



# **What Is the Optimal Unsubscribing Journey for Paid Video Streaming Services?**

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## ABSTRACT

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With the digitalisation of daily life, paid video streaming services became common practice amongst most people. Media companies launched their own services to be a part of the competition, and with that came the need to find ways to keep subscribers paying for their service. For that, some user experience designers turned to dark designs patterns, which made users attempting to cancel their video streaming memberships even more complicated.

To find out where the middle-ground between services trying to convince their users to stay and the best possible cancellation experience for the user is, user testing of four commonly used video streaming services was conducted with twenty-one different people in different age groups. The testing aimed to understand user's interactions with the service, their pain points, and what kinds of dark design patterns could be found in those journeys.

Through the research, an average time spent on the cancellation process was mapped, the bad aspects of existing unsubscribing journeys were understood, and a careful set of guidelines was created to fulfil the gap between a good user experience and a service keeping their paying clients. According to the survey findings, the most successful unsubscribing journey includes a clear button to "cancel membership", gathers feedback from the user's reasons to cancel, does not try to offer last minute offers or recommendations, and offers a clear confirmation that the subscription was cancelled.

Additional research and user testing would be needed to gather information about if the journeys vary depending on the subscribers' age.

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Key words: user experience design, dark design patterns, streaming services

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**GLOSSARY**

UX User Experience

UI User Interface

## 1. INTRODUCTION

First coined in 1993 by Don Norman, the term User Experience refers to all aspects of a service, product, or digital solution that encompass the end-user and their goals. From that, UX design was created. These end-user focused aspects can be subdivided into more specific terms, such as User Interface Design, Interaction Design, Information Architecture Design, Service Design, amongst others.

The idea of UX design revolves around the concept of designing for a specific demographic's usability, however, it can easily be used to benefit a company's interest over the user's ability to navigate a service, through dark design patterns. These questionable methods can be applied, among other things, to coerce a user into paying for a service they do not necessarily want or need; create challenges to cancel a subscription; or trick the user into receiving multiple emails with advertisement they were not expecting.

Video streaming services are one of the most widely used forms of entertainment in the current digital era, but as with most big market shareholders, the interest to keep the users paying is present. However, if streaming services strive to provide good usability and user experience, how does that translate into their membership cancellation? And how does the use of tricks affect a user's perception of the service?

## **2. DEFINITION OF UX**

UX stands for User Experience - and can be loosely defined as a way with which people interact with UI - user interface - creating feelings such as happiness, excitement, frustration, anxiety, etc. (Abstract: The Art of Design). UX designers often have in mind the psychological aspects that permeate how a user interacts with a digital platform and how much influence designers can have over those interactions.

As Ian Spalter (2019) explained in his episode of the Netflix show, “It’s all part of the experience, thinking about the conditions and the context. And then how do you work within those constraints to make that task as easy and pleasurable as possible?”

### **2.1. Psychology of UX**

In the book UX Psychology Basics, Dave Lull (2017) analyses different aspects of the psychology behind human computer interaction through a few key concepts. For him, all design choices and user interactions boil down to the second layer of basic drives for humans - the first layer being water, food, shelter, and warmth - such as safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation; which in turn enable pride, lust and greed to come through. Dark patterns would be a clear example of greed guiding design choices in the benefit of a company. (Lull, 2017.) With that in mind, there are a few concepts that must be taken into consideration when it comes to the psychology behind design patterns.

#### **2.1.1. Cognition**

Lull (2017) recognises two main forms of cognition: experiential cognition and reflective cognition.

The first refers to dealing with things that are obvious and yet not necessarily apparent, but that come naturally; such as opening a window or turning a light

switch on and off. There's no thinking involved, but it is behaviour learned through life and it varies incredibly from culture to culture.

Reflective cognition, on the other hand, requires thinking. And "if a user has to think, remember, or search the screen more than two or three seconds, then the UI has failed" (Lull 2017).

### **2.1.2 Processing**

The human brain processes information in three different levels: visceral, behavioural, and reflective. The first two are mostly subconscious, and refer to biological heritage and learned skills, which in turn makes them part of experiential cognition - responsible for example, for the differentiation of colour and greyscale (Lull 2017.) The reflective level refers to the conscious, self-aware part of the brain; so everything that demands thinking.

### **2.1.3 Definitions and Thresholds**

Definitions are a concept that tends to be overlooked in daily conversations because people assume everyone understands words the same way. Concepts that can be explained differently by multiple people are an example of varied definitions (Lull 2017).

Thresholds happen when even though there is a common definition, society assumes everyone agrees on the extent with which that idea extends (Lull 2017) - such as when someone says they "speak French", it could mean anything from basic sentences to fluent conversations.

Thresholds directly apply to UX in mobile app standards. Designers most of the time expect users to know certain standards for application use, such as swiping up and down to scroll, long pressing to open an options menu, and that a house icon means homepage. When you consider new users, for example, that would mean reflection is required, and by Lull's standard, the UI has failed.

#### **2.1.4. Users**

The end goal of UX is user welfare, first and foremost. However, a designer needs to keep in mind that user wants and user needs are not always the same thing, and that human communication is flawed (Lull 2017). Even with the most thorough user-centred research, it does not take into account the human factor: users might not understand the questions asked during the research, they might not be able to communicate their thoughts properly, they might be biased, or they might miss something, and blindly trusting the users might lead to UX failures.

#### **2.1.5. Industry Influence**

Commonly used mobile applications and websites are usually the benchmark projects used to base their interfaces on, but it is important to trust UIs that work instead of copying businesses because of their popularity without necessarily checking if they follow good UX practice (Lull 2017).

#### **2.1.6. Psychology of colour**

Taking into account all the principles mentioned in Lull's book, it is also important to look into colours and the different roles they play in human psychology when it comes to influencing a user's emotions and decision-making by conveying meaning and delivering the correct message (Ishan 2020).

**Orange:** Energy and warmth, brings up excitement.

**Red:** Associated with passionate feelings, either good or bad such as love, passion, and anger.

**Yellow:** Colour of happiness because of sunlight it symbolises joy, warmth.

**Green:** The most present colour in nature, brings calming and renewing feelings.

**Blue:** Like green can be used for calm feelings, but is also associated with sadness and distance. Is very often see in corporate logos and images.

**Purple:** Linked to royalty, magic, mystery and things related to the supernatural.

**Black:** Somewhat of a joker colour, black can signify tragedy but also modernity and tradition. Depends very much on how it is used and which colours it is paired with.

**White:** Associated with purity, innocence and clarity.

### **3. LAWS OF UX**

With the previously mentioned principles in mind, the Laws of UX are a collection of rules and guidelines that most user experience and user interface designers use as reference for best practice that is based on psychology, Gestalt, sociology, and cognitive theory. These are often taken into account when designing user-friendly and ethical interfaces. Listed here are the ones most likely to influence a user in their journey to unsubscribe to a video streaming service, based on their application in existing services.

#### **3.1. Aesthetic-Usability Effect**

The aesthetic-usability effect states that users are often prone to overlooking any usability issues or malfunctions if the platform looks aesthetically pleasant to them, since it creates a positive response in their brains. It also means that users tend to equal aesthetically pleasant as user friendly (Yablonski 2022). This effect was first observed in 1995 by Masaaki Kurds and Kaori Kashimura by testing different variations of an ATM machine's UI. They found a strong correlation between a user's rating of aesthetic appeal and what they thought was good usability rather than with actual ease of use (Morgan 2017).

#### **3.2. Hick's Law**

Hick's Law determines that the time a user takes to make a decision increases according to the number and complexity of choices available (Hick 1952). That means that choice overload and highlighting certain options can influence a user's experience, but simplifying too much to the point of abstraction can damage the user's end goal. This law was created by psychologist William Edmund Hick, and it helps simplify a user's decision-making process by organising options in order to assist them to reach their goals faster - but without removing decisions from the process entirely.

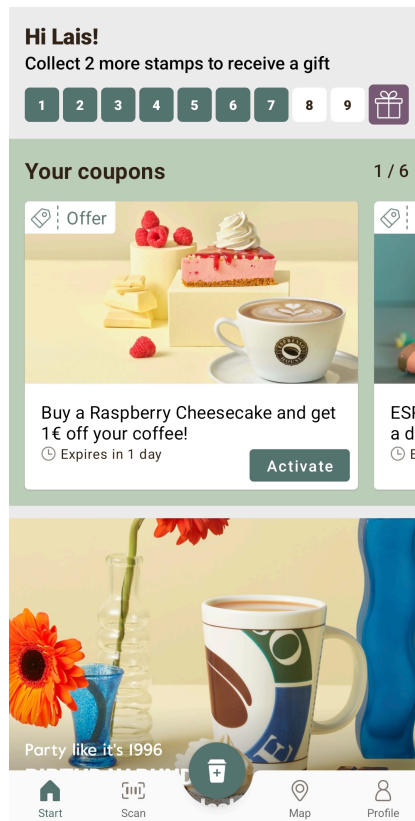
One great example of this is Instagram's double tap function. By giving users only three possible actions when faced with a post - like, comment, or share - as well as providing them with the shortcut of double tapping a post to like it, Instagram applied Hick's Law in a way that makes that choice be made in a matter of milliseconds (Ramesh 2020).

### **3.3. Goal-Gradient Effect**

Users have a tendency to work faster towards a goal, the closer they are to reaching it, so providing a way for the user to track their progress increases productivity by motivating users to complete tasks (Yablonski 2022). One simple example of this law applied to daily life is any sort of gamification element on mobile apps for example. Progress bars, badges, rewards, percentages. User's do not really care for how far they have come, but how much there is left to go (Clinehens 2020).

In Espresso House's mobile app (Picture 1) that can be seen in practice: 10 purchases equals a free coffee of any choice. Because of that, on the main screen the user can already see how many purchases they have yet to make before they achieve that reward. And that is clearly used as an advantage for the business by making the user focus on the reward instead of the amount they have to spend in order to achieve it.





PICTURE 1. Screen capture of Espresso House's mobile application showing that the user is two purchases away from a reward (Glaser 2022).

### 3.4. Jakob's Law

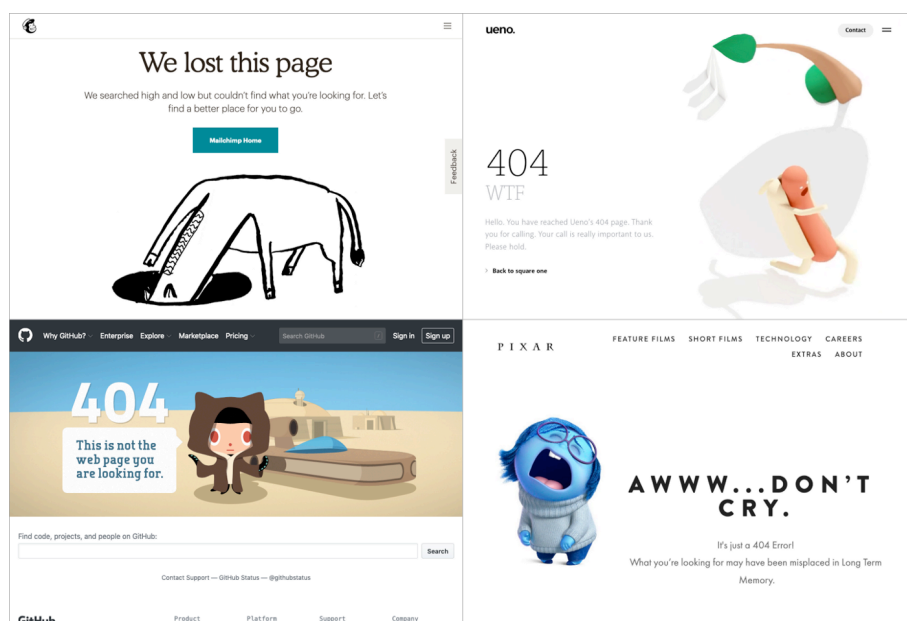
A great deal of time is spent in other mobile applications or websites, which means users will expect all platforms to work similarly. With a familiar operation a better usability experience is created, and less time is spent learning how to navigate the space (Nielsen 2000). This means that modelling a digital service after already existing services that are proved to offer good usability increases the chances of providing good user experience. So models such as menus, arrows as back buttons, footers, headers, etc are conventions that affect a user's knowledge on how to deal with the service.

### 3.5. Law of Proximity

Items that are close to each other tend to be perceived as a group, which helps users organise information faster. That also means that users assume such objects share functionality traits (Yablonski 2019.) This law is a direct application of Gestalt into principles of design, and can be seen very commonly in input fields, or image captions for example (Moon 2019).

### 3.6. Peak-End Rule

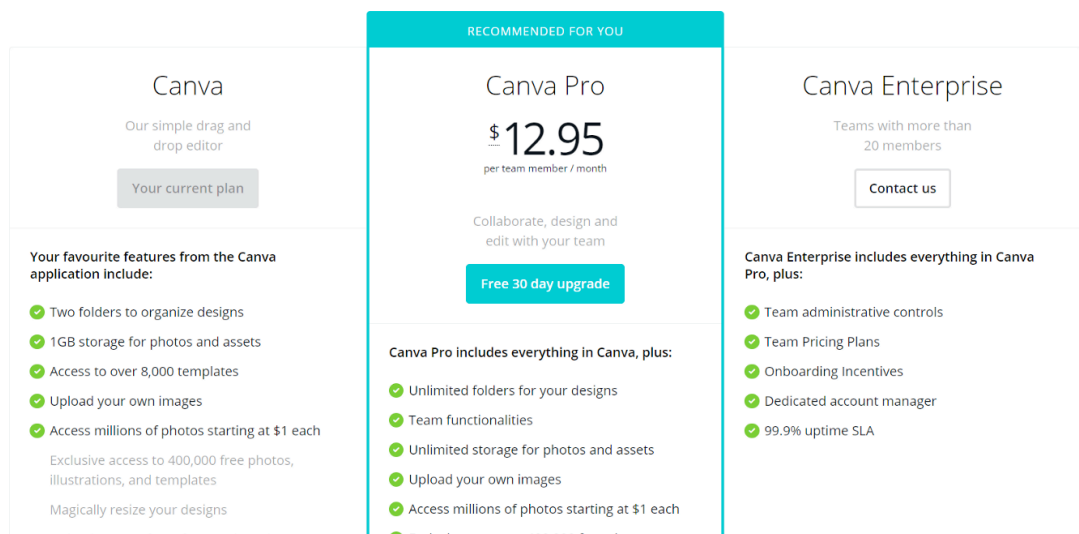
Humans judge an experience based on how they felt at its peak and its end, instead of an average of the entire duration of said experience. Paying close attention to final moments of an experience can leave quite the impression with the user, and remember that people tend to remember negative experiences more vividly than positive ones (Yablonski 2022). This law is easily applied to most services or experiences in one's life, but can be easily illustrated by for example, when a brand uses the common 404 page error to further promote their image in a comical way (Picture 2), for instance, making an otherwise bad experience a bit more enjoyable in order to build a rapport with the user (Yablonski 2019).



PICTURE 2. Screen capture of different error pages illustrating humour and creativity on an otherwise bad experience (Yablonski 2019)

### 3.7. Von Restorff Effect or The Isolation Effect

This effect states that when multiple different objects are presented, the one that differs the most from the other is more likely to be chosen or remembered. Meaning that a designer must keep in mind ways to mark key actions with the due contrast needed from everything else (von Restorff 1933). This effect can also be used for the opposite effect: if a certain key or element is more likely to be remembered, then the rest of the information is also likely to be forgotten. One example of this is pages that provide any sort of paid service with different plans, such as Canva (Picture 3). There, the user's attention is automatically dragged to the Pro subscription option by applying a blue frame to the option, and inviting the user to select that one instead of reading the other options available (Mbaka 2019).



PICTURE 3. Screen capture of Canvas's subscription plans (Mbaka 2019).

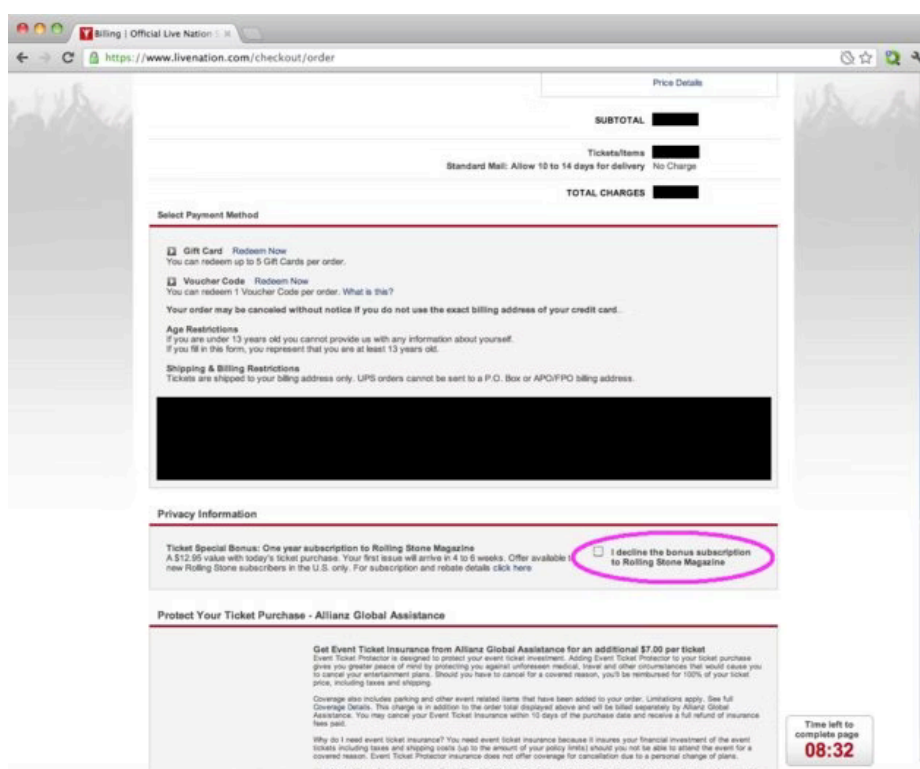
### 3.8. Dark Design Patterns

Dark Patterns were first referred to by that name in 2010 by Harry Brignull, and consist of tricks in digital platforms created to make the user do things they do not necessarily mean to do.

Even though Dark Design Patterns are not exactly part of the Laws of UX according to Yablonski, I have included them in this section of the paper because user experience designers apply them to websites and mobile apps somewhat frequently - 11 out of 31 did so in Eskelinen's (2021) research, even if 8 of them did it only when requested by their superiors. There are several different types of Dark Design Patterns, and I will include the ones found in the streaming services analysed in this paper.

### 3.8.1. Roach Motel

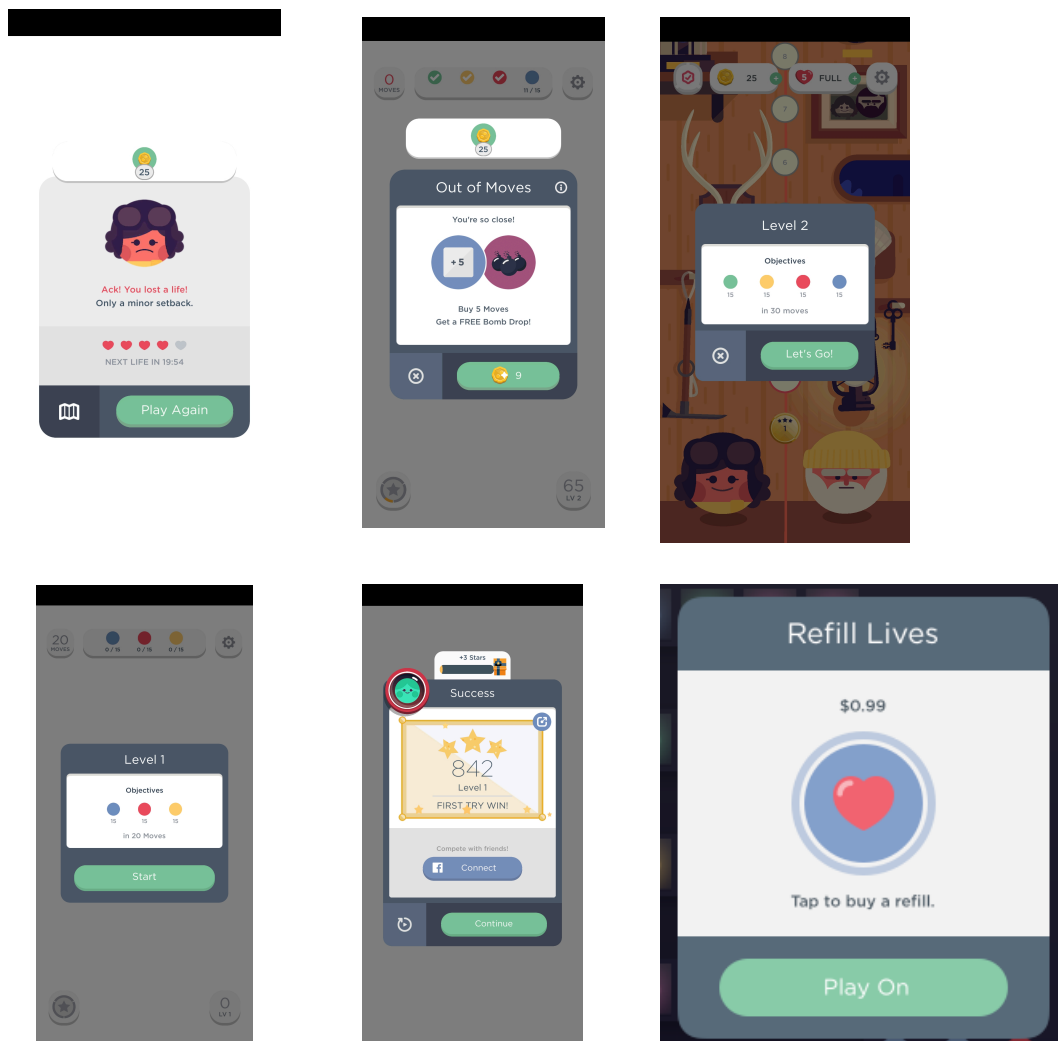
This dark pattern consists of making it incredibly easy for the user to get into a situation, but hard for them to get out (Brignull). For example, any sort of subscription or account that is extremely hard to cancel: Livenation's website for example (Picture 4), requires an extra action in order to avoid a Rolling Stone magazine subscription when making a purchase of something else (Fard N.d).



PICTURE 4. Screen Capture of Livenation's website and their option to not purchase a magazine subscription unintentionally (Fard N.d)

### 3.8.2. Misdirection

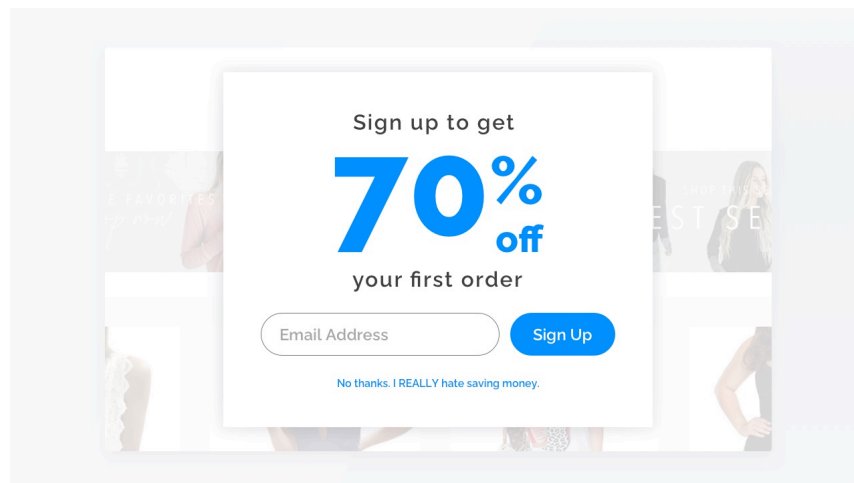
Misdirection happens when a design purposefully draws your attention to something in order to distract you from something else (Brignull). The mobile game Two Dots is an example of this: during the entire game, the design conditions the user to press green buttons: to start the game and the levels, to continue once a level is finished, to play again, but also to purchase extra lives to keep playing - with real money. By misdirecting the user to assume green buttons mean continue or keep playing, the game can deceive them into accidentally falling into in-app purchases (Picture 5). Misdirection can also be an application of the Von Restorff effect (see 3.7) but in detriment of the user's original goal.



PICTURE 5. Screen Captures of the mobile game Two Dots showing the use of green buttons to deceive the user into making an accidental purchase.

### 3.8.3. Confirmshaming

Consists of guiltting the user into thinking twice before confirming an action that does not benefit the company behind the service, or guiltting them into opting for something else - such as a cheaper version of a subscription (Brignull). One example of this that can be easily found in daily digital use is e-commerce websites that offer discounts in pop-ups and make the button for opting out of the sale worded in a way to make the user feel guilty (Picture 6).



PICTURE 6. Screen Capture showing a website's discount with the button to exit the pop-up saying "No thanks, I REALLY hate saving money" (Taut 2019).

### 3.8.4. Forced Continuity

Once a free-trial for a service comes to an end, the user's credit card is charged without any previous warning or reminder about the end of the trial period (Brignull). The online platform Skillshare is an example of this dark pattern (Picture 7): once the free trial period ends, the platform automatically charges the credit card entered in registration, without warning the user before it happens.

**SKILL SHARE**

Welcome back to Skillshare  
Get complete, unlimited access to all Skillshare classes.

Select a payment method

PayPal

or

Card    Sofort    Bancontact

CARD NUMBER  
1234 1234 1234 1234

EXPIRATION    CVC  
MM / YY    CVC

COUNTRY  
Finland

Enter Gift Card or Discount Code

After free trial ends    11,99EUR/month  
(143,88EUR billed annually)

**Today's Total**    **143,88EUR**  
(that's only 11,99EUR/month)

**Start Membership**

Billed at 143,88EUR for first year. After first year, a recurring yearly charge of 143,88EUR (plus tax, where applicable) will automatically be applied to your payment method. You may cancel at any time, effective at the end of the billing period, by going to your payment settings. Rates for subsequent years may change. All amounts paid are non-refundable, subject to certain exceptions. By clicking "Start Membership", you agree to our [Terms of Service](#) and authorize this recurring charge.

PICTURE 7. Screen Capture showing Skillshare's payment screen before the free trial period (Glaser 2022).

#### 4. STREAMING SERVICES

Streaming services came about in 2007, when Netflix changed cable and satellite TV forever. By providing commercial free entertainment, with no download time, streaming services took the industry by storm with their cheaper prices and benefits (Blomeley 2021). In the late 2010s, most families had switched from spending up to \$100 on cable services to Netflix's \$8.99 monthly subscription.

With Netflix's success, other companies jumped in the race. Hulu, Amazon Prime, HBO, and local production companies benefited a lot from the COVID-19 pandemic since people staying at home during lockdown sought entertainment in these services. At the start of 2020, Netflix gained 15 million new subscribers. Disney + was launched in November of 2019 and gained around 22 million subscribers during the beginning of the lockdown. According to research, more than half of working adults watched TV or streamed video during their work breaks since working from home because of the pandemic, and Americans surveyed in October of 2020 reported watching 21% more TV than they normally would (Settembre 2020). Considering that, and adding that kids are more at home and people do not feel comfortable going out, COVID-19 ended up being the push the industry needed to get into its golden age (Blomeley 2021).

The following streaming services were chosen for this thesis because of their relevance in the market, presence in Finland, as well as differential content - since they all present some original productions. They do present a similar price range (Figure 1), with the exception of national service C More. Amazon Prime did not make the cut since their subscription is also a part of the Prime service that includes faster shipping delivery for Amazon bought products and that strays away from the main focus: video streaming services.



# Subscription prices

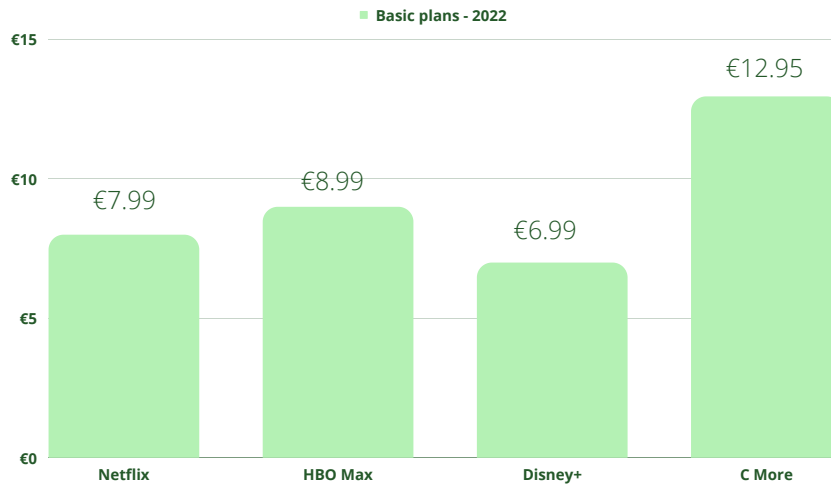


FIGURE 1. Graph showing the different prices for the basic plans in the four chosen streaming services (Glaser).

## 4.1. Netflix

Netflix is a streaming service with about 222 million memberships in over 190 countries (Form 10-k 2021). Launched in 2007, it is often considered a pioneer of the digital entertainment services, and charges for the basic plan €7,99 per month (as of March 2022).

### 4.1.1. Unsubscribing User Journey

Based on my own testing of the platform, Netflix has a fairly simple user journey for their subscription cancellation (Figure 2).

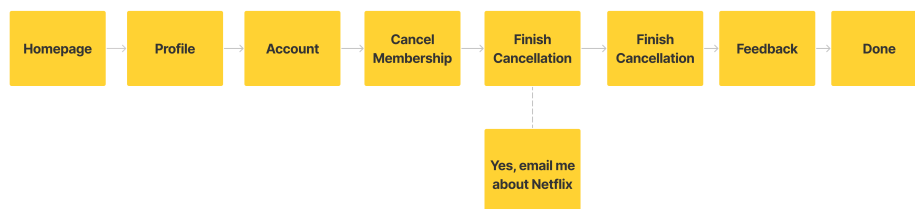
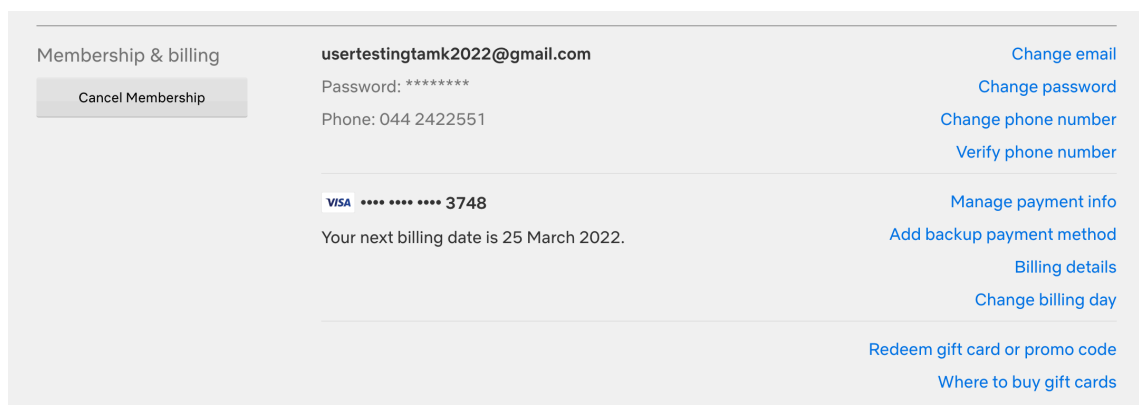


FIGURE 2. Netflix's unsubscribing journey (Glaser 2022).

It is located in the profile section, and the only slightly deceiving technique used is to place the Cancel Membership button on the left side of the screen, while having all other options placed on the right side (Picture 8). Netflix also includes an optional feedback session, where users can state why they are cancelling their subscription of the service - which allows the user to select multiple reasons.

Regarding the graphics and semiotics of the journey, Netflix uses a completely different screen for the account settings, having a light grey background that does not relate to the usual red and black theme of the brand, clearly separating the entertainment from the serious aspects, as seen in Picture 8.



PICTURE 8. Screen capture of Netflix's account management page.

## 4.2. HBO Max

HBO Max was released in the Nordic Countries in October of 2021, and currently has, combined with HBO, a number of 73.8 million subscribers (Hayes 2022a). In Finland, their basic monthly subscription costs €8,99.

### 4.2.1. Unsubscribing User Journey

HBO Max's unsubscribing journey is slightly different from Netflix, but is also fairly simple (Figure 3).

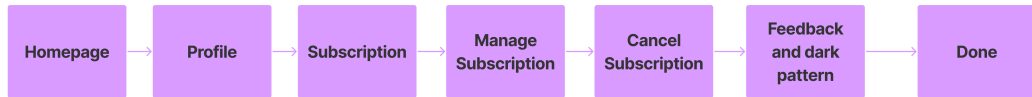


FIGURE 3. HBO Max's unsubscribing journey (Glaser 2022).

Unlike Netflix, HBO Max does include a clear dark design pattern in their feedback page (Picture 9), as well as a carefully positioned button once the cancellation is successful that induces the user to accidentally press it to restart their subscription (Picture 10). The feedback did not allow the user to pick more than one reason, but when it comes to visual aspects, the entire process remains true to the brand's image and voice, even in the way it approaches the user.

## Cancel Your Subscription?

We're sorry to see you go! To help us improve, feel free to answer the optional survey about why you decided to cancel.

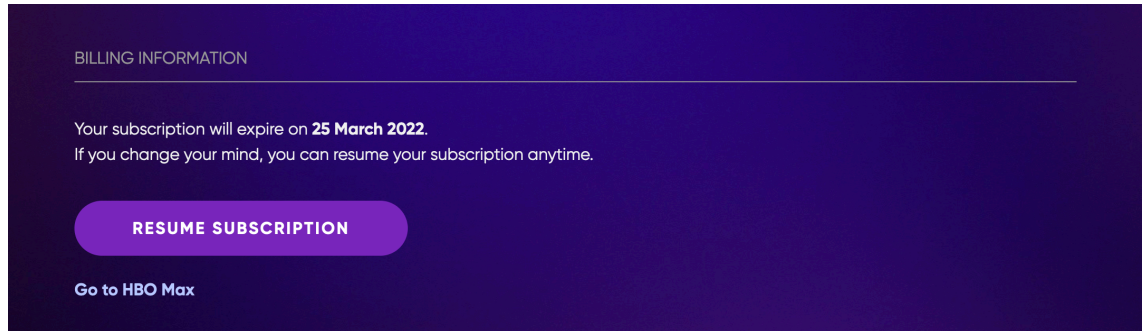
**You can get a big discount on your current price by switching to the yearly subscription.** See the yearly option. For more on your subscription options, please contact Customer Service.

- Too expensive
- Already have an HBO Max account
- Not enough content
- I finished the show I signed up for
- No time to watch
- Technical difficulties
- I want to switch to another product

NO, NEVER MIND

YES, CANCEL SUBSCRIPTION

PICTURE 9. Screen capture HBO Max's feedback page including a misdirection dark pattern by highlighting the option opposite to what the user's goal is. (Glaser 2022).



PICTURE 10. Screen capture with the button placed to deceive to user into resuming their subscription. (Glaser 2022).

### 4.3. Disney+

Filled with content from Disney, Pixar, Marvel, Star Wars, amongst other big franchises, Disney + launched in Finland on September 15, 2020 (Ramachandran, 2020), and currently has 129.8 million subscribers (Hayes, 2022b), and costs €6.99 per month.

#### 4.3.1. Unsubscribing User Journey

Contrary to the previously mentioned services, Disney+ offers a bit of a bigger challenge for the user, by hiding their cancellation option fairly well into the journey (Figure 4), as well as trying to sway the user towards staying by showing them some content recommendation (Picture 11). Visually, Disney+ does not rely on any tricks or changes to the pages, but like HBO Max it does not allow the user to pick multiple reasons to cancel their membership.

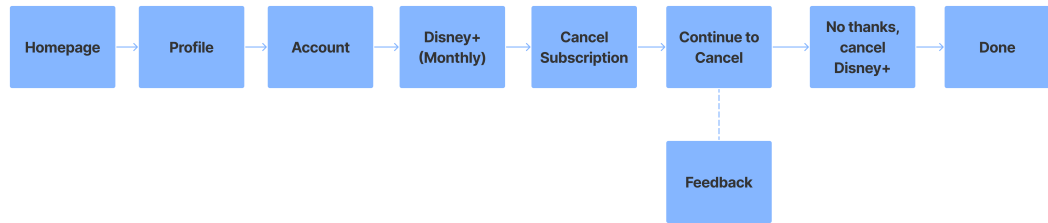
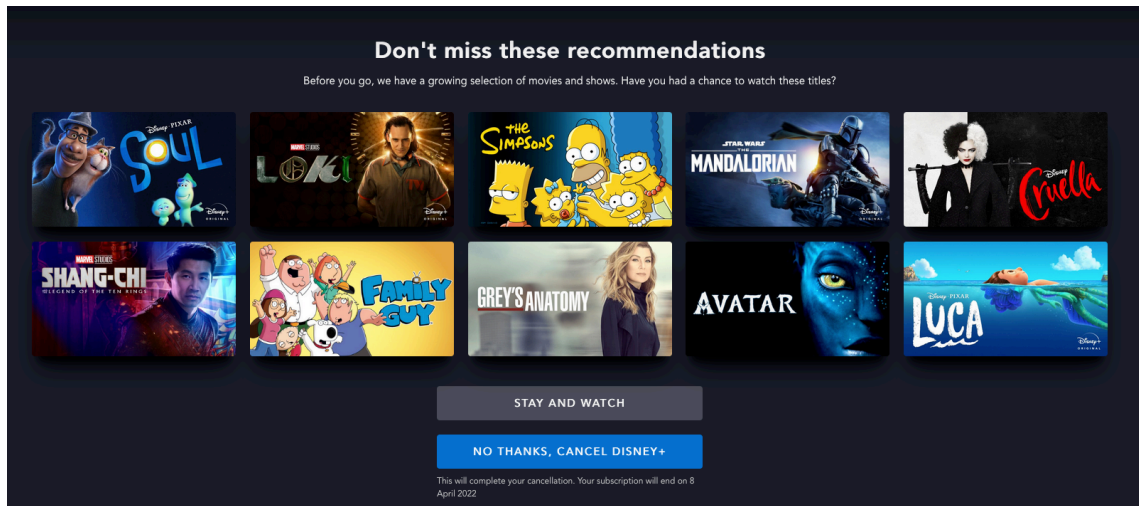


FIGURE 4. Disney's unsubscribe journey includes optional feedback, but is way more hidden in the account management page (Glaser 2022).



PICTURE 11. Screen capture of Disney+'s attempt at keeping the user subscribed through confirmshaming. (Glaser 2022)

#### 4.4. CMore

C More is a streaming service that targets exclusively the nordic countries, with around 900,000 subscribers (Blackbox 2022). It charges €12.95 per month for the basic package, but unlike any other service mentioned, C More offers a free two week long trial - which did not rely on the Forced Continuity dark pattern (see section 3.8.4.): after the 2 week long trial period, it required the user to reenter their credit card information and confirm the purchase.

#### 4.4.1. Unsubscribing User Journey

C More has the simplest user journey out of all the previously mentioned services (Figure 5), and instead of asking for feedback, they use the recommendation method paired with a dark pattern (Pictures 12 and 13) to try and keep the user subscribed. There is no option to change the language from Finnish to English or Swedish, but for users who speak the language it is fairly easy to find the path to cancellation. The brand stays true to itself during the entire unsubscribing journey, but does not gather any sort of feedback from the users on their reasons to cancel.

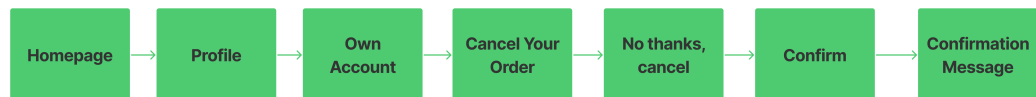
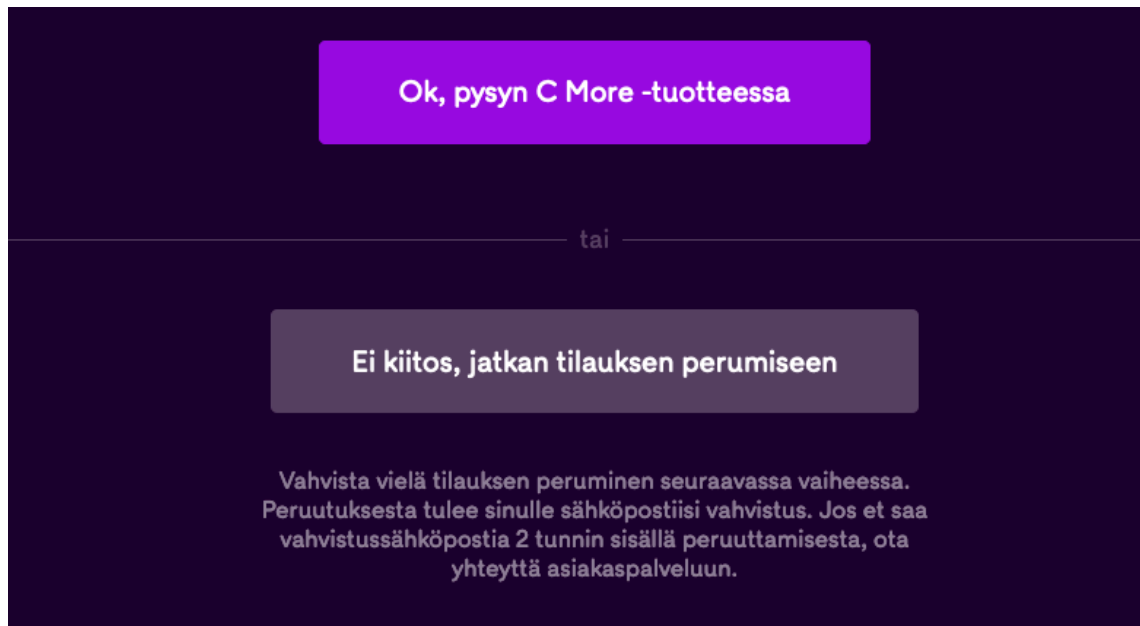


FIGURE 5. C More's unsubscribing user flow. All the buttons were translated from Finnish to English by the author. (Glaser 2022)



PICTURE 12. Screen capture showing the recommendation section C More shows on the user's cancelling journey (Glaser 2022).



PICTURE 13. Screen capture of the dark pattern used by C More: the highlighted button keeps the user subscribed, while the second option is the actual end goal of the user. (Glaser 2022).

## 5. USER TESTING

To further analyse the effects of the journey on a user, taking into account my experience is fairly biased since I deal with the user experience field daily, I conducted twenty one different user tests with the four streaming services previously mentioned. The users were part of different age groups, with a majority being in their 20s (Table 1). The test consisted of a simple task: unsubscribe from the service. Each user performed this same task for every streaming service in the following order: Netflix, HBO Max, Disney+, and C More. Follow up questions regarding the process were asked after the task was solved to gather extra insight into the users' perspectives. Some tests were conducted in person, while others happened remotely due to scheduling issues or distance. All users were timed according to how much time they took to finish the task in each different streaming platform.

TABLE 1. Users Tested

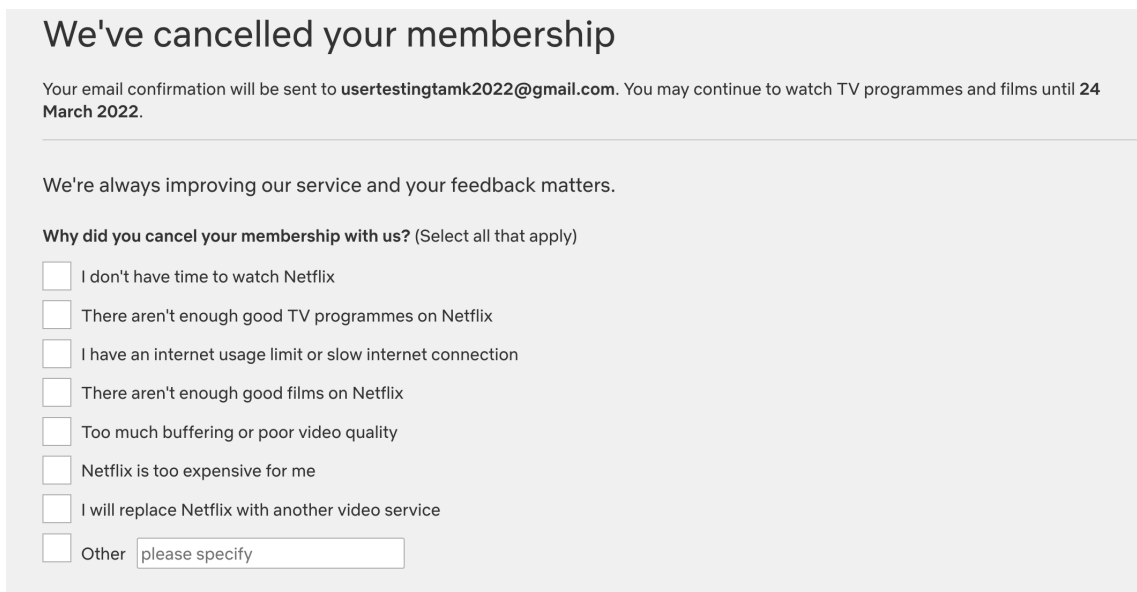
Age	Number of users
10-19	2
20-29	13
30-39	1
40-49	2
50-59	3

It is important to note that one of the services, C More, only offers its platform in Finnish, and not all of the users who participated in the research were native Finnish speakers. But they all managed to successfully unsubscribe, even if there was an added challenge with a foreign language: 10 out of the 21 did not speak Finnish or had a different native language. For the user tests conducted remotely, TeamViewer was used in order to allow users abroad to access the exact same version the users in Finland would have accessed, in order to keep the testing as equal as possible.



Another thing to keep in mind is that since users were doing several unsubscribing journeys in a row, the last ones would be faster including users who had never cancelled a subscription before, since they got used to the different conventions that most services use, such as the generic and common user flow of Profile > Account > Subscription > Cancel Subscription.

For the streaming services that asked for feedback questions in their cancelling process, such as “Why did you cancel your membership with us?” (Picture 14), users were told to answer in an honest manner, as if they were actually unsubscribing to that service. Netflix, HBO Max and Disney+ asked for feedback, but Netflix was the only one that allowed the user to select more than one reason, while all of them presented the feedback as an optional step.



**We've cancelled your membership**

Your email confirmation will be sent to [usertestingtamk2022@gmail.com](mailto:usertestingtamk2022@gmail.com). You may continue to watch TV programmes and films until **24 March 2022**.

---

We're always improving our service and your feedback matters.

**Why did you cancel your membership with us?** (Select all that apply)

- I don't have time to watch Netflix
- There aren't enough good TV programmes on Netflix
- I have an internet usage limit or slow internet connection
- There aren't enough good films on Netflix
- Too much buffering or poor video quality
- Netflix is too expensive for me
- I will replace Netflix with another video service
- Other

PICTURE 14. Screen capture from Netflix's last step in the unsubscribing journey (Glaser 2022).

### 5.1. Limitations of the research

It is important to note that as closely as the user testing resembled a user journey towards cancelling a streaming service subscription, there are elements that cannot be reproduced in these situations: such as loyalty to a service,

emotional attachment, or even feelings of betrayal once users exchange one service for another. And of course, the services exploit those feelings by using language that speaks to the user on a personal level as seen on HBO Max (Picture 9), as well as making last minute offers to the users. Finally, as clearly stated by Lull (2017), users are flawed. And as important as their take on experiences is, humans can only rely on so many communication skills and abilities to express themselves.

## 5.2. Test Findings

Through the 21 different user tests, it was possible to map out exactly what kinds of aspects were flawed and what each service presented positively. From those user tests, 12 were conducted in person and 9 happened remotely. The average time spent on the journeys (Figure 6) was a direct reflection of the number of steps as well as how clearly the buttons were displayed for the user to see. It is important to take into account that since all the tests were performed in the same order (Netflix, HBO Max, Disney+, and C More) that after performing the first one, there was a noticeable increase in user confidence on the process. And of course, even though C More did not present a much different user flow than the other services, the language barrier should be taken into account. Many foreign users in fact, begun their unsubscribing journey by looking for a menu that allowed them to change the language of the website.

## AVERAGE TIME SPENT UNSUBSCRIBING



FIGURE 6. Graph showing the average time spent by users in each different streaming service (Glaser).

None of the users in the first three age groups fell for the dark pattern tricks used by the services, however, from the 50s group, out of the 3 different users, 2 of them fell for both the HBO Max's and C More's misdirections (see 4.2.1. and 4.4.1.). One of them even happened to accidentally click on HBO Max's dangerously placed "Resume Subscription" button accidentally, because they did not read things before clicking.

As much as dark patterns did make older generations victims (Figure 7), none of the tested users mentioned those as a reason to unsubscribe from a service and not return to it in the future. Surprisingly, 3 people mentioned morals and political affiliations as reasons to abandon a service, even though content and price were definitely key defining factors (Figure 8).

## Users affected by dark patterns

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2022

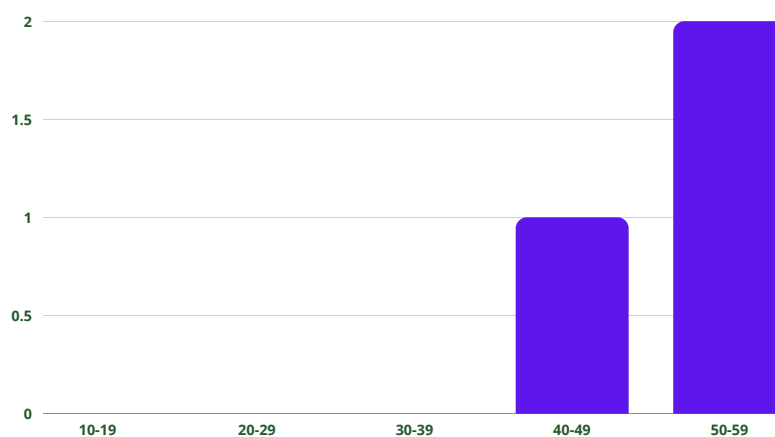


FIGURE 7. Bar Graph showing the number of users whose journey was affected by dark patterns, divided by age group (Glaser).

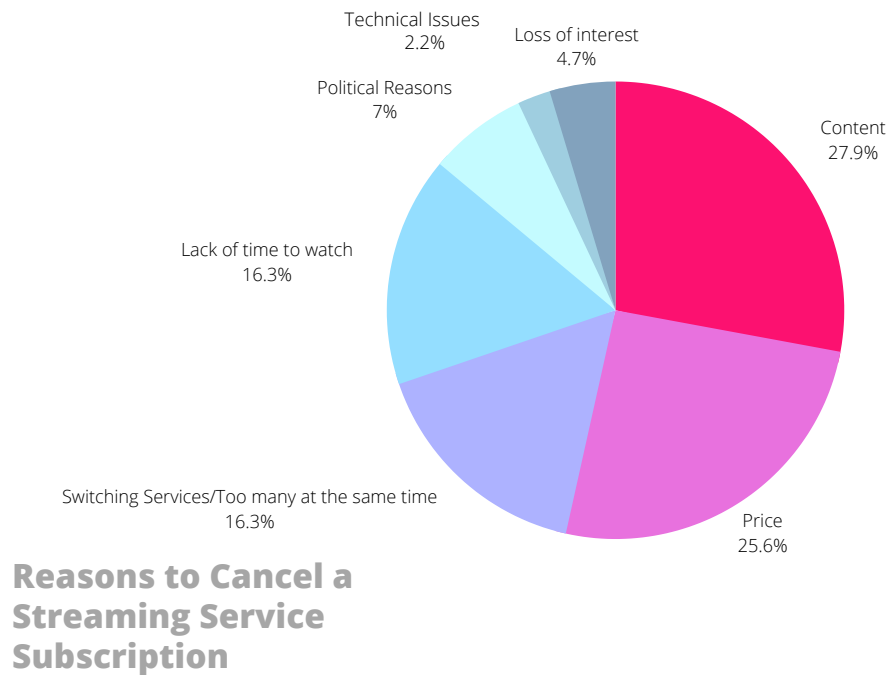


FIGURE 8. Pie Chart showing different reasons users gave to unsubscribe in the research (Glaser).

Knowing a service’s unsubscribing journey, and taking into account the Peak-End Rule (see 3.6.), rarely affected a user’s perception of the service, with or without the use of dark patterns: only 3 users seemed bothered by HBO Max’s misdirection, and 2 mentioned getting suspicious over the difficulty in finding Disney+’s “Cancel Subscription” button and the last minute recommendations hiding the final click they had to do after scrolling. 2 users mentioned being temporarily disappointed in those services, but that it would not keep them from subscribing in the future.

In fact, knowing a service’s unsubscribing journey had the exact opposite effect: 4 users affirmed they expected the process to be more frustrating and tiring than it actually was, and that this new found knowledge actually made them more likely to subscribe to these services again in the future, regardless of the dark design patterns.

By far, the most problematic membership cancellation journey appeared to be Disney+’s: two users actually assumed the cancellation was completed once

they reached the recommendations page (see Picture 11), and never successfully unsubscribed. On top of that, the page with the option to cancel the membership was so well hidden about 5 users accidentally ended up in Disney+'s Frequently Asked Questions page, which in turn redirected them back to the Account page once they could not find what they wanted. Only one user thought the last minute recommendations made by Disney+ as confirmshaming was in fact, a nice gesture. All other 20 users were annoyed by that practice, even though none of them minded providing the services with feedback before cancelling a membership. Finally, HBO Max opened an entirely new tab once the user clicked on "Manage Subscription" and 3 different users manifested their dislike of the practice.

## 6. FINAL GUIDELINES

Based on the conducted user tests, a simple final user flow was created as a guideline:

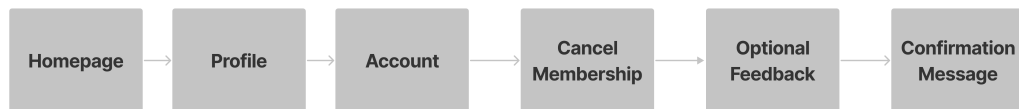


FIGURE 9. User flow for the ideal membership cancellation journey based on the user tests conducted between February and March 2022 (Glaser).

As similar as it is to Netflix's current user journey (see Figure 2), this example reduces the number of clicks while still giving the user the option to confirm their action before it is final, as well as gathering feedback to help improve services.

Taking into account Thresholds and Industry Influence (see 2.1.3. and 2.1.5), the flow follows the convention that most users are used to following: finding the account settings inside a profile page, and from there having the option to cancel their membership.

The guideline also reiterates the importance of visually clear options to cancel the subscription, since this was the biggest hurdle for the older age groups. Further research into the different age groups would have to be conducted in order to determine how exactly these user journeys should differ in order to cater to the different age groups.

Given Figure 5, it is important to keep the journey less than one minute long, since that seems to be the industry standard and even older generations (Figure 10) seem to stick to that pattern. The less a user has to think about what they are doing, the better the usability of the product an application of Jakob's Law (see 3.4.).

# Average time by age group

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2022

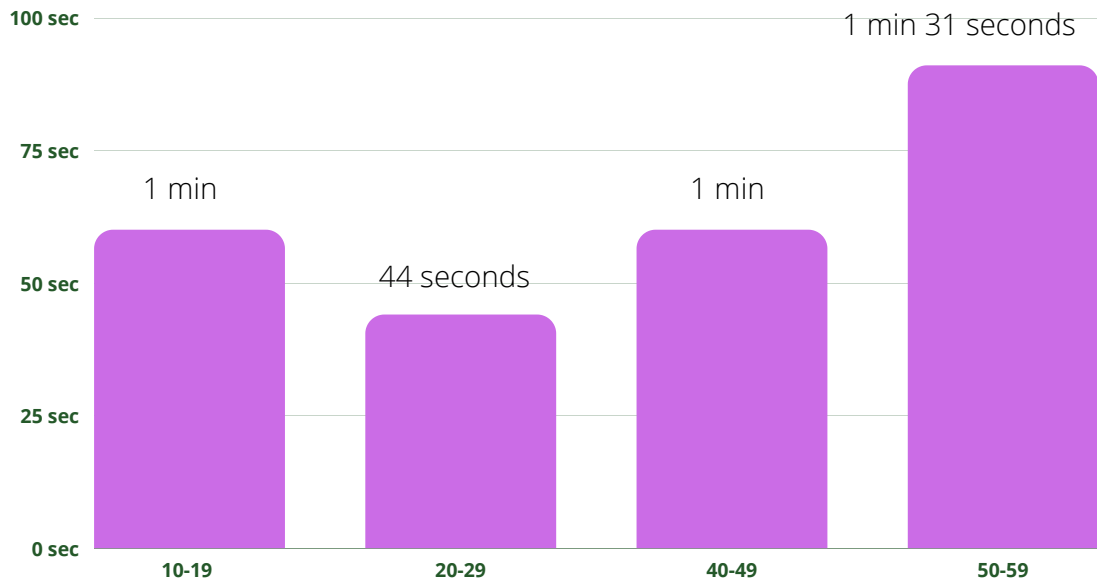


FIGURE 10. Bar Graph showing the average time each different age group spent unsubscribing per service. The 30-39 group was left out because there was only one user who fit that age demographic in the conducted user tests.

Ideally, dark patterns would be completely ignored in any design process, but it is hard to assume a more ethical approach would be immediately accepted by big corporations, as well as users. From the research, it was noticeable that users were actually expecting to be tricked during the process; which could be remedied by clear confirmation of the cancellation. The confirmation message would also avoid situations as seen with Disney+, where the recommendations shielded the next step towards cancellation and some users assumed it was already completed at that point in the journey. All this information can be put into a visual infographic (Figure 11) that sums up the final guidelines in 5 simple points.

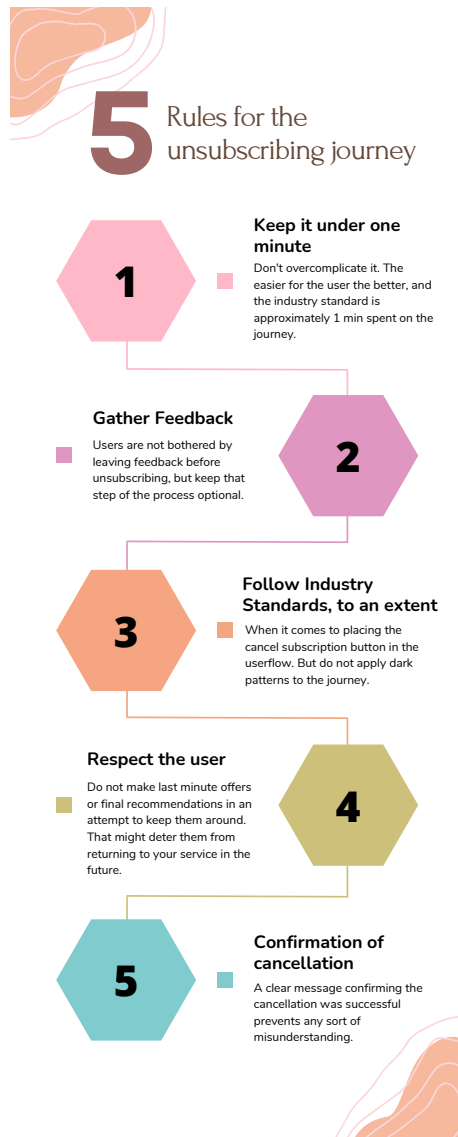


FIGURE 11. Infographic summing up the guidelines researched in this thesis (Glaser).



## 7. DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to define UX and its psychology and laws, as well as Dark Patterns and how they are presented in modern day paid video streaming services. Through user research, guidelines were created to establish the best possible practices in the subscription cancellation user journey.

The study conducted clearly indicated that dark design patterns present a slight hindrance in a user's experience with a video streaming service, although it does not affect a user's perspective of the company as a whole nor their willingness to subscribe again in the future.

It also showed how different age groups are affected by design patterns, and that older generations are more prone to falling victims of tricks put on their path.

The final guidelines include a simple user flow that takes into account industry influence, user's satisfaction as well as a service's ability to gather feedback and improve, without disturbing user goals or placing tricks on their way.

To further cater to specific demographics with personalised cancellation journeys, more research should be done into the interactions different age groups have with the services.

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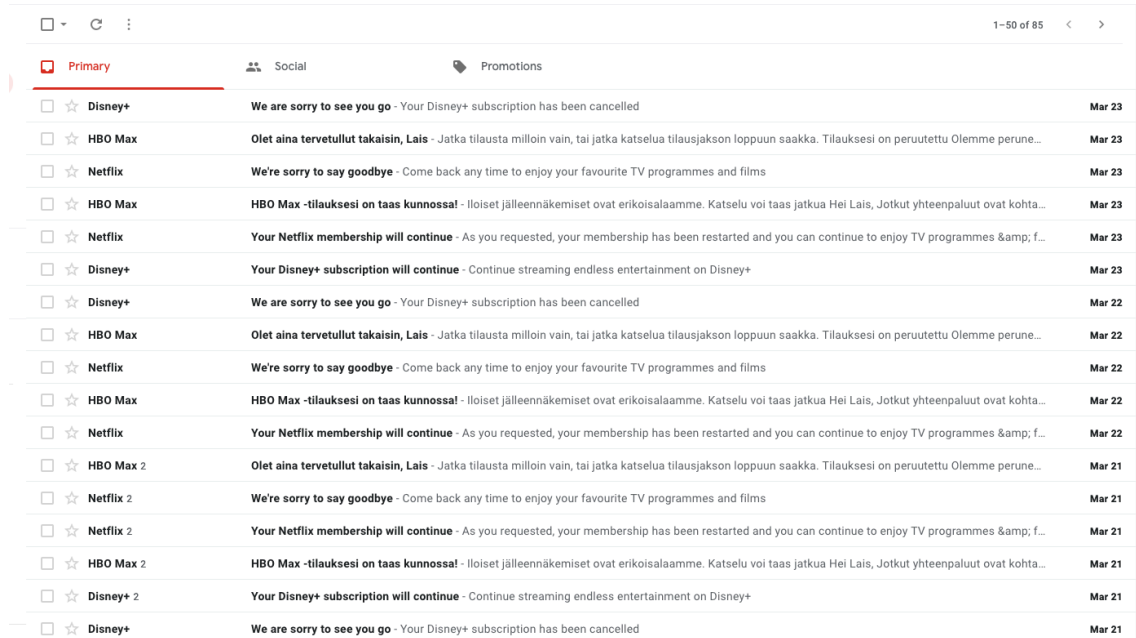
## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Questions Asked in User Tests

- How did you feel about the processes?
- Would you have done anything differently?
- What would make you unsubscribe from a streaming service?
- Now that you've been through the cancellation journey in these 4 different services, did it influence your perspective on them?

## Appendix 2. Spam Emails

Every single user test resulted in spam to the email account - created solely for user testing purposes - one message about the cancellation, and one about resuming the account once it was restored for the next user test.



Sender	Subject	Date
Disney+	We are sorry to see you go - Your Disney+ subscription has been cancelled	Mar 23
HBO Max	Olet aina tervetullut takaisin, Lais - Jatka tilausta milloin vain, tai jatka katselua tilausjakson loppuun saakka. Tilauksesi on peruutettu Olemme perune...	Mar 23
Netflix	We're sorry to say goodbye - Come back any time to enjoy your favourite TV programmes and films	Mar 23
HBO Max	HBO Max -tilauksesi on taas kunnossa! - Iloiset jälleennäkemiset ovat erikoisalaamme. Katselu voi taas jatkua Hei Lais, Jotkut yhteenpaluut ovat kohta...	Mar 23
Netflix	Your Netflix membership will continue - As you requested, your membership has been restarted and you can continue to enjoy TV programmes & f...	Mar 23
Disney+	Your Disney+ subscription will continue - Continue streaming endless entertainment on Disney+	Mar 23
Disney+	We are sorry to see you go - Your Disney+ subscription has been cancelled	Mar 22
HBO Max	Olet aina tervetullut takaisin, Lais - Jatka tilausta milloin vain, tai jatka katselua tilausjakson loppuun saakka. Tilauksesi on peruutettu Olemme perune...	Mar 22
Netflix	We're sorry to say goodbye - Come back any time to enjoy your favourite TV programmes and films	Mar 22
HBO Max	HBO Max -tilauksesi on taas kunnossa! - Iloiset jälleennäkemiset ovat erikoisalaamme. Katselu voi taas jatkua Hei Lais, Jotkut yhteenpaluut ovat kohta...	Mar 22
Netflix	Your Netflix membership will continue - As you requested, your membership has been restarted and you can continue to enjoy TV programmes & f...	Mar 22
HBO Max 2	Olet aina tervetullut takaisin, Lais - Jatka tilausta milloin vain, tai jatka katselua tilausjakson loppuun saakka. Tilauksesi on peruutettu Olemme perune...	Mar 21
Netflix 2	We're sorry to say goodbye - Come back any time to enjoy your favourite TV programmes and films	Mar 21
Netflix 2	Your Netflix membership will continue - As you requested, your membership has been restarted and you can continue to enjoy TV programmes & f...	Mar 21
HBO Max 2	HBO Max -tilauksesi on taas kunnossa! - Iloiset jälleennäkemiset ovat erikoisalaamme. Katselu voi taas jatkua Hei Lais, Jotkut yhteenpaluut ovat kohta...	Mar 21
Disney+ 2	Your Disney+ subscription will continue - Continue streaming endless entertainment on Disney+	Mar 21
Disney+	We are sorry to see you go - Your Disney+ subscription has been cancelled	Mar 21

PICTURE 15. Screen capture of the email inbox after all the user tests were conducted.

## Appendix 3. Chart of Conducted User Tests

Table 2. Table with all the conducted user tests showing each user's time per streaming service as well as their age, and the overall average time spent cancelling each service.

Users	Netflix	HBO Max	Disney+	C More	Age
1	2min34	2min51	1min26	1min46*	51
2	43sec	46sec	54sec	31sec*	52
3	1min21	55sec	59sec	29sec	45
4	1min56	1min41	2min38	35sec	51
5	40sec	36sec	1min18	26sec*	19
6	53sec	30sec	23sec	13sec	21
7	34sec	24sec	21sec	13sec	25
8	47sec	29sec	33sec	44sec	23
9	36sec	32sec	1min02	14sec	22
10	50sec	34sec	50sec	30sec	28
11	50sec	52sec	43sec	1min17*	26
12	1min09	35sec	48sec	3min37sec*	18
13	29sec	33sec	30sec	27sec*	30
14	44sec	48sec	1min10	45sec	23
15	1min10	1min33	1min12	2min19*	27
16	31sec	43sec	39sec	34sec	27
17	39sec	54sec	1min22	2min16*	44
18	29sec	25sec	24sec	1min54*	26
19	34sec	57sec	1min6	1min35*	24
20	49sec	46sec	40sec	18sec	27
21	46sec	29sec	25sec	24sec	22
average time	54sec	51sec	55sec	1min	