

## Unit 1 Collaborative Discussion 1

### Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

The chosen case study from the Association of Computing Machinery (2022) relates to using dark patterns in user interfaces (UX). Dark UX patterns “are user interfaces whose designers knowingly confuse users, make it difficult for users to express their actual preferences, or manipulate users into taking certain actions” (Luguri and Strahilevitz 2021). They reduce users’ ability to conscientiously make choices, forcing them into preferences they otherwise would not have chosen. Shockingly, over ninety-five percent of free Android-based applications (from the Google Play Store) fall victim to dark UX patterns (Di Geronimo et al., 2020). A few examples of dark UX patterns include:

- countdown timers convincing consumers that purchases are time-limited
- hiding information in small print in obscure, non-prominent locations
- presenting obstacles to cancelling services
- intentionally confusing visual prompts with loaded questions that end with acceptance as default

In the case study, the product changed its left and right rectangle action buttons’ standard behaviour with unexpected behaviour. For example, the left arrow accepted the company’s default product instead of navigating backwards. The right arrow automatically upgraded the user to a more expensive product category and, without confirmation, silently added a protection warranty. Utilising dark UX patterns in this manner raised the client’s revenue. However, several users complained they did not want the protection warranty and requested refunds. Also, the poor choice of colour scheme misled visually impaired users away from appropriate disclaimers.

The case study shows the value of the ACM Code of Ethics by highlighting areas of failure: 1.2 (avoid negative consequences), 1.3 (honesty), 1.4 (fair, no discrimination), 2.1 (user dignity), 2.5 (credible testimony to users), 3.1 (public good), and 3.4 (policies that support the Code of Ethics). Compared to the BCS (British Computer Society) code of conduct, the case study failed to adhere to the public interest (discrimination) and professional competence (injury via false action and inducement).

Dark UX patterns impact society by disregarding customer trust—doing something other than advertised; taking advantage of human behaviour. Chugh and Jain (2021) state, “Users’ decisions are influenced by the way information is presented to them”. In contrast, Gray et al. (2021) point out that dark UX patterns, such as forced acceptance, could be because of

economic business models whereby users fund a website or service. Lastly, disadvantaged and marginalised groups are more susceptible to dark UX tactics (Chugh and Jain, 2021). The professional impact of dark UX patterns is that clients and managers may consider such practices acceptable and employ different dark UX patterns to drive future profits, leading down a moral and ethical slope of unsound business practices. From a legal point of view, in the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), in charge of consumer protection, regulates dark patterns and penalises service providers by punishing them for unfair and deceptive practices.

## References

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