

## **Illegal, Hidden Influence in Online Trading is Spreading**

**31 January 2023, Budapest - According to the results of a screening (“sweep”) by European consumer authorities, more than a third of traders manipulate consumers online using undetected ‘dark-pattern’ methods. The Hungarian Competition Authority (GVH), which was involved in the European accelerated investigation, has already taken up the fight against hidden bias in consumer decisions.**

The Consumer Protection Cooperation Network (CPC) of the European Commission and the Member State authorities have [published](#) the results of a coordinated screening involving 25 countries, which measured the presence of "dark patterns" in online trading. The investigation covered almost 400 online shops across Europe, from clothing to electronics, focusing on three known manipulative practices: fake countdown timers, web interfaces designed to lead consumers to purchases, subscription or other choices and information hiding.

The results show that almost 40% of websites used one of the three infringing techniques. 42 stores prompted consumers with a fake countdown timer, and 54 websites steered consumers towards choices that served the interests of retailers (e.g. more expensive products or delivery options) through the design or language of the interface. 70 websites have hidden important information (e.g. on delivery costs, product composition or cheaper options); and 23 websites tried to persuade consumers to subscribe to something using the same technique. The investigation also covered the in-store apps: In 27 out of 102 cases, some dark patterns popped up.

The national authorities in each Member State will contact the online shops concerned to put an end to the unacceptable practices, and, if necessary, launch procedures to bring infringements to an end as soon as possible.

In recent years, the Hungarian Competition Authority acted several times against the hidden influence of consumers, as the trading techniques investigated in the European action are not unknown in Hungary either. In the case of subscriptions obtained by hiding information [there have been examples of administrative fines in the billions of forints](#) in Hungary; also, the GVH even currently [investigates](#) online [platforms](#) due to ‘fake’ countdown clocks that put pressure on consumers but do not actually affect price or stock. Last time last autumn, [following a quick analysis like the one conducted now](#), The national competition authority strongly warned airlines available in Hungary to change their methods for selling tickets and advertising in a way that undetectably distorts consumer choice.

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