

Appendix A

Compilation of Digital Dark Patterns

Digital Dark Patterns are design practices that trick or manipulate users into making choices that they might not otherwise have made. Below are some common dark patterns identified by FTC workshop panelists and found in the academic literature.

Dark Pattern Type	Dark Pattern Variant	Description
ENDORSEMENTS (aka “SOCIAL PROOF”)	False Activity Messages	Making false claims about others’ activity on a site or interest in a product <i>Example: “24 other people are viewing this listing”</i>
	Deceptive Consumer Testimonials	Using phony customer endorsements or presenting other people’s experience without revealing material information, such as: (1) the endorsers were compensated; (2) the endorsers have a connection to the company, like being an employee or a family member; or (3) the endorsers’ experiences aren’t typical of what others will experience in similar circumstances
	Deceptive Celebrity Endorsements	Featuring testimonials that falsely appear to come from celebrities OR Using celebrities or prominent influencers to endorse a product without disclosing that the celebrity was paid for the endorsement or was given the product for free
	Parasocial Relationship Pressure	Using characters that children know and trust to pressure them into making a certain choice <i>Example: Using a well-known cartoon character to encourage children to make in-app purchases</i>
SCARCITY	False Low Stock Message	Creating pressure to buy immediately by saying inventory is low when it isn’t <i>Example: “Only 1 left in stock – order soon”</i>
	False High Demand	Creating pressure to buy immediately by saying demand

	Message	is high when it isn't <i>Example: "20 other shoppers have this item in their cart"</i>
URGENCY	Baseless Countdown Timer	Creating pressure to buy immediately by showing a fake countdown clock that just goes away or resets when it times out <i>Example: "Offer ends in 00:59:48"</i>
	False Limited Time Message	Creating pressure to buy immediately by saying the offer is good only for a limited time or that the deal ends soon – but without a deadline or with a meaningless deadline that just resets when reached
	False Discount Claims	Creating pressure to buy immediately by offering a fake "discounted" or "sale" price
OBSTRUCTION	Price Comparison Prevention	Keeping shoppers from easily comparing prices by bundling things, using different measures (price per unit v. price per ounce), or listing the price per payment (such as \$10 per week) without disclosing the total number of payments or overall cost
	Roadblocks to Cancellation	Making it easy to sign up but hard to cancel, by requiring people to go through tedious, time-consuming cancellation procedures <i>Example: letting people sign up online, but making them use another means to cancel</i> <i>Example: requiring that people cancel by phone but then concealing the phone number, short-staffing the cancellation line, opening the line during limited hours, or requiring people to listen to a sales pitch or upsell while trying to cancel</i>
	Immortal Accounts	Making it hard or impossible to delete an account
SNEAKING OR INFORMATION HIDING	Sneak-into-Basket	Automatically adding items to the shopping cart without a shopper's permission OR Tricking a shopper into buying unwanted items by using a pre-checked box
	Hidden Information	Hiding material information or significant product limitations from people <i>Example: hiding info in fine print, in lengthy terms of service documents, behind nondescript</i>

		<i>hyperlinks, or in pop-up boxes that only appear if someone hovers over the right thing</i>
	Hidden Costs	Adding hidden fees or other charges that people don't know about <i>Example: an undisclosed origination fee deducted from loan proceeds</i>
	Drip Pricing	Advertising only part of a product's total price initially and then imposing other mandatory charges late in the buying process <i>Example: a "convenience fee" that appears only when a shopper reaches the check-out screen</i>
	Hidden Subscription or Forced Continuity	Offering a free trial and, at the end of the trial, automatically and unexpectedly charging a recurring fee if consumers don't affirmatively cancel OR Offering a product for a small one-time fee, then automatically enrolling people into a subscription or continuity plan without their consent
	Intermediate Currency	Hiding the real cost by requiring consumers to buy things with virtual currency <i>Example: "coins" or "acorns" in kids' apps</i>
INTERFACE INTERFERENCE	Misdirection	Using style and design to focus users' attention on one thing in order to distract their attention from another <i>Example: presenting the subtotal price in a bright green highlighted box, then listing additional mandatory taxes and fees below in a non-highlighted section so users don't notice their final total will be higher</i>
	False Hierarchy or Pressured Upselling	In giving options, using contrasting visual prominence to steer users into making a certain selection <i>Example: during cancellation, presenting the "Keep My Subscription" option as a bright orange button, while presenting the "Cancel My Subscription" option as a smaller font, pale gray hyperlink hidden below the orange button</i>
	Disguised Ads	Formatting advertisements to falsely appear to be unbiased product reviews or independent journalism OR Presenting a ranking list, search engine, or comparison-

		shopping site as neutral and unbiased when it is actually based on advertising dollars
	Bait and Switch	A choice or interaction leads to an unexpected, undesirable outcome <i>Example: a user clicks the X in the top right corner of a pop-up but, instead of closing the box, it downloads software</i> <i>Example: selling a consumer something that turns out to be materially different than what was originally advertised</i>
COERCED ACTION	Unauthorized Transactions	Tricking people into paying for goods or services that they did not want or intend to buy, such as mislabeling the steps in a transaction or failing to obtain the express informed consent of the accountholder <i>Example: a shopping website button labeled "Next" that people think will lead to the next screen but, instead, processes the transaction immediately</i> <i>Example: a one-click button in children's gaming apps that charges parents real money</i>
	Auto-Play	Automatically playing another video once one video ends in a manner that is unexpected or harmful <i>Example: after the first video, a less kid-friendly video – or a sponsored ad camouflaged to look like a recommended video – automatically plays</i>
	Nagging	Asking repeatedly and disruptively if a user wants to take an action OR Making a request that doesn't let the user permanently decline – and then repeatedly prompting them with the request <i>Example: asking users to provide their data or turn on cookies then repeatedly presenting the choices as "Yes" or "Not Now" instead of "Yes" or "No"</i>
	Forced Registration or Enrollment	Making users create an account or share their information to complete a task <i>Example: "Create an account to continue with your purchase"</i>
	Pay-to-Play or	Saying that things are available with a purchase or

	<p>Grinding</p>	<p>download, but then charging users to actually obtain those things OR Making the free version of a game so cumbersome and labor-intensive that the player is induced to unlock new features with in-app purchases</p>
	<p>Friend Spam, Social Pyramid Schemes, and Address Book Leeching</p>	<p>Asking for an email address or social media permissions for one purpose but then using it for another OR Making users share information about people in their social network</p>
<p>ASYMMETRIC CHOICE</p>	<p>Trick Questions</p>	<p>Using ambiguity or confusing language – often double negatives – to steer a user to things they don’t want <i>Example: “Uncheck the box if you prefer not to receive email updates”</i> <i>Example: A checkbox next to the phrase “Decline the option of renewing your loan,” which if left un-checked is interpreted as acceptance of auto-renewal terms</i> <i>Example: when trying to cancel a subscription service, a button labeled “No, cancel” that doesn’t cancel your subscription but instead takes you out of the cancellation path</i></p>
	<p>Confirm Shaming</p>	<p>Using shame to steer users away from certain choices by framing the alternatives as a bad decision <i>Example: “No, I don’t want to save money” appears when a shopper selects a one-time purchase over a recurring one</i></p>
	<p>Preselection</p>	<p>Preselecting a default that’s good for the company, but not the user <i>Example: add-on products such as trip insurance or an extended warranty are automatically tacked on to a purchase unless the customer notices and opts out</i> <i>Example: the accept tracking cookies box is pre-checked</i> <i>Example: the site automatically shows shoppers the most expensive option, not the cheaper or free option</i></p>
	<p>Subverting Privacy</p>	<p>Tricking users into sharing more information than they</p>

	Preferences	really intended to <i>Example: asking users to give consent but not informing them in a clear, understandable way what they are agreeing to share</i> <i>Example: telling users the site is collecting their information for one purpose but then sharing it with others or using it for other purposes</i> <i>Example: including default settings that maximize data collection and making it difficult for users to find and change them</i> <i>Example: giving users a choice, but one where the "Accept" choice is in a bold, blue background, while "Reject" is greyed out and in small print</i>
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