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A Web of Anxiety

Developments in accessibility for people with anxiety and panic disorders

David Swallow

Principal UX Consultant

Photo by Jene Yeo on Unsplash

Hurry, only 2 tickets left!

02:00

Book now as 6 other people are viewing this hotel!

03:00

Booked 83 times in the last 24 hours

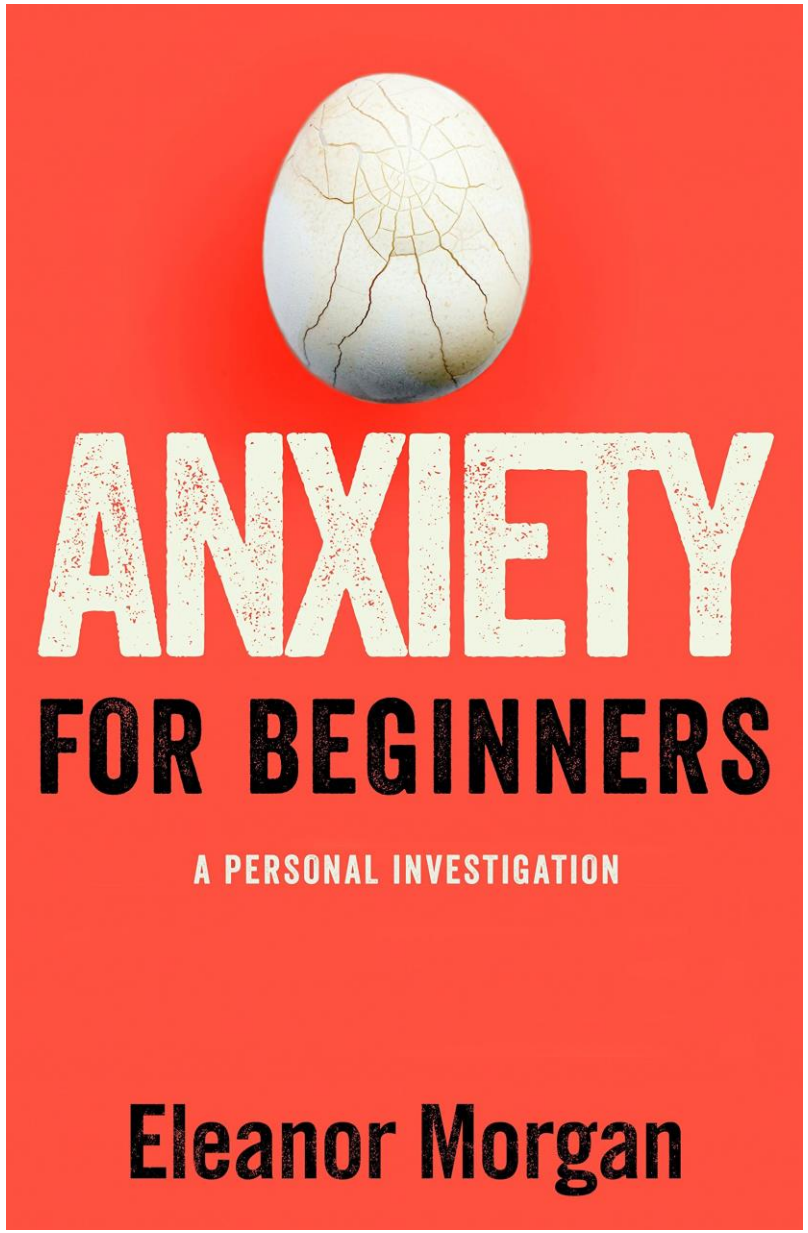
You will be logged out automatically in 60 seconds

04:00

05:00

What are anxiety and panic disorders?

- A range of mental illnesses, characterised by excessive feelings of fear, apprehension, and dread
  - Social anxiety disorder: intense fear of being embarrassed, humiliated, or judged negatively by others in a social or work setting
  - Claustrophobia: fear of confined spaces
  - Agoraphobia: fear of being in a situation that would be difficult to escape from
  - Health anxiety: preoccupation with the idea that you have (or will have) a physical illness
- Panic disorders: sudden, frequent, and intense feelings of panic or fear, sometimes for no clear reason



"If someone tells you they never experience anxiety, they're either a) lying or b) a sociopath. Really."

A web of anxiety: accessibility for people with anxiety and panic disorders [Part 1]

David Swallow | August 14, 2018 | Development, User Experience (UX)

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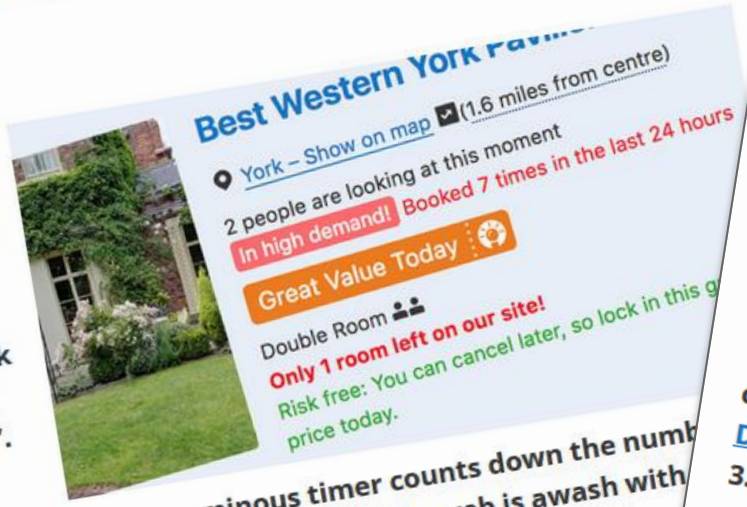

Anyone booking a vacation has likely encountered persuasive notifications urging them to "Hurry, only 2 tickets left!" or to "Book now as 6 other people are viewing this hotel".

We've all fumbled to enter our credit-card details as an ominous timer counts down the numb minutes remaining to complete our transaction. The web is awash with manner of so-called dark patterns, designed to convert visitors and pa from their money. While such intrusions can be a source of irritation stress for many people, they may be complete showstoppers for peo anxiety or panic disorders.

Anxiety disorders comprise a range of mental illnesses that are chara pervasive feelings of fear, apprehension, and dread. For example, so fear of being embarrassed, humiliated, or jud trophobia is the fear of difficul

A web of anxiety: accessibility for people with anxiety and panic disorders [Part 2]

David Swallow | November 7, 2018 | Development, User Experience (UX)

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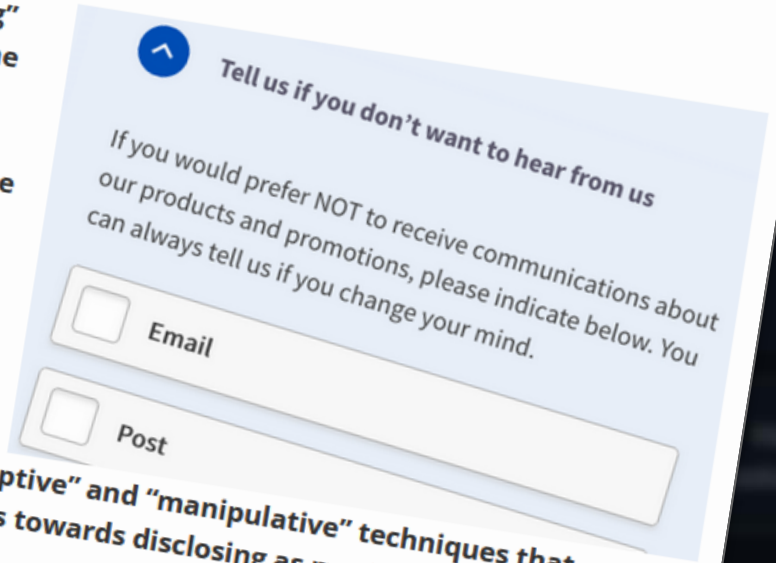
"Unethical", "misleading" and "exploitative" are the words used by the Norwegian Consumer Council to describe the use of dark patterns and privacy-intrusive default settings by Facebook, Google and Microsoft. The council's report, titled Deceived by Design (PDF, 3.2MB), documents the "deceptive" and "manipulative" techniques that companies use to nudge users towards disclosing as much information as possible.



Yet despite protestations and renewed commitments to data privacy from the companies named in the report, nefarious design practices are unlikely to go away. Dark patterns (at least in the short term) are simply too profitable. The truth is: many companies care little about how anxious or stressed the websites make you feel. In fact, companies may want you anxious.

Urgency

Flights

Flight + Hotel

Ontario › Toronto › Search results

82% of places to stay are unavailable for your dates on our site

Show on map

Toronto: 63 properties found

Sort by: Our Top Picks

Commission paid and other benefits may affect an accommodation's ranking. Learn more.

perty name:

o

day, October 17, 2022

date

esday, October 18, 2022

tay

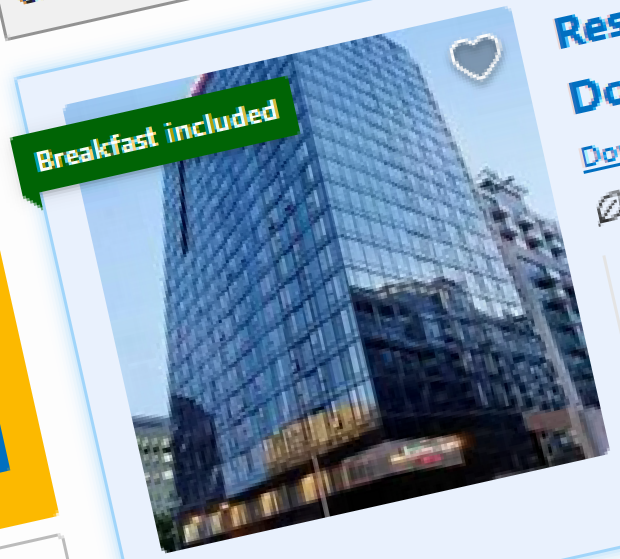
ults · 0 children · 1 room

tire homes & apartments

m traveling for work

Search

Filter by:



Residence Inn by Marriott Toronto Downtown / Entertainment District ★★★★

Downtown Toronto, Toronto · Show on map · 0.7 miles from center

Travel Sustainable property

Very Good 8.2
1,250 reviews

King Studio with Sofa Bed
Private studio • 1 kitchen • 42m²
2 beds (1 king, 1 sofa bed)

Breakfast included

Only 5 left at this price on our site

1 night, 2 adults
£547
Includes taxes and fees

See availability

Chelsea Hotel Toronto ★★★

Downtown Toronto, Toronto · Show on map · 0.5 miles from center

Subway Access

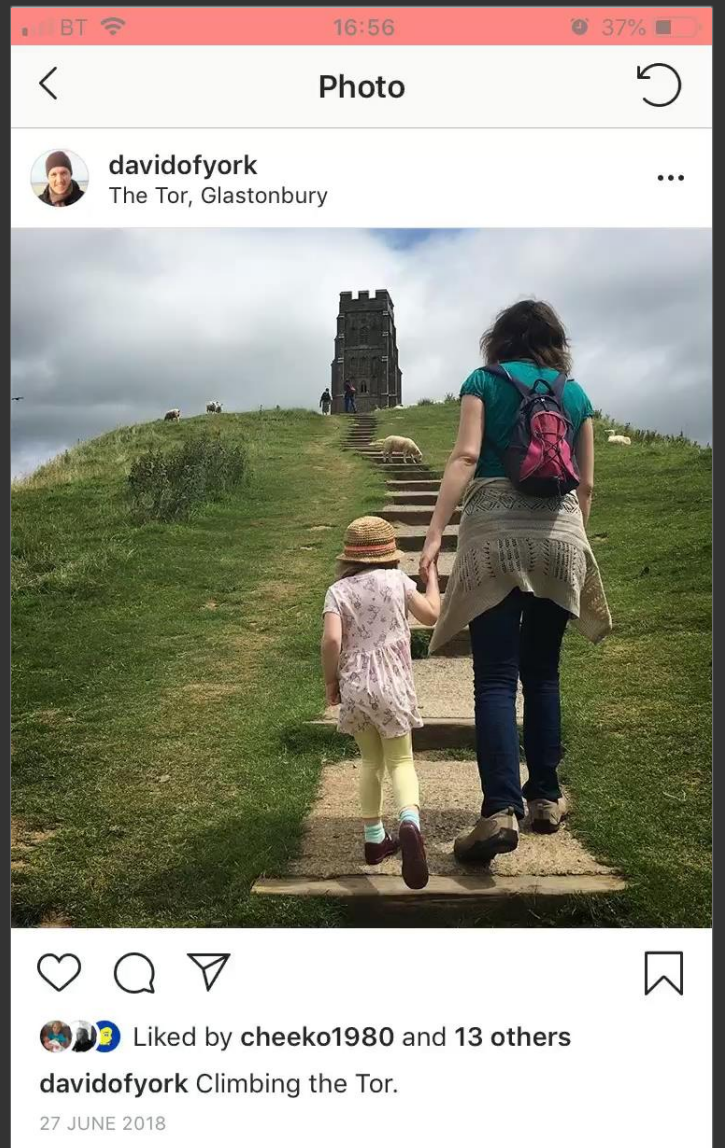
Good 7.1
4,466 reviews

Two Double Beds

1 night, 2 adults
£338
Includes taxes and fees

Unpredictability

“I didn’t mean to ‘like’ it, but will I look weird or like a stalker if I leave it? Or will I look rude if I remove it? … I find Instagram immensely stressful.”



A prime example…

No thanks, I don’t want any benefits

Powerlessness

“Ads on YouTube are probably the worst offenders for me, especially suddenly being randomly assaulted by them at intervals throughout an interesting video.
I find ads that seem to be forced on us against our will a kind of invasion of our personal space”

Video will play after ad

Are you sure you want to deactivate your account?

Deactivating your account will disable your profile and remove your name and picture from anything you've shared.

Pat will miss you

Send Pat a Message

Steve will miss you

Send Steve a Message

Jonny will miss you

Send Jonny a Message

Sensationalism

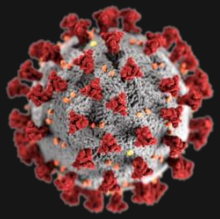
“I hate reading a cute news story about dogs and then randomly get slapped with a link to an article entitled ‘Putin threatens to nuke’. This is one of the main ways that I accidentally stumble across events which trigger my anxiety in recent times.”

“That’s how these websites operate. They know that anxious people find it hard to resist anxiety triggers such as ‘Breaking News’. More often than not, Breaking News is pretty routine news anyway. It used to be called ‘News’. Now everything is sensationalised for dramatic effect.”

Image by Freepik

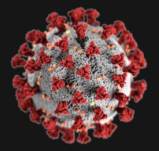
RED WINE CAUSES CANCER

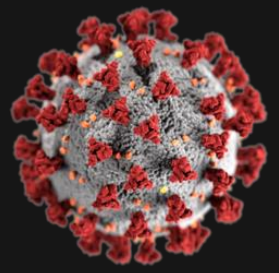
Stress really DOES turn your hair grey!



Can house dust make you fat?

CHILLAX ON HOL IS 'DEADLY'

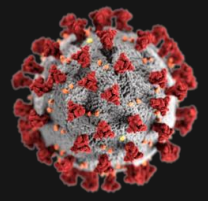




Are men being 'nagged to death'?

RED WINE PREVENTS CANCER

5 flu symptoms you should NEVER ignore



You don't snooze, you lose: poor sleep linked to death

Does Tetris beat trauma?

Lavender scent may help with anxiety

Image: Public Health Image Library / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain

Tackling tension

The Cycle of Anxiety

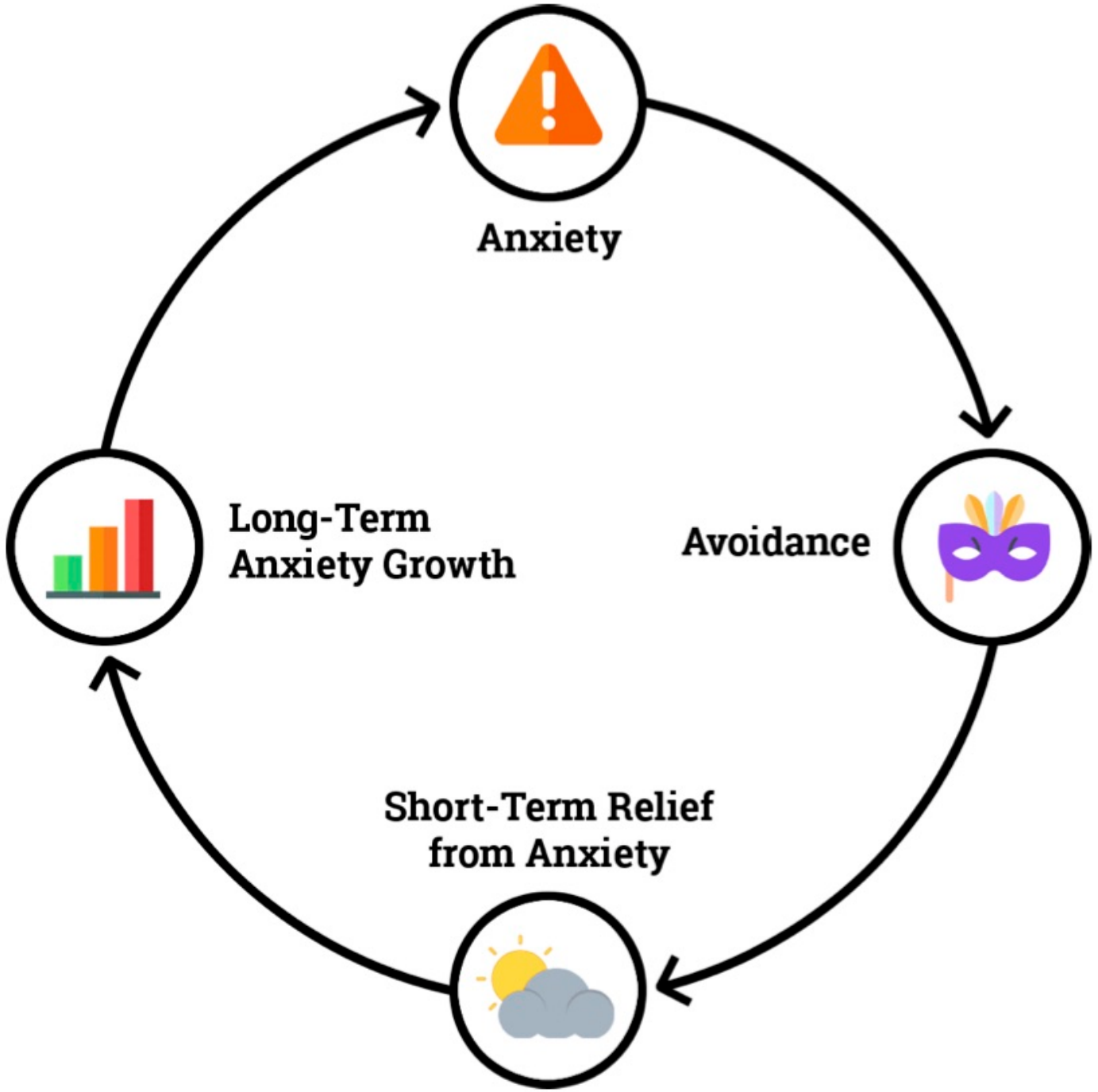


Image source:
https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/cycle-of-anxiety

DECEPTIVE DESIGN

Hall of shame

Luton airport, after prepaying for parking

Luton airport website shows a disguised ad. It appears to be a "continue" button leading on from the checkout, but in fact tricks users into subscribing to a totally unrelated service.

Luton airport | Socially Distant David | Aug 21, 2022

Skype tricks users into uploading their address book - via a dialog box that has no visible option to refuse.

Noticed my Skype client on the iPad started doing this sneaky crap where when you open the app it presents a prompt that asks you to approve sharing all your contacts w/ Skype. And there's no visible way to say "no."

Skype | briankrebs | Aug 21, 2022

Nice dark pattern @treatwellnl! That didn't work.

Treatwell uses trick questions - alternating sentiment for its checkbox labels - to trick users into

Anxiety-related resources

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1
  by the W3C
  www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/
- Inclusive Design Principles
  inclusivedesignprinciples.org
- Designing for users with anxiety
  by the UK Home Office
  accessibility.blog.gov.uk/2016/09/02/dos-and-donts-on-designing-for-accessibility/

COGA Task Force

https://www.w3.org/TR/coga-usable

Working Group Note

Making Content Usable for People with Cognitive and Learning Disabilities

W3C Working Group Note 29 April 2021

This version:
.org/TR/2021/NOTE-coga-usable-20210429/
ersion:
org/TR/coga-usable/
io/coga/content-usable/
TR/2020/WD-coga-usable-20201211/
z (Invited expert)
tgomery (Invited expert)
oga/issues/new
w3.org (archives)
e as multiple pages, with separate pages for each section.
Keio, Beihang). W3C liability, trademark and permissive document license rules apply.
ake web content (web pages) and web applications. It gives advice on how
ith cognitive and learning disabilities. This includes, but is not limited to:
ities (LD), neurodiversity, intellectual disabilities, and specific learning
disabilities,
ent,

Cognitive Accessibility Guidance

This guidance provides advice on how to better meet the accessibility needs of people with cognitive and learning disabilities. The guidance listed below is grouped under "Objectives" and provided in "Design Patterns".

+ Expand All Sections | – Collapse All Sections

+ Help Users Understand What Things are and How to Use Them
+ Help Users Find What They Need
+ Use Clear and Understandable Content
+ Help Users Avoid Mistakes and Know How to Correct Them
+ Help Users Focus
+ Ensure Processes Do Not Rely on Memory
+ Provide Help and Support

Design Patterns for Mental Health

Principles Patterns Examples About Contribute Join our Slack

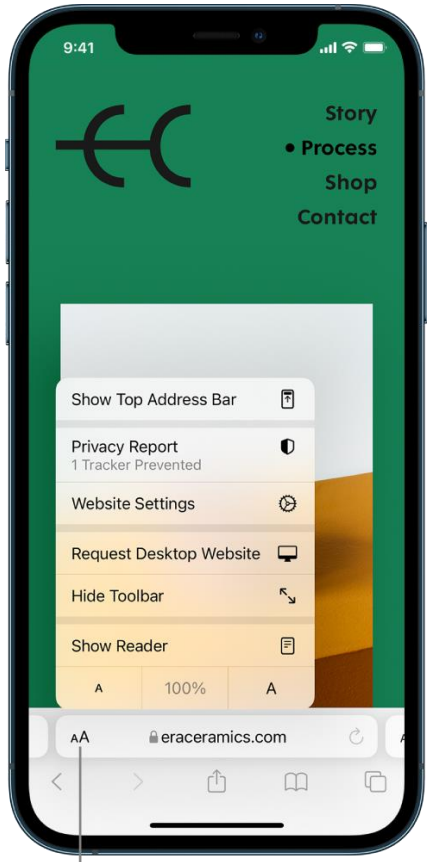
Welcome

The Mental Health Patterns Library is a resource for those involved in developing and delivering digital mental health support. It's designed to encourage learning and the sharing of best practice.

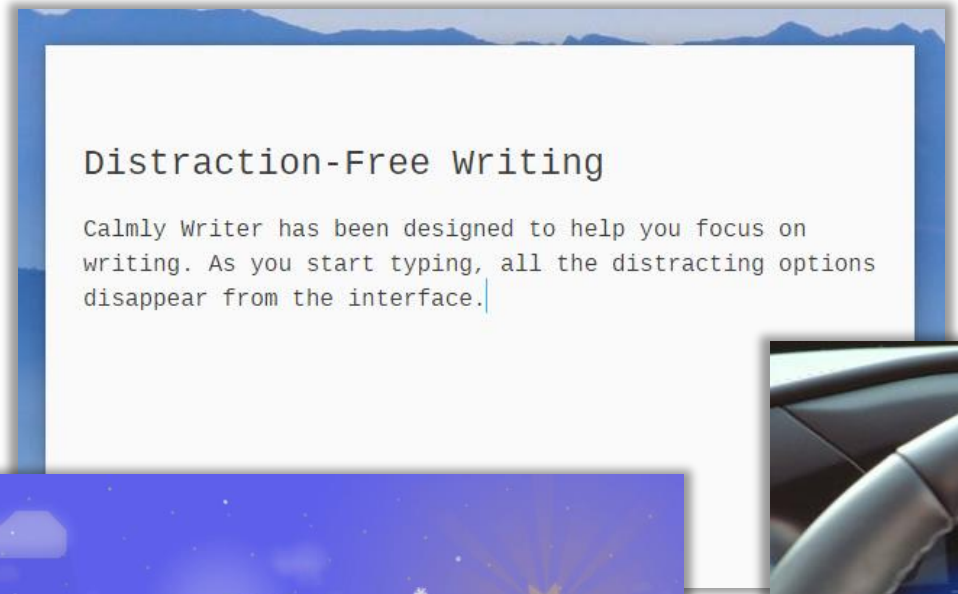
Browse principles

https://designpatternsformentalhealth.org

prefers-reduced-anxiety ?



Tap to view the page in Reader.



Calmly Writer

Calm mode in the game, Paper Wings

Calm mode in the Ford Explorer

Image by PNGITEM

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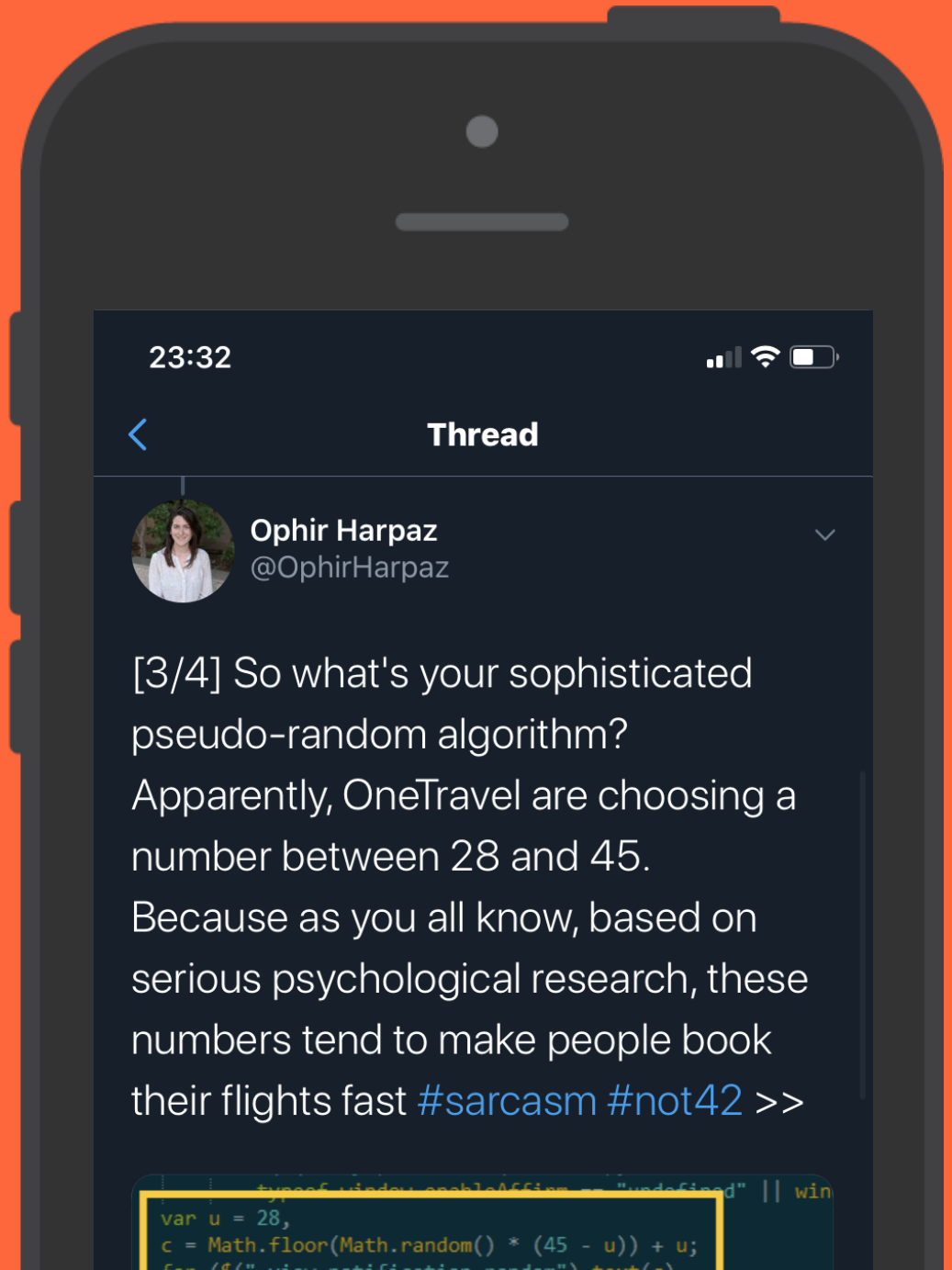
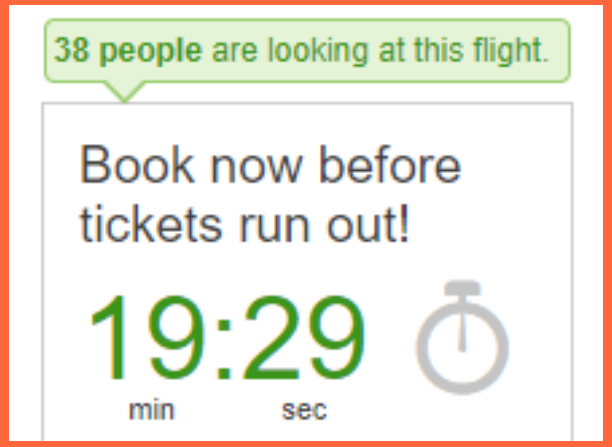
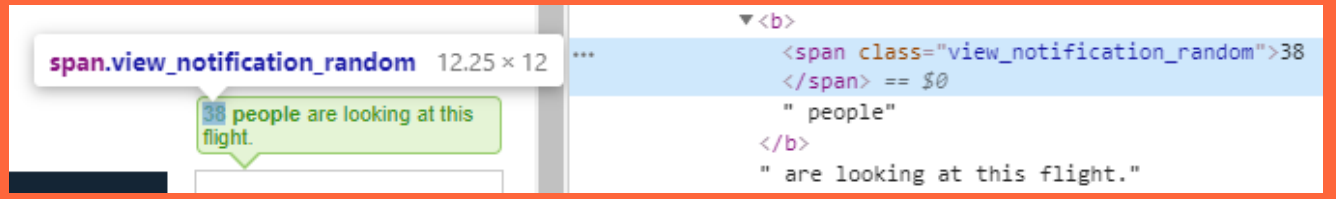
The trouble with regulation…

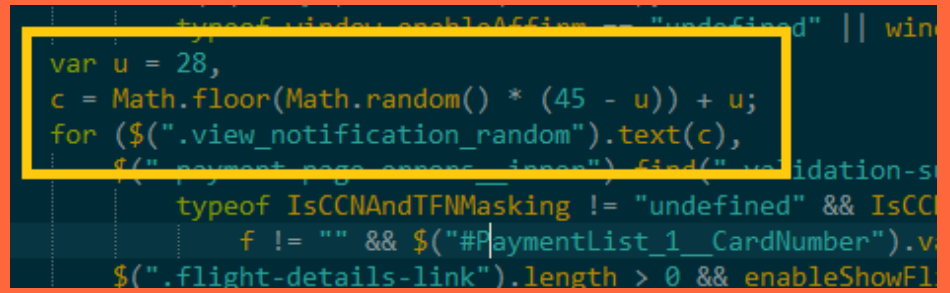
- New deceptive patterns are being developed all the time
- Defining deceptive patterns…
  - too *precisely* → legislation becomes outdated
  - too *loosely* → legislation is circumvented
- Also a risk of banning potentially *useful* patterns

38 people are looking at this flight – or are they?









Treating Customers Fairly

- Principle-based approach to regulation by the UK Financial Services Authority (FCA)
- Businesses are also obliged to treat customers fairly to comply with the FCA's regulations
- All firms must be able to show consistently that fair treatment of customers is at the heart of their business model
- Firms that fail to treat customers fairly can receive large financial penalties from the FCA and suffer reputational damage

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How to make the web a less stressful place

- Do nothing and encourage users to confront their fears?
- Follow established accessibility resources to create less stressful experiences
- Tackle deceptive patterns on a case-by-case basis through browser extensions and plug-ins
- Outlaw the most egregious examples of anxiety-inducing patterns through tightly-defined laws
- Encourage companies to behave ethically and treat users fairly and with respect

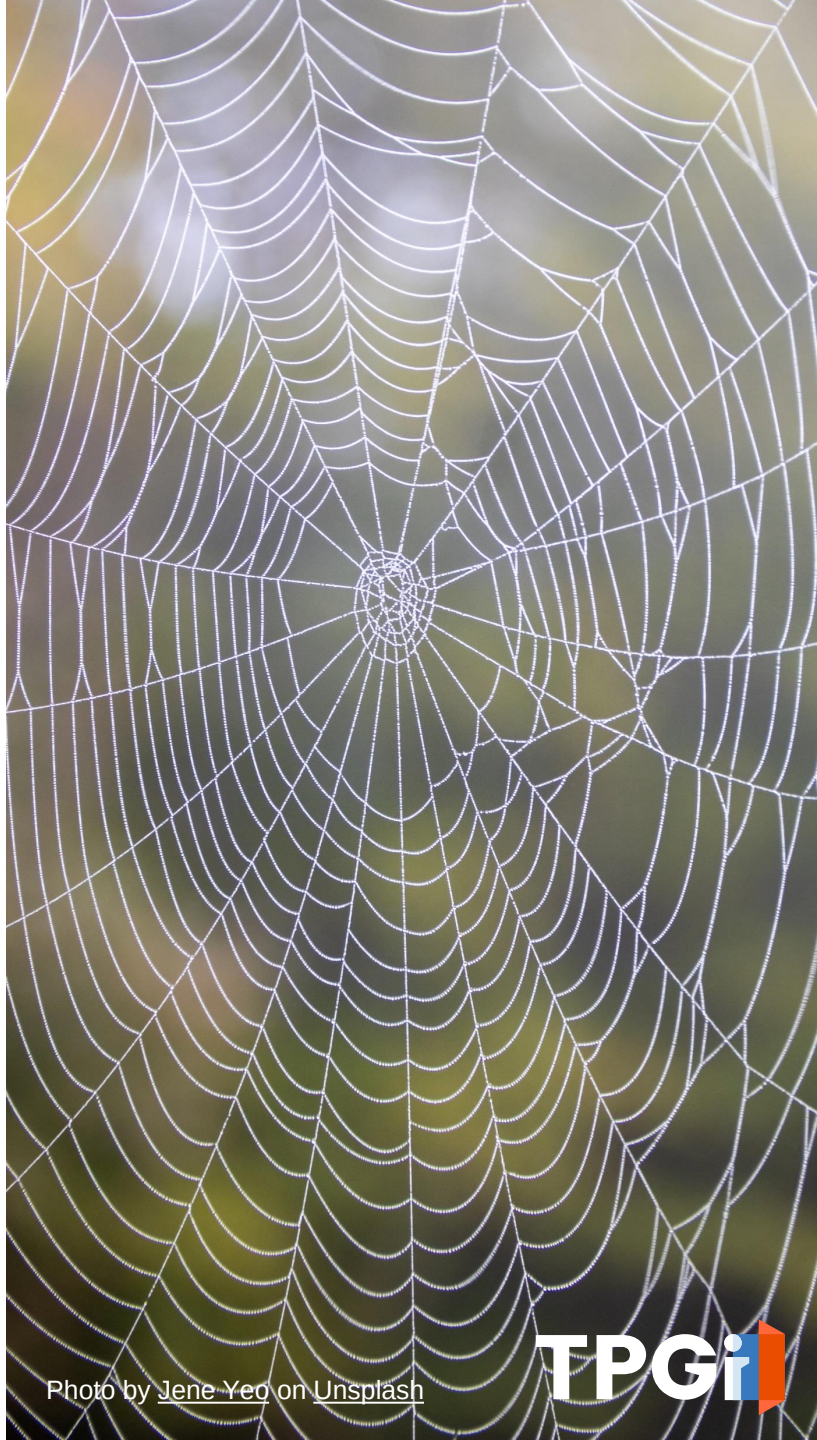

Photo by Jene Yeo on Unsplash

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Thanks for listening!

Photo by Jene Yeo on Unsplash