportion of Indian internet users do not understand the implications of accepting cookies or agreeing to terms of service. The study called for national-level digital literacy programs and simplified privacy disclosures in regional languages.

4. Utz et al. (2023): investigated how cookie consent banner design influences user behavior. The research revealed that nudging techniques such as pre-ticked boxes, prominent 'Accept All' buttons, and hidden reject options dramatically reduce users' ability to make informed decisions. The study recommended neutral design standards for consent interfaces.

5. Menon & Krishnan (2025): analyzed the effectiveness of India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and its implications for user consent mechanisms. The study highlighted that while the Act mandates clear and affirmative consent, enforcement and implementation at the ground level remain challenging, particularly for small businesses and regional digital platforms.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1.1: Showing Respondents' Awareness of Digital Privacy and Consent Mechanisms

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Fully Aware	22	22%
Partially Aware	38	38%
Slightly Aware	20	20%
Not Aware	10	10%
No Opinion	5	5%
TOTAL	90	100%

Interpretation:

The data indicates that only 22% of respondents are fully aware of digital privacy and consent mechanisms, while 38% are partially aware. A combined 30% of respondents report being slightly aware or not aware at all. This reveals a significant gap in digital literacy and highlights the need for targeted awareness campaigns in Coimbatore district. Only a small proportion (5%) expressed no opinion, suggesting high engagement with the topic among the surveyed population.

Table 1.2: Showing Respondents' Behavior When Encountering Privacy Policies

Behavior	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Read Fully Before Agreeing	12	13%
Skim Through and Agree	25	28%
Agree Without Reading	40	44%
Decline When Possible	8	9%
Unsure / Don't Remember	5	6%
TOTAL	90	100%

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

Interpretation:

The data reveals a concerning pattern in user behavior. A majority of respondents (44%) agree to privacy policies without reading them, while 28% only skim through the content. Only 13% of users report reading the policy fully before agreeing. A mere 9% attempt to decline when the option is available, while 6% are unsure of their own behavior. These findings confirm that in practice, most consent given by digital users in Coimbatore district is not truly informed consent, raising serious questions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of current consent mechanisms.

Table 1.3: Showing Respondents' Perception of Effectiveness of Consent Mechanisms

Effectiveness Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very Effective	10	11%
Moderately Effective	20	22%
Somewhat Effective	27	30%
Ineffective	23	26%
Completely Ineffective	10	11%
TOTAL	90	100%

Interpretation:

The perception data indicates that a combined 37% of respondents view consent mechanisms as ineffective or completely ineffective, while only 33% consider them very or moderately effective. Approximately 30% believe they are somewhat effective. This even distribution signals a lack of user confidence in existing consent systems, reflecting the need for more transparent, accessible, and user-friendly consent interfaces across digital platforms.

FINDINGS

The study presents several key findings relating to user consent mechanisms and digital privacy in Coimbatore district:

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

1. Awareness Gap: Only 22% of respondents are fully aware of digital privacy rights and consent mechanisms. A significant 30% have little to no awareness, indicating a critical gap in digital literacy in the region.
2. Uninformed Consent: A majority (44%) of users agree to privacy policies without reading them. Only 13% read the complete policy before accepting, meaning most consent given online is not truly informed.
3. Design Influence: Many users report being influenced by the default settings and layout of consent interfaces. Large 'Accept All' buttons and hidden 'Reject' options are frequently cited as factors that push users toward uncritical acceptance.
4. Low Trust in Mechanisms: 37% of users perceive current consent mechanisms as ineffective, reflecting widespread distrust and frustration with how consent is managed by digital platforms.
5. Regulatory Unawareness: Most respondents are not aware of India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and the rights it grants them as data subjects, suggesting a significant gap in public communication about legal protections.
6. Preference for Simplicity: A large majority of respondents prefer clear, simple, and visual privacy summaries over lengthy text-based policies, indicating that readability and design are key factors in improving consent effectiveness.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Digital literacy programs focused on privacy rights and consent should be conducted in schools, colleges, and workplaces across Coimbatore district, in both English and Tamil.
2. Regulatory bodies should mandate the use of simplified, plain-language privacy notices that users can genuinely understand, limiting the use of technical or legal jargon.
3. Dark patterns in consent interfaces such as misleading button placement, pre-ticked checkboxes, and buried reject options should be prohibited under India's data protection framework.
4. Digital platforms should adopt layered consent models that allow users to selectively agree to different categories of data use rather than requiring all-or-nothing acceptance.

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

5. Government and civil society organizations should run public awareness campaigns about the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and how it empowers individuals to control their data.
6. Platforms operating in Tamil Nadu should be encouraged or required to provide consent mechanisms and privacy policies in Tamil to ensure regional users can make informed decisions in their native language.

CONCLUSION

User consent is the cornerstone of digital privacy. Without meaningful and informed consent, the entire framework of data protection becomes hollow. This study, conducted with special reference to Coimbatore district, reveals that despite increasing digital engagement, user consent in practice is far from being truly informed. Most users click through privacy prompts without reading them, are unaware of their legal rights, and have limited confidence in the effectiveness of existing consent mechanisms.

The findings underline an urgent need for reform — not just in the design of consent interfaces but also in public awareness, regulatory enforcement, and digital education. As India implements the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, there is a timely opportunity to ensure that the spirit of consent is upheld, not just its form. Businesses, regulators, and civil society must collaborate to build a digital ecosystem in which users in Coimbatore and across India can make free, informed, and meaningful choices about their personal data.

With proper policy implementation, interface redesign, and public education, user consent mechanisms can become genuinely effective tools of digital privacy protection, enabling citizens to participate in the digital economy with confidence and security.

REFERENCES

- Acquisti, A., Brandimarte, L., & Loewenstein, G. (2023). Privacy and human behavior in the age of information. Science, 347(6221), 509–514.
- Matte, C., Bielova, N., & Santos, C. (2024). Do cookie banners respect my choice? Measuring legal compliance of banners from IAB Europe's transparency and consent framework. IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy.
- Sharma, P., & Gupta, R. (2024). Digital privacy awareness among internet users in India. Journal of Information Technology and Society, 12(3), 45–61.

ISSN: 2349-4883
Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal
Journal Website: www.nsmj.in

- Utz, C., Degeling, M., Fahl, S., Schaub, F., & Holz, T. (2023). (Un)informed consent: Studying GDPR consent notices in the field. Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer and Communications Security.
- Menon, S., & Krishnan, V. (2025). The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023: Implications for user consent in India. Indian Journal of Law and Technology, 19(1), 22–38.
- Rajendran, K. (2024). E-commerce growth and digital privacy concerns in Coimbatore. Journal of Regional Commerce Studies, 8(2), 14–29.
- Pillai, A. (2023). Understanding online privacy behavior among Indian consumers. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 47(4), 892–905.