



Is it possible that we are all being Manipulated ?

Have you ever contemplated the possibility that the world is being manipulated and rejected it as a conspiracy theory? Well, here's one that is definitely not a conspiracy theory, Dark Patterns. These are user interface and design techniques used on websites, mobile applications (Apps) or any other digital medium to manipulate users to do something they did not intend to do in order to benefit the website or App owner. For example, purchasing something or signing up for a service. The use of dark patterns is obvious in numerous digital services and products.

Dark patterns can range from subtle omissions to explicit lies, but they all serve to undermine users' objectives and waste time or money they didn't intend to spend. More often than not, users' access to privacy and control over their psychological and behavioural autonomy is jeopardised by the exploitation of dark patterns by digital service providers, undercutting the concept of freedom of choice. Dark patterns exploit human psychology for the sole purpose of encouraging people to act against their best interests. They often take the shape of misleadingly worded buttons, difficult-to-undo choices, and graphical features like colour and shading that draw users' attention to or away from specific options.

Consumers with access to gadgets and the internet, especially children, are usually duped into auto-renewing their subscriptions, downloading apps they have no business with, and cancelling their subscriptions is made a laborious task. Is this a design decision that should be made by anyone?

Children are particularly affected by dark patterns in that they typically have difficulty distinguishing between an advertisement and a non-advertisement. These advertisements are presumably developed with them in mind, so they merely see them as a continuation of the fun they are currently enjoying. They are also unlikely to question the validity of assertions stated, it is not uncommon to have an in-game or in-app ad displayed every 60 seconds when spending time with children and their devices. It becomes a game in and of itself to figure out how to turn off the commercials. A simple shut button built to this level must have been placed in such a way or made so small that it is commonly overlooked. A sly attempt to persuade users to click the download or share button instead

Dark patterns often create an imbalance between users and organizations with usually no means or access to seeking redress for the harm or unfairness caused to them. Using dark patterns often leads to a bad customer experience because the users either did not intend to use the service or could not opt-out of using the service. This translates into a loss of the user's faith in digital services which equals a decline in the digital economy, simply put Nigeria keeps losing money.

Therefore, it is crucial for regulatory authorities like the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to understand these manipulative techniques in order to create structures and frameworks for the promotion of ethical products that enhance user's trust and experience.

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