**Dark UX Patterns: An Ethical Analysis**

The Dark UX Pattern ACM case study (Association for Computing Machinery, 2018a) presents an example in which a UX designer, Stewart, was instructed to implement interface designs that deliberately manipulated users into unintended actions by replacing clear buttons with confusing arrows and introducing colour schemes hostile to accessibility. The following analysis evaluates this situation in light of the ACM and BCS ethical codes.

**Code Violations and Professional Standards**

The design changes contravene fundamental principles within both the ACM Code and the BCS Code of Conduct. The BCS Code requires members to “have due regard for public health, privacy, security and wellbeing of others” and to “promote equal access to the benefits of IT” (British Computer Society, 2022). The deliberate obfuscation through arrow placement and the silent addition of warranties directly conflict with these obligations. Gray et al. (2018, p. 10) classify such practices as “forced action” patterns, where users “are required to perform a specific action to access (or continue accessing) a specific functionality.”

The ACM Code’s Principle 1.2 directs members to “avoid harm,” while Principle 1.4 requires fairness and non-discrimination, explicitly noting that technologies “should be as inclusive and accessible as possible” (Association for Computing Machinery, 2018b). The use of a red–green colour scheme that disadvantages visually impaired users is a direct breach of accessibility requirements. Both codes demand consideration of all stakeholders; however, the client celebrated increased revenue while disregarding accessibility complaints.

**Legal and Social Implications**

These practices raise serious concerns under accessibility guidelines and consumer protection legislation. Mathur et al. (2019, p. 17) document how dark patterns exploit cognitive biases including “anchoring, bandwagon and default effects,” disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Luguri and Strahilevitz (2021, p. 82) demonstrate experimentally that consumers exposed to dark patterns are “significantly more likely to remain enrolled in an unwanted service,” with participants of lower educational attainment being particularly susceptible. The accessibility violations potentially breach the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which require perceivable information for all users.

**Professional Responsibility**

Stewart faced conflict between organisational pressure and professional duty. The BCS Code requires members to “avoid any inducement to unethical behaviour” and “not misrepresent or withhold information” (British Computer Society, 2022). Both Stewart and his manager failed to uphold these standards by proceeding with deceptive design implementations despite recognising their harmful nature.

**References**

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