

MOBILE BROWSERS AND CLOUD GAMING MARKET INVESTIGATION

Summary of hearing with Alphabet Inc (Google UK Limited) held on 24 July 2024

Introduction

1. The CMA explained the purpose of the hearing and recent updates to the market investigation, highlighting the publication of working papers and the deadlines for responses.

Google's Overview

2. Google explained that its business model incentivises it to invest in the open web and open-source browsers and engines. Google believes that developers, original equipment manufacturers and users benefit from this approach.
3. Google stated that it innovates and invests in Chrome to compete with other browsers and attract users. Google stated that it does not believe that openness and choice needs to sacrifice privacy and security for users and that there is a proportionate balance that can be struck between these objectives.
4. Google stated that Chrome's popularity is due to Google's investment in creating a browser that meets the needs of users and that users choose to use. Google submitted that it actively responds to competition from other browsers in order to evolve and ensure it is a strong competitor in the browser market.

The WebKit Restriction on iOS¹

5. In relation to security, Google stated that open-source systems, such as Android, are now viewed as being at least as secure as closed-source systems - though both have their merits and their detriments. Google submitted that open-source technology leads to greater transparency and iteration.
6. Google argued that it would be possible for multiple browsers using different browser engines to operate in a way that could manage security risks. Google referred to programs and policies that it applied within the Android ecosystem

¹ The requirement that all browsers on iOS use Apple's WebKit browser engine. See [Issues statement](#), paragraph 27(b).

to ensure a baseline security with all applications, not just browsers. Google stated that it applied the same mitigations and policies to browsers as other types of software.

7. Google explained that a lot of the Chromium-based browsers have their own security teams and Google has good relationships with them. Google stated that it also has formal mechanisms such as Security Notify, which allows the proactive communication of security fixes.

Browser Functionality

8. Google explained that its own browser, Chrome, generally operates without relying on private APIs connected to the Android operating system and most Android APIs are publicly available. Google noted there are some limited exceptions to this (for example features that make use of Google services, such as a feature for translating web pages). Google added that while it aims to make all its APIs publicly available, in some instances there are trade-offs with security and privacy risks and the resource cost involved.

In-app Browsing

9. Google explained that the in-app browsing technology available to developers of apps on Android provides a choice regarding how web content is displayed within an app, based on an app developer's preferred level of customisation. Google said that this allows developers to build a better app experience, which may result in users spending more time in the app.
10. Google stated that its 'Custom Tabs' implementation of in-app browsing enables a shared user experience between the browser and the in-app browsing activity. This is because the cookie settings, browsing history and autofill data are carried across from the browser to the Custom Tabs in-app browser. Google said that the shared state between the in-app browser and the browser provides a user experience benefit and acknowledged it may also provide advertising benefits.
11. Google said that its 'WebView' implementation of in-app browsing allows app developers to build a more customised app experience, or app developers can build their own bespoke in-app browser
12. Google stated that it strives to find the appropriate balance between security and privacy properties and functionality for in-app browsers on Android. Google explained that for both WebView and Custom Tabs implementations, the security properties of the underlying engine matter and do not change depending on whether the engine is rendering web content in an app or a browser. For WebView the content of the page is fully accessible by the app developer. However, in the Custom Tabs implementation the browser is

separate from the app, and the app developer only receives certain signals on user engagement.

13. Google said it has seen more in-app browsing taking place within apps over the past 5 years and considers this to be an [✂] within browsing overall.

14. Google explained that it uses limited data derived from in-app browsing, including in relation to [✂].

Choice Architecture

15. Google explained that Chrome is set as the default browser on roughly 20% of all mobile device shipments in the UK.

16. Google stated that switching browser defaults is easy on Android, that users know how to switch defaults, and that users can easily download third party browsers.

17. Google explained that since 2019, and as agreed with the European Commission following the *Android* decision,² Google has shown UK users a choice screen the first time they use the Play Store, which prompts them to install an additional browser. On Android, browsers can prompt users to set them as default.

18. Google stated that its agreements with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) which contain provisions regarding the pre-installation and placement of Chrome on Android devices support a competitive Android ecosystem and support OEMs in building competitive, high-quality devices. Google stated that its agreements with OEMs are optional, non-exclusive and on a device-by-device basis. Google added that OEMs are free to install other browsers on their devices.

19. Google submitted that the prompts that browsers (including Chrome) it may surface to users asking them whether they wish to switch their default browser are beneficial to browser competition. Google stated that its prompts did not inhibit user choice and that the CMA's research indicates that users find such prompts helpful.

20. Google stated it considers that pre-installation of browsers on a device does not preclude competition and that apps can be successful even if a competing app has been pre-installed.

² European Commission Case AT.40099, [Google Android](#) dated 18 July 2018.

21. Google stated that Chrome could be disabled by users on Android devices and this had a similar effect to a user deleting it, because after being disabled, Chrome would no longer be visible, and it would no longer collect data.