

Antitrust laws could hit your favorite ‘dupes’

Jennifer Huddleston

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If you spend any time on social media platforms, you have probably encountered videos or other content promoting alternative “dupes” of popular or expensive products. Consumers have long looked for cheaper versions of popular products, and various retailers have taken information on these consumer trends and provided cheaper alternatives under in-house brands.

As many consumers worry about inflation and the possibility of a recession, it is unsurprising that “dupes” are a social media trend. However, some proposed changes to antitrust laws could make it harder for Amazon or other popular retailers to offer their own store brands — including some of the consumers’ favorite dupes.

In recent years, the word “dupe” has proliferated on social media, especially through niche influencers who share various hacks for shoppers on a budget. Their recommended products are similar to the original in looks or quality but come at a significantly lower cost and are more affordable to the typical consumer.

As of July 17, the tag #dupe has almost 5 billion views on TikTok and more than 300,000 posts on Instagram. Many of these dupes are generics, and some are more specifically store brands that are made particularly for one specific store, like Costco’s Kirkland brand or Amazon’s Amazon Basics.

Proposed changes to antitrust law would make it harder for Amazon (and possibly other retailers) to offer store-brand products. Proponents of these changes, like Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minnesota, have called to eliminate “self-preferencing,” claiming that leading technology companies like Amazon are unfairly harming smaller sellers by ripping off their products and then giving the store-brand alternatives favorable placement in search results. The result has been legislative proposals like the American Innovation and Choice Act that could eliminate choices like “dupes” for consumers.

The result would allow regulators to effectively tell the store where they must place the products and require that they give less favorable placement to the cheaper alternatives consumers often seek.

But this approach is not grounded in how retail and online marketplaces work and could eliminate many of consumers’ favorite products, especially those beloved dupes. Many of these

proposals would lead to retail platforms having to choose between eliminating the ability of others to sell through their platforms or eliminating their own products, including store brands. It would provide small businesses with fewer options of where and how to sell their products and consumers with fewer options. One place this would hit hardest is in the world of dupes.

While the current changes might only reach Amazon and its brands, the growth of online third-party marketplaces for stores like Target and Walmart means they might soon find themselves implicated in antitrust proposals against “self-preferencing.”

In this economy, many consumers are looking to keep up with trends and products they love via “dupes,” but changes to antitrust law could eliminate dupes as collateral damage and leave consumers with fewer choices and higher prices.

Jennifer Huddleston is technology policy research fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington.