

Towards Trusted Design - Takeaways from workshops on “Prototyping the Future”

Trusted Design, as defined by the Web Foundation, puts people and their needs ahead of the platform and gives the user control over their online choices. [In the first workshop](#) of a series on Trusted Design, held by the [Tech Policy Design Lab](#) and global design partners [3x3](#) and [Simply Secure](#), participants collectively imagined that the experience of Trusted Design would utilise ongoing consent (“no means no”) and leave web users satisfied with their choices and in control of the decisions they make online (as well as their data.) Participants [brainstormed opportunities and ideas](#) for advancing the application of Trusted Design.

The most recent round of workshops were held on three different dates (July 19, 21, and 26) and times to accommodate three time zones. We gathered participants representing different regions of the world (North America: 33%; Europe: 29%; Asia: 10.5%; South America: 10.5%; Africa: 8%; Australia: 5%; and the Middle East: 4%) and different sectors (Civil Society: 48%; Industry: 19%; Design: 13%; Academia: 10%; Government: 7%; Media: 2%).

During the workshops, participants selected and further defined solutions that would advance Trusted Design or tackle Deceptive Design (also known as “dark patterns”) based on the opportunities that emerged from the first workshop. The goal was to produce more concrete examples of solutions or interventions for Trusted Design that would involve relevant key stakeholders and address the core challenges of Deceptive Design.

Recommended solutions that emerged from the workshop

The following are the set of recommended solutions and models that groups within the workshops discussed:

Principles and Guidelines:

A set of principles and guidelines for Trusted Design that continuously evolves and serves as best practices for product teams to follow and can also be used as evaluation benchmarks. Key principles such as accessibility and plain language contribute to protect the most vulnerable user groups (e.g. older people and those who are less digitally literate, etc) from deceptive design and enhance privacy and security. While principles and guidelines are intended to be universal, there may be varied tiers of application to allow companies to ease into the practices and gradually mature. A set of UX/UI examples were also developed in one of the workshops—using government online services as an example and how they can be simplified and designed through a service design approach.

Public awareness campaign through crowdsourced storytelling using animations or games

shared on social media: This idea is intended to amass a global and diverse set of stories and web users’ experiences of deceptive design and trusted design. These narratives build an inventory of case studies that serve to tell the impact of Trusted Design, especially highlighting experiences from the Global South, marginalised groups and less talked about issues such as mental health. The stories would serve as a foundation for an advocacy campaign online in the form of social media campaigns or animations or gamification techniques. The group decided that leaning on youth activism and the tools available to them (e.g. social media) could be a powerful storytelling force that could maximise reach.

Crowdsourced reporting tool for identification, tracking and response of Deceptive Design: This idea would streamline deceptive design detection through the participation of public institutions so that deceptive design is more visible and reportable, bringing the opportunities to redress the harms of deceptive design. The reporting tool would enable crowdsourced data that could generate a visualisation displaying where deceptive designs are occurring the most. It would also serve as an awareness raising asset for both users and regulators and can be scalable so more organisations can contribute. Core existing and credible institutions are connected to the platform so that individuals could find avenues of enforcement and action.

Evaluation framework: for evaluating impact of the design of a technology platform based on the principles and guidelines of Trusted Design. Such an evaluation framework could serve as the basis for regulation or even 'scoring' technology. Third party assessors could also look at the evaluations to make suggestions towards improving on best practices. The framework would also need a core governance model to evolve the framework and ensure it is applicable across different contexts.

Global Accreditation System: The idea of global accreditation is to incentivise companies who are looking to position their brand and hopefully recognise 'trailblazing' institutions that are practicing Trusted Design. The hope is that more companies would seek out such accreditations and practice Trusted Design, perhaps eventually adopting a cycle of evaluation that would also affect product processes and internal processes within technology companies.

Internationally applicable regulatory framework that features national-level politically driven regulation, a task force that initiates dialogues (for example, conferences), and international open standards (for example, W3C or OASIS) that help to converge and maintain consistency. Achieving this framework would require a granular, multi-pronged, and multi-faceted approach, instead of just solely focusing on siloed issues. A global coalition could be a good example of an organisation that is responsible for setting and seeing the 'norms' or 'best practices' through.

Key insights to guide the work

Regardless of whether the recommendations above are taken forward, there are a set of key insights and cross-cutting recommendations that must guide the work of carrying out such solutions with a multi-sectoral collaborative approach.

- **Guidelines and standards are ever-changing.** During the workshops, the guidelines for Trusted Design were continuously built upon, re-mixed, extended and improved through an iterative process that was gradually more considerate of different perspectives and insights relating to the key principles. Going forward, it would make sense for the principles and guidelines to be developed in the 'open' so they are continuously evolving based on an ever-changing landscape and web.
- **Establish a coalition.** Perhaps the foremost task when it comes to establishing best practices and standards is to set up a coalition or taskforce that is responsible for setting, evolving and driving the principles, standards and guidelines. There should be a clear governance model for how these guidelines are iterated upon that also invites participation from others. The coalition would help converge inputs and maintain consistency.
- **Global frameworks and global collaboration, but locally driven and enforced.** Groups that talked about regulation agreed on the need for an international regulatory framework that features national-level politically driven regulation. Even an evaluation framework that is based on global best practices and standards should take context into consideration.

- **Involve and center voices from Global South and most vulnerable.** The recommended solutions that emerged largely focused on involving the most vulnerable communities: storytelling to be led by and/or capturing stories from Global South and most affected communities; guidelines to be centered on those most vulnerable (e.g. older people and those who are less digitally literate, etc). When technology is created based on the lived realities of those that are most marginalised, [the resulting product ends up often being safer, more secure and less harmful for us all.](#)
- **Multi-pronged and intersectional approaches.** Groups in the workshop brought up how tackling deceptive design, whether through guidelines, regulation or global collaboration, needed to involve communities and frameworks from different sectors (for example, consumer protection, human rights, etc) as well as touch upon different aspects (for example, legal, human, business).
- **Support from a network and wider community.** The guidelines can be promoted, distributed and practiced through wider communities that are bought in. Regardless of the solution or intervention discussed at hand, almost every group identified the need to have buy-in from certain communities: funders, regulators, business-community online and design communities to propel the models forward and make them work.
 - Multilaterals and global organisations: to help codify and disseminate international frameworks
 - Product designers: to be partners in identifying deceptive patterns
 - Regulators: can use evaluation framework as a criteria to check up on companies, can also use heat map as evidence
 - Researchers, designers, web users and civil society: to flag issues, create heat maps and crowd-sourced campaigns, and crowdsource methods for large scale audits of systems
 - Funders: to fund work such as the story-telling campaign and other advocacy initiatives
 - Journalists and advocates getting the word out about Deceptive Design through advertising the campaigns and the reporting tool; investigative journalists or academics that showcase companies could also create more incentives for the private sector to be more involved.
 - Educators and academics also play an important role as they could help in advocacy and prevention as direct influence.

Remaining questions and needs

During the workshops, some common questions and considerations pervaded many of the breakout rooms. The following questions reflect the remaining gaps that we collectively need to consider moving forward and have large implications for how we approach and bring forth Trusted Design.

- **What are the right incentives for some of these systems to work?** We need incentives for organisations or people to detect and bring attention to deceptive design, and incentives for third-party assessors, auditors or accreditation organisations to evaluate companies on their practices. What would be the motivating factor for companies and organisations to adopt standards that they are being evaluated upon? For example, companies may have brand positioning incentives for being associated with Trusted Design practices—how might we ignite those incentives more?
- There is no incentive for detecting and reporting on deceptive design unless there is a way to intake complaints. **How can we ensure that complaints are heard or responded to so that people feel motivated to report in the first place?**
- **What would be the most appropriate approach to jump start or propel some of these systems?** For example, would a decentralised approach or multilateral approach work better for

establishing an evaluation framework on Trusted Design? What makes sense to come first—an accreditation system or an evaluation framework from which that accreditation is based (once basic principles and guidelines are established)?

- **How can we articulate the issues of deceptive design so it can encompass the inter-related issues that concern different communities**, especially beyond the data protection and consumer protection communities? Do we have a way to translate the problem of deceptive designs for people in different issue areas for them to understand and tie this to their work? e.g. how do data protection advocates perceive deceptive designs? How may communities fighting disinformation perceive manipulations through interface or algorithm designs?
- **There are more stakeholders that we have yet to identify or engage with more:**
 - Who is the global body with enough authority and legitimacy that is responsible for granting accreditations?
 - Who are the existing credible institutions that could help in the identification of deceptive design patterns (for the crowdsourced reporting tool) so that users can more easily identify avenues towards enforcement or action?
 - Who might be able to be funders to support raising awareness and building narratives around deceptive design and its harms to the most vulnerable?
 - How could actors from the global south or other groups representing marginalised people be motivated and involved in contributing to the principles, guidelines and standards as well as contributing to story-telling for awareness building purposes?
 - How might we partner with journalists and educators to help spread awareness of campaigns or act as oversight?

What's next?

For the next round of engagements, the Tech Policy Design Lab and its partners at 3x3 and Simply Secure plan to gather a group of stakeholders who have demonstrated commitment and investment to the work of advancing Trusted Design to review recommendations and discuss the way forward. This includes:

- 1) Testing prototypes developed on the basis of insights generated by our co-creation workshops
- 2) Reviewing and shaping recommended solutions for Trusted Design and developing action plans for further developing and implementing them, and
- 3) Exploring how a potential coalition would carry out the recommended solutions.

If you have any questions or would like to contribute to this final round of reviews and co-creating action plans for a way forward, please reach out to techlab-workshops@webfoundation.org.