

Beyond Persuasion: A Theory for Understanding Hyper-Influence in the Digital Marketplace

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Abstract

Digital platforms exert unprecedented influence over consumers beliefs and behaviours. Rapid technological advances have led to the spread of manipulative design practices such as dark patterns which resulted in record fines as regulatory scrutiny accelerates. Yet, while researchers and regulators have treated these practices as isolated persuasion attempts, we argue that they reveal a broader shift in how influence operates online. We introduce hyper-influence as the state of modern platform–consumer relationships emerging from persistent asymmetries of power, knowledge, and platform control. We also introduce and conceptualize technological consumer extraction (TCE), the process through which platforms convert this asymmetry into economic value. Together, hyper-influence and TCE describe a vicious cycle in which data extraction deepens influence, and deeper influence enables further extraction—dark patterns being one of the most visible manifestations of this dynamic.

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics