

12-12-2022

Re-Purposing Digital Platform Ecosystems: A research agenda for addressing global challenges

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Recommended Citation

David, Rodreck, "Re-Purposing Digital Platform Ecosystems: A research agenda for addressing global challenges" (2022). *ICIS 2022 TREOs*. 7.
https://aisel.aisnet.org/treos_icis2022/7

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TREO

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Re-Purposing Digital Platform Ecosystems:

A research agenda for addressing global challenges

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Abstract

Background: Platform ecosystems are a recent business model and organizational form (Gawer, 2014) that have changed the traditional ‘pipeline’ business models and the organization of resources and services. Their greatest advantages are in cutting inefficiencies and hierarchical controls in the traditional model (Jacobides, Cennamo & Gawer, 2018). They link consumers of resources and services directly via a platform (technological intermediary) to producers and suppliers; and they leverage network effects to generate digital innovation. When they gain traction, platforms form ecosystems that attract millions to billions of consumers globally, making it possible for competition and innovation to flourish amongst producers and suppliers seeking to provide their services to such a large market.

Problem space: Despite the opportunities presented by platform ecosystems, the trend has been that this business model and form organizing is largely used to generate organizational profit by parent providers. This has meant that most consumer-facing platforms are largely monopolistic (Hovenkamp, 2020). A few parent providers of platforms can have massive control of a significant portion of national and even global services and resources (e.g., online commerce, social interactions, transportation, accommodation, media consumption, etc.). Consequently, they can also wield so much control over some of the most complex aspects of human life. This includes aspects that have traditionally been regulated through national institutions of government that often need to have a social contract with the general population. Thus, current forms of platform organizing complicate the approach to address challenges emerging from such form of organizing, such as over consumption & rampant consumerism, unsustainable sourcing, monopoly & antitrust behaviour, and the spread of mis-dis-information.

Research agenda: This new research programme aims to develop an alternative to how platforms are *designed* and oriented, to focus on utilizing the same principles that make platforms so successful (e.g., critical mass, network effects, collective action, co-sourcing, openness, and generative architecture, etc.) but re-purposing these principles to address major societal challenges – placing sustainability and good will as a critical condition from the very conception and design of platforms. The intention is to move platform ideas from monopolistic “winner-takes all” business models to a “winner benefits all” model, from monopoly to collective action, from single parent providers to large scale inter-organizational collaboration. This research programme will focus on two main areas: (i) *the environment and sustainability challenge - covering areas such as sustainable consumption of fashion and food, transportation, and accommodation, and (ii) the societal challenge - covering areas such as promotion of healthy social interactions, open communications, and addressing mis/dis information in online media.*

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