

Do you wish to buy a plane ticket? Be careful, this is how they influence your decision!

28 October 2022, Budapest - According to a rapid analysis by the Hungarian Competition Authority (GVH), the majority of airline websites distort consumers' decisions by unnoticed methods. For the time being, the GVH is making suggestions to help eliminate wrong practices and avoid subliminal tricks. However, if these do not lead to any progress, the GVH may later investigate the application of the rules of fair competition on market in the context of competition proceedings.

In October 2022, the Hungarian Competition Authority carried out a comprehensive rapid analysis sweep to assess whether the websites of airlines available in Hungary, including low-cost ones, and popular domestic airfare comparison websites use dark patterns in their ticketing and advertising practices. Dark patterns are digital messages and user interfaces that can lead consumers to make undesirable choices without being noticed.

The GVH's rapid analysis revealed a number of problems in the practices of airlines available in Hungary. Most platforms use psychological pressure to limit offers (e.g. "*only 2 tickets available at this price*"), often combined with sensory manipulation: i.e. some offers are highlighted in striking colours, while making cheaper, simpler solutions harder to spot. There is a tendency for ambiguous wording and, in most cases, information overload, which confuses and distracts consumers. In many cases (especially on low-cost airline websites), these are accompanied with concealed important information and choices, especially in the choice of seats, where the lack of information gives consumers the impression that they will not be able to do so later (or only at a higher price). Dark patterns have also appeared occasionally on domestic airfare comparison sites, GVH experts have revealed.

The GVH advises the undertakings concerned to avoid commercial practices that urge consumers to make a choice, to present their choices in an equally noticeable and clearly worded way, and structure the information to ensure transparency and easy understanding.

The Hungarian Competition Authority advises consumers to try to resist impulse buying and not to allow being rushed into a decision. They should always take the time to compare offers and think carefully about their needs and options. You should also try to filter the information and consider how relevant it is to your decision.

Press Office of the GVH