

# Dark Patterns: *How Good UX Can Be Bad UX*

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# HELLO IT'S ME, ANISA

Animator



2D Artist



UI / UX Designer



**Game  
Title**

**Company  
Name**




# DARK PATTERNS

A pattern used intentionally by a game creator to cause negative experiences for players which are against their best interests and likely to happen without their consent.



Zagal, J. P., Bjork, S., Lewis, C. (2013)  
“Dark Patterns in the Design of Games”  
[https://www.eng.utah.edu/~zagal/Papers/Zagal\\_et\\_al\\_DarkPatterns.pdf](https://www.eng.utah.edu/~zagal/Papers/Zagal_et_al_DarkPatterns.pdf)

 darkpatterns.org  
Conceived by Harry Brignull (2010)

## ~~GOOD UX~~ EFFECTIVE UX

- Psychological principles and behavioural techniques
- Intended goals:
  - Monetisation
  - User retention

The global games software market's total digital **revenue** in Dec 2016 increased by

**↑ 10%**

from 2015 to a record

**\$7.6 billion**

Source: SuperData Research, 2016  
<https://www.superdataresearch.com/us-digital-games-market/>

## ~~BAD UX~~ EXPLOITATIVE UX

- Players feel cheated & dissatisfied
- Results in:
  - Negative perception of the game, developers, and industry as a whole
  - Retention drop

Out of **10 million players** covering more than 30 mobile games over 90 days:

- **19%** of those new players opened the games only **once**
- **66%** had stopped playing after the first **24 hours**
- **53%** of spending happened within the first **7 days**

Source: Swrve, 2014  
<http://landingpage.swrve.com/0414-new-players-report.html>

**BUT IT MAKES MONEY**



**SO WHY NOT?!**

**Actually, it's about ethics.™**

# Ethical Obligation



“Designers have a duty to consider the ends of players and potential players; a game which is exploitative towards a group of players or simply ignores them during the design process is unlikely to meet this duty.”

Erica Neely, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Source:  
“Video Games, Power, and Social Responsibility” by E. Neely. (2016)  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305220809>

# Moral Responsibility

“When people play games, they are entrusting the developers with their time and money. As developers, we have a responsibility to make sure that we give them something equally valuable in return.”

Ex-employee, “Dark Pattern” utilising company

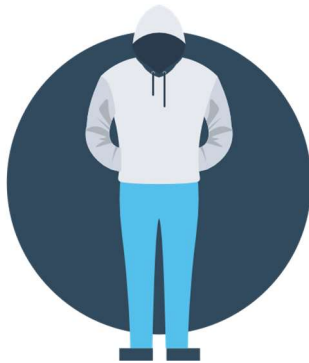


Source:

“Chasing the Whale: Examining the ethics of free-to-play games” by M. Rose. (2013)

[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/195806/chasing\\_the\\_whale\\_examining\\_the\\_.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/195806/chasing_the_whale_examining_the_.php)

# Treating Players with Respect



“Free-to-play games aren't after everyone for a few dollars - they're after weak people in vulnerable states for hundreds, if not thousands.”

Chris, former “whale” user

Source:

“Chasing the Whale: Examining the ethics of free-to-play games” by M. Rose. (2013)

[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/195806/chasing\\_the\\_whale\\_examining\\_the\\_.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/195806/chasing_the_whale_examining_the_.php)

# It Takes a Village

“Game journalists and reviewers could play a valuable role - in reporting how 'exploitive' specific titles are or are not. 'Exploitive mechanics' could be harder to detect in a single 'Let's Play' video, so game critics could help a lot in that area”

Todd Harris, COO of Hi-Rez Studios



Source:

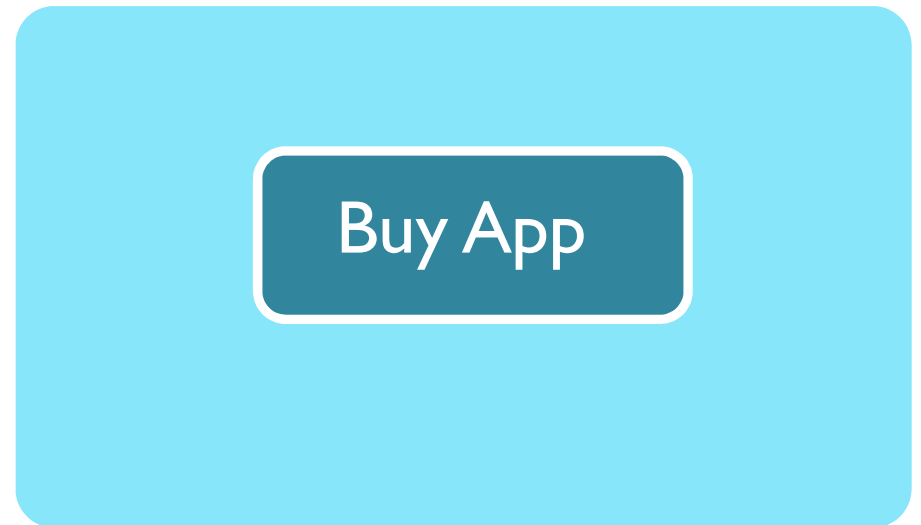
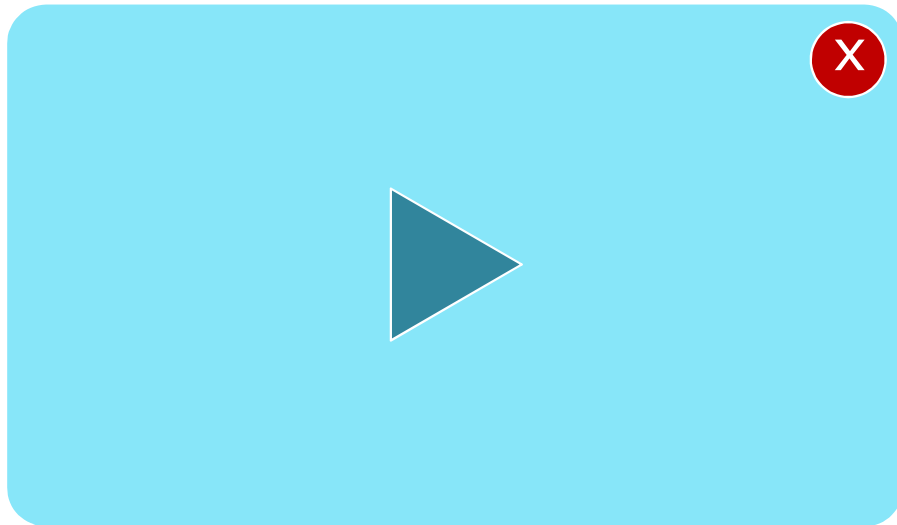
“Chasing the Whale: Examining the ethics of free-to-play games” by M. Rose. (2013)

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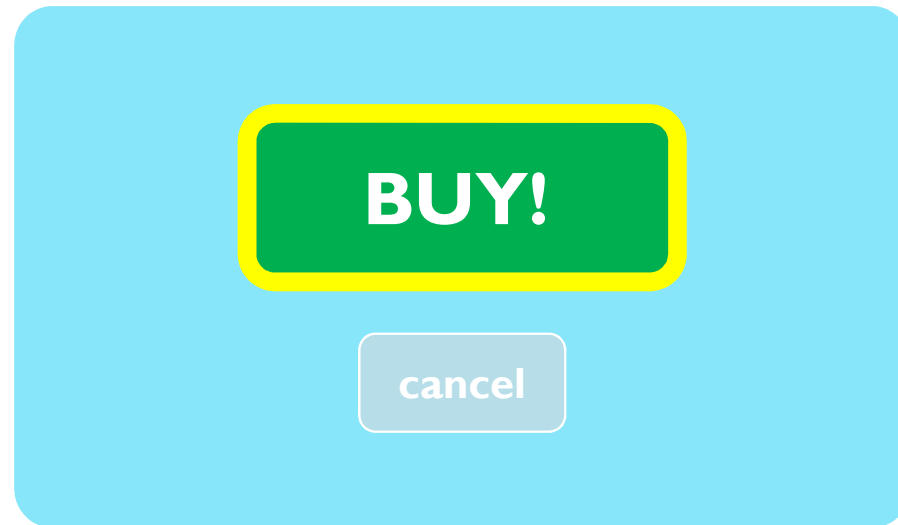
# (A FEW) DARK PATTERN EXAMPLES

- What it looks like
- How to avoid them

## Bait & Switch



# Misuse of Graphic Design



# Demoralising Terminology

**Buy more lives**

**Give up, loser**

## Daily “Rewards”

Log in tomorrow  
and recieve this  
**REWARD!**  
(0.0003% chance)



# Guilt Tripping Notifications



**Your village is  
dying! Don't you  
care? Come back!**

# Social Validation / Compliance



**Your friend just  
beat your high  
score! Play now!**



(HOW BOUT SOME)  
**ANTI-DARK  
PATTERN  
EXAMPLES**

## Clear Trade Offs



Watch ad to  
replenish lives?

No, thanks

Don't want ads?

Buy for \$0.99!

## Balanced UI Design

**\$0.99**

**\$4.99**

**\$9.99**

## Definitive and Clear Language

Buy power up?

Yes

No

# Rewarding Loyalty

Lvl 1246

Lvl 1245

Lvl 1244

## So, what now?

### •UI / UX Designer

- Discussion matters - a code of ethics
- Does it manipulate players, or aid them and let them feel secure about their knowledge and decisions?
- Designing for the mutual benefit of players and the game



## So, what now?

- A Company

- Ensure the UX conveys company values
- Facilitate an environment that allows for the refusal of unethical requests
- Use metrics to increase player enjoyment, not as a tool of manipulation

*“On my business card, I am a corporate president. In my mind, I am a game developer. But in my heart, I am a gamer.”*

Satoru Iwata



*“I love video games, and I love making them.”*

Me


... and probably you too




**Thank you, please UX kindly!**

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 [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

 [flaticon.com](https://flaticon.com)