



Ressort: Internet und Technik

## Online platforms in European Union

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Online platforms are key enablers of digital trade and for example e-commerce market in China represents a huge opportunity for millions of firms. Online commercial transactions are clearly on the rise and at the present time, more than one million EU enterprises trade through online platforms in order to reach their customers, and it is probable that around 60% of private consumption and 30% of public consumption

of goods and services related to the total digital economy are transacted via online intermediaries.

Online intermediation activities usually profit from important data-driven direct and indirect network effects which have a tendency to result in only a limited number of successful platforms per intermediated segment of the economy.

Data from Eurostat, the European Union's statistical office, confirm the increase in online purchases. The significant increase is shown in

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/E-commerce\\_statistics\\_for\\_individuals](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/E-commerce_statistics_for_individuals).

Although the average figure in Europe was 68% in 2017, in Italy only 29% of users buy online, often dissuaded by having to provide their credit card

and information and credentials.

This growing intermediation of transactions through online platforms, amalgamated with strong indirect network effects that can be fueled by data-driven advantages by the online platforms, lead to an increased dependence of businesses on online platforms as quasi "gatekeepers" to markets and consumers. The asymmetry between the relative market strength of a small number of leading online platforms – not necessarily dominant in the sense of competition law – is exacerbated by the inherently fragmented supply-side consisting of thousands of small merchants. To the extent these exist, a similar dynamic is not observed in relation to online platforms that intermediate business-to-business (B2B) relations, where

both of the business users and the online platform have a tendency to create large and sophisticated firms that can more promptly ensure well-balanced contractual relationships. It has been observed that this awareness of risks was one factor that held back the widespread adoption of B2B e-markets.

The providers of online intermediation services covered by the present initiative include in principle online e-commerce market places, online software application stores and online social media. These different types of online intermediation services all aim to facilitate, through the provision of information society services, the initiating of direct transactions between contractually bound business users and consumers,

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regardless of whether

the ultimate transactions are executed online or offline.

So as to facilitate such direct transactions, these online intermediation services all fundamentally permit an online presence of business users offering goods or services to consumers, without those business users being required to operate a standalone website. Along with allowing for an online presence of business users, online intermediation services frequently enable straightforward communications between individual business users and consumers through an embedded online communications interface. As regards online social media, it has been noted that certain providers of this category of online service providers actually incorporate

different online intermediation services within one and the same digital environment.

Business pages for example consent to consumers to find local businesses and service providers and are an important enabler of business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions. Such business pages are more and more combined with a direct booking or purchasing functionality, converting these services into online e-commerce market places.

While offering great potential in terms of efficient access to (cross-border) markets, European businesses cannot fully exploit the potential of the online platform economy due to a number of potentially harmful trading practices and a lack of effective compensation mechanisms in the Union.

At the same time, online service providers concerned tackle difficulties operating across the single market due to emerging fragmentation.

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