



# Summary of the Seminar on “Information in the Digital Single Market”

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*Věra Jourová*

Commissioner for Justice, Consumers  
and Gender Equality



*Justice and Consumers  
Directorate General*



## Session on platforms

The first session of this Seminar was devoted to the role of online platforms in providing information to consumers and what should be done to ensure they provide consistent and effective consumer information. Platforms have indeed become gateways for companies wishing to trade online and reach consumers and determine what information consumers receive when they buy online.

### Participants identified the following points:

- There is a **difficulty to define** clearly what constitutes a platform. There are many different types, which are constantly evolving.
- There are instances where platforms' practices can **negatively impact the traders** they feature. For instance, large platforms may **impose their own T&Cs** which may not necessarily correspond to the legislation, or may make it difficult for the traders to comply with legislation (e.g. by limiting the information that traders can give to consumers). Similarly, some platforms may use the marketing materials from sellers for their own purposes or use different pictures, leading to issues of misleading advertising. For this reason participants stressed the need **to clarify the liability** of these intermediaries (including in the sharing economy, where platforms act as intermediaries between two consumers).
- There is a need to make sure that **information requirements** are **fit for the mobile commerce** era but also that platforms **provide accurate, clear and transparent information**. Concerns were also raised in relation to the **information gathered by platforms** which can be used to personalise the offer made available to the consumers, often without knowledge of the consumer.

### Participants made the following recommendations:

- Overall, it was recognized that at this moment the focus should not be on platform-specific legislation but rather on **a better enforcement of existing rules** (in the field of competition, consumer legislation and data protection) and especially to look into these platforms that do not comply with rules and prevent traders from being compliant.
- Platforms need to more **transparent**, for instance in relation to their business model or their coverage.
- There should also be further reflection as to **what kind and amount of information people should get** to be sufficiently informed and **how it should be done**, taking into account the different types of devices.

## Session on the Internet of things

The second session of the workshop looked at consumer information in the Internet of Things era. By 2020, it is indeed estimated that the number of connected devices will grow by 25 billion and will be embedded in every aspects of a consumer’s daily life.

### Participants identified the following points:

- In the IoT, the **current model for generating value is likely to change**, as consumers become co-creators and information from many sources together form the basis for new products and services.
- Participants raised a number of **concerns in relation to data security and privacy**, pointing for instance to uncertainty as to who is actually using the information collected by sensors and for which purpose. Some participants voiced fears that data collected via connected devices could be used to **profile consumers** and offer them personalized offers (for instance in the field of insurance) which could be unfair or discriminatory.
- Participants stressed that **consumers** were the ones **owning their own data**, not the platforms and IoT companies. It must be possible for consumers to control who uses the data, in particular when data is being passed on. However, it was also recognized that services providers sometimes also need to use this data to provide and improve the service.
- It was also highlighted that there is still, at this stage, uncertainty as to whether the benefits of IoT outweigh the concerns it raises. Some participants suggested that the IoT may look quite different than we expect today.
- There was a broad agreement among the participants that **consumer trust** will be the pre-requisite for the uptake of IoT.

### Participants made the following recommendations:

- **Consumers should remain in control of their data.** Privacy by design is particularly relevant in the context of IoT.
- Balance between **usability and security** needs to be found.
- Terms and conditions should be much clearer and meaningful as to what consumers give their consent to and what service they get. Participants acknowledged that this may be a challenge in light of the complexity of products in IoT.