

The Anguish of Dark Pattern in UX Design - نجنى لالى

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Abstract

As a Pattern Intelligence Specialist, my work revolves around understanding the complex ways in which systems, whether digital or social, trap individuals in patterns that appear alluring at first, but ultimately restrict their freedom. This cycle of entrapment is something I have deeply studied, especially in the context of dark patterns in user experience (UX) design. The Roach Motel dark pattern, where users are easily lured into a system but find it nearly impossible to exit, has always been one of my prime concerns.

However, the motivation behind writing this research and poem has not come from theory alone, but from an emotional experience I had one day when I saw a Hijra (Translation: Intersex person) performing. There was something hauntingly beautiful about the performance, yet beneath that vibrant display, I could not shake the feeling of deep emotional pain. As I watched, I could not help but see the entrapment of this performer, who, like so many marginalised individuals, was only able to exist within the narrow confines of societal expectations. The glittering performance she put on was not an expression of freedom, but a reflection of the only role society had allowed her to take on; one that stripped her of autonomy and dignity.

The particular experience led to the ideation of Laali, the character in my poem. Laali, like the Hijra performer I observed, was both trapped by societal expectations and performing her role in a system that restricted her. Her dance, a symbol of joy and celebration, masked a deeper sadness; an emotional burden that I felt mirrored something I had been exploring in my professional life for years, the Roach Motel dark pattern.

As I reflected on the Roach Motel in the context of my practice, I saw how it was not just a digital issue but something that also happens on a cultural level. Both Laali's societal entrapment and the digital entrapment users experience in the Roach Motel pattern share common traits. The illusion of freedom, the deceptive promises of agency, and the hidden manipulation behind seemingly harmless UX designs or social roles. Just as users in a Roach Motel can easily enter a system but find it nearly impossible to exit, Laali's performance, the façade of celebration offers her no real way out from the confines of a life dictated by others.

This is where my emotional response to the performance of the Hijra and my concern for UX design converged. As a pattern intelligence specialist, I am deeply aware of the social structures that impose invisible yet powerful restrictions on marginalised individuals. Through the lens of UX dark pattern, I saw similar principles in the digital world. The experience triggered an emotional realisation, just as Laali's performance is not liberating, neither are the systems that manipulate users into thinking they have control when, in reality, they do not.

This poem, therefore, became more than just an artistic and poetic expression, it became a way for me to bridge the gap between two domains of entrapment: the societal and the digital. Through Laali's story, I wanted to convey the emotional cost of being trapped in a system that promises inclusion but delivers exhaustion and frustration. Whether in a Hijra's dance performance or a user's interaction with a dark-patterned system, the emotional toll is

the same; a sense of powerlessness, a feeling of being controlled, and an exhausting cycle of trying to escape but never truly being free.

This is what motivated me to write the poem. It was not just a theoretical exercise, but an emotional response to the pain of seeing someone trapped in a system they had little control over, whether that system was societal or digital. It was a plea for recognition, for dignity, for the recognition that both individuals and users deserve to have control over their choices, free from manipulative patterns that only serve to entrap.

In the end, the Roach Motel dark pattern was not just a concept to me; it was a mirror of the cyclic entrapment I saw around me, both in digital spaces and in real life. The poem became my way of translating that frustration and empathy into something tangible, something that could speak to both the emotional weight and the systemic forces at play in our lives, whether in society or online.

Keywords: UX Design, Dark Patterns, Roach Motel Dark Pattern, Deceptive Design, Ethical UX Design