



Organization Studies

Special Issue Call for Papers

Platform Organizations and Societal Change

Guest Editors

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Motivation

Platforms are digital infrastructures that connect users in a flexible way, thereby intermediating between (at least) two user sides who can be individual and/or collective actors. Google, Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft are popular examples of *platform organizations* – organizations that operate one or more platforms. More and more management scholars consider platform organizations as a distinct and novel form of organizing (Benzell, Hersh and Van Alstyne, 2023; Kretschmer, Leiponen, Schilling, & Vasudeva, 2022; McIntyre, Srinivasan, Afuah, Gawer, & Kretschmer, 2021). They specified the distinctiveness of platform organizations in especially two ways.

One way pertains to the variety of features that constitute different *platform types* (Cusumano, Gawer, & Yoffie, 2019; Kornberger, Pflueger, & Mouritsen, 2017). Transaction platforms (also referred to as marketplaces), for instance, enable users to exchange or temporally access resources (e.g., Airbnb, eBay) and to contract services on the spot (e.g., Uber, TaskRabbit). Innovation platforms, especially operating systems like Apple's iOS, provide a modular infrastructure for collaborative innovation and are the fundament of large-scale ecosystems (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021; Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018). Information and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor) provide users access to information filtered and categorized according to their needs.

The second distinction of platform organizations is the modalities by which platform organizations *create value and govern users*. Scholars identified the relevance of algorithms

and interfaces in re-organizing membership and collective action rules (Benzell et al., 2024; Chen, Tong, Tang, & Han, 2022; Reischauer & Mair, 2018), showcasing how users are governed by standardizing interactions, controlling behaviour, and promoting evaluative practices (de Vaujany, Fomin, Haefliger, & Lyytinen, 2018; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Kornberger et al., 2017). Some platform organizations were even found to nurture organized immaturity – the erosion of the individual’s capacity for the public use of reason – to avoid user resistance and have a strong governance regime (Harracá, Castelló, & Gawer, 2023).

This emerging body of research yields rich explanations on what makes platform organizations a distinct and novel form of organizing and how they create value and govern users. What is far less understood is the *role of platform organizations in societal change*. Recent studies in three domains within management theory have yielded initial insights on this relationship.

One group of scholars examined the link between *institutional change and platform organizations* (Boon, Spruit, & Frenken, 2019; Frenken, Vaskelainen, Fünfschilling, & Piscicelli, 2020; Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Gegenhuber, Logue, Hinings, & Barrett, 2022; Mair & Reischauer, 2017; Uzunca, Rigtering, & Ozcan, 2018), providing first ideas of how platform organizations create, redefine, and weaken cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and practices that stabilize social behaviour (Scott, 2001). In this regard, platform organizations act as skilful cultural entrepreneurs that often enjoy high status amongst users and stakeholders (Sasaki, Ravasi, & Micelotta, 2019).

A second line of research has studied the relationship between *change of knowledge paradigms and platform organizations*. Organizational and information systems scholars alike have a longstanding interest in examining the organizing and disorganizing power of information technologies, and how they reframe knowledge, mediate affects, and carry specific rationalities (Hasselbladh & Kallinikos, 2000; Orlikowski, 2000). Some of these discourses have taken new currency in the world of platform organizations (Alaimo & Kallinikos, 2022; Beyes, Chun, Clarke, Flyverbom, & Holt, 2022; Kornberger et al., 2017). These studies point out that data infrastructures and various digital artifacts make visible the world in new ways, leading to the emergence of novel practices within and across organizational boundaries as well as increase the potential of disorganization (Alaimo, 2022; Power, 2022; Ratner & Plotnikof, 2021; Saifer & Dacin, 2021).

A third group of scholars has explored the *responses to platform organizations from established organizations and forms of organizing*, such as firms, public administrations, local and online communities, social movements, standard setting organizations, and interest groups. One of these responses is to operate an own digital platform with the objective to not lose ground against challenging platform organizations and to collaborate with others in new ways (Khanagha, Ansari, Paroutis, & Oviedo, 2022; Logue & Grimes, 2022). Others studies indicate that established organizations and forms of organizing may respond by taking a stance against the challengers (Cameron & Rahman, 2021; Ricart, Snihur, Carrasco-Farré, & Berrone, 2020; Gegenhuber, Schüßler, Reischauer, & Thäter, 2022). Likewise, local communities may organize protests to reduce platform offerings in their neighbourhood (e.g., local and virtual protests to reduce Airbnb offerings in tourist areas).

Despite these advances, our knowledge of the role of platform organizations in societal change remains fragmented. Specifically, we know too little about (1) the processes, practices, and rhetoric through which platform organizations shape and promote new knowledge paradigms, social orders, power regimes, and culture; (2) how, when, and with what effects platform organizations alter established organizations and forms of organizing; (3) the responses of established organizations and forms of organizing to platform organizations, and (4) the dynamics these responses set in motion.

Objectives and Scope

This special issue aims to generate robust organization theory that advances our understanding of the various ways through which platform organizations affect societal change and are shaped by other organizations, organizing, the organized, the disorganized, and the unsettled in and between economy, politics, and society. Put differently, we aim to explore platform organizations in their societal context and how they shape these contexts, as opposed to studies of platforms as a close system.

To meet this objective, we invite papers that draw upon and combine insights from organization and management theory, information systems, innovation and entrepreneurship research, strategic management, public and non-profit management, management history, science and technology studies, sociology, organizational behaviour, accounting, public policy and political science, philosophy, and critical management studies, inter alia. We are open to all levels of analysis, such as group, middle manager, organizational, ecosystem, industry, and field level. Papers that theorize at multiple levels of analysis are also welcome. Moreover, we embrace a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods, including mixed methods and novel approaches.

We envision the special issue to become a forum for papers that collectively bridge academic boundaries to push the frontiers of platform research by shifting the current debate from the features and (governance) strategies of platform organizations to the plural ways society and platform organizations complement and redefine each other. Aside from these aspired theoretical implications, we believe that our special issue also holds important implications for practice. While management scholars have provided guidance for the regulation of platform organizations (Cennamo, Kretschmer, Constantinides, Alaimo, & Santaló, 2023; Jacobides & Lianos, 2021; Kirchner & Schübler, 2020), more empirical research is needed so that practitioners can undertake more accurate assessments of the impact of platform organizations and how to organize and push platform organizations that drive positive social change.

Potential Research Topics

We below outline potential themes and questions that would meet the special issue's objective. These themes should be understood as starting points and inspirations. Submissions should respond to the overall quest to expand our understanding of platform organizations in their social context and the role of platform organizations in societal change.

- ***Drivers, forms, and (un)intended consequences of platform-driven societal change:*** We invite papers that examine patterns, practices, and processes through which platform organizations redefine institutions, culture, and knowledge paradigms and revisit the discourses that have developed around them. Exemplary questions include:
 - How do platform organizations create, interfere with, and weaken cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and practices?
 - What is the role of data and digital technologies in reframing processes and practices of platform organizing and disorganizing?
 - How and under which conditions do platform organizations alter cultural frames, knowledge paradigms, and institutional logics?
 - What is the role of social evaluations (e.g., stigma, legitimacy, identification), network embeddedness, and institutions in how platform organizations grow and decline?
 - What are the alternative discourses and frames championed by platform organizations?
 - How are self-portrayals of platform organizations (e.g., “too big to fail”, “technology firm”) put forward to convince others that they are a “remedy of all things” (Zilber & Goodman, 2021), and with what effects?

- How do platform organizations capitalize on crises, grand (digital) challenges (e.g., fake news, digital workforce), and field-configuring events?
 - What is the role of platforms in the maintenance of social orders?
 - How are platform organizations constructing, navigating, and shaping timing norms and evaluation practices?
 - What role do third parties, such as the media or standard-setting organizations, play in platform-driven societal change?
 - What new and alternative forms of organizing are emerging under the label of platform organizations?
 - What is the role of technology in defining the emergence of certain types or forms of platform organizations and/or social change initiatives?
 - How and under which conditions do platform organizations shape the emergence, evolution, convergence, and decline of fields and ecosystems?
 - What is the role of shared cognitions, social practices, values, and emotions in championing and/or inhibiting responses to platform organizations?
- ***Organizational responses to platform organizations and societal change:*** The rise of platform organizations prompts reactions by organized collective actors such as firms, public administrations, local and online communities, social movements, standard setting organizations, and interest groups. We seek papers that advance theory on how these established organizations and forms of organizing respond to platform organizations at multiple levels of analysis, and the consequences of these responses. For instance, open questions include:
 - Which responses can reduce potentially harmful impact of platform organizations?
 - Under which conditions do established organizations respond with what market responses (e.g., new offerings, geographical expansion) and/or nonmarket responses?
 - How applicable are established insights on responses of collective actors, such as the exit-voice-loyalty framework by Hirschman (1970), responses to uncertainty, or responses to institutional complexity)?
 - How and when do responses alter formal structures, processes, practices, and identities of the responding established organizations and forms of organizing?
 - What is the role of sociotechnical arrangements in shaping collective action within and/or in response to platform organizations?
 - What is the role of digital technologies and social structures in enabling responses?
 - What dilemmas and paradoxes do responses to platform organizations cause for whom and how are they navigated?
 - How and when do organizations coordinate, cooperate, and collaborate (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020) when responding, and how are these arrangements governed and routinized?
 - How are responses interrelated across hierarchical levels, professions, and communities of practice?
 - What unintended consequences do responses trigger for whom and how do these effected actors cope with them?

- ***Politics of platform organizations and power shifts***
 - How do data and digital technologies reconfigure the politics of platform organizations? How do they change notions of power and power dynamics in platform organizations?
 - How is the calculative power and evaluative practices (Kornberger et al., 2017) sustained and diminished?
 - How and under which conditions do firms, public administrations, and civil society organizations propose and impose alternatives to platform organizations?
 - How do platform organizations construct, redefine and/or destroy political discourses?
 - What nonmarket strategies do platform organizations pursue and why?
 - How do platform organizations interfere with existing notions of markets?
 - How do market mechanisms transform due to platforms and platform competition?
 - How do platform organizations interfere with entrenched power dynamics and governance configurations?
 - How do they coordinate and govern the interaction between actors in the private sector, public sector, and civil society, and with what effects?
 - How are platforms reacting to responses directed at them, and with what effects?
 - How are third parties and/or politics nudged to take actions in support of or against platform organizations?

Submitting Your Paper

Please submit your manuscript through the journal's online submission system (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/orgstudies>). You will need to create a user account if you do not already have one, and you must select the appropriate Special Issue at the "Manuscript Type" option. The Special Issue Editors handle all manuscripts by standard policies and procedures for Organization Studies; they expect authors to follow the journal's submission guidelines <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/OSS>). You can submit your manuscript for this Special Issue between February 15 and February 28, 2025. For administrative support and general queries, you may contact Sophia Tzagaraki, Managing Editor of Organization Studies, at sofficer@gmail.com.

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