



ticketing mailbox <ticketing@culture.gov.uk>

Evidence

1 message

17 November 2015 at 17:13

To: ticketing@culture.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing with evidence to be considered as part of the 'Review of Consumer Protection Measures relating to Online Secondary Ticketing Platforms'.

The document states that evidence which will be considered includes, 'Observations on how the market is working for consumers'.

I am a consumer and an entertainment journalist, attending an average of more than one ticketed event per week each year, which I pay for myself. I attend theatre, concerts, film screenings, talks and other events in London with great frequency.

The secondary ticket market does not work for me or anyone I know. I am deeply disturbed by the fact that Government refuses to intervene in and legislate against the secondary ticket market, which is dominated by unscrupulous businesses and individuals who participate in what I personally characterise as a protection racket.

First and foremost, I note that it is illegal to profit from the re-sale of football tickets in the UK and it was illegal to do so with Olympics tickets as well. As such, I see no reason why it shouldn't be illegal to do the same with concert tickets. In my opinion, this is an arbitrary, nonsensical and indefensible disparity.

Secondly, I would like to explain why I characterise the secondary ticket market as a protection racket.

These businesses and individuals claim to be offering a legitimate solution to a problem - the problem being a shortage of tickets to popular shows. Indeed, culture secretary Sajid Javid has claimed that ticket touts are merely evidencing entrepreneurial spirit.

However, an entrepreneur will typically spot a gap in the market and offer a product or service to fill it. But secondary ticket sellers, in the main, block consumers from purchasing the product they want to in order to force them to buy the same product for a vastly inflated sum. That isn't entrepreneurial spirit. It's shocking behaviour and it should be outlawed immediately.

Individuals and companies in the secondary market deliberately buy up huge numbers of tickets for popular shows with the sole intention of selling them on for massive profits.

Their 'industry' is tantamount to walking into the only bakery in a remote village, buying up all the bread, then setting up a portable stall outside selling it all at multiple times the original price, safe in the knowledge that the consumers can no longer walk into the bakery and purchase it themselves for the real price. Some might call that extortion. Sajid Javid calls these people 'classic entrepreneurs'.

Secondary ticket sellers restrict access to tickets on the primary market, and they do it unashamedly. They frequently advertise tickets at vastly inflated prices for shows which have not even gone on sale on the primary market, flaunting the fact that they plan to intentionally buy tickets that a genuine consumer could have bought, then effectively hold them to ransom.

For example, I recently saw two £60 tickets for a Prince concert, days before it was even due to go on sale, being offered on a resale website for more than £6,000 - more than 100 times face value.

Again, I must question - if it is illegal to do this with a football ticket or an Olympics ticket, why is it not illegal to do so with a concert ticket? Consumers deserve equal protection. I see no reason why a football fan should receive greater consumer protection than a music fan. What legal or moral justification can there possibly be for that? Are not all men to be considered equal in the eyes of the law? This should apply not only to the ticket buyers, whether for music events or football events, but also to the sellers.

In simple terms, the secondary market manufactures a shortage of tickets by deliberately buying them up in bulk from primary sellers, preventing legitimate consumers from buying them. They then offer a 'solution' to the shortage that they have deliberately manufactured, which is to offer the tickets which they have blocked genuine consumers from buying - at sometimes more than 100 times face value.

What is that, if not a protection racket?

I find it staggering that this behaviour is not already illegal and, in my opinion, it is vital that the law is changed swiftly to ensure that it is deemed illegal as soon as possible.

More galling than being pipped to the post in the primary sale by a ticket tout is the knowledge that elements of the live performance and ticketing industry frequently sell tickets straight through secondary agencies, bypassing the original sale completely and essentially masquerading as fans who have bought tickets in good faith but can no longer attend.

This amounts, in my opinion, to false advertising - particularly when the tickets are marketed as having a 'face value' in line with the original, primary sale, but in fact were never sold in that primary sale and were offered for the first time at vastly inflated prices.

It is not only consumers/fans who are disgusted by this abhorrent behaviour. There is growing anger among artists, whose fans are effectively blocked from attending concerts by ticket touts who restrict the flow of face value tickets and charge prices which normal consumers simply cannot afford.

The musician Prince was so sickened by the sale I mentioned earlier in my evidence that he cancelled the ticket sale and published a series of comments on Twitter criticising ticket touts. Rock group Metallica has tried repeatedly to devise ticket sale methods which block touts from ripping off their fans. However, touts always seem to find a way around them.

The only failsafe way to protect genuine consumers who wish to purchase tickets is to criminalise those who deliberately block them from buying on the primary market in order to make, in some cases, thousands of pounds profit for a single sale on the secondary market.

Sincerely,