e-Portfolio Activity: Collaborative Learning Discussion 1: Codes of Ethics and Professional Conduct
Initial Post

Task:

> Review the application of the ethics code to the situation described and highlight the impact on any relevant legal (jurisdictional or non-jurisdictional) and social issues, as well as on the professionalism of the computing professionals involved. You should provide comparisons to the British Computer Society (BCS) Code of Conduct.
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> You should demonstrate that you understand the topic covered and ensure you use references to academic literature (including journals, books, and reports). This activity will provide evidence of your personal growth and your summary post is required in your e-portfolio.
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> Your initial posting should respond to the question and be at least 200 words long. Your initial post should be labelled "initial post".

Initial Post:

As a User Experience (UX) designer, I selected a case study on dark patterns (ACM, N.D.) because of its significant relevance to my professional practice. The case in point demonstrates that the role of design decisions, for example, confusing arrows and color combinations, can influence users to make unavoided choices, and in doing so, they can be used by the company at the cost of user freedoms. This situation has serious ethical implications, especially when compared with the British Computer

Society (BCS) Code of Conduct, which is designed based on a public interest, professional ethics perspective, and respect for someone else's values.

Professionals are required according to the BCS Code of Conduct to "attend to public health, privacy, security and that of others" (BCS, 2022: Section 1a). In the case study, in addition to misguiding users, the design changes are also unhelpful to visually impaired individuals as they use red and green color that hid important disclaimers. That is an obvious breach of Principle 1.4 of the BCS Code (2022), the principle of fairness and non-discrimination. In addition, the managers' decision to focus on revenue at the expense of user trust is consistent with the "asshole design" paradigm, in which user utility is sacrificed in favor of shareholder utility (Gray et al., 2018).

From a legal perspective, allowing this type of behaviour could violate accessibility legislation, for instance, the Equality Act 2010 (UK), which mandates that digital services are accessible to all, i.e., to disabled people. Ethnically, the "Dark UX pattern" application has been one that has undermined the trust expectation for digital platforms and hence has inflicted reputational harm on the companies (Narayanan et al., 2020). The case study further highlights the ethical dilemma that Stewart raised, who knew that the design was ethically wrong, but which was accepted by his boss. This raises the question, of what ethical design responsibility computing professionals have to society, a responsibility whose weight is arguably furthered by the BCS Code's (2022) discussion of the individual's professional responsibility to the self for the sake of society, and vice versa.

The BCS Code goes on to tell practitioners that when they "work only as far as they can reasonably be expected to" and that it is a "safe thing" for them to do, and avoid harming others by their recklessness and bad intention 'deceit' and 'malice' (BSC,

2022: Section 2a, Section 2f). In the case study, the design group made deceptive changes to the users, such as clandestinely adding the protection warranty without the users' condition. This not only creates a violation of user trust but also goes against the BCS Basic Principle of Honesty and Fairness. Moreover, managers' festivities to celebrate the surge in revenues, but unmindful of the dissatisfaction of the users, is a manifestation of an unethical approach to the managers' behavior in the line with "dark design" proposed by Nielsen (2023).

Regarding jurisdiction and such practices, one might transgress consumer law, such as the UK Consumer Rights Act of 2015 (UKPGA, 2025), which requires good faith in commercial transactions. From a social perspective, the existence of Dark UX patterns contributes to an environment of distrust of the user in the digital realm (and trust in technology more broadly) (Rousi et al., 2024). The case study further demonstrates that UX designers have an ethical obligation to challenge questionable procedures, even though they are tempted for business reasons. This is consistent with advocacy for "to assist in upholding the pride and stature of the profession" and "to be ethical watchdogs" (BSC, 2020: Section 4a) when in organizations. The case study provides an example of design choices taken under business constraints; for example, omitting interface elements designed to be misleading to users, and in doing so, contributing to a loss of the confidence and autonomy of the user in the system. This situation offers an exciting opportunity to reflect upon the BCS Code of Practice, particularly concerning the principles of organisational accountability and ethical leadership. The BCS Code (2022) further announces that practitioners "shall professionally comport him/herself with reasonable care and diligence" (Section 3a) and. "shall seek to prevent any conflict of interest that may arise" (Section 3b). In the case study, the design team made decisions on the side of revenue rather than on user satisfaction,

for example, by installing a protection warranty under user agreement. Not only is this unethical and unfair to the principles of truthfulness and fairness presented in the BCS Code, but it also demonstrates the ethical issues that developers may face when working in organisations where profit overrules user welfare. Managerially driven "celebration" of higher revenues when user dissatisfaction exists is an example of, an ethic of indifference as "dark design," as pointed out by Gray et al. (2018). From a legal perspective, such conduct could form a breach of consumer protection legislation, such as the UK Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations of 2008, which makes it unlawful to engage in unfair or abusive commercial practices (CPR, 2025). From an ethical standpoint, employment of Dark UX patterns erode trust in digital platforms and, in turn, trust in society and trust in technology is lost. This case study demonstrates how organisational guidelines and management may influence design practice ethics. The BCS Code highlights the need "to lead expression and maintenance of policy that is consonant with the principles of the Code" (BCS, 2022: p. 3.4) and argues that ethical design is both a leadership role and one that demands broadening the acceptance of principles oriented towards users.

In conclusion, the case study underscores the need for organisations to prioritise ethical design practices and foster a culture that values user trust and autonomy. By following the BCS Code of Conduct, management and designers can keep the right path in their work, ensuring harmony with the values of professionalism and public interest.

References

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