



31st European regional conference of the International Telecommunications Society

Reining in Digital Platforms? Challenging monopolies, promoting competition and developing regulatory regimes

20th –22nd June 2022, Gothenburg, Sweden

There are many benefits associated with ICT. The pandemic has vividly demonstrated the benefits of ICT, which enabled many activities to go online. Without widespread ICT availability and adoption, it would not have been possible for large parts of economies to work from home or for students to be educated online. And online shopping, which among other things has allowed groceries to be ordered remotely, has grown in popularity in many countries. Quite simply, without ICT the pandemic would have been very different experience.

But there are also problems. Many ICT markets are highly concentrated, with one large company dominating the market. These ‘winner takes all’ (or most) markets are driven by network effects and scale economies, where large numbers of users generate competitive advantages that are difficult for rivals to overturn. It is perhaps no surprise that four out of the five most valuable companies globally are technology based, with Apple and Microsoft currently being capitalised at over \$2 trillionaire apiece. The growth of Amazon, which has catapulted its founder, Jeff Bezos, to become the world’s richest man, overtaking another tech company founder in the process.

As tech companies have grown and increased in value, the resources available to them have multiplied. Many of the leading tech companies have engaged in frequently and ambitious M&A activity, acquiring through what is often described as a ‘Pac man’ strategy their rivals, actual or potential. Through these purchases tech companies have sought to entrench their positions, thereby strengthening their dominance in markets.

Over the years, tech companies have attracted considerable attention. Their tax arrangements have been criticised, especially in those countries where they have grown at the expense of local companies or where they are viewed as not contributing their ‘fair share’ of taxes. The new global framework, co-ordinated by the OECD, appears to be a step in the right direction when it comes to addressing the concerns of government, but it is too early to tell whether it address the concerns of others.

And their business models have come under intense scrutiny. The European Union has, in recent years, imposed fines on Alphabet due to its anti-competitive behaviour. While these fines amount to almost €10 billion, they are dwarfed by the financial resources available to Alphabet – this throws into doubt their effectiveness in changing’s Alphabet’s behaviour. In the UK, the initial enquiry by the Competition & Markets Authority into Facebook’s purchase of Giphy found that it could harm competition. The on-going in-depth review of the purchase could force Facebook to sell the company to someone else. In the United States, the House Judiciary Committee in 2020 suggested structural separation as one of the tools through which the anti-competitive nature of the big tech business models could be checked.

Data is at the heart of the business models of many big tech companies. Through collecting, combining and analysing data from multiple sources in unprecedented amounts, big tech companies have been able to develop innovative services that are popular with users. But increasingly individuals are concerned about the data they are providing and how it is being used, frustrated by their inability to control who has access to it and how it is used. Governments have sought to provide those who provide data with greater control over it, but differences exist between countries in how they treat data. But what else can governments do? Can data interoperability be implemented, thereby allowing users to switch between companies, or can greater control be given to data providers?

Governments are also developing policies to capture the benefits of the data based economy that is emerging. Industrial policies are emerging that seek to provide countries with the necessary digital infrastructure, thereby enhancing the country’s competitiveness. Some of these policies have focused on the physical infrastructure, such as fibre roll-out or cloud computing, while

Governments have also sought to develop policies to capture the benefits of the data based economy that is emerging. Industrial policies are emerging that seek to provide countries with the necessary digital infrastructure to enhance their competitiveness, with some initiatives focusing on the physical infrastructure while others have concentrated on data. In an increasingly global economy, are individual countries able to improve their cloud or data sovereignty? Are some policies better suited to enhancing a country’s competitiveness?

As big tech comes under greater scrutiny, a number of questions emerge. Should big tech companies be broken up? If so, how should they be broken up and which governments should take the lead? If they are not to be broken up, what should governments do instead? Does a series of new regulatory tools and approaches need to be developed, and then implemented in a co-ordinated (global) approach by governments? Or should governments and regulators concentrate on data, focusing on enhancing user privacy or providing them with greater control over their data.

We welcome submissions on ‘digital platforms’ in terms of the regulatory and competitive challenges that they pose, and how they may be addressed in a post-Covid world. In addition, we welcome submissions on a range of topics as outlined below:

- The current and lasting impact of Covid-19 on telecommunications networks, different industries and users

- The roll-out of 5G and the emergence of (innovative) business models
- The Internet of Things – verticals, innovative business models and revenue sources
- Digital divides - their changing nature and how they can be overcome
- Digital skills – identifying and then providing the skills needed to participate online, for individuals and businesses
- The use of ICT by marginalised groups
- Operator strategies – bundling, fixed-mobile and content-telecommunications convergence
- The role of consumers within telecommunications markets
- OTT – strategies and impact on the telecommunications sector
- The socio-economic impact of new technologies (e.g., IoT, AI, blockchain)
- Greening the ICT sector – strategies, regulation and the impact of technological innovation
- The role of ICT in addressing and achieving Sustainable Development Goals
- The scope and nature of universal service in telecommunication markets
- Innovative ways of providing telecommunications infrastructure in remote and rural areas
- Standards within telecommunication markets
- Equipment suppliers – supply chain dynamics, Open RAN and 5G

Submissions addressing any other subject relating to telecommunications technologies and markets are also welcome. Theoretical and empirical papers are welcome, as are methodologically qualitative and quantitative papers.

Important dates:

- 16th December 2021: Deadline for abstracts and panel session suggestions
- 17th January 2022: Notification of acceptance
- 16th May 2022: Early registration deadline
- 10th June 2022: Deadline for final papers
- 19th June 2022: Welcome reception
- 20th – 22nd June 2022: Conference

We hope to offer a face-to-face conference next year. Given the current uncertainties, a final decision will be made in early-2022.

Submission of abstracts:

Abstracts should be about 2 pages (800 to 1000 words) in length and contain the following information:

- Title of the abstract / panel session
- A clear statement of the research question
- Remarks on the methodology adopted in the paper
- Outline of (expected) results
- Bibliographical notes (up to 6 key references used in the paper)

Abstracts should be submitted via EasyChair. If you do not already have an account, you will need to create one. Existing accounts can be used to submit your abstract.

Please submit your abstract via:

<https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=its2022>

All abstracts will be subject to blind peer review.

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