

Dark Pattern Risk Audit Kit.

A practical kit to spot manipulation risks in your product before your users (or regulators) do.

What you'll get inside:

- Risk checklist (Pricing • Trial • Consent • Upsells • Cancellation)
- 10-point Ethical Influence Scorecard
- "Fix copy" swipe file (clean alternatives)
- 1-page exec summary template for leadership

Made by a working UX practitioner, Manoj Kumar. Built for real teams.



Why I made this

Let me start with the uncomfortable truth.

Most "dark patterns" don't come from evil teams. They come from **growth pressure + shipping speed + A/B testing**.

So what happens?

- Conversion goes up this week
- But cancellations, refunds, angry tickets... start rising quietly
- And then one day your founder says:
"Why are customers mad? We didn't do anything wrong."

That's the moment this kit is for.

NN/g calls these *deceptive patterns* because they push users into actions not in their best interest.

Who this kit is for

If you are:

- A founder scaling paid acquisition
- A product head owning retention + revenue
- A UX leader tired of being asked "just increase conversion"
- A growth team that doesn't want brand hate later

This kit will fit your world.

This is not a moral lecture. This is a business risk audit.

What counts as "dark pattern risk"

Here's the simplest definition I use in reviews:

Guidance

User understands the choice and won't regret it later

Manipulation

User is pushed into something they didn't truly intend

Regulators are now using similar framing:

- The FTC highlights designs that trick/trap people into purchases or giving up privacy.
- The EU's Digital Services Act prohibits deceptive/manipulative online interface design for online platforms.
- Privacy regulators warn against consent flows that subvert real choice.

Where dark patterns usually hide (the 5 risk moments)

Almost every case I've seen falls into these:

- 1 — Pricing & plan selection
- 2 — Trial → paid conversion
- 3 — Consent (cookies, tracking, permissions)
- 4 — Upsells, add-ons, bundles
- 5 — Cancellation / downgrade

If you audit only these five, you'll catch most of the damage.

The Dark Pattern Risk Map (quick taxonomy)

Use this as your mental model.

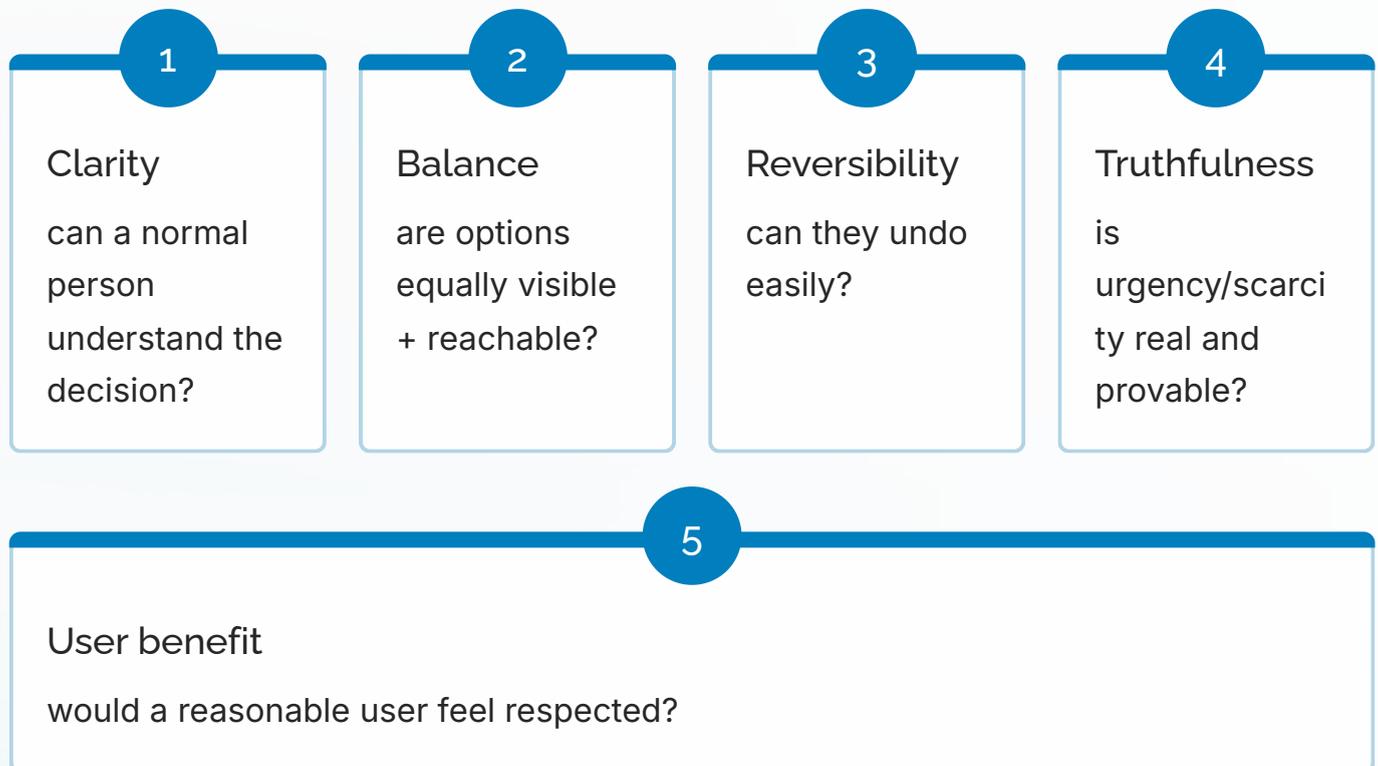
- 1 — A) Choice pressure
 - fake urgency, countdown timers
 - scarcity without proof
 - guilt copy ("No thanks, I hate saving money")
- 2 — B) Choice structure
 - hard to compare plans
 - decoys (one plan engineered to look dumb)
 - defaults that benefit company, not user
- 3 — C) Choice information
 - buried fees, vague terms, hidden renewal logic
 - unclear "what happens next"
 - confusing plan naming
- 4 — D) Choice friction ("sludge")
 - cancel hidden or multi-step maze
 - downgrade blocked
 - consent reject harder than accept

- UK regulators group these harms under "online choice architecture" patterns that can harm consumers.

10-point Ethical Influence Scorecard

Core tool: Score any screen or flow from 0 to 10.

Give 0–2 points for each:



Interpretation

- **9–10** = clean, keep it
- **7–8** = watch carefully, minor fixes
- **≤6** = **risk zone** (expect regret, churn, complaints)

Tip: Don't argue. Score it fast. Then fix what's obvious.

Risk Checklist #1: Pricing & Plan Selection

Check if true, if not.

Clarity

- Pricing is fully visible (no surprise fees later)
- Renewal timing is clear (monthly/yearly, trial end)
- Plan differences are easy to compare (not hidden in tooltips)

Balance

- All plans are readable without scrolling forever
- No "greyed out" buttons that shame the user

No decoys

- We're not intentionally designing a plan to look stupid

Red flags

- "Only 2 left" with no proof
- "Best plan" label used without logic
- confusing names (Starter/Basic/Standard) without meaning

Risk Checklist #2: Trial → Paid Conversion

This is where the biggest trust damage happens.

✓ Users are told clearly:

- When billing starts
- How much they will be charged
- How to cancel before billing
- What happens if they downgrade

Red flags

- Forced continuity (trial silently becomes paid)
- Reminder emails intentionally vague
- Cancel path hidden until after billing

📄 The FTC highlights cancellation traps and hidden terms as common dark pattern tactics.

Risk Checklist #3: Consent & Cookie Banner

If you operate in EU/UK/US privacy-heavy markets, treat this as serious.

- ✓ Reject should be as easy as accept
- ✓ No confusing toggles ("legitimate interest" buried)
- ✓ No pre-ticked boxes
- ✓ No endless "more options" that exhaust the user

CNIL has explicitly warned about cookie banner dark patterns and emphasizes that rejecting cookies should be as easy as accepting. EDPB guidance discusses dark patterns that undermine informed and freely given choices (especially in social platform interfaces). CPPA has issued advisories on avoiding dark patterns in privacy choices.

Risk Checklist #4: Upsells, Add-ons, Bundles

This is where sneaky revenue happens.

- ✓ Add-ons are clearly optional
- ✓ Price impact is visible before confirmation
- ✓ "Remove" is easy, not hidden
- ✓ No "pre-selected" add-ons without clear value explanation

Red flags

- Add-on sneaks into cart
- Bundles that obscure real per-item price
- "Continue" button implies mandatory purchase

Risk Checklist #5: Cancellation & Downgrade

The truth test: This is the screen where your brand reveals itself.

✔ What good looks like

- Cancel is reachable in 1–2 steps from account settings
- Downgrade is allowed (unless product truly can't)
- "Pause" is optional, not forced
- You're not hiding cancellation behind chat, email, or forms

Red flags

- "Find cancel option" scavenger hunt
- Cancel only available on desktop
- Cancel requires calling support
- "Are you sure?" loops 4 times

📌 Subscription traps are repeatedly highlighted by regulators as harmful patterns.

"Regret Metrics" (what you should measure instead of only conversion)

If you want the business truth, track these:

Regret Signals

- refund rate
- chargebacks / disputes
- cancel reasons
- support tickets tagged "billing / cancel / confusion"
- negative reviews mentioning "trick" "scam" "can't cancel"

Healthy Growth Signal

- conversion stays stable
- regret signals go down
- retention improves after renewal

If your conversion went up but regret went up too... you didn't win. You just borrowed revenue.

Fix Pack: Copy Swipe File (ethical alternatives)

Use these when your team is tempted to use pressure copy.

Instead of:

"Only 2 seats left!"

Use:

"Cohort starts on [date]. Seats are limited because live reviews are capped."

Instead of:

"Don't miss out!"

Use:

"If this isn't the right time, you can start later. Here's what you'll miss + what stays available."

Instead of:

"Are you sure you want to cancel?"
(x4)

Use:

"Before you go: choose a reason (helps us improve). Cancel in 1 click."

Instead of:

"Accept all" big button / "Reject" hidden

Use:

"Accept all" and "Reject non-essential" equal weight.

Page Exec Summary Template (copy/paste)

Dark Pattern Risk Audit — Executive Summary (2026)

Product / Flow audited:

Date:

Owner:

1. Top risks found (max 5)

Risk #1:

Risk #2:

Risk #3:

2. Business impact (plain language)

- Revenue risk (refunds, chargebacks, churn)
- Trust risk (reviews, brand damage)
- Compliance risk (privacy / platform policies)

3. Recommended fixes (fast wins first)

Fix 1 (low effort, high impact):

Fix 2:

Fix 3:

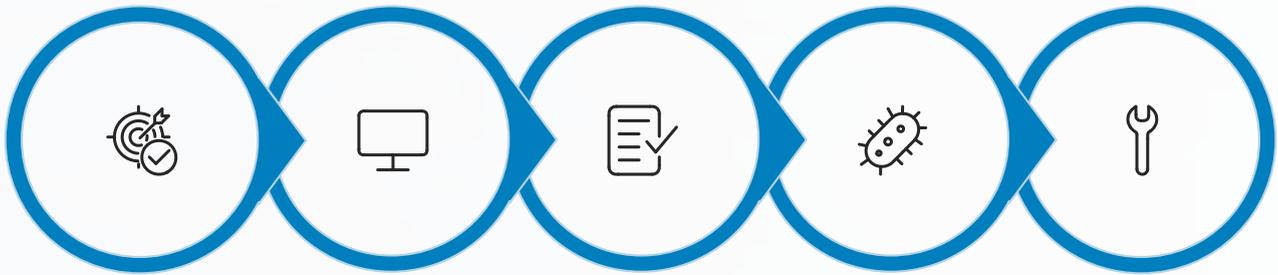
4. Success metrics (2 weeks + 8 weeks)

2 weeks: (support tickets, complaints, funnel drop-offs)

8 weeks: (renewal retention, churn, refund trend)

How to run this audit in 45 minutes (team ritual)

This is the workflow I use.



Pick Moment

Screen-share

Score Screens

Mark ≤6 Fixes

Apply Fix Pack

Do this once a month. You'll prevent future disasters.

Why this kit comes from UXGen Academy mindset

I didn't write this to sound smart. I wrote this because I've seen what happens when UX becomes "growth at any cost."

Teams lose user trust. Then they lose pricing power. Then they spend more on ads just to stay flat.

At **UXGen Academy**, we teach UX as a business skill:



decision clarity



trust-building
design



behavioral UX
without
manipulation



retention-first
thinking



measurable
outcomes

If you want your UX team to think like product leaders... that's what we build.

What to do next

Option A — Self-apply

- Use this kit on your top 5 revenue flows
- Fix the ≤ 6 score screens first
- Track regret metrics for 8 weeks

Option B — Get a senior review

If you want a fast, no-drama audit from experienced eyes:

Book a Dark Pattern Risk Audit (UXGen Studio)

We'll map risks → fixes → measurable outcomes.

References (for credibility + compliance teams)

- Definition and examples of deceptive patterns (NN/g).
- FTC reporting on dark patterns tactics and harms.
- EDPB guidelines on dark patterns in social media interfaces.
- DSA Article 25 prohibition framing (interface manipulation).
- CNIL formal notice on cookie banner dark patterns.
- CPPA enforcement advisory on dark patterns in privacy choices.
- UK CMA research on online choice architecture harms.

What UXGen Academy can help you with.

If you're a founder or product leader:

You don't need more UI polish. You need decision-safe UX.

In UXGen Academy, we train teams and senior UX folks to:

- spot risky patterns before they ship
- write leadership-friendly audit reports
- connect UX decisions to trust, churn, and revenue
- build compliant, fair, high-conversion experiences

If you want the done-with-you version of this audit (with an executive report), that's what we do.

Need Expert UX Support?

Drive Better Retention & Smarter UX Decisions with UXGen Studio.

Every comprehensive UX audit should seamlessly transition into tangible action. However, transforming initial insights into impactful product improvements demands strategic foresight, meticulous discipline, and proven execution expertise. At UXGen Studio, we provide the dedicated support and specialised knowledge needed to bridge this gap, ensuring your audit findings translate directly into enhanced product experiences and robust business growth.

At UXGen Studio, we help SaaS and digital product teams to:

-  **Uncover Deep User Insights & Hidden Friction**
Go beyond surface-level observations to identify the root causes of user struggles and drop-offs.
-  **Translate Research into Prioritised UX Improvements**
Convert complex research findings into clear, actionable recommendations with a strategic roadmap for implementation.
-  **Reduce Churn & Accelerate Retention**
Implement targeted UX interventions that foster user loyalty, minimise voluntary churn, and maximise lifetime value.
-  **Improve Activation, Engagement, & Conversion**
Optimise critical user journeys to drive higher product adoption, sustained engagement, and increased conversion rates.
-  **Align UX Strategy with Business Outcomes**
Ensure that every UX decision directly supports your overarching business objectives, delivering measurable ROI.

Whether your team is embarking on its inaugural UX Audit or is poised to elevate its UX practice into a robust growth engine, UXGen Studio is equipped to convert your research findings into measurable, positive results.



How We Partner With You

At UXGen Studio, we transform your UX challenges into tangible growth opportunities. We offer a comprehensive suite of services designed to integrate seamlessly with your product development lifecycle, ensuring every decision is backed by robust research and strategic insights. Our partnership model focuses on actionable outcomes, from initial audits to sustained implementation and optimization.

Strategic UX Consulting

- UX research planning & execution
- Usability testing & user interviews
- Churn analysis & retention UX strategies

UX Audit to Action

- Prioritised UX recommendations
- Roadmaps aligned to product goals
- Design system & UI improvements

Implementation Support

- UX design + prototyping
- Collaboration with product & engineering
- Ongoing measurement & optimisation

Why UXGen Studio?

We don't just design interfaces – we solve product challenges with clarity, data, and human insight. Our work helps product leaders make confident decisions backed by research, not guesswork. Here's what you gain when you work with us:

- Business-aligned recommendations, not generic UX tips
- Actionable priorities that move KPIs
- Faster impact with structured UX frameworks
- Hands-on collaboration with product teams

30 Min FREE! UX Service Support Call Offer

As a thank-you for reading this document, we offer a complimentary 30-minute UX strategy consultation for teams serious about reducing churn and boosting retention.

[Book your FREE session now](#)

Let's Connect

If you found this document valuable and are ready to elevate your product's user experience, imagine the transformative impact a tailored engagement could have. At UXGen Studio, we bridge the gap between insightful audits and measurable growth, ensuring your investment in UX translates into tangible business success.

Get in Touch Directly

We're always eager to discuss how we can help solve your unique UX challenges. Reach out to us through your preferred method:

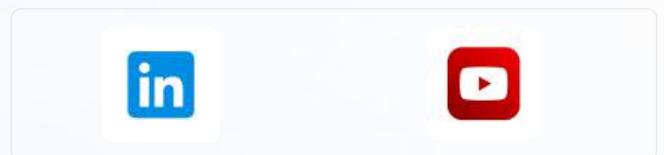
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Our Global Presence

While our roots are in Gurugram, India, our expertise knows no geographical bounds. We proudly partner with global clients, bringing world-class UX strategies and solutions to businesses across continents. Our commitment to creating exceptional user experiences is universal.

Join our community and stay updated with the latest in UX insights and offerings:

Connect With Us on Social Media Platforms



We look forward to partnering with you to craft intuitive, engaging, and compliant digital experiences that drive retention and fuel sustainable growth for your product.

 Uxgen Studio 
Our Services
Explore UXGen Studio's range of services including UX design, UI design, UX audits, mobile and ERP app design, and more. Tailored solutions to enhance user engagement.

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