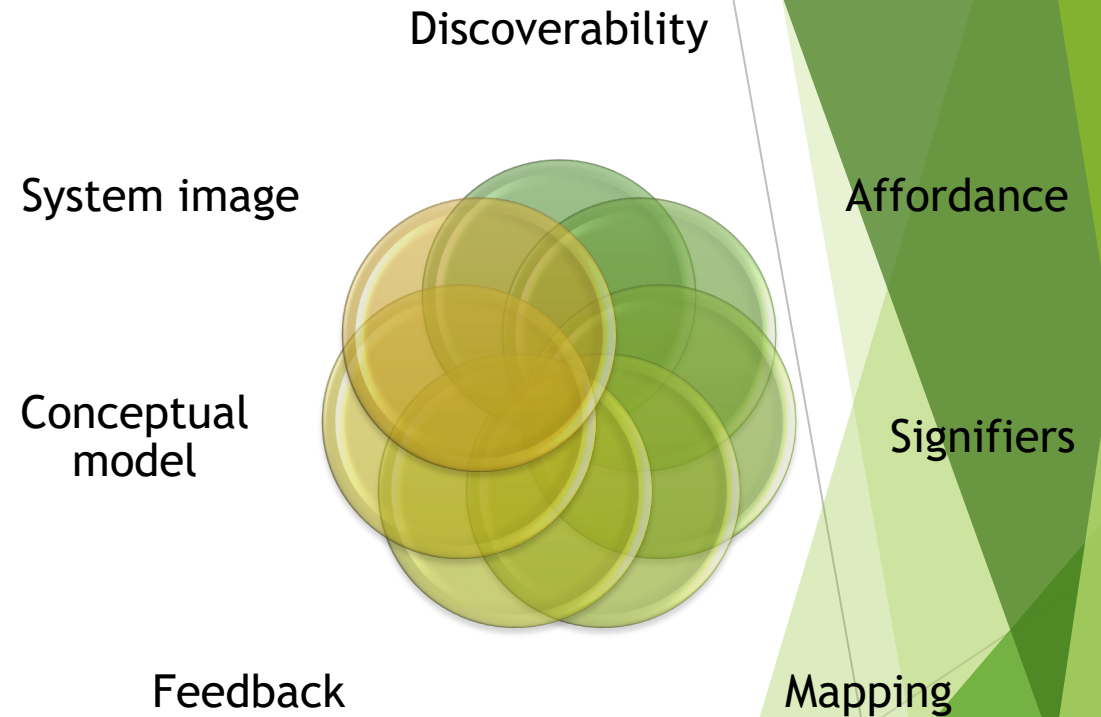


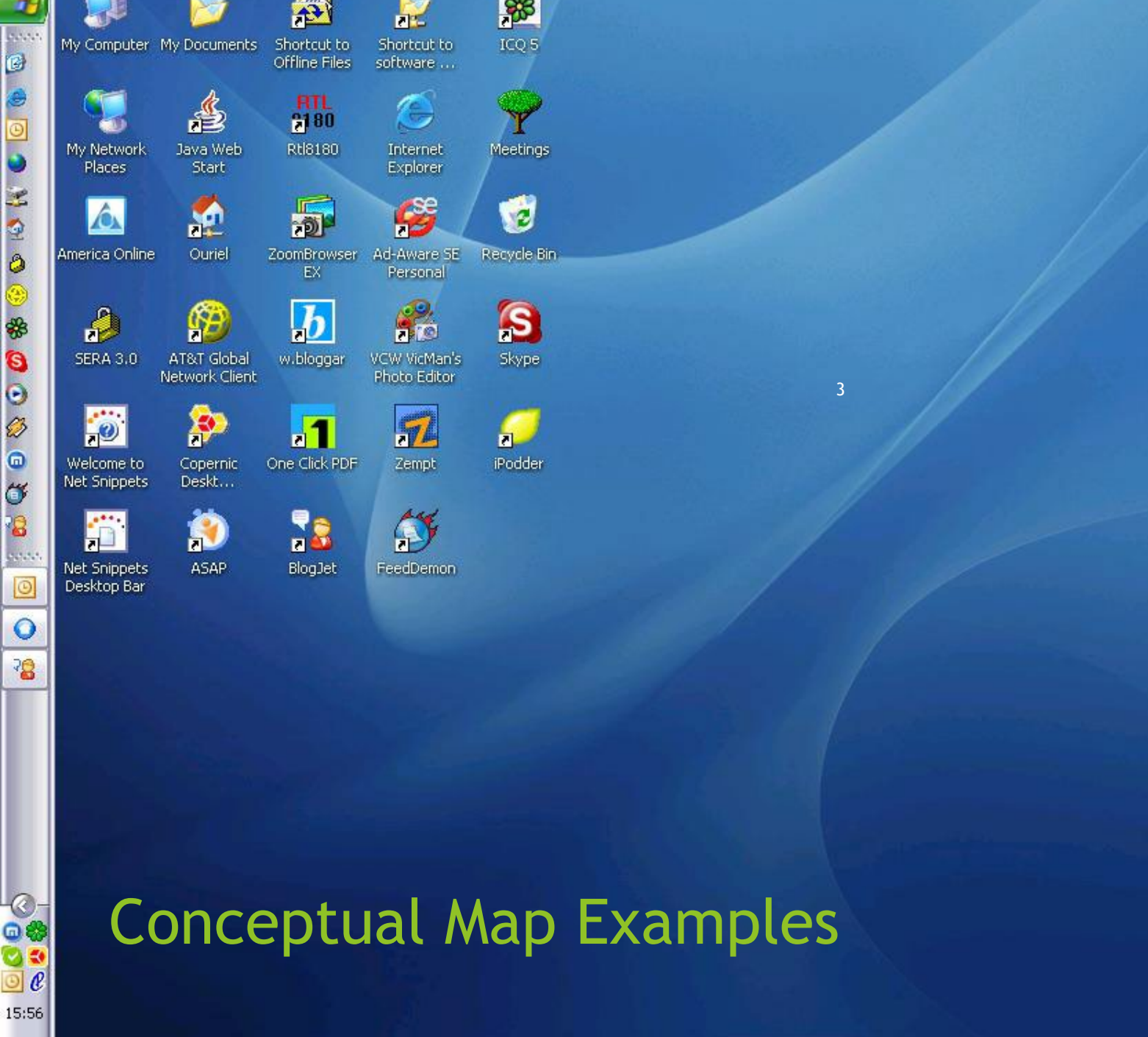
MIS3506: Ethics & Blame

Lavin * Spring 2026

Conceptual Model

- ▶ Represent our understanding of how things work
- ▶ Framed by the affordances, signifiers, constraints and mappings
- ▶ Mental Model



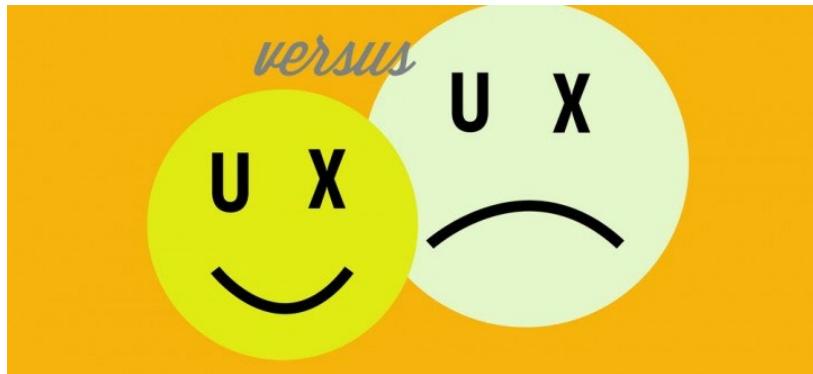


Conceptual Map Examples

Everyone forms stories
(conceptual models) to explain
what they have observed.

(Norman, p. 59)

If the user is confused by the error and it doesn't fit within their conceptual model - that cause stress - blaming themselves is the path of least resistance...



When things go wrong

- ▶ I hate uncertainty - don't you? Think about the period of time in which we are living - complete uncertainty.
- ▶ We/Users will do anything to escape uncertainty
- ▶ Our brains want the world to be easy to navigate

In UX design, the concept of "blame" refers to the tendency for users to internalize errors or frustrations caused by poor design, leading to feelings of inadequacy or frustration, rather than recognizing the design as the problem.

I am only human



Blame the wrong thing



Look for cause & effect



Learned helplessness

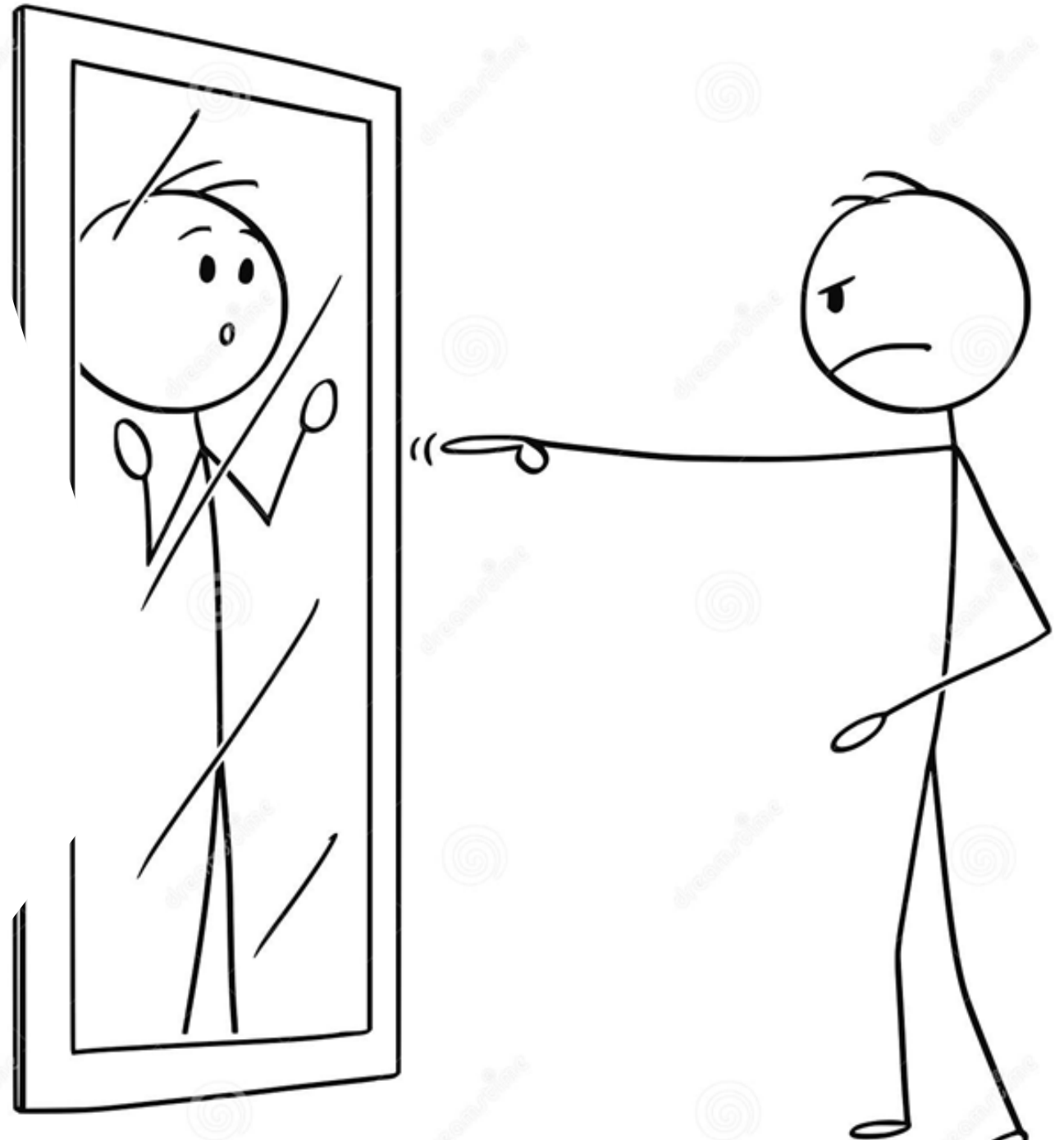


Positive psychology (not!)



Blame yourself

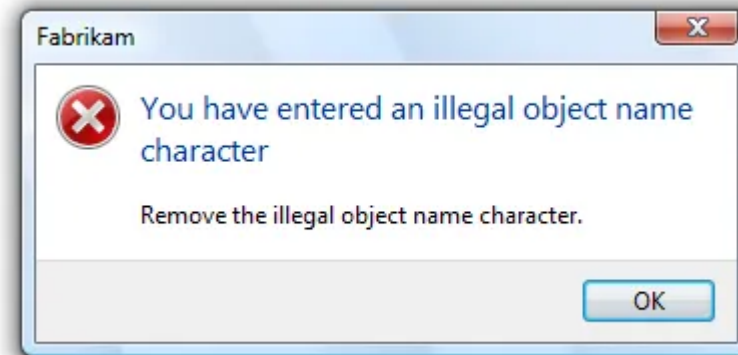
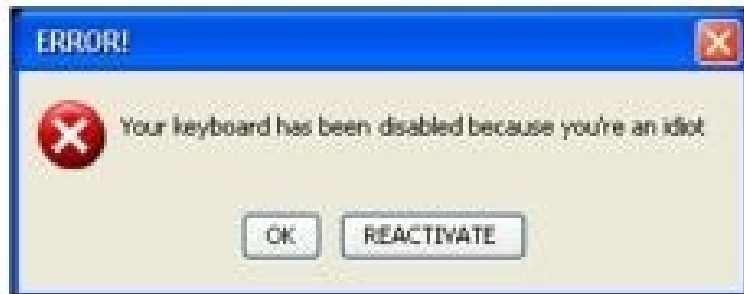
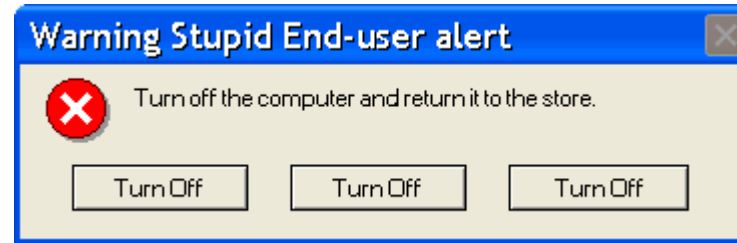
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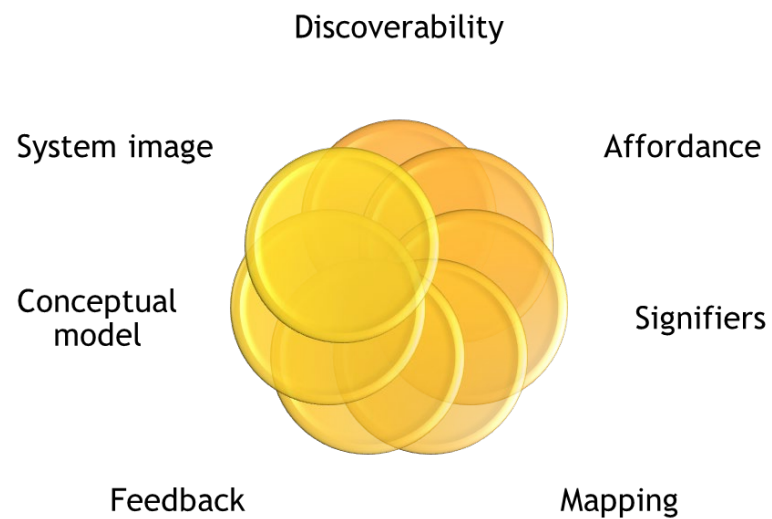
Learned
helplessness:
Repeated failure at
task - decide the
task cannot be done

Positive psychology:
Fail often, fail fast -
a positive learning
experience

It's not me... it's you....







Anticipate that things will not always go smoothly...

- ▶ Designers have an obligation to ensure that the behavior of the machine is understandable to the people who interact with them.
- ▶ Strive to minimize the chance of inappropriate actions through the design framework
- ▶ Use affordances, signifiers, mapping and constraints to guide actions

Advice to designers:



Do not blame
people



Take difficulties as
signifiers for
improvement



Eliminate error
messages - provide
help and guidance



Make corrections
possible



Think positively

Don't criticize unless you can do better!



Ethics in User Experience...

- ▶ Ethics in user experience design is not a binding rule, but rather a collection of professional tips that would help you improve your product for your target users.
- ▶ It is not always obvious, so, if you have any suspicion or ethical challenge during the creation of a flow for example, just put the question through the following filter: in a conflict of interests, do the user's interests win? Meaning, no wasting time, no invasion of personal privacy, no unnecessary limitations and so on.

Core ethical principles

- **User privacy and data protection:** Protecting user data and being transparent about how it is collected and used is a fundamental responsibility.
- **Transparency and informed consent:** Users should understand what they are agreeing to and how their data will be used.
- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** Designing products that are usable by as many people as possible, regardless of their abilities.
- **Avoiding manipulative or deceptive practices:** Not using "dark patterns" or other tricks to mislead users into actions they didn't intend.
- **Honesty and fairness:** Presenting information accurately and avoiding bias in design and algorithms.
- **User control:** Giving users control over their experience and the ability to delete their data or opt-out of features.

Why should we be ethical in our UX designs?

- **Builds trust:** Ethical practices foster long-term trust between users and brands.
- **Enhances brand reputation:** Companies known for ethical design have a better public image.
- **Reduces risk:** It helps avoid legal and reputational risks associated with privacy violations and manipulative tactics.
- **Creates better products:** Focusing on the user's well-being leads to more positive and effective experiences.

Key Question - Freedom vs. Control

Freedom vs. Control:

- ▶ **Maximum freedom:** More personalization options but can waste user time
- ▶ **Guided experience:** Streamlined, foolproof processes with limited choices

The right balance depends on the context (e.g., banking requires more hand-holding than auto-save features)

Key Question - Freedom vs. Control

- ▶ Good guideline: When facing an action with significant consequences, where no mistakes are allowed, we need to lead our users, while confirming the understanding of each step and pacing by them.
- ▶ Passwords - In such situations, try to think of an action that would be a reasonable compromise for the user that would save future attempts to reset forgotten passwords. Example? Social login (Google/Facebook/Twitter), external confirmation (email/SMS), or even providing a little “life hack” to your users on how to remember passwords.

Seven Guidelines for Ethical UX

- ▶ **Foolproof it** - Prevent user errors with confirmations and reversible actions
- ▶ **Be the good guys** - Consider what you'd want as a user
- ▶ **Use research** - Base decisions on real data and testing
- ▶ **Correct data hierarchy** - Make advertised features easily accessible
- ▶ **Don't fear change** - Gather feedback and iterate
- ▶ **Read the room** - Understand your audience and market expectations
- ▶ **Small bites** - Implement changes gradually (A/B testing)
- ▶ **Bottom Line:** Prioritize user interests—respect their time, privacy, and autonomy—and you'll build trust and long-term success.

Dark Patterns

- ▶ Tricks used in websites and apps that make you do things that you didn't mean to, like buying or signing up for something.
 - ▶ GPS/Location detail
 - ▶ Sign up
 - ▶ No visible anti-action of confirmation
 - ▶ Unclear or impossible touch actions
- ▶ Dark patterns are deceptive user experience designs that exploit our typical behavior on websites and apps to get us to do something we didn't intend.





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Tell us what you are NOT interested in receiving by checking the boxes below to opt out of specific content.

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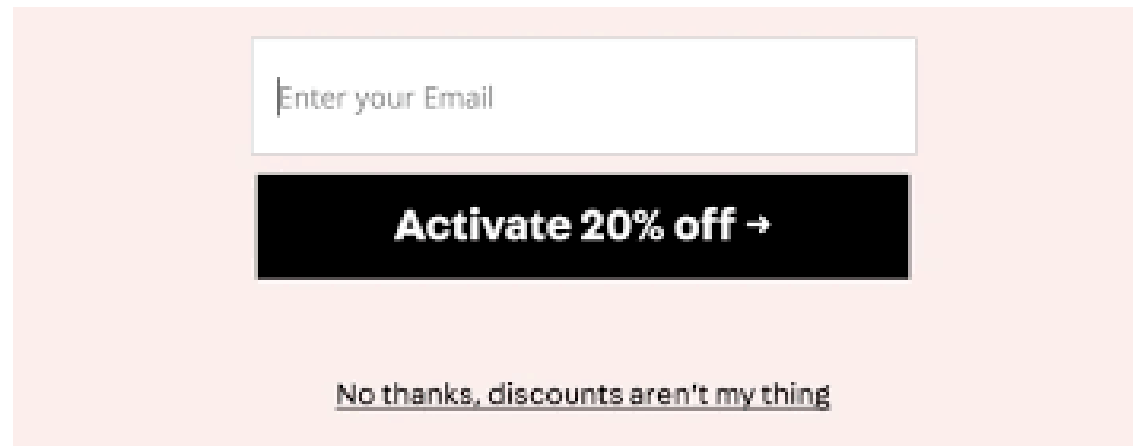
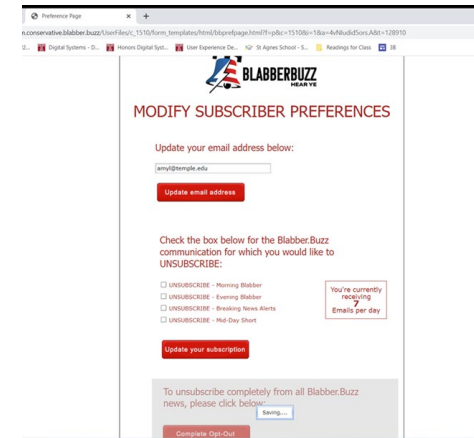
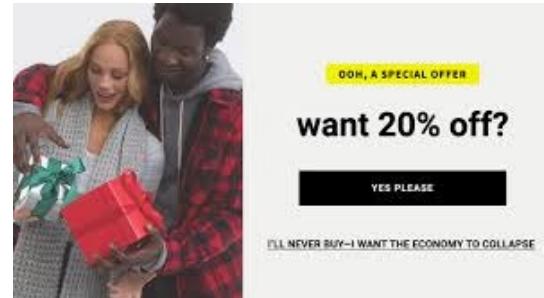
- Webinars
- Important Announcements and What's New
- Product Information
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- White Papers, Infographics, How-To Guides, Tips and Tricks

Opt out from all email communications:

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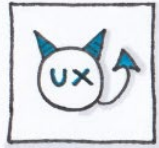
Examples of Dark Patterns

- ▶ Confirmshaming - my least favorite
- ▶ friend spam
- ▶ forced continuity
- ▶ disguised ads
- ▶ bait and switch
- ▶ hidden costs
- ▶ roach motel
- ▶ privacy suckering
- ▶ misdirection
- ▶ price comparison prevention
- ▶ trick questions
- ▶ sneak into basket



Common Types of Dark Patterns

- 
Bait and Switch
 When information says something else and a different action gets performed upon clicking
- 
Hidden Costs
 The cost shown is different initially, but increases as the buyer moves ahead with the payment
- 
Forced Continuity
 Having to give information or card details to move ahead with using the website, a product, or a service
- 
Confirm Shaming
 When manipulative content is used to changes user action
- 
Disguised Ads
 When a ad banner looks similar to a useful button such as a download button, but a different action is performed when you click on it
- 
Roach Motel
 Entering is easy, exit is equally tricky, i.e., subscription is easy, cancelling is difficult
- 
Asking More than Intended
 Asking information from a user more than what they intend to tell in the name of knowing your users
- 
Triggering Fear
 When a user is asked to not opt-out of a subscription or a feature selection as it can lead to negative consequences
- 
Social Proof
 When you influence user actions and behavior by telling them a success story of other similar users
- 
Triggering FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)
 This is prevalent on the eCommerce websites where a user is told "Only a few left"



DARK PATTERNS

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UX Knowledge Base Sketch #29

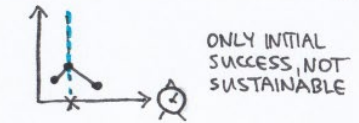


DARK PATTERNS ARE TRICKS THAT MAKE THE USERS DO THINGS THEY DID NOT MEAN TO.

FINE LINE BETWEEN INFLUENCING USERS' BEHAVIOR AND TRICKING THEM!

DARK PATTERNS CAN WORK IF SOMEONE IS LOOKING FOR SHORT-TERM RESULTS.

vs. USING DARK PATTERNS HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT IN THE LONG-TERM



THE MOST COMMON TYPES

FORCED CONTINUITY
FREE TRIAL → CHANGES TO A PAYING SCHEME WITHOUT WARNING

ROACH MOTEL
THE START IS EASY (SIGN UP/SUBSCRIPTION), QUITTING IS HARD

GROWTH HACKING THE SPAMMING
YOU BECOME THE SPAMMER WITHOUT KNOWING IT

DELIBERATE MISDIRECTION
FOCUSING THE USERS' ATTENTION ON THE MORE EXPENSIVE OPTION, HIDING THE CHEAPER WAY

OBSCURED PRICING
MAKING IT HARD TO COMPARE THE PRICES

SNEAK INTO BASKET
A RANDOM ADDITIONAL APPEARS IN YOUR BASKET (WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT)

BAIT & SWITCH
USE A CONVENTION, PATTERN IN A WAY TO MAKE THE USER FALSELY ASSUME SOMETHING

DISGUISED ADS
AN AD LOOKING LIKE ANOTHER TYPE OF CONTENT / NAVIGATION

ROADBLOCK
A POP-UP INTERRUPTS YOUR INTENDED ACTION

HIDDEN COSTS
AT THE CHECKOUT, A NEW, UNEXPECTED COST APPEARS

PRIVACY ZUCKERING
SHARING MORE PRIVATE INFO THAN YOU WANT

MISINFORMATION
E.G. CONFUSING COLOR, CONTRAST LANGUAGE

In Class Discussion



Find 3-4 examples of Dark Patterns by type



In teams, discuss the use of dark patterns in UX



Do you think it is an effective business strategy?

As a user?

As a business owner?



How do these dark patterns fit into ethical design guidelines?

Consider: Does the severity of consequences change ethical obligations? The article contrasts banking apps (high stakes) with auto-save features (low stakes).

Should designers apply different ethical standards based on the potential impact of user actions? Are "opt-out" defaults ever ethical? Consider examples like Facebook's comment notifications or email list sign-ups. When might defaulting to "yes" be acceptable versus manipulative?

- ▶ Compare the slide deck created by your instructor with the slide deck generated by NotebookLM. Which deck provides a stronger user experience for the intended audience, and why? In your response, evaluate both decks using UX principles such as clarity, organization, visual hierarchy, readability, audience fit, engagement, and trustworthiness of information. Identify specific design choices that improve or weaken the experience, and explain which deck better supports learning and decision-making.



- ▶ Instead of using dark patterns, UX designers should argue for treating customers with respect by giving them choices that are transparent and clear. While this won't lead to the same short-term gains as a dark pattern, it will lead to a less frustrating and much improved customer experience
- ▶ In the long-term this will also help companies retain customers, ultimately giving them a competitive advantage. Customers are far more likely to stay with companies, brands, and product experiences that are transparent, authentic, and trustworthy!