Dark patterns
tricking the user to perform undesirable actions

Have you ever faced a situation in which after purchasing some flight tickets you realise the price is higher than what was stated at the beginning? Did you know that this was due to a dark pattern on the airline website?

Dark patterns are "interface design choices that benefit an online service by coercing, steering, or deceiving users into making unintended and potentially harmful decisions"[1]. Dark patterns occur online when a user is tricked into performing a behaviour they don't want to do, find difficult to do or aren't aware they are doing.

Dark patterns are connected to harms, some monetary, other emotional, even discriminatory. Common types include[2]:

- **Confirmshaming:** it shames the customer into choosing an option that is desirable for the website, but not necessarily for the user;

- **Privacy Zuckering:** the user agrees to something without acknowledging the full extent of their consent. Usually related to data privacy;

- **Hidden costs:** lack of information and costs that aren't revealed at the start but usually at the check-out process;

- **Roach Motel:** the user gets into a situation very easily, but then he finds it is hard to get out (e.g. premium subscription);

- **Fake urgency scarcity:** the website urges the user to buy because there are just a few units available or the offer is about to expire;

- **Forced continuity:** the user is tricked into giving their personal data away in order to complete their purchase.

Scams don't work if the victim knows what the hustle is trying to do. Solving the problem of dark patterns is not only in the hands of companies and their UX designers. Users and consumers also play an essential role. They must **develop digital and information literacy skills** that enable them to become aware of these abusive constructions and empower them as knowledgeable and informed online users.

Want to know more? Have a look at the dark patterns hall of shame at
https://twitter.com/darkpatterns

(1) Mathur. A., Acar. G., Friedmann M.J., Chetty. M. & Narayanan. A. (2019), Darkpatterns at scale: Findings from a crawl of 11K shopping websites, Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction. 3(CSCW), 1-32
(2) Dark Patterns (www.darkpatterns.org)