

Addictive UX: Heuristic Evidence from Online Gambling UX and the Need for Ethical Guidelines

About

This study critically examines how online gambling platforms use specific User Experience (UX) design strategies to foster compulsive engagement and maximize user retention. Through a heuristic evaluation of five popular platforms, the research identifies and analyzes common persuasive and manipulative design patterns that exploit users' cognitive vulnerabilities.

Problem

The rise of online gambling has created a high-risk digital environment where sophisticated design techniques are used to encourage continuous play, often leading to compulsive behavior and addiction. There is a significant lack of transparency and ethical consideration in how these platforms are designed, exploiting user vulnerabilities for profit without implementing necessary protective measures.

Study Outcome

- A consistent and standardized set of UX design strategies focused on user retention was found across all analyzed gambling platforms.
- All ten addictive design heuristics, including immediate sensory reinforcement, variable rewards, and artificial scarcity, were present in 100% of the platforms.
- Platforms were found to strategically manipulate social proof by constantly displaying messages of other users' alleged winnings to distort the perception of luck.
- A complete absence of user protection mechanisms, such as warnings about risky behavior, loss limits, or mandatory breaks, was a key finding.
- The study concludes that design principles intended for usability are being transformed into mechanisms of manipulation that prioritize engagement over user well-being, highlighting a significant ethical risk.

Keywords

Addictive UX • Online Gambling • Ethical Design • Heuristic Evaluation • User Experience • Dark Patterns • Persuasive Technology