



Dark Patterns

For Prelims: Dark Pattern, Deceptive Patterns

For Mains: Dark Pattern, Use of Dark Pattern by Companies, Harm of Dark Pattern to Users

Why in News?

Recently, an increase in the cases of “**Dark Patterns**” or “**Deceptive Patterns**” have been noted where internet-based companies have been **tricking users into agreeing to certain conditions or clicking a few links**.

- Such acceptances and clicks are **flooding inboxes of the users with promotional emails** they never wanted, making it hard to unsubscribe or request deletion.

What are Dark Patterns?

▪ About:

- Dark Patterns are **unethical UI/UX (user interface/user experience) interactions**, designed to mislead or trick users to **make them do something they don't want to do**.
 - In turn, they benefit the company or platform employing the designs.
- By using dark patterns, digital platforms **take away a user's right to full information** about the services they are using and their control over their browsing experience.
- **Examples of Dark Patterns include** “baseless” countdowns for online deals, conditions in fine print that add on to costs, making cancellation buttons hard to see or click, making ads appear as news reports or celebrity endorsements, auto-playing videos, forcing users to create accounts to finish a transaction, silently charging credit cards after free trials end, and using dull colours to hide information that users should know about.

▪ Usage by Companies:

- Social media companies and Big Tech firms such as **Apple, Amazon, Skype, Facebook, LinkedIn, Microsoft, and Google** use dark or deceptive patterns to downgrade the user experience to their advantage.
 - Amazon came under fire in the [European Union](#) for its confusing, multi-step cancelling process in Amazon Prime subscription.
 - After communicating with consumer regulators, Amazon, in 2022, made its cancellation process easier for online customers in European countries.
- In social media, LinkedIn users often receive unsolicited, sponsored messages from influencers.
 - Disabling this option is a difficult process with multiple steps that requires users to be familiar with the platform controls.
- Another dark pattern on social media platforms like Instagram is **sponsored video ads getting scattered between reels and stories** users originally opted to view, tricking them for several seconds before they can see the small “sponsored” label.
- **Google-owned YouTube nags** users to sign up for YouTube Premium with pop-ups, obscuring final seconds of a video with thumbnails of other videos.

- **Harm to Users:**

- Dark patterns **endanger the experience of Internet users** and make them more vulnerable to **financial and data exploitation** by Big Tech firms.
- Dark patterns confuse users, introduce online obstacles, make simple tasks time-consuming, have users sign up for unwanted services/products, and force them to pay more money or share more personal information than they intended.

Way Forward

- Dark and deceptive patterns don't just stop with laptops and smartphones. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) report has warned that as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) platforms and devices grow in usage, dark patterns will likely follow users to these new channels as well.
 - Internet users who are able to identify and recognise dark patterns in their daily lives can choose more user-friendly platforms that will respect their right to choice and privacy.

[Source: TH](#)

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