**Documenting and Deconstructing Dark Patterns and Asymmetry in Online Subscription Processes**

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Abstract

Growing public discontent with online subscriptions has drawn attention to dark patterns in sign-up and cancelation processes. Current research has yet to document the distinct manifestations of dark patterns throughout these processes, and existing taxonomies group online subscription dark patterns into a single type. This study illuminates the labyrinth of distinct dark patterns users encounter when subscribing or unsubscribing from an online service or product. In-depth case studies document and deconstruct asymmetry and dark patterns in eleven streaming platforms and diversified software services. The findings illustrate salient examples of asymmetric effort and deceptive design. Results indicate several asymmetric characteristics of the sign-up and cancelation process, including the time and number of steps required, the prevalence of dark patterns, and the underlying complexity in information and choice architectures. Recommendations include greater oversight by consumer protection bodies and design guidelines for decreasing the asymmetry between sign-up and cancellation processes.