Defining “Broken”: User Experiences and Remediation Tactics When Ad-Blocking or Tracking-Protection Tools Break a Website’s User Experience

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Browser Extensions

Built Into Browsers
“Standard” Enhanced Tracking Protection
“Strict” Enhanced Tracking Protection
What are all the ways these tools can break webpages?

What do users do when they encounter breakage?

How much do users care about these types of breakage?
Reviews and Issue Report Analysis

Small-Scale Online Survey
Reviews and Issue Report Analysis
Extensions used in the analysis
When uBO is enabled, it sometimes blocks actual news stories, leaving spaces on the page. Screenshots show page with uBO enabled and same page with uBO disabled. This same breakage also occurs on other pages of the site, and with all content in their Travel Tips "By the Way" section; see: https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/tips/omicron-holiday-travel-health-experts/
In all cases, disabling uBO restores the missing articles.
Jane Doe

Slows Or Stops Pages From Loading.

Ghostery Support

Hello Jane,
Thanks for reaching out. Sorry to hear you are having …

John Smith

Needs to be constantly and consistently updated to stay untraceable. **Certain websites have countered adblock with a window demanding it be turned off**.........................making this thing almost useless outside youtube.

Jackie Joe

Wow, it works. It flipping works!
Hello Jane,

Thanks for reaching out. Sorry to hear you are having issues with Ghostery slowing or stopping pages from loading. I'm reaching out to help address the concern.

Best regards, Ghostery Support

John Smith

Needs to be constantly and consistently updated to stay untraceable. Certain websites have countered adblock with a window demanding it be turned off..........................making this thing almost useless outside youtube.

Jackie Joe

Wow, it works. It flipping works!
38

Unique ways that breakage was discussed
I am not a robot
Disable your extension to access this site
Key Mitigation Strategies

- Disable Extension
- Uninstall Extension
- Clear Browsing History and Data
- Switch Browser
Small-Scale Online Survey
95 participants asked about either:

Privacy preserving extensions (n=46)
Privacy preserving browsers (n=49)

Recruited through Prolific
Proportion of participants that said they would try to fix breakage
91% of participants experienced breakage that they attributed to their extension
67% of participants had never reported the breakage they experienced
Built-in features were the most used method of reporting breakage
Created taxonomy of 38 types of breakage

Mitigation strategies are varied and context dependent

Many users have experienced breakage while using existing ad-blocking and tracking protection tools
Ad-blocking and tracking protection tools can break websites.

Users experience this breakage in a variety of different ways.

There are many different ways users respond to breakage.

The actions users take are context dependent.