Microsoft's market strategies and their impact on consumer choice in the global browser ecosystem

New analysis from The Browser Choice Alliance highlights the impact of Microsoft's anticompetitive practices in the browser market.

MICROSOFT IS RIGGING THE WEB BROWSER MARKET

For years, Microsoft has abused the power of its dominant Windows OS to rig the browser market in favor of its own product, Edge.

It employs three main categories of tactics to do this:

+ **Abuse of the close integration between Windows and Edge** to shape user behavior and restrict meaningful browser choice;
+ **Dark patterns and other manipulative tactics** to discourage the download, installation, and continued use of alternative browsers;
+ **Technical self-preferencing** that undermines interoperability and fragments the web ecosystem. This is through closed standards, proprietary protocols, discriminatory APIs and other tactics.

Taken together, these tactics have allowed Edge to artificially grow its market share.

The market share of Microsoft's browsers (Internet Explorer and Edge) rose in moments where Windows' market share exceeded 85% (from 2009 - April 2025).

This inflection suggests that at high levels of operating system dominance, browser adoption is not a function of product quality or user preference.

In 97% of the cases where Edge was the leading browser in a certain period, it retained that position in the following period (from 2009 - April 2025).

This is an exceptionally high persistence rate, and reflects the structural effects of Microsoft's tactics.

THE AI RACE HEIGHTENS THE INCENTIVES AND RISKS

The convergence of operating systems, browsers and AI capabilities increases the strategic importance of desktop browsers.

CCIA (2024) found that 74% of enterprise users expect their desktop usage to increase due to the adoption of AI tools. This is not just a matter of consumer preference — it reflects deeper structural dynamics involving computing power, input versatility, and cross-application interoperability.

This momentum will only increase the incentive for a dominant OS provider such as Microsoft to control user access points to AI (like browsers).

Microsoft abuses its tightly interconnected ecosystem - of desktop operating system (Windows), browser (Edge), and generative AI tools (Copilot, Bing Chat, GPT-4 via OpenAI) - to control the environment where most users access AI tools.

This means Microsoft is not just a participant in the AI race - it is shaping the conditions under which users access AI.

BROWSER CHOICE ALLIANCE

EXTRA IMPACT IN THE LATAM MARKET

Microsoft's practices are especially impactful in Latam, because of the region's reliance on foreign technologies and its strong tendency toward digital consumption.

The high market share of Windows OS in the region (e.g. Brazil at roughly 84%, considerably above the global average of 73.4) means a large proportion of users are exposed to the negative effects.

Edge browser has been able to increase its market share in the region accordingly. **Between 2020 and 2024, Edge's market share in the four countries, and across South America more broadly, doubled.**

These countries and the region posted annual growth rates for Edge — between 18% and 25% — that exceeded the global average growth rate for the browser's market share (15.5%)

Guillermo Cruz, consultant and author of the report:

"Microsoft's tactics are clearly designed to suppress competitive entry and consolidate its power in the web browser market. Over a number of years, it has created an effective closed-loop architecture in which user friction, behavioral biases, and systemic self-preferencing undermine real user choice. The race to AI will only heighten Microsoft's incentives to continue manipulative tactics, and so regulators must urgently intervene."

MICROSOFT'S MARKET STRATEGIES AND THEIR ADVERSE EFFECTS ON CONSUMER CHOICE IN THE GLOBAL BROWSER ECOSYSTEM

The report is based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative research. Sources include existing literature and publicly available information, coupled with insights from interviews with experts. Quantitative analysis was conducted using common academic techniques such as Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) econometric modelling, Markov state transition model and stochastic simulations.