Polity & Governance · GS - II

Examine how dark patterns in digital platforms undermine consumer autonomy and fair competition. Discuss the role of the Central Consumer Protection Authority in addressing such practices in India.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 13/11/2026	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

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Answer Hint

Dark patterns, informed consent, consumer autonomy, information asymmetry, unfair trade practices, Consumer Protection Act 2019, CCPA, e-commerce guidelines, digital accountability, regulatory enforcement.

Model Answer

Introduction

The expansion of digital commerce has increased consumer convenience but also created opportunities for manipulative interface designs known as dark patterns. These practices influence users into making choices they might not otherwise make.

Impact on Consumers and Markets

1. **Reduced consumer autonomy:** Misleading prompts, forced actions and deceptive defaults weaken informed decision-making.

2. **Financial harm:** Hidden charges, unwanted subscriptions and misleading payment prompts can impose unintended costs.

3. **Information asymmetry:** Digital platforms often possess greater knowledge of consumer behaviour, enabling targeted manipulation.

4. **Unfair competition:** Businesses using deceptive designs may gain an artificial advantage over platforms following transparent practices.

Regulatory Role of CCPA

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 empowers the CCPA to investigate consumer-rights violations and unfair trade practices. The 2023 Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns identify prohibited practices and provide a framework for action. The authority can order discontinuation of unfair practices and impose penalties for misleading advertisements.

Way Forward

Regular digital audits, transparent pricing, informed consent, grievance redressal and stronger platform accountability are essential.

Conclusion

Effective regulation must ensure that digital innovation operates within a framework of transparency, fairness and consumer choice.

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