



Dark patterns

Description

Most design practitioners think they are on the side of the good. Design training typically elevates positive values. Architecture for example harbours a strong sense that it is supporting the public good. It is never comfortable if aligned with enabling corporate greed.

HCI (human computer interaction) and UXD (user experience design) are disciplines similarly founded on human-centred, humanistically-inspired values and practices. Such professional sensibilities are offended by accusations that the design of human-computer interaction in apps, web search engines, social media platforms, online retail, booking systems, and other services might be co-opting

human-centered values in the service of deceptive or malicious aims (534).

That quote is from an article 'The dark (patterns) side of UX design'. The authors build on an article and campaign by Harry Brignull, who coined the term 'dark patterns' as a way of categorising the diverse techniques by which digital systems persuade, sell, and deceive consumers.

Design ethics

The *dark patterns* discourse adds a helpful contribution to discussions about digital ethics from a design perspective. It provides a suitable complement to Shoshana Zuboff and other critics who focus on how social media and certain platforms harvest and monetise our personal data. For such critics, design comes across as merely part of the corporate enterprise, inevitably complicit in 'surveillance capitalism'.

On the other hand, the discourse about dark patterns invokes design terminology (even in its title: colour and pattern) and focusses on what it is like to design and use systems that appear to have 'malicious aims'.

This warrants further investigation, but in the mean time, here's one example of many from the article 'The dark (patterns) side of UX design':

Hidden Costs: You get to the last step of the checkout process, only to discover some unexpected charges have appeared, e.g. delivery charges, tax, etc. (535).

They highlight that designers can make it easier to get into something than to get out of it. It is in the interest of producers to make it simple to commit to an online subscription service, but harder to cancel. I think any consumer can relate to that.

See posts: [Shock and plunder](#) and [Obfuscate!](#)

Bibliography

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Category

1. Design

Tags

1. HCI
2. UXD

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