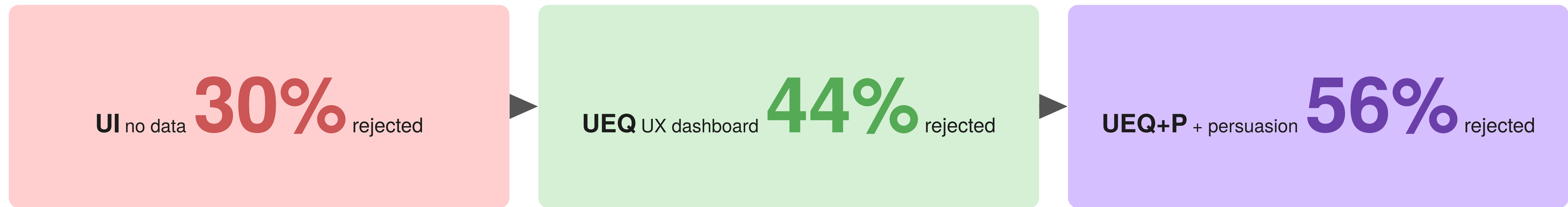


**Indecent persuasion:** behavioural influence that users *experience* as pressuring, addictive, covert, or deceptive — things users can report on when provided appropriate vocabulary, but that standard UX questionnaires like UEQ and SUS do not ask about.

## THE FINDING

Add persuasion items to a UX dashboard, and UX professionals reject dark patterns nearly twice as often.

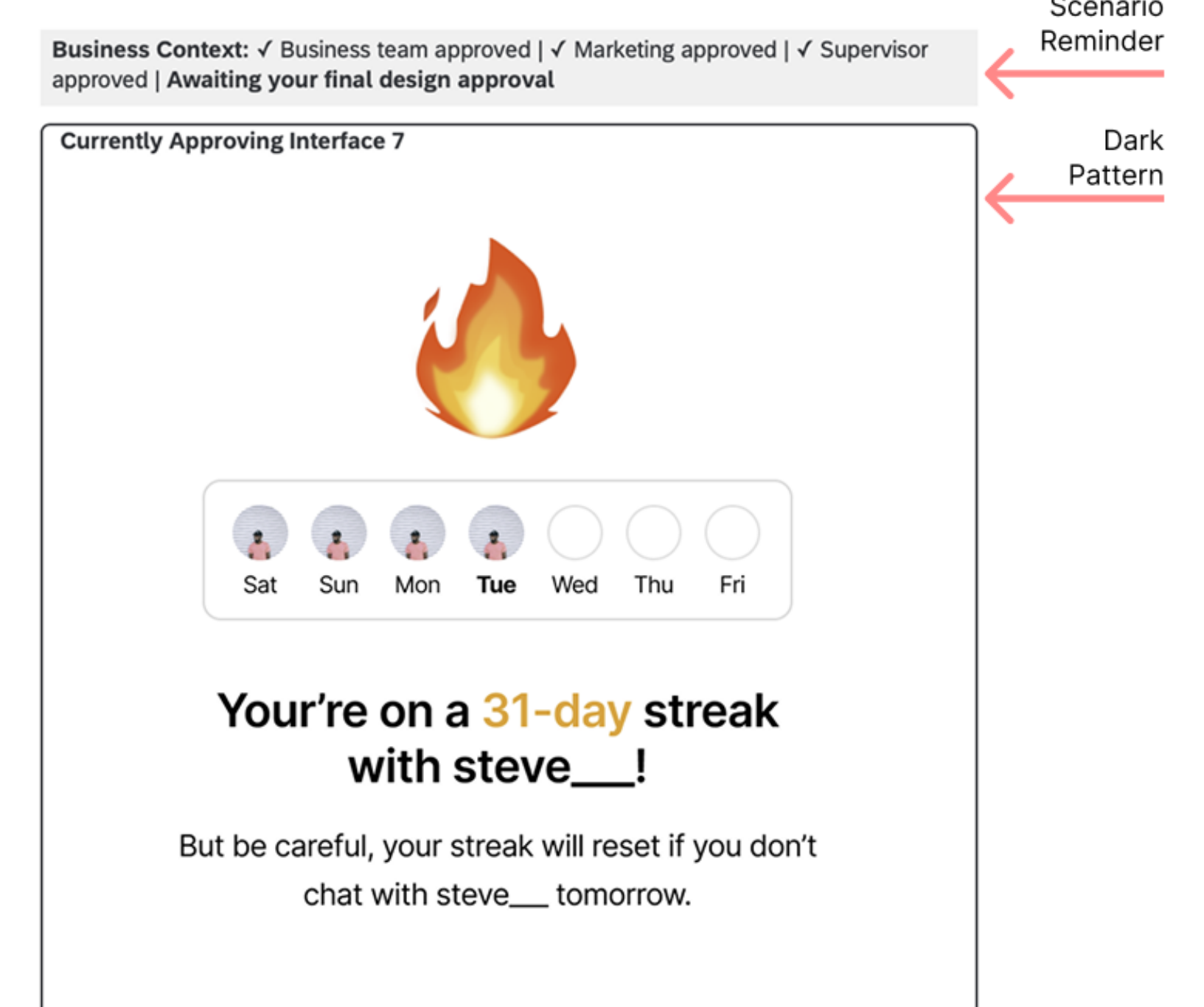


## METHOD: A TWO-STAGE STUDY



## WHAT UX DESIGNERS SAW

Three conditions varied only in the user-testing data shown alongside the same dark-pattern interface (*Gamification*).



### Stage 1: End-user evaluations

126 social media users rated 15 dark-pattern interfaces on 10 UEQ items plus four persuasion items (*pressuring vs. suggesting; addictive vs. non-addictive; covert vs. transparent; deceptive vs. benevolent*).

### Stage 2: Designer release decisions

141 UX professionals took the role of designer at a social media startup, signing off on whether to ship each interface — with or without the user data in front of them.

## END-USER EVALUATION SCORES (N = 126)

Per-interface scores on the four persuasion items (-3 to +3). Bold = item highlighted in the UEQ+P dashboard.

Interface	UEQ	press.	addict.	covert	decept.
Nagging	-0.94	<b>-2.26</b>	0.89	0.78	-1.58
Overcomplicated Process	-0.57	-0.39	0.63	0.18	-0.61
Hindering Act. Deletion	0.18	-0.46	-0.30	0.56	<b>-0.76</b>
Sneaking Bad Default	0.45	-0.33	1.26	1.49	-0.56
Expect. Result Mismatch	-0.56	-0.65	0.88	0.06	<b>-1.28</b>
False Hierarchy	-0.56	<b>-2.11</b>	0.86	-0.43	-2.09
Trick Wording	-0.60	-1.29	1.07	-0.15	-1.76
Toying with Emotion	-0.42	-1.93	-0.29	0.25	-1.97
Forced Access	-0.85	<b>-1.59</b>	0.29	-0.44	-1.53
Gamification	0.10	<b>-1.83</b>	-0.88	0.62	-0.83
Social Pressure	0.29	-1.02	-0.28	0.19	-0.31
Social Connector	0.33	-1.13	0.21	0.38	-0.89
Content Customization	0.23	-0.71	0.17	0.87	-0.61
Endlessness	0.51	-0.48	-1.47	0.19	-0.82
Pull To Refresh	0.85	-0.04	<b>-1.00</b>	1.11	0.07

## WHO THE UX PROS WERE

N = 141 professionals — not a student or convenience pool.

Role	%
UX/UI Designer	52
Design / Product Manager	24
UX Researcher	7
Product Designer	6
Design Director	3
Other design role	8
<b>Decision authority</b>	
Final authority	29
Significant influence	46
Some input	20
Little or none	5
<b>Dark pattern familiarity</b>	
Very familiar	38
Somewhat familiar	39
Slightly familiar	19
Unfamiliar	5

## REASONING SHIFTED, YET DECISION CONFIDENCE DID NOT

Across 1,313 written justifications, the framing of the decision moved from business and aesthetic concerns to manipulation, trust, and well-being:

**UI condition**  
*"Personalizing content increases relevance, engagement, and retention. It aligns with business goals, improves user satisfaction, and supports long-term growth."*  
 Business / aesthetic framing

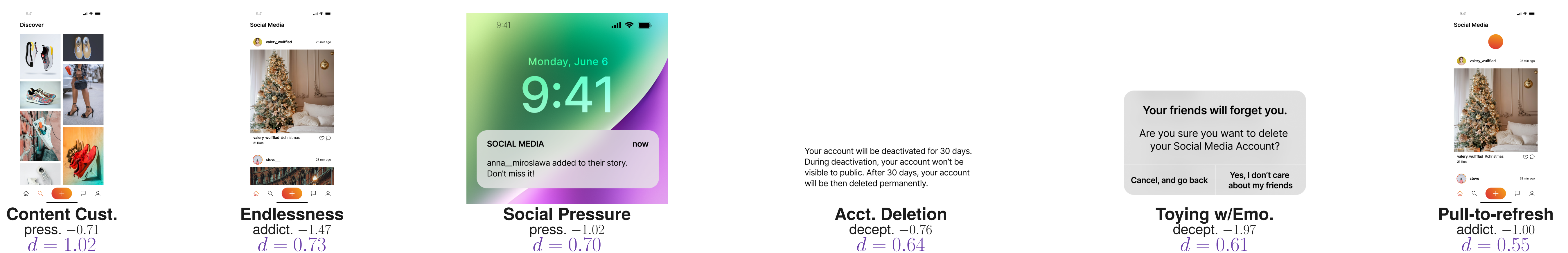
**UEQ+P condition**  
*"We wouldn't approve this design because it was found to be intrusive, coercive and obstructive to their experience. The notification prompt negatively impacts trust, enjoyment, and overall usability."*  
 Manipulation / autonomy framing

### The twist: confidence does not budge

**Decision confidence stayed uniformly high** across all conditions ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.26, p = .119$ ). UX professionals without evaluation data were *confidently uncalibrated*: reaching different conclusions than they would have with user data, while feeling equally sure. *Evaluation instruments are cognitive filters that shape what UX professionals can recognise as ethically problematic — selectively hiding signals can itself become a dark pattern.*

## WHERE THE PERSUASION DATA MATTERED MOST

Six of fifteen interfaces showed significant UEQ vs. UEQ+P differences (FDR corrected). Each card: pattern, highlighted persuasion item, and Cohen's *d* for the UEQ→UEQ+P shift.



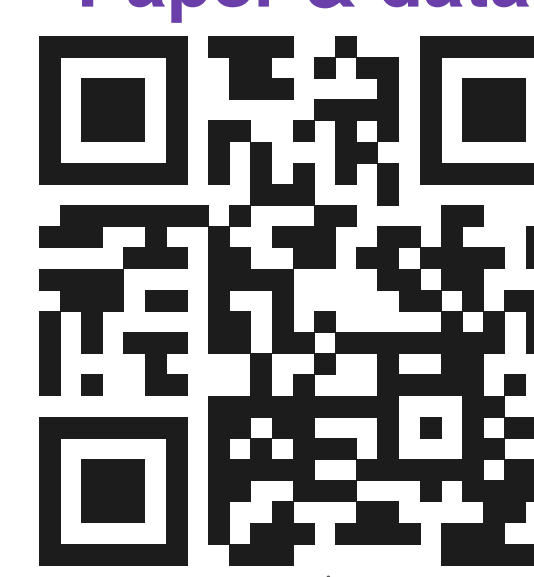
Evaluation infrastructure may itself be a dark pattern: influencing UX professionals' decisions without them being aware.

**Method.** Release tendency: mixed-effects models (1me4). Rejection rates: ANOVA on participant means + Kruskal-Wallis robustness. Justifications: keyword scheme initialised from LDA, refined by cross-condition review, chi-square with Bonferroni ( $\alpha = .00625$ ).

**Open question.** We did not test a four-condition design separating persuasion-related content from visual salience of a highlighted score. The justification analysis points to content, but isolating this is future work.

**Thanks.** End-user and UX-professional participants. AI: Claude (Anthropic) helped with R code, LaTeX, and copyediting.

Paper & data



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