

Digital Platforms and Business Models: Strategies, Challenges and Implications

Project summary and plan of activities

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The past decade has witnessed various industries being disrupted by digital platforms. Nowadays, platforms are ubiquitous and they reach almost every aspect of our life, such as food (e.g., Glovo), mobility (e.g., Uber), entertainment (e.g., Netflix), and travel (e.g., Airbnb). As successful as they may be, the growth and survival of these and other platform businesses largely depend on their ability to choose and implement a proper business model.

Taking the publishing industry as an example, platform strategies have implications for actors in the ecosystem around the platform, both on the demand and supply side. For actors on the supply-side such as publishers, digital platforms represent new complementary assets as they complement publishers' products online by increasing their distribution and commercialization opportunities. However, the platform's control of the monetization strategy and the fact that several actors compete on the supply side cause several value capture problems for actors such as publishers.

Empirically, the project aims at studying the Italian book publishing as a context (although related service industries could be also explored) to study the emergence and evolution of digital platform business models and ecosystems. The research will be carried by either using qualitative or quantitative methods, depending on data availability and sources.

Plan of activities and tasks of the fellow

In the last few years, book publishing has been radically reshaped by digital. As an example, while digital channels in 2015 in Italy accounted for 15% of total sales, in 2020 they represented 43% of sales. Parallel to the rise in prominence of the digital channel as a preferred means of consumption by readers (demand-side), traditional incumbent publishers (supply-side) have witnessed increasing competition from digital platforms such as Goodreads and Anobii. New technologies and AI, such as ChatGPT, represent another fundamental trend reshaping the book publishing industry in ways that are yet to be understood on both the supply- and demand-sides. From a digital platform perspective, while securing user base growth is key to becoming attractive on the supply-side, monetization strategies are equally important to sustain growth and expansion. Hence, it becomes both theoretically and empirically relevant to understand how monetization strategies co-evolve with the incumbents-platforms-users relationships.

By drawing on specific examples of digital platforms (e.g., Anobii, Goodreads) and their interactions with incumbent book publishers (e.g., Harper Collins, Mondadori), the research fellow will investigate the evolution of the platform-based ecosystem over time. As such, the research fellow will have the responsibility of collecting the archival and primary sources needed. He/she will work, among others, to recruit interviewees, maximize their participation rate throughout the project, as well as build a database of archival sources. He/she will collect, prepare, transform, and analyze the data together with the research team. An important aspect of the project will be also related to the write-up of the results and their dissemination at the most prestigious national and international conferences including AoM meetings, SMS conference, and SIMA conference. By the end

of the fellowship, the expected outcome is to produce a working paper ready for submission to a top journal (ABS 4/4*) and a report presenting the project's main findings to be disseminated within and beyond academia.

In summary, the ideal candidate will have the following characteristics:

- Background in the broader management field (including entrepreneurship, innovation, organization, or strategy), sociology and related fields [required]
- Excitement for the topics of digital platforms and business models [desirable]
- Advanced knowledge of English language [required] and good knowledge of Italian language [desirable]
- Being comfortable with the broader literature of the study's project supported by a promising research pipeline [optional]