

Proposed decision report: SMS investigation into Google's mobile platform

About the Coalition for Online Data Empowerment

The Coalition for Online Data Empowerment (CODE) is the trade association for organisations that are helping people take control of their personal data online. We speak for more than 15 businesses across three continents, including Personal Information Management Services, Data Unions, SaaS providers and more.

CODE members enable better consumer outcomes with respect to personal data, including by assisting with access, understanding and insights, control and consent management, and sharing in its value. Although our members are unique and diverse, they are united by a shared set of firmly-held values regarding user consent, data ownership, security, transparency, and control.¹

CODE response

CODE is pleased to see that the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has provisionally found Google to have Strategic Market Status in the provision of its mobile platform. Our response grows out of our previous submission on the topic of mobile browsers and cloud gaming, and we reiterate that markets work best when individuals are empowered and free to make their own choices and are not unduly restricted in that ability.² Therefore, we are pleased to see that, according to the proposed decision report, the CMA is investigating various restrictions that Google imposes on its mobile platform, which prevent users from using alternative apps, app stores, and browsers, as well as the barriers to entry and expansion for alternative services.

8. Do you have any other views in relation to the assessment/evidence set out in the proposed decision?

While our main goal and focus is enabling user data portability, some of our members offer browser extensions to provide their services. CODE has previously submitted that the CMA should consider the restrictions imposed by Google regarding its Chrome app on Android, which does not allow for browser extensions.³ This is despite the fact that Google does allow third-party browsers on Android to ship extensions. However, its own Chrome app does not.

¹ <https://www.codepolicy.org/>

² See:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65faad7aa9b76001dfbdb4d/Code_issues_statement_response_23.02.2024.pdf

³ See:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65faad7aa9b76001dfbdb4d/Code_issues_statement_response_23.02.2024.pdf

As pointed out by the CMA in its proposed decision report, “Chrome and Blink have held a high and stable share of supply within Google’s Mobile Ecosystem over a significant period of time and that this may indicate Google faces limited constraint from alternative mobile browsers and browser engines”.⁴ The proposed decision report points out how Chrome is often pre-installed and prominently placed on Android-powered devices, so that from the user’s perspective, it is one piece of an integrated package of services.⁵ Chrome’s dominance means that although users can download different browsers and alternative browser engines, Chrome maintains a “79% share of supply on Android and faces limited competitive constraint from alternative browsers”.⁶ This means that Chrome blocking browser extensions on mobile is a significant barrier for businesses that rely on browser extensions, as they are likely unable to reach 40-50% of UK smartphone users who have an Android device.⁷ This is even more significant considering that 97.8% of people globally browse the internet via smartphone, as opposed to 58.3% accessing the internet on a desktop.⁸

Taken together, we hope that the CMA considers extending any potential conduct requirements to include mandating Chrome to allow browser extensions. We therefore support the proposed decision to designate Google’s mobile platform and encourage any conduct requirements that increase user choice, entry and expansion for alternative browsers and improve the conditions for businesses which rely on browser extensions.

Thank you for considering our response.

Kind regards,

[Redacted Signature]

Assistant Director of the Coalition for Online Data Empowerment

CODE

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/sms-investigation-into-googles-mobile-platform#proposed-decision>
See Proposed Decision, p. 142.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/sms-investigation-into-googles-mobile-platform#proposed-decision>
See Proposed Decision, p. 39.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/sms-investigation-into-googles-mobile-platform#proposed-decision>
See Proposed Decision, p.10.

⁷ According to the market share reported in the Proposed Decision, see p. 6.

⁸ [Devices used to access the internet Q3 2024| Statista](#)