# Addictive design of online services and consumer protection in the EU single market

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The European Parliament adopted by 545 votes to 12, with 61 abstentions, a resolution on addictive design of online services and consumer protection in the EU single market.

***Addictive design of online services***

Members are alarmed that **certain platforms and other tech companies exploit psychological vulnerabilities** to design digital interfaces for commercial interests that maximise the frequency and duration of user visits, so as to prolong the use of online services and to create engagement with the platform. The Commission is called on to urgently assess and, where appropriate, close **existing regulatory gaps** with regard to consumer vulnerabilities, dark patterns and addictive features of digital services.

If the issue of addictive design is not sufficiently covered in existing EU legislation, this could lead to further deterioration in the area of public health, especially affecting minors. If the topic remains unaddressed, **Parliament should take the lead** and use its right of legislative initiative.

The Commission is invited to:

- examine the necessary policy initiatives and propose, where appropriate and necessary, **legislation** against addictive design;

- **ensure a high level of protection in the digital environment** by ensuring that the growing problems of addictive, behavioural and manipulative design of online services are tackled as part of its review of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, the Consumer Rights Directive and the Unfair Contract Terms Directive;

- urgently assess the need to prohibit the most harmful practices not yet blacklisted as misleading commercial practices in Annex I of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive or in other EU legislation, including infinite scrolling and default auto-play, constant push notifications or receive or read receipts.

Undertaking should have an obligation to develop ethical and fair digital products and services that are free from dark patterns and misleading or addictive design. This constitutes reasonable professional diligence. In addition, the Commission should assess the addictive and mental-health effects of interaction-based recommender systems, in particular hyper-personalised systems, that keep users on the platform as long as possible rather than serve them information in a more neutral manner.

***Ethical design of online services***

Parliament demanded that, in its review of existing EU legislation on addictive design, the Commission puts forward a digital ‘right not to be disturbed’ to empower consumers by turning all attention-seeking features off by design and allowing users to choose to activate these features by simple and easily accessible means, possibly with an attached mandatory warning of the potential dangers of activating these opt-in features.

The Commission is urged to foster ethical design of online services by default and to **create a list of good practices** of design features that are not addictive or manipulative and ensure users are fully in control, such as ‘think before you share’, disabling all notifications by default, making more neutral online recommendations, choosing from the outset between colour and greyscale applications, or issuing warnings when users have spent more than 15 or 30 minutes on a specific service, or automatically locking certain services after a preset time of use, particularly for minors.

Furthermore, the broad use of educational guidelines and prevention plans as well as awareness-raising campaigns should promote self-control strategies to help individuals develop safer online behaviours and new healthy habit.

Lastly, Members underlined the need to promote regulation of addictive design online in this regard and the need to promote and implement policy initiatives and industry standards on safety by design in **digital services and products for children** that can foster compliance with children’s rights.