

## **52 out of 53 of top apps in India use deceptive patterns- reveals study by ASCI Academy & Parallel**

- Report analysed more than 12,000 screens from 53 apps across nine industries, identifying an average of 2.7 deceptive patterns per app
- Health-tech apps were found to have the highest usage of dark patterns, followed by travel booking and fintech sectors
- Report suggests ethical design alternatives and a scoring tool to build more conscious UI/ UX design interfaces and choice architecture in apps

**Mumbai, August 1, 2024:** In a pathbreaking study by the ASCI Academy, in collaboration with Parallel HQ, a leading design firm, the prevalence of deceptive patterns in popular Indian apps has been brought to light. Dark patterns are deceptive UI/UX practices that can mislead or trick users into doing something they originally did not intend or want to do. The comprehensive web report titled '[Conscious Patterns](#),' a study of deceptive patterns in top Indian apps, was unveiled during a webinar held today. The study revealed that 52 out of the 53 analysed apps employ deceptive design practices. It is important to note that the widespread use of dark patterns can impact user autonomy and informed decision-making. These apps collectively have been downloaded over 21 billion times, pointing to the potential of their consumer impact. The report also provides examples of more ethical designs used by some apps as alternatives that can be considered, and a scoring tool that can aid more conscious app design. Industry body Nasscom is partnering with ASCI and Parallel to highlight various challenges and practical solutions in this space.

The report identifies 12 distinct deceptive patterns, including privacy deception, interface interference, drip pricing, and false urgency, which are popularly used in online interfaces. Privacy deception emerged as the most prevalent deceptive pattern, observed in 79% of the apps analysed, followed by interface interference (45%), drip pricing (43%), and false urgency (32%). The results highlight the urgent need for more conscious effort in app development. In June 2023, ASCI released guidelines on deceptive patterns that are mainly used in advertising. Further, the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA) released its guidelines for 13 deceptive patterns in November 2023. According to the guidelines, the use of any of these prescribed dark patterns amounts to a misleading advertisement, an unfair trade practice, or a violation of consumer rights.

## Key Findings of the Report:

1. Four deceptive patterns accounted for 78% of the total occurrences - privacy deception (24%), drip pricing (19%), interface interference (18%), and false urgency (17%).
2. > 80% of apps exhibited deceptive patterns in the settings/ profile section.
3. All e-commerce apps studied made it difficult for users to delete their accounts.
4. Some health-tech apps—4/5, relied on creating time-based pressure (false urgency) to rush users into making decisions.
5. Basket sneaking was four times more prevalent in delivery and logistics apps as compared to other sectors.
6. The three sectors with the highest deceptive patterns per app were health-tech at 8.8, travel booking at 7.2, and e-commerce at 5.3.
7. The lowest incidences of deceptive patterns per app were observed in streaming services at 1.8 and in the gaming sector at 2.4.

To empower UI/UX designers and developers, the report introduces an Ethical Score Calculator, a valuable tool that allows professionals to assess the ethical standing of their apps and websites by identifying the presence of deceptive patterns. Complementing this resource is the Gallery of Inspiration, which showcases examples of flows and patterns that may be more compliant and fairer to consumers. These alternatives could be actively considered in the future development of apps.

The event commenced with an opening note from Namrata Bachani, Director of the ASCI Academy. Following her introduction, Robin Dhanwani, founder of Parallel, guided participants through the key findings of the report, which analysed 12,000 screens from 53 top apps available in India. The report summary can be accessed [here](#). The entire study, including the ethical score calculator and the gallery of inspiration, can be accessed at [www.consciouspatterns.in](http://www.consciouspatterns.in)

The webinar also featured a panel discussion with esteemed panellists, including Shri Rohit Kumar Singh, former Secretary of the Department of Consumer Affairs, Ashish Agarwal, VP and Head of Public Policy at Nasscom; Robin Dhanwani, Founder of Parallel, and Manisha Kapoor, CEO and Secretary General, who moderated the discussion. Together, they provided valuable insights into the implications of deceptive patterns for both consumers and brands, discussing the importance of greater transparency and ethical standards in the digital landscape.

**Manisha Kapoor, CEO & Secretary General of ASCI**, said, “Deceptive patterns harm consumer trust and transparency in the digital ecosystem. With just the top 53 apps being

downloaded over 21 billion times, the consumer exposure to deceptive patterns across apps, websites, and other digital interfaces is mind-boggling. We urge organisations to follow conscious design principles that protect the consumer's right to make an informed choice. The gallery of inspiration and the score calculator are important resources for organizations that wish to get it right. We are extremely grateful to Parallel for being our knowledge partner and to Nasscom for supporting us in the wide dissemination of these findings and resources.”

**Robin Dhanwani, Founder, Parallel,** stated, “As tech professionals deeply committed to design, at Parallel we understand the profound impact ethical practices have on user experiences. Our research uncovers the subtle yet widespread presence of deceptive patterns in Indian apps, highlighting the need for a shift towards more transparent design practices. By championing ethical design, we not only build user trust but also drive innovation that honours consumer autonomy. I hope this report encourages makers to rethink growth strategies and put user-first thinking as the foundation of their products in the coming future.”

## **About the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)**

The ASCI, established in 1985, is committed to the cause of self-regulation in advertising, ensuring the protection of consumer interests. ASCI seeks to ensure that advertisements conform to its Code for Self-Regulation, which requires advertisements to be legal, decent, honest, and truthful and not hazardous or harmful while observing fairness in competition. ASCI looks into complaints across all media, such as Print, TV, Radio, hoardings, SMS, Emailers, Internet/website, product packaging, brochures, promotional material, point of sale material, etc. ASCI has collaboratively worked with various government bodies, including the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Ministry of AYUSH, and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). In August 2023, the ASCI Academy, a flagship program of ASCI, was launched to build the capacity of all stakeholders to create responsible and progressive advertising. ASCI Academy aims to raise standards of advertising content through training, education, outreach, and research on the preventive aspects of advertising self-regulation.

## **About Parallel**

Parallel is a Bangalore-based design studio that specializes in product design. Their team is dedicated to transforming innovative ideas into exceptional products. Their expertise spans product strategy, design and development, user research, and most recently AI experience design. As one of India's first design studios, they have partnered with several

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product communities, impact companies, and government think tanks to design digital products (like Digilocker, CoWin, Meta and NDAP) that have impacted over a billion lives in India in the last decade.

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