Governance and Responsibilities in the Context of Digital Platforms

Three Essays on the Interplay between Platform Governance and the Political Role of the Corporation

Hussein Fadlallah

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sheds light on the critical research topic of *platform governance* defined broadly as the manner in which platform owners incentivize and influence the participation of autonomous users within their respective digital platforms. Platform governance – especially as it pertains to the exercise of voice – presents important challenges to traditional conceptions of the roles and responsibilities of private corporations. The dissertation comprises of three essays (chapters 2, 3, and 4) that collectively study (i) the political underpinnings of platform governance, (ii) the political roles and responsibilities that platform owners undertake within their respective platforms, and (iii) the intellectual structure that denotes extant research into the political role of the corporation. The first essay (chapter 2) reviews extant research into the political role of the corporation as a precursor for the study of platform governance. Using Web of Science to source a dataset of political articles published in management outlets and bibliometric techniques, I highlight the gaps and opportunities that denote extant research and propose a subsequent research agenda. The second essay (chapter 3) examines the limitations of underpowered conceptions of platform governance and proposes an alternative conception informed by political research within management. The study develops the arguments through invoking multiple literature strands coupled with three mini case studies that are leveraged for illustrative purposes. The third essay (chapter 4) examines the political mediator role of platforms owners through which they govern the engagement between platform communities and their respective political sphere. Using an inductive qualitative study of Twitter, I unpack the political practices and activities that denote platform governance. The practices are further contextualized by several factors that influence their adoption by platform owners. Collectively, the essays contribute to platform governance research through bringing fresh insights into extant understanding of the expansive roles and responsibilities of corporations in the digital age.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Over the last decade, digital platforms such as Amazon, Uber, and Facebook have emerged across multiple industries with widely acknowledged disruptive implications. Digital platforms can be broadly defined as groups of users (individuals, communities, corporations, developers, etc.) who organize around central digital infrastructures with computing and network capabilities (Adner & Kapoor, 2010; Cennamo, 2021; Kretschmer et al., 2020; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). The platform form of organizing is distinctive relative to traditional forms of organizing, in that platforms predominantly depend on the participation of autonomous users for value creation (Cennamo, 2021; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). With corporations that own digital platforms (hereafter, platform owners) notably dominating the list of most valuable corporations for the last several years, digital platforms have constituted an important avenue of management research.

While the different manifestations of digital platforms share commonalities as per the forementioned distinguishing characteristics, they also exhibit differences in terms of the forms of participation that they afford to their respective users and the subsequent value creation activities that these users undertake. Platforms such as Amazon's Marketplace facilitate the exchange of products and services between platform users as buyers and sellers. Platforms such as Apple's App Store foster innovation as developers leverage Apple's platform to innovate and develop applications that are subsequently offered to users. Platforms such as Meta's Instagram enable the exercise of voice[1] between platform users through the sharing and consumption of content,

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[1] Relative to the other forms of participation, the exercise of voice has been under researched. This can be attributed to the fact that the exercise of voice has been primarily associated with social media platforms, which have not been the focus of empirical studies, relative to others. With that said, the exercise of voice is present in most platforms and digital services. Moreover, it has been argued that the limited research into social media platforms is noteworthy considering their prevalence, even beyond the more established platforms (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram (Reuber & Fischer, 2022)).

information, and ideas. Digital platforms in practice – including the forementioned examples - typically afford to their users two or more of these forms of participation, albeit in varying degrees.

Boosted by digital communications, digital platforms have constituted a novel form of organizing in which the locus of value creation is decentralized, beyond hierarchical controls relative to employees or contractual obligations relative to suppliers, to autonomous users with no legal linkages and obligations to platform owners other than broadly defined terms of service (Gawer, 2014; Gillespie, 2018; Jacobides et al., 2018). In this context, the success of digital platforms, which exhibit very high failure rates (Hagiu, 2015), is attributed to the ability of platform owners to incentivize platform users to participate and influence their value creation activities accordingly (Kapoor, 2018). With the lack of hierarchical controls and contractual obligations, the systems and processes, what are put into place by platform owners to govern the participation of users, are critical for the viability and competitiveness of their respective platforms.

Research into the manner in which corporations govern value creation activities have for long been central to management research (e.g., Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1975). For example, in the context of strategic alliances, it has been argued that governance is key to understanding the subsequent success and failure of value creation between focal corporations and their respective partners (Faems et al., 2008). As such, extant researchers have produced an impressive body of research into alliance governance that detailed the interplay between structural (design and enforcement of contracts) and relational considerations between alliance partners (Madhok, 1995; Madhok & Tallman, 1998). However, such considerations are not fully applicable to the governance of digital platforms, where focal corporations (i.e., platform owners) do not have equivalent structural or relational associations with platform users.

To date, platform research has produced important insights that shed light on the decisions and tradeoffs that platform owners make as they govern the participation of platform users.

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Underlying extant research into platform governance however are the same conceptual underpinnings as with traditional conceptions of governance that emphasize economic efficiency and cost-benefit considerations, albeit with different mechanisms. I contend that platform governance is distinctive in kind to the point that it warrants further novel theorizing. This is especially accentuated as it pertains to the exercise of voice within platforms, which is treated hereafter as a boundary condition[2] relative to the other forms of participation. I define *platform governance* broadly as the manner in which platform owners utilize systems and processes to enable and influence the exercise of voice within digital platforms (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Zhang et al, 2020). In what follows, I highlight three distinctive challenges that platform governance poses for platform owners and extant theorizing, especially with the forementioned boundary condition.

First, platform owners face what Tajedin et al. (2019) refer to as the "unknown unknowns" problem in that they do not ex-ante know 1) who is going to participate in their respective platforms, nor do they know 2) the outcomes of the subsequent participation. This translates to challenges in designing the systems and processes that govern participation. I further argue that as it pertains to the exercise of voice, the *interaction* between the two facets of the "unknown unknowns" challenge further problematizes platform governance. Put plainly, governing the participation of unknown users as they exercise their voice and potentially reflect their experiences, ideologies, agendas, and beliefs within Facebook's Instagram platform is evidently more elusive than governing the participation of unknown users as they innovate within the relatively confined developer environment of Apple's App Store or as they exchange products within Amazon's marketplace.

Second, platform owners have been called upon to assume expansive responsibilities in

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[2] Throughout the dissertation, platform governance is discussed as it pertains to the exercise of voice (discursively and non-discursively sharing and consumption of content, opinions, news, discussions, etc.). The exercise of voice takes place in the context of most digital platforms, though it is more prevalent in social media platforms (e.g., reviews in Amazon's marketplace, comment sections in digital websites, blog entries in blogs, etc.).

accordance with their platform governance. Although historically portrayed as inherently democratizing "liberation technologies" (Tucker et al., 2017), the implications of the exercise of voice within digital platforms for the broader public sphere[3] has been critically reevaluated following multiple high-profile events (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). This in turn has recently reflected in policy makers, civil society organizations, and platform users increasingly invoking the responsibilities of platform owners in influencing the exercise of voice within their respective platforms, amidst calls to make platform owners democratically accountable (Suzor, 2019). In terms of management research this has reflected in calls for critically examining questions pertinent to the governance of digital technologies and platforms (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019)

Third, much of the theorizing in management research assumes the presence of established legal and institutional frameworks that inform the manner in which corporations govern value creation relative to employees (e.g., labor laws), suppliers (e.g., contract laws), and the market (e.g., property rights). For the most part, extant conceptions of platform governance have not relaxed this assumption; this is notable considering that digital platforms predominantly operate in grey regulatory areas by the virtue of the supranational Internet, in which private ordering is evident (Chenou & Radu, 2019; Etter et al., 2019; West, 2019). In this context, platform owners possess a great deal of discretion in terms of the governance systems and processes that they put in place; this has led platform owners to be depicted as "de facto governments" relative to their platforms (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 55). Beyond the metaphor, the expansive roles of platform owners need to be further unpacked since they depart from the roles attributed to private corporations.

Digitalization is emblematic of transitions in the macro-environment that have typically led to paradigm shifts in management research. Yet, in light of the forementioned challenges, the

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[3] The "public sphere" is broadly defined as the social space in which multiple perspectives and opinions are expressed, issues of concern to the public are discussed, and collective remedies are developed through communicative practices

treatment of platform governance has not fully reflected this shift despite important and insightful contributions. Extant conceptions have not acknowledged the notion that with the decisions that they make platform owners are increasingly influencing (and shaping) public discourse, collective decisions, and provisioning public and common goods in supranational contexts (Whelan et al., 2013). These roles and responsibilities essentially fall into the political turn associated with changing roles of private corporations relative to the political sphere (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer et al., 2016). I contend that the political[4] dimension of platform governance – which has been mostly lacking - presents both opportunities and challenges for our understanding of the digital platforms and the political role of the corporations, more broadly.

It should be noted that governance in management research has been predominantly invoked in relation to corporate governance (Benz & Frey, 2007; Daily et al., 2003). To date, most work on this research stream has focused on the systems and processes that would resolve conflicts of interest between senior managers and shareholders, in terms of the creation and distribution of economic value (Amis et al., 2020; Fenwick et al., 2019). Research on corporate governance has largely developed separately from governance questions focused on the broader relationships between a corporation and its multiple stakeholders taking part in value creation (Amis et al., 2020; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984). While acknowledging this limitation, the dissertation does not engage directly with the relationship between corporate governance and platform governance. The guiding assumption is however that platform owners are economic actors that seek to maximize their long-term self-interest (Whelan, 2012).

1.2   Relevant Literature

I contend that underlying platform governance are essentially political underpinnings. The political

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[4] Throughout the dissertation, there are references to the political underpinnings of platform governance and political roles and responsibilities of platform owners. The "political" follows the broad definition of influencing (and shaping) public discourse, collective decisions, and provisioning of public goods (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Scherer et al., 2014; Whelan et al., 2013).

dimension of platform governance and the corresponding political roles and responsibilities that platform owners undertake within their respective platforms are fundamental to their viability and competitiveness; not to mention that they have important perceived implications for the broader public sphere. As such, unpacking platform governance beyond arguments around economic efficiency and cost benefit considerations, as implied in extant research, invokes two broads sets of literature that inform the dissertation. First, research into digital platforms, which primarily motivates the dissertation. Second, research into politics in management.

Platform literature Platform governance is central to platform research due to its instrumentality to the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms. This has reflected in scholarly interest around the research topic that has increased steadily within management outlets. Researchers have attempted to unpack the concept and highlighted the decisions and challenges associated with the governance of the participation of platform users (Chen et al., 2021; Gorwa, 2019; O'Mahony & Karp, 2022; Wareham et al., 2014). That said, discussions around platform governance have been predominantly embedded within broader platform research, which comprises of three distinct perspectives (Gawer, 2014; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017).

In accordance with the economics perspective, platform governance revolves around instigating network effects, which furthers the value and attractiveness of platforms based on increased participation, through pricing and non-pricing mechanisms (Armstrong, 2006; Hagiu & Wright, 2015; Rochet & Tirole, 2006). In accordance with the technology management perspective, platform governance emphasizes mechanisms related to balancing the degrees of openness that manage the restrictions on participation for users (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Tiwana, 2008; Tiwana et al., 2010). The strategy perspective has assumed an integrative approach that builds upon the emphasis on network effects and platform openness as per the forementioned perspective, while accounting for competitive considerations (Gawer 2014; McIntyre & Srinivasan 2017).

The different perspectives examined issues related to platform governance and proposed several discipline-specific mechanisms. However, it has been rightly noted that platform dynamics are more complex than the capacity of a single perspective or discipline to encompass all considerations (Gawer, 2014). This realization has translated into calls for developing an integrated conceptualization of platforms, and by extension platform governance (Chen et al., 2022; De Reuver et al., 2018; Flyverbom et al., 2019). As such, studying platform governance through a political conceptual lens – in conjunction with the integrative strategy perspective – responds to these calls and promises to address the identified gaps in extant research that has not accounted for the distinctive challenges associated with governing the exercise of voice within digital platforms.

Politics in Management. Research into non-market strategies has examined the manner in which corporations engage and influence the political sphere (Baron, 1995; Hillman et al., 2004; Lawton et al., 2013). The assumption of this research stream denoted as Corporate Political Activity (CPA) is that private corporations are motivated exclusively by their economic interests and engage with political markets in order to proactively or reactively improve their competitive positioning through accessing and controlling political resources (Baysinger 1984; Hillman et al. 2004). Researchers in the CPA tradition have extensively studied the practices and activities that constitute the political role of the corporation. Notably, the theoretical foundations, context conditions and methods of CPA are internally consistent, resulting in a relatively homogeneous body of research that partially informs this dissertation (Hillman et al. 2004; Lawton et al. 2013; Scherer, 2018).

More recently, politics in management have been invoked in light of the expansive roles of (multinational) corporations in providing public goods and defining and enforcing public governance. Collectively denoted as Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR), this emergent body of research denotes the political responsibilities of multinational corporations in accordance with the transitions in the macro-environment associated with globalization, especially

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under the assumption that governments and public institutions are increasingly unwilling or unable to address gaps and voids in global governance. PCSR comprises of two research streams: corporate citizenship (Logsdon & Wood, 2002; Matten & Crane, 2005) and the political conceptions of social responsibility (Scherer & Palazzo 2007, 2011) both of which emphasize state-like roles of multinational corporations beyond the narrow scope of CPA and CSR (Carroll & Shabana 2010).

The dissertation primarily – though not exclusively – invokes the forementioned literatures that inform and substantiate the conceptual and theoretical arguments along two overarching research gaps. The primary research gap is addressed through leveraging research into politics within management in order to theorize for the political underpinnings of platform governance and the political roles and responsibilities that underly this conception of governance. That being said, the fragmented and multi-disciplinary nature of research into politics in management poses challenges and opportunities that need to be critically assessed (Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016). As such, a secondary research gap addressed through this dissertation relates to advancing extant understanding of the political role of the corporation – which has been traditionally deemed an illegitimate field of inquiry - through analyzing its intellectual structure, while reflecting on the evidently disruptive context of digital platforms.

1.3   Overview of the Dissertation

In the dissertation, I primarily shed light on the important research topic of platform governance by framing the subsequent governance systems (i.e., human moderators and algorithmic systems) and processes as manifestations of the entanglement between the economic and political spheres in an increasingly digitalized macro-environment (Figure 1.1 summarizes the overall focus and structure of the three essays in the dissertation). In particular, I study and contextualize the political roles and responsibilities of platform owners as they incentivize and influence the exercise of voice of autonomous users and communities within their respective platforms.

To systematically unpack platform governance and the manner in which platform owners mediate the exercise of voice, I position the political roles and responsibilities of platform owners within the broader research into politics in management. Towards this purpose, I take stock of extant research to question whether traditional political perspectives can readily accommodate for the expansive scope of platform governance or alternatively whether digitalization requires further theorizing that would further research into the political role of the corporation (essay 1). Then, I focus on the limitations of an apolitical approach to platform governance, as conceptualized in extant research and the corresponding added value of an alternative approach to governance through reflecting on recent perspectives on the political role of the corporation (essay 2). Moreover, with an aim to better understand the political role of platform owners, I argue that the practices undertaken by platform owners can be evidently distinguished from those detailed in extant research around the political role of the corporation. I examine not only the political practices of platform owners but also the contextual factors that influence the adopted platform governance (essay 3). The three essays leverage various data sources and are also motivated by the insights from recent academic and non-academic discussions around the governance of prominent digital platforms amid increasing criticisms and scrutiny.

As illustrated in Figure 1:1, the three essays can be segregated into two categories. The first category is that of essay 1 that conducts an exhaustive review of research into the political role of the corporation within management literature. In this regard, essay 1 serves two main purposes within the dissertation. Firstly, it targets a research gap in terms of taking stock of extant research in an otherwise highly fragmented body of research. This has implications in terms of furthering extant understanding of the manner in which politics have been invoked in relation to private corporations. Second, the dissertation is motivated by the notion that platform governance has political underpinnings. As such, essay 1 provides an overview of the research streams that in turn are

leveraged to unpack platform governance in essay 2 and essay 3. The second category illustrated in Figure 1:1 that includes essay 2 and essay 3 studies platform governance in a more specific manner. It leverages the findings of essay 1 towards this purpose. That said, it should be noted that essay 2 and essay 3 did not exclusively invoke concepts and perspectives identified in essay 1 (which restricts the literature review to management research). The essays have invoked political concepts and perspectives from political theory (e.g., feminist tradition, critical theory, agonistic pluralism, etc.). Moreover, the arguments and findings illustrated in essay 2 and essay 3 can also inform further research into the political role of the corporation (i.e., essay 1), more broadly.
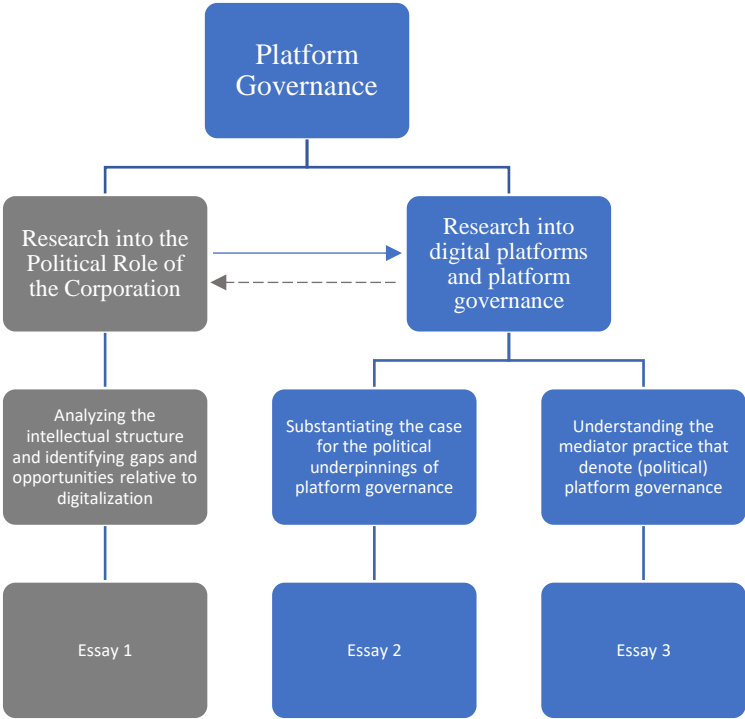
Figure 1:1 Structure of the Dissertation

1.3.1 Essay 1

In the first essay, I attempt to position the essentially political roles that platform owners undertake within broader research into politics in management. The starting point of this essay is the cautionary tale around over-representing a novel phenomenon that can be otherwise explained by

extant theories and perspectives (i.e., pouring old wine in new bottles). I ask the research question through which I *conduct a review that seeks to identify the intellectual underpinnings and scholarly conversations that have constituted research into the political role of the corporations.* I answer the research question by conducting an exhaustive review of the research into politics in management, what I refer to collectively in the essay as research into the political role of the corporation. I track the evolution of the fragmented body of research whose subject matter has been traditionally deemed illegitimate and the associational themes (i.e., conversations) that denote this evolution.

I highlight that the current state of research into the political role of the corporation exhibits what has been referred to in management literature as the separation thesis between the strategy on one hand and responsibility and ethics on the other hand (Freeman, 1994; Wicks, 1996). Moreover, I reflect on the implications of digitalization and the proliferation of digital platforms in which the expansive locus of value creation entails the participation of autonomous platform users. In tandem, the locus of responsibility associated with digital platform has similarly expanded to reflect the implications associated with the exercise of voice within platforms. I contend that the current state of research into the political role of the corporation is ill-equipped to tackle the context of digital platforms. Rather, the proposed research agenda argues for bridging the separation thesis as it pertains to the political role of the corporation. In this essay, I utilize bibliometric techniques (e.g., Johnson-Cramer et al., 2021) to conduct co-citation analysis on a comprehensive dataset of articles that invoke an agentic political role for private corporations within select management outlets.

1.3.2 Essay 2

In the second essay, I assert the inherent challenges in governing the exercise of voice of autonomous platform users through reflecting on the criticism and scrutiny that prominent platform owners have experienced in the past few years that have proved detrimental to their strategic positioning. I argue that these challenges can be partially attributed to a conceptual tension between

the apolitical conception of platform governance and the calls for platform owners to assume political responsibilities relative to the exercise of voice within their platforms. In line with this argument, the essay addresses the following questions in which I *critically examine the extant conception of platform openness; in doing so, I present a power-laden conception of platform governance relative to the exercise of voice within digital platforms*. I contend that the central construct of platform openness, as conceptualized in extant research, does not account for the power relations between platform users; openness may thus reproduce or even exacerbate issues of marginalization and underrepresentation due to power asymmetries that may resurface in digital contexts. I invoke Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) research streams to propose the power-laden construct of inclusion as an alternative approach to platform governance in digital platforms that are inherently and ontologically contested arenas of citizenship.

Using three mini-case studies based on unique datasets, I illustrate different manifestations of contest that take place within prominent digital platforms: Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook. I invoke key observations, which are presented descriptively in accordance with the research objectives of this essay, to highlight the implications for platform governance systems and processes that do not account for power relations between users in terms of the reproduction of privilege and marginalization. Furthermore, I present several paths to bridging the conceptual distance between the construct of openness and the proposed norm of inclusion, which has been central to recent theorizing around the political role of the corporation in accordance with the PCSR research stream. Moreover, this essay invokes critical political theory in the conceptual development.

1.3.3 Essay 3

In the third essay, I examine the political practices that underly platform governance and that mediate the engagement of platform users with their public sphere and ask the questions: *what are the practices pursued by platform owners, as political mediators, that govern the engagement*

between platform communities and public institutions? And what are the factors that influence the decision making of platform owners in choosing among the political practices? That is, if the question of 'why' platform owners assume political roles and responsibility is inherent to the platform form of organizing, the question of 'how' remains under researched. This omission is notable considering the centrality of platform governance is to the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms through incentivizing and influencing the participation of platform users and communities (Chen et al., 2022; Rochet & Tirole, 2003, 2006). The political practices and activities traditionally studied in extant research are the ones adopted by corporations as they engage directly with the political sphere to further their competitive advantage and financial performance. Alternatively, the political practices adopted by platform owners influence and mediate how other platform communities engage with their respective political sphere.

In this essay, I address the forementioned research questions through an inductive study of Twitter. The study tracks the evolution of Twitter's governance of its platform and identifies three sets of political mediator practices: intermediation, augmentation, and restriction. The latter two are notable since they deviate from the perception of platform owners as neutral intermediaries. Moreover, I identify contextual factors that influence the decision of platform owners to adopt different political mediator practices in different contexts. In examining the contextual factors that inform updates in platform governance, I contend that the discourse of political responsibility can be invoked by platform owners to legitimize their governance along with strategic and commercial considerations. Moreover, this study highlights that the separation of the economic and political domains is untenable in the study of the platform governance.

1.3.4 Alignment of Platform Ecosystem Considerations

The political underpinnings of platform governance and necessary confluence between business and politics are central to the dissertation; as such they are addressed extensively across the three essays.

With that said, I contend that a byproduct of the critical unpacking of platform governance is that it highlights the necessary alignment between the expansive locus of the value creation and the concurrent expansion of the locus of responsibility in the context of digital platforms. It has been argued that the separation thesis, which suggests that it is meaningful to separate the discourse of business from that of ethics and responsibility, is untenable for managers and researchers (Freeman, 1994; Noland & Phillips, 2010; Wicks, 1996). This is in particular evident in the context of platforms due to the forementioned political implications and spillovers of participation within platforms.

In essay 1, I highlight that the separation thesis has extended to research into the political role of the corporation, characterized by limited scholarly conversations and co-citation patterns between the respective research streams. By considering broader conceptual arguments as well as those necessitated by proliferation of digital platforms, I substantiate the case for bridging the separation accordingly. Essay 2 and essay 3 highlight that in practice platform owners have notably acknowledged the close alignment between value creation and political responsibilities relative to platform governance. In essay 2, I argue that the conception of platform governance should align with the conception of platforms as inherently and ontologically contested arenas of citizenship. As such, the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms hinges on platform governance accounting for broader responsibilities around marginalization and privilege, for example. With a focus on understanding the political mediator practices and activities of platform owners in essay 3, I highlight the propensity of Twitter to make consistent discursive references to the political responsibilities that it has assumed on a global scale. In the research findings, I highlight the negative implications of a mismatch between Twitter's platform governance and its presumed responsibilities.

Overall, the dissertation collectively points to digitalization as exemplary of the transitions in the macroenvironment that have traditionally led to paradigm shifts in management research. In particular, the three essays develop the idea of platform governance as entailing political roles and

responsibilities that are instrumental for the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms. The political underpinnings motivate a reexamination not only of platform governance but of the extant conceptualization of digital platforms, more broadly. The dissertation comprises of three essays that have a common theme of platform governance and examine its different manifestations and determinants. By virtue of the subject matter and the literature streams invoked, the dissertation contributes to the platform research by incorporating an under-researched political dimension in conjunction with other perspectives (i.e., economics, technology management, and strategic management) towards a more holistic understanding of platform governance. Moreover, the dissertation contributes to research into the political role of the corporation by highlighting the opportunities that digital platforms pose for theoretical and empirical development.

CHAPTER 2

THE INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE CORPORATION: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY

2.1 Abstract

Recent developments have made it increasingly difficult to ignore the entanglement between business and politics. Motivated by the advent of the digital age and the proliferation of digital platforms, this study takes a step backwards to analyze the intellectual structure that denotes research into politics in management, what we refer to collectively as the political role of the corporation. We conducted a bibliometric analysis of co-citations in the literature for the last four decades. Reporting these results, we examine the evolving structure of research into the political role of the corporation that has been historically deemed illegitimate. Driven by important attempts by researchers to legitimize an otherwise under researched subject matter, this structure is notable for how it invokes multi-disciplinary arguments, invites perspectives from adjacent domains in social sciences, and arrives at important insights. Reflecting on the connections and gaps in the bibliometric analysis, we advance a research agenda and argue that the proliferation of digital platforms presents gaps and opportunities for future research.

2.2 Introduction

"The right to freedom of opinion is of fundamental importance," Steffen Seibert, Merkel's chief spokesman, told reporters in Berlin. "Given that, the chancellor considers it problematic that the president's accounts have been permanently suspended." (Reuters, 11/01/21)

The decision of private corporations, based in the United States and rooted in its legal and institutional systems, to de-platform the President at a critical juncture of the Presidential Elections is notable. However, it is by no means singular in its political inclinations. Rather, the decision exemplifies the increasing political underpinnings of the governance decisions that corporations (hereafter, platform owners) undertake within their respective platforms. The past decade has witnessed the proliferation of digital platforms to the point of ubiquity. While mostly celebrated for

their disruptive potential, recent literature has called for critically examining the manner in which platform owners govern their platforms due to the aforementioned political implications (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019; Rifkin, 2014). The rising concerns bring to the fore questions around political roles of private corporations in an increasingly digitalized economy in which platform owners occupy privileged positions to impact civic liberties, rights of citizens, and global governance, more broadly.

Few topics have invoked more contrasting sentiments throughout management research over its history than what we refer to collectively as the political role of the corporation. The engagement of private corporations with the political sphere along with implications for democracy, the provisioning of public goods, and principles of political representation is a critically important avenue for research by virtue of its subject matter. The importance of the research topic, however, did not translate in scale within management research. For the longest period, the political role of the corporation has been characterized as "an intellectual backwater" (Baysinger, 1984, p. 248) whose subject matter is not worthy of serious study (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Barley (2007) argues that the silence of management literature "is particularly troubling (since) corporations, in particular, now wield inordinate political power" (p. 201). Hanlon (2008) similarly laments "the denial of politics" within management research that has not embraced the political dimension of corporate strategies as a legitimate field of inquiry (Matten, 2009; Scherer, 2018).

The research topic has been always approached with trepidation. From some of the field's earliest engagements (e.g., Aplin & Hegarty, 1980; Baysinger, 1984; Epstein, 1969), research into the political role of the corporation was motivated and legitimated by important transitions in the broader macro-environment in the United States. Early researchers asserted that the increasing political engagement of corporations in the United States is merely a by-product of increasing government oversight following the demise of the golden age of American Capitalism (Reich, 2007).

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Since then, research has evolved along multiple local and global political transitions and has found purchase in fields, such as strategy (e.g., Hillman et al., 2004); international business (e.g., Boddewyn & Brewer, 1994); organizational theory (e.g., Oliver & Holzinger, 2008); and social issues in management (e.g., Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). Though under-researched (Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Matten, 2009), management scholars have produced a diverse, albeit very fragmented, body of research.

In theorizing for the roles that platform owners undertake amid yet another transition in the broader macro-environment with the advent of the digital age, there is a risk as with any new phenomenon of pouring old wine in new bottles; a risk complicated by what most committed theorists have observed in that the research into political role of the corporation lacks coherence and demarcation that has often resulted in scholars "talking past each other" (Johnson-Cramer et al., 2021) due to tensions inherent in a multi-disciplinary research topic (Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Mellahi et al., 2016). As multiple research streams have invoked the political role of the corporation for different and sometimes specific purposes, recent transitions in the broader macro-environment present pressing questions that have fit squarely in the research agenda of management scholars (Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016). Towards addressing these questions, we conduct a review that seeks to identify the intellectual underpinnings and scholarly conversations that have constituted research into the political role of the corporation.

This review takes a step backwards to discern structure in the manifold threads of the political activities and strategies of corporations that have taken shape in the pages of management outlets. We report the results of a bibliometric analysis of the literature (e.g., Johnson-Cramer, 2021). We conducted a search for citations of "political" and discursive variants in management journals. Using the Web of Science database, we generated co-citation network maps to identify the associations between frequently cited pairs of references in those articles. Further, we examined the evolution of

these networks over four decades of development and identified conversations or *associational themes*, statistically generated clusters of co-citations that constitute a pattern of more or less close association between and among contributions. Among the many voices contributing to the domain, these clusters represent common understandings through which different political activities, strategies, and responsibilities have been studied.

Our aim in taking stock of the literature is not only to discover its underlying intellectual structure but also to discern the contributions of different disciplines and perspectives to extant research. In proposing a research agenda that builds upon the conversations or lack thereof, we reflect, in closing, on the challenges that the governance of digital platforms poses for our understanding of the political role of private corporations. Reading through critical accounts of the political roles and responsibilities of platform owners in non-academic circles reaffirms (e.g., Klein, 2007; Matten, 2009; Reich, 2007) the sentiment that management research has been less likely to deploy a political lens for transitions in the broader macro-environment (i.e., digitalization). We hope the observations in what follows will inspire an exciting discussion around the political role of the corporation, more generally, and the challenges inherent in the governance of digital platforms, which we address in closing.

2.3   Conceptual Background

Making sense of the political role of the corporation is a task complicated by the wide range of deployments of "politics" and "political" within management research and social sciences, more broadly. Management researchers have studied politics as a research topic both internal and external to the corporation**.** From a comparative standpoint, the interest in external agentic political behavior of the corporation (relative to internal corporate politics, CEO succession, strategic change, etc.) has been less prevalent in mainstream management (Carroll et al., 1990). This disparity has been attributed to a long-held perception that political activities by corporations are illegitimate and,

hence, not worthy of serious study (Baysinger, 1984; Matten, 2009; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). While the depoliticized view of the corporation has dominated management research, it did not preclude the emergence of notable contributions from institutional entrepreneurs who advocated for rich albeit sporadic research agendas over the past four decades.

To be sure, there have been several reviews and meta-theoretical pieces on business-government relations, corporate political activities, and non-market strategies, what we collectively refer to as the political role of the corporation. These reviews mark important junctures in the development of the different research streams that approached the subject matter from different conceptual angles. In an early review, Shaffer (1995) highlights the notable shift in the research into business-government relations towards an agentic approach through which corporations are increasingly responding to governmental and regulatory pressures. The review, however, laments the "fragmented disciplinary loyalties" that characterize extant research (p. 497) and lists the different disciplines traversed by extant research (political science, organization theory, economics, sociology, strategic management, etc.). Subsequent reviews have similarly detailed the far-ranging disciplines and research streams that inform discussions around corporate political activities and strategies but called for more focused research agendas (Hillman et al., 2004; Lawton et al., 2013; Lux et al., 2011). In particular, ongoing historical reflection has sought to build upon Hillman et al.'s influential research agenda (2004), which aggregates extant research under the label of Corporate Political Activity (CPA) and positions the research stream squarely within the frameworks of strategic management. More recent reviews shed light on research into the political role of the corporation beyond CPA. For example, Frynas and Stephens (2015) review political research stream that have emerged within social issues in management around questions of corporate responsibility. Their review surveys the theoretical underpinnings of the research stream, which has been increasingly referred to as Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR).

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These reviews share three features. First, they fulfill a taxonomic function, imposing top-down categories on extant research to lend order to apparent fragmentation. Hillman et al.'s (2004) framework that aligns with strategic management research agenda – antecedents, types, processes, and outcomes of corporate political activities and strategies – is influential. However, it is just one of many categorizing schemes proposed by several reviews of the literature. Second, most reviews reiterate the emphasis on associations and relationships between theoretical constructs to propose future research without revisiting the assumptions that underly these relationships. For example, Lux et al. (2011) review the relationship between the political activities and strategies that denote the CPA research stream and financial performance, in line with the research agenda of CPA. Third, most reviews tend to be additive, suggesting new insights on top of a particular research tradition or discipline stretching back to earlier discussions (e.g., Elms et al., 2011; Johnson-Cramer et al., 2021). This has been the case with both discipline-specific reviews of CPA and PCSR respectively.

If yet another review is to lend coherence to an evidently fragmented conversation, it demands a more robust theoretical apparatus to contextualize its insights. The target here is to go beyond reviewing isolated publications that share interest in a common research topic. Our starting point is the proclamation that we alluded to earlier, which is that the theoretical underpinnings of the political role of the corporations are inherently multi-disciplinary and are invoked differently among the various management disciplines. Dissatisfaction with those has led researchers to go back to political theory and political philosophy for a more robust theorization (Crane et al., 2008; Logsdon & Wood, 2002; Matten & Crane, 2005). Thus, there have been calls for practical efforts aimed at advancing a more useful and robust perspective around business-government relations, both in the normative sense of prescribing political engagement. Second, the external agentic engagements of the private corporations with the political sphere necessitate that variations in the macro-environment both from

a proximal and temporal standpoint reflects differently in different conceptions of the political role of the corporation both from descriptive and normative standpoints. The evolution of these conceptions needs to thus be captured by the literature review.

2.4   Research Methods

Bibliometric analysis has become a common tool for studying the intellectual structure of theories, fields, and research topics in management research, including on subjects relevant to business and society (e.g., Barnett et al., 2020; de Bakker et al., 2005; Nerur et al., 2016). Johnson-Cramer et al. (2021) frame bibliometric analysis and related techniques as part of what Ventresca and Mohr (2002) refer to as the "new archivalism" that is well suited to depict the shared intellectual and social underpinnings of academic research, among other social processes. Using these techniques, we sought to identify the most influential works and publication that denote the political role of the corporation and relatedly trace the evolution of the respective intellectual structure through tracking changes in co-citation patterns and associational themes over time.

To obtain a comprehensive dataset, we collected all articles with "political" and its different variants ("politics", "polity", "politically") either in their title, abstract, and keywords that were published in select management journals: *Academy of Management Review* (AMR), *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), and the *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ), Journal of Management Studies (JMS), Organization Science (OS), as well as in top "Social Issues in Management" (SIM) journals: *Journal of Business Ethics* (JBE), *Business Ethics Quarterly* (BEQ), and *Business & Society* (BAS). We chose these journals for several reasons. First, they enjoy strong reputations as leading journals within their respective domains. Second, the journals, collectively, publish a wide range of contributions and conversations within management research; these include social science-based (conceptual and empirical) and ethics-based research. Given the broad range of applications of the deployment of politics in academic research, it is important to capture the full range of approaches.

Third, from a practical standpoint, the entries for these journals and their respective details are accessible for bibliometric analysis and produced networks that are tractable for visual analysis.

Of course, invoking the engagement between corporations and the political sphere has received attention far beyond this narrow set of journals considering the salience of the term (i.e., political). Even were we to have increased the list of journals tenfold, we would not have captured the breadth of possibilities and range of different uses of the term. Given the interpretive nature of the study, the goal of data collection, however, is not statistical but theoretical sampling (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our intent was to achieve a meaningful representation of how those scholars most closely associated with this research subject, themselves, structure the topic. To be sure, this requires data sampled from meaningfully different outlets, addressed to qualitatively different scholarly audiences, and published in the different forms (conceptual, empirical, etc.) through which research was advanced during the phase. In sum, we are confident that the articles collected and analyzed are meaningfully representative, though clearly not exhaustive. We then take inventory of the literature around the political role of the corporation and suggest future avenues for research.

Moreover, since we sought to understand the process of research evolution, through changes over time, we divided the study into multiple periods. Relying on historical reflections by respected scholars in the field (e.g., Baysinger, 1984; Hillman et al., 2004; Matten, 2009; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer et al., 2016), we identified periods based on milestones that accompanied the four decades. *Phase One (1980 -2004)* extends from early management research, more generally, and reflects changes in the political environment of the United States, the establishment of strategic management, and the emergence of Corporate Political Activity (CPA) as a formalized research stream. *Phase Two (2005 – 2016)* witnessed several influential publications building upon those earlier works. It involved keywords such as "corporate citizenship" exploding within management research as highlighted by Waddock (2008). *Phase Three (2017 – 2021)* witnessed the further

formalization of the Political Corporate Social Responsibility research stream under the label of PCSR 2.0. While periodization is necessarily imprecise, these milestones represent a set of socially meaningful events which specify community membership and define the terms of its conversation.

2.4.1 Data Collection

We collected data using the Web of Science database (a product of Clarivate Analytics *Web of Knowledge* database), which includes the Science Citation Index-Expanded (SCI-Expanded), the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), which allowed the retrieval of articles cased on the constraints discussed above (i.e., different variations of "political" in the title, abstract, Web of Science keywords, and keywords of the articles).

Instrumental to our data collection is the boundary condition necessitated by the broad deployments of the term "political" within management research. Among these deployments is the conception of corporations as polities— collectives where groups with diverse views pursue various goals within the constraints of formal and informal systems of authority—informed foundational contributions during the emergence of modern organization theory. Our initial dataset featured several organization theorists, including Selznick (1949, 1957), Roy (1952), Gouldner (1954), Dalton (1959), March (Cyert & March, 1963; March, 1962), Zald (Zald & Denton, 1963), and Crozier (1964) who were concerned with understanding how power structures and political processes in organizations lead to various outcomes. The multiple manifestations of internal politics have been more prevalent within management research relative to the agentic engagement of corporations with the political sphere. As we are predominantly interested in the latter, our dataset that resulted in 1315 articles was manually inspected in accordance with this boundary condition.

The manual inspection of the dataset filtered articles in which corporations undertake roles, activities, and strategies to influence the political sphere. This resulted in 381 articles. For the intents and purposes of this study, we limit the analysis to these articles in which the political engagement

of corporations with the political sphere is theorized or studied. The resulting dataset included 18520 cited publications in 381 political articles. To track the evolution of the dataset along multiple stages of development and adaptation to broader transitions in the macro-environment, we break it down according to the phases identified in Table 2:1.

Academic Journal	Number of Articles
Journal of Business Ethics	165
Business & Society	68
Business Ethics Quarterly	46
Strategic Management Journal	29
Academy of Management Review	25
Journal of Management Studies	20
Academy of Management Journal	12
Organization Science	11
Administrative Science Quarterly	4
Academy of Management Annals	1

Table 2:1 Political Articles based on Publication Source

2.4.2 Data Analysis

Analysis of bibliometric data typically occurs in two separate stages (e.g., White & McCain, 1998; Ramos-Rodriguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004; Nerur et al., 2008). In this study, the preliminary stage comprised a citation analysis to identify the publications that have been cited most frequently by the articles within our dataset. The purpose of this step is to highlight influential ideas in the development of specific phases of research into corporations and the political sphere. In the second step, co-citation analysis identifies dyadic (and subsequently higher-order network) relationships between and among cited references. To illustrate this form of analysis, a co-citation occurs between two contributions, say Matten and Crane (2005) and Scherer and Palazzo (2007), when another article, published subsequently, includes both Matten and Crane (2005) and Scherer and Palazzo (2007) in its list of references. Across the datasets, the number of cited references of Matten and Crane (2005) that match the cited references of Scherer and Palazzo (2007) gives the frequency of co-citations between the two works and are presented graphically in our network maps. At this

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aggregate level, one begins to identify associational themes, or clusters of articles that are frequently cited together. These cultural-cognitive structures are interesting both in their own right and for the ways that they evolve over time.

To analyze patterns in the co-citation networks, we used VOSviewer, a bibliographic mapping software program that creates citation lists based on text mining of the cited references of the articles within a dataset. VOSviewer has been increasingly used in research (e.g., Barnett et al., 2020; Johnson-Cramer et al., 2021) and provides functionality through which it generates co-citation network maps based on text mining of the cited references of the respective articles. Co-citation network maps enable the visualization of the intellectual structure of a discipline. These maps also allow us to see changes in how different publications have been invoked over time (Ding et al., 2001; Linnenluecke et al., 2020).

Network maps communicate three important features for our purposes: the size of the nodes, the links between the nodes, and the color-coded clusters:

- The *nodes* represent the publications that have been cited by the articles in our datasets. For simplicity's sake, nodes are labelled by their first author. (Full references for all nodes can be found in the Appendix.) In the co-citation network maps, the *size* of the nodes is proportional to their Total Link Strength. For a given node (i.e., cited publication), the Total Link Strength indicates the total number of co-citation relationships that a node has with other nodes. Node size is also correlated with the number of times publications are cited within the dataset.

- A co-citation *link* is a tie between two publications that are both cited by the same article in our dataset. The strongest co-citation links between cited publications are represented by lines. The distance between two nodes in the network maps approximately indicates the relatedness of the cited publications in terms of co-citation links. In general, the closer nodes are located to each other, the stronger their relatedness.

- Finally, nodes are *clustered* through an algorithm programmed and applied through VOSviewer on the articles within our dataset. By default, VOSviewer applies a clustering algorithm to assign cited references to clusters, which are comprised of closely related nodes. Each node in a network is assigned to exactly one cluster. The number of clusters is determined by a resolution parameter. The higher the value of this parameter, the larger the number of clusters. In the visualization of a bibliometric network, VOSviewer uses colors to indicate the cluster to which a node has been assigned. The clustering technique used by VOSviewer is discussed by Waltman et al. (2010). It relies on a smart local moving algorithm to solve the relevant optimization problem (Waltman & Van Eck, 2013).

To continue our illustration from above, consider again Scherer and Palazzo (2007). With its high number of citations in our dataset, the node representing the AMR publication is among the largest nodes in the network map. The lines between Scherer and Palazzo (2007) and Matten and Crane (2005) as well as their proximity correspond to the frequency with which articles in our dataset cite both publications in conjunction. Finally, in each map, these two prominent citations are colored according to their membership in the clusters, which are groupings of nodes categorized in a non-overlapping manner in addition to the link strength of the node. This is to say that these citations are more closely associated with similarly colored nodes (i.e., contributions in the same cluster) and less closely associated with differently colored nodes (i.e., contributions in distant clusters). It is very possible that these two citations will appear in different colors (clusters) or in relationship to each other across the different time phases, as the stakeholder theorists citing them ascribe different meanings to them and, thus, associate them with different themes.

Using these co-citation maps and the results of the citation analysis, we conducted iterative analysis to identify key similarities, patterns, and differences in the resulting maps. It should be noted that these iterations involved experimenting with different variations of data analysis in terms of

producing alternative maps based on different temporal definitions of the three phases as well as parameters and configurations. The iterations substantiated our interpretation of co-citation maps and form the basis for the next section.

2.5 Research Findings

In this section, we describe the results of the analysis, starting with a description of how the co-citation maps of research into the political role of corporations evolve over the three phases.

2.5.1 Bibliometric Analysis: Phase One (1980 - 2004)

The first network map (Figure 2:1) isolates articles with five or more citations in the first phase. This relatively low-density network foreshadows nascent patterns that emerge in later phases. We see, for example, the early prominence of scholars who go on to define and anchor associational themes in future periods (e.g., Hillman, Keim, Schuler, Baysinger). Notable within this representation is the clustering of political publications organic to management research. The conversations around the political role of the corporation during this phase are prefaced and positioned as attempts to keep pace with the evolving landscape in the United States in which business-government relations had undergone fundamental changes. In particular, the expanded regulatory oversight, the reorganization of Congress, changes in election laws, and the increase in the size and number of interest groups collectively increased the political presence and engagement of corporations within Washington D.C. (Aplin & Hegarty, 1980). Baysinger (1984) assumes a central position within the red cluster and the network map, more generally. The Academy of Management Review paper is one of the earliest to systematically position business political activities as part of the "environment management family" for corporations. Specific activities within the family include domain selection (Child, 1972; Thompson, 1967); establishing external linkages (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978); developing internal coping structures (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967); and domain management/domain defense (Mahon & Murray, 1981; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Further, Baysinger (1984) provides a

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typology of business political activities that details corporate attempts to influence the regulatory, legislative, and electoral processes through constituency building, political action committee (PAC) contributions, advocacy advertising, (grassroots) lobbying, and coalition building. The expansive list of activities was subject to further analysis by influential publications that were featured in the network map. Business political activity was studied in terms of its antecedents (Lenway & Rehbein, 1991), contingencies (Keim & Baysinger, 1988), and effectiveness (Keim & Zeithaml, 1986) in response to the changes within the United States.

While the two associational themes (clusters colored red and green) remain only loosely defined, they hint at an emerging body of research. The first theme in particular includes foundational works organic to management in which researchers attempt to advance the study of the political role of corporation through asserting the resources that major United States corporations have been devoting to the coping with and managing social, political, and regulatory issues (Baysinger, Keim, & Zeithaml, 1983; Baysinger & Woodman, 1982) on one hand, and through leveraging established perspectives within management (e.g., resource dependence theory, agency theory, institutional theory, organizational capabilities) to make sense of business political activities. Second, the associational theme represented by the green cluster represents some of the seminal works that were invoked as researchers tackled the political role of the corporation. This pattern of emergence is not unusual. After all, the foundational works (some of which fell short of the minimum citation threshold) had a much longer and well-established history in the field. Emerging logics rarely replace existing ones fully or instantly; instead, they emerge in relation to them, prompt a renegotiation of identities, and coexist in a sort of ideological tension and symbiosis (Thornton et al., 2012). Finally, the position of Freeman (1984) is notable considering its disconnection from the other works on the network map, as illustrated in Figure 2:1.
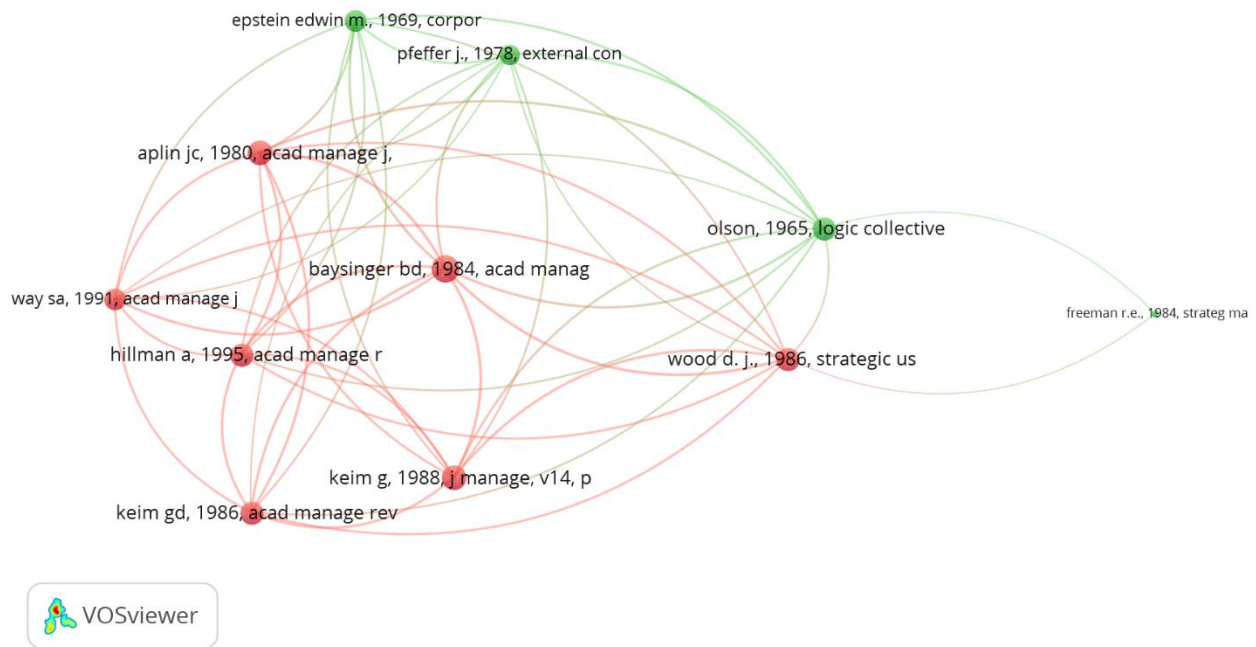
Figure 2:1 Network Map of Co-citations in Phase One (minimum citations = 5)

Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Aplin & Hegarty (1980)	Epstein (1969)
Baysinger (1984)	Freeman (1984)
Hillman & Keim (1995)	Olson (1965)
Keim & Baysinger (1988)	Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)
Keim & Zeithaml (1986)	
Lenway & Rehbein (1991)	
Wood (1986)	

Table 2:2 Cluster Composition for Phase One

Freeman's seminal work argues that expanding the obligations of corporations to encompass stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, employees, suppliers, buyers, etc.) is integral to their strategies. Though stakeholder theory is conceptually distinct from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Freeman's position in the co-citation map in Figure 2:1 visually highlights a limited attention to corporate responsibility despite discussions around the engagement of corporations with critical democratic and electoral processes in the United States. While Epstein (1980) calls for studying

whether corporations pose "a real or chimerical, a present or future, an active or passive threat to American democracy" (Epstein, 1980, as cited in Keim & Baysinger, 1988), this sentiment is not expanded upon. Rather, influential publications such as Aplin and Hegarty (1980) have lamented America's tradition of "political pluralism" that aggravates the ability of corporations to operate with no oversight by permitting all segments of society to voice their opinions (Parsons, 1969). As such, this legitimizes the engagement of corporations with the political sphere irrespective of potential implications.

2.5.2   Bibliometric Analysis: Phase Two (2005 – 2016)

In the second phase, we witness the rising influence of a number of publications published in the Academy of Management Review journal (e.g., Bonardi et al., 2005; Hillman & Hitt, 1999; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten & Moon, 2008; Mitchell et al., 1997; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). These join Hillman and Keim (1995) and Keim and Zeithaml (1986) in central positions in their respective clusters as illustrated in Figure 2:2. The impact of AMR's conceptual and theoretical research on the trajectory of the scholarly discussion around the political role of the corporation is evident. Though the influence of AMR as a venue for conceptual development was already present in the first phase, its role in second phase appears to suggest that the underlying causal arguments being advanced around the political role of the corporation were assuming a level of rigor and clarity to reach the most selective outlets for conceptual work in the field with increasing frequency. Essentially, theorists publishing in the second phase appear to ascribe a growing conceptual ingenuity. We consider the following associational themes as illustrated in Figure 2:2.
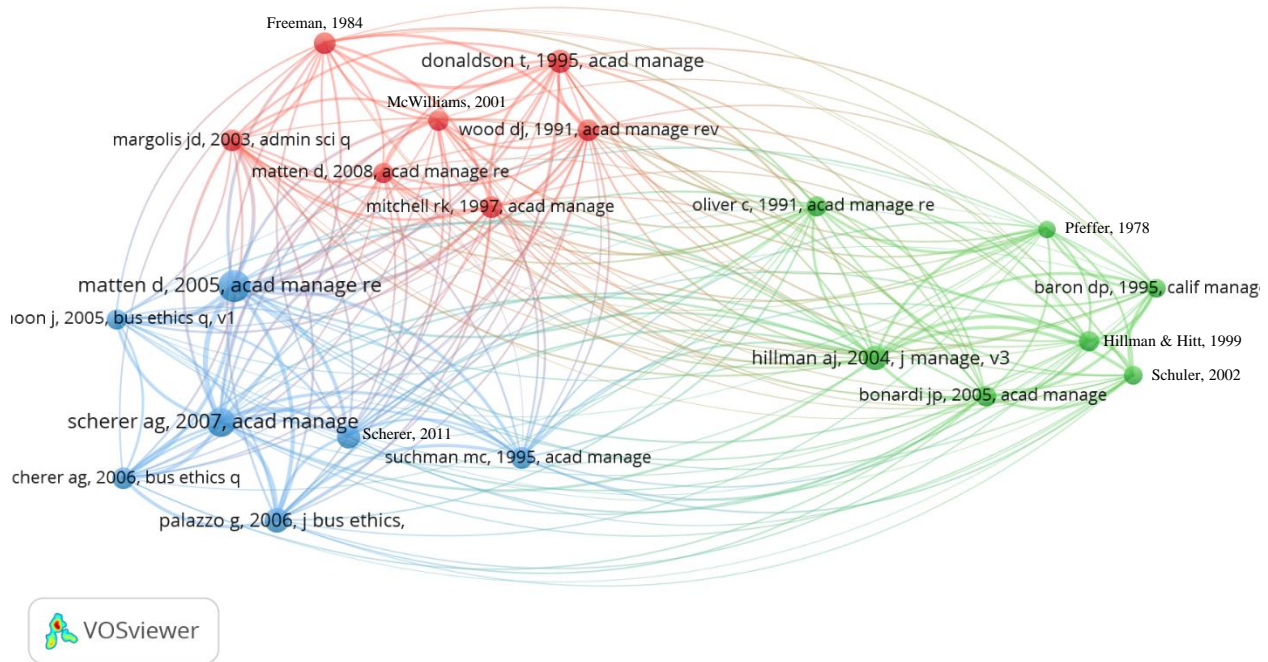
Figure 2:2 Network Map of Co-citations in Phase Two (minimum citations = 25)

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
Baron (1995)	Donaldson & Preston (1995)	Matten & Crane (2005)
Bonardi et al. (2005)	Freeman (1984)	Moon et al. (2005)
Hillman & Hitt (1999)	Margolis & Walsh (2003)	Palazzo & Scherer (2006)
Hillman et al. (2004)	Matten & Moon (2008)	Scherer & Palazzo (2007)
Oliver (1991)	McWilliams & Siegel (2001)	Scherer & Palazzo (2011)
Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)	Mitchell et al. (1997)	Scherer et al., (2006)
Schuler et al. (2002)	Wood (1991)	Suchman (1995)

Table 2:3 Cluster Composition for Phase Two

Theme 1: The Formalization of CPA within Strategy. This associational theme extends from the emergent body of work from the previous phase. The main publications that constitute this theme frame the political dimension as integral to strategy. In response to the relative silence of strategic management frameworks of competitive advantage and financial performance with regards to political resources (e.g., Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993), these publications collectively call for the

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integration of both market and non-market (including the political) components of strategy. The publications that constitute this theme invoke concepts central to mainstream strategic management during this time frame such as the Resource Based View (RBV).

In their modelling of corporate political activities, Boddewyn and Brewer (1994) extend the premise of RBV by introducing a political dimension that has been largely missing. The authors argue that while competitive advantage can be achieved through control of distinctive (economic) resources in (factor) markets, corporations need to similarly attend to the distinctive political resources. Bonardi et al. (2005) further theorize for 'political markets' where demanders and suppliers interact and transact to access political resources. The authors draw parallels between industries and political markets in accordance with Porter (1980) to unpack the conditions that make political markets more or less attractive for corporations. Underlying the publications that constitute this theme is the notion that corporations should invest in both economic and political resources to effectively compete in economic and political markets (Baron, 1995).

At the center of this associational theme is the influential Hillman, Keim, and Schuler (2004) publication that overtakes Baysinger (1984) in terms of centrality during this phase. Hillman et al. (2004) aggregate scholarly work around corporate political activities and strategies; the authors subsequently present the case for an agenda that substantiates the alignment between the CPA research stream and strategic management research. The authors present a top-down taxonomy of extant research that addresses the antecedents of corporate political activities, types of corporate political activities and the practices that denote CPA. The latter have been notably theorized by the seminal Hillman and Hitt (1999). In a departure from previous reviews, Hillman et al. (2004) make explicit the case for competitive advantage and financial performance being the desired outcomes and dependent variables for corporate political activities and strategies.

It should be noted that this associational theme also contains co-citations with foundational

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wop (e.g., Oliver, 1991; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Although barely missing the minimum citations threshold adopted in our bibliometric analysis for this phase, the publications that theorize for the resource-based view and industry analysis (e.g., Barney, 1991; Porter, 1980) have been frequently co-cited along with the other publications within this associational theme as highlighted earlier. This is not surprising considering the attempts by CPA researchers to formalize the research stream and align its research agenda with strategic management research. That being said, the reason these publications have not been featured in the respective network map of the second phase is due to a technicality in the visual representation parameters.

Theme 2: Addressing the (missing) question of corporate responsibility. During this phase, a notable portion of papers in our dataset grappled with issues of responsibilities and obligations vis-à-vis corporate political activities and strategies. As such, this associational theme has coalesced around publications, which for the most part, were missing in the co-citation patterns in the previous phase. The evolving network map prominently feature Stakeholder Theory publications. Whereas the conversations described in the first phase were concerned with corporate political activities as instruments for corporations to defend, manage, and in cases pre-empt the electoral, legislative, and regulatory processes in the United States, questions around the ethical implications of these activities were downplayed. This can be visually asserted by the peripheral position of Freeman (1984) in the previous phase. During this phase, the lonesome node notably transformed into a heavily invoked cluster of co-citations. It is evident that that this associational theme was invoked within our dataset to address a gap around political responsibility.

This theme features publications such as Mitchell et al. (1997) in which the authors invoke the constructs of legitimacy and power to illustrate how managers and corporations acknowledge and prioritize stakeholder interests and demands. The seminal publication builds upon the developments within Stakeholder Theory that describe and prescribe the scope of corporate

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responsibility and obligations in terms of 1) identification of the stakeholders (i.e., suppliers, employees, buyers, local communities. Etc.) and the 2) balancing of the interests and demands of the respective stakeholders. To be sure, the featured publications (i.e., Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997) are not political. Rather, the denoted publications align strategic interests with stakeholder legitimacy and obligations (Freeman, 1984; Phillips, 1997, 2003). As such, the papers within our dataset invoke Stakeholder Theory during this phase towards unpacking the relationship between corporations and governments, public institutions, and (impacted) local communities.

Relatedly, the papers in our dataset that invoked this associational theme questioned whether CSR accommodates for the impact of globalization, the internationalization of (Western) corporations, and the erosion of traditional national boundaries. This similarly reflected in the publications that were part of the co-citation patterns within this them. Wood (1991, p. 701) in discussing corporate social performance argues that in light of the increasingly globalized economy "old questions demand more intense study and, eventually, answers". In taking stock of different CSR theories and frameworks, Garriga and Mele (2004) highlight the increasing relevance of the relationship between corporations and society and their responsibility in the political arena. In their proposed research agenda, the authors detail the conceptual challenges posed by globalization. This trend to reflect on the implications of globalization and internationalization explains the prominent structural position of Matten and Moon (2008) who question the transferability of business practices and CSR across different institutional contexts.

Theme 3: Emergence of Political Corporate Responsibility. Unlike the other two associational themes, the publications that constitute the third cluster are organic to this phase. That is, these publications are co-cited in a contemporaneous manner; notably seven of the eight publications have been published in a span of three years. As in the first phase, we observe, within

the confines of this associational theme, strong patterns of co-authorship by institutional entrepreneurs calling for a paradigm shift in academic research. The gap around political responsibility, which is partially addressed through the conversations within the second theme, similarly led to the emergence of this theme, which argues for studying the political roles and responsibilities that private corporations are undertaking in the global economy.

The theme centers around multiple publications that invoke political theory and related philosophical concepts towards theorizing for corporations as political actors. While the notion of corporate citizenship had been sporadically invoked since the 1950s by researchers and practitioners, it "exploded" during this phase (Waddock, 2008). Fundamentally, corporate citizenship is extended beyond narrow deployments of philanthropy and social responsibility towards a politically grounded conception (Logsdon & Wood, 2002; Moon et al., 2005; Crane et al., 2008). At the center of this associational theme, Matten and Crane (2005) argue that corporations are increasingly administering citizenship rights to citizens in contexts where governments and public institutions are unable or unwilling to do so. These expansive roles are driven by corporations undertaking functions that have been traditionally confined to governments and public institutions (e.g., healthcare, security, governance, etc.). In a similar manner, Scherer and Palazzo (2007) invoke Jurgen Habermas's Theory of Democracy to propose a deliberative integration of the corporate use of power in contexts where globalization has eroded established institutions and governance processes. The authors criticize the applicability of positivist and post-positivist CSR perspectives in light of globalization. They alternatively propose a (normative) political conception of corporate responsibility through which corporations are to assume expansive responsibilities and obligations and address gaps in global governance and subsequently tackle broader political challenges in the global context.

This theme is positioned in contradistinction to the first theme, though the co-citation patterns between the themes is limited. For example, Matten (2009, p. 573) criticizes the CPA research stream

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for showing "next to no awareness of the … fundamental and highly problematic consequences for democracy, the public good, and some vital principles of political representation and decision making". This theme similarly reflects dis-satisfaction with the capacity of traditional CSR theories and frameworks to account for the changes in broader contexts. Here, we begin to see authors carving a research stream and making a clear distinction between work focused on the instrumentality of corporate engagement with the political sphere (i.e., Theme 1) and work emphasizing non-political conceptions of political responsibility (i.e., Theme 2).

The second phase suggests an increased scholarly interest in further analyzing the political role of the corporation. The diversity of perspectives and publications invoked across the three associational themes highlight the maturation of extant research. This is further reinforced by the ever-increasing number of journal articles that invoke politics in the dataset during this phase. Each associational theme represents a common attempt by authors to approach the expansive roles and responsibilities of private corporations. With that said, the contributions of Theme 2 and Theme 3 are notable considering their emergence during this phase relative to the previous phase.

2.5.3   Bibliometric Analysis: Phase Three (2017 – 2021)

The network map of co-citations in the third phase divides into two themes. The associational themes are both recognizable as evolving from the prior period, but there are notable differences. The first is the marked decrease in citations from non-political publications. Works such as Freeman (1984), Donaldson and Preston (1995), and Michell et al. (1997) are no longer featured in the network map. Those that remain (e.g., Matten & Moon, 2008; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Suchman, 1995) appear in a somewhat different structural positioning. The second difference is the growing presence of Social Issues in Management scholars (e.g., Matten, Crane, Moon, Scherer, Palazzo), and by extension SIM publications. In particular, the Journal of Business Ethics and Business Ethics Quarterly have become increasingly important outlets for discussing the political role of the

corporation relative to other journals during this phase. The third notable difference is the increased concentration and reduction in the associational themes with the Stakeholder Theory (and CSR) theme in Phase Two embedded.

Theme 1 (Green): The empirical measurement of CPA. This theme is an extension of the first theme from the previous phase, in that it primarily revolves around the CPA research stream. The majority of publications from the second phase carry over to this phase; these publications have maintained central positions within this theme. With that said, the main change to the cluster during this phase lies in the emergence of several empirical publications (including meta-analysis) that measure the relationship between corporate political activities and financial performance; a relationship that is suggested by publications during Phase Two. Among the empirical studies, Peng and Luo (2000) emerges as a highly cited and prominently co-cited addition to this theme. The publication situates its empirical research within the "transition economy" of China and measures the implications of access to political resources by managers to the financial performance of the respective corporations. Notably, the authors find support for the notion that political access to Chinese government officials (supported by gifts, banquets, and bribery) leads to higher financial performance relative to economic access to other corporations and business partners. With that said, the empirical studies that emerge during this phase (i.e., Hadani & Schuler, 2013; Lux et al., 2011; Peng & Luo, 2000) while suggesting a positive association between CPA and financial performance add nuance to this through several moderators and contextual factors and call for further studying the instrumentality of CPA.

Anchored once again by Hillman et al. (2004), seven of the ten works in this associational theme carried over from the prior phase. The centrality of the research agenda proposed by Hillman et al. (2004) and Hillman and Hitt (1999) suggests that there remains a strong focus by CPA researchers on positioning the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of corporate political activities

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within broader strategic management research. Though relatively stable, this theme includes a collection of notable additions. In the previous phase, Schuler et al. (2002) was the only empirical publication to meet the minimum citation threshold; this evidently changed during this phase as discussed earlier. On the flipside, this relative stability points to the lack of recent conceptual and theoretical publications within the cluster. With that said, it is notable that works from Institutional Theory still represent a strong connective pattern across cluster boundaries with the other theme(s).

Theme 2 (Red): Dialectic development of PCSR. Unlike the first theme that constitutes an internally consistent research stream, the second theme has emerged in a more fragmented manner. During this phase, the institutional entrepreneurs whose publications dominate this theme further the research agenda under the umbrella label of Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) (Scherer et al., 2016). While the label had been invoked in the previous phase in relation to Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011), PCSR expanded during this phase to collectively reflect two main streams: the political conceptions of corporate responsibility (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007) and extended corporate citizenship (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Moon et al., 2005), despite both streams exhibiting important differences. The prominent publications that had been featured the previous phase, Scherer and Palazzo (2007, 2011) and Matten and Crane (2005), still occupy central positions within the theme. The conversation around PCSR, however, is anything but uncontested as critical responses to the assumptions and arguments of PCSR emerged (Jones & Haigh, 2007; van Oosterhout, 2005, 2008; Willke & Willke, 2008; Wood & Logsdon, 2008). The critiques directed at the emergent theme persisted and led to several responses by Scherer and Palazzo, who co-author five of the eleven works during this phase. These critiques were also featured in the network map. In particular, Whelan (2012) assumes a critical perspective and poses questions around the normative underpinnings of PCSR, in the Habermasian tradition, and the motivation, ability, and accountability of corporations as political actors.
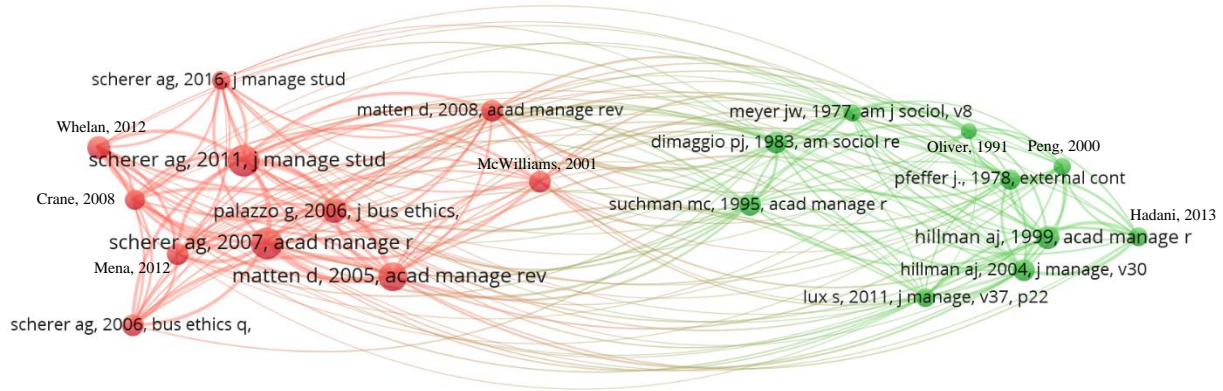
Figure 2:3 Network Map of Co-citations in Phase Three (minimum citations = 15)

Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Peng & Luo (2000)	Matten & Crane (2005)
Bonardi et al. (2005)	Scherer et al. (2016)
Hillman & Hitt (1999)	Palazzo & Scherer (2006)
Hillman et al. (2004)	Scherer & Palazzo (2007)
Oliver (1991)	Scherer & Palazzo (2011)
Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)	Scherer et al., (2006)
Meyer & Rowan (1977)	Suchman (1995)
Lux et al. (2011)	Mena & Palazzo (2012)
Suchman (1995)	McWilliams & Siegel (2001)
McWilliams & Siegel (2001)	Matten & Moon (2008)
Hadani & Schuler (2013)	Whelan (2012)

Table 2:4 Cluster Composition for Phase Three

The resulting associational theme represents the implications of the intense scholarly conversations between the proponents and detractors of PCSR. This back and forth culminated in the emergence of Scherer and Palazzo (2016) within the cluster. The researchers introduce PCSR 2.0 that acknowledges the limitations of the first iteration of PCSR and constitutes a research agenda that

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accounts not only for the critiques but also for further changes in broader contexts (beyond the over-emphasis on globalization that characterizes the early conceptions of PCSR). The evolved definition of PCSR as per Scherer and Palazzo (2016) entails "responsible business activities that turn corporations into political actors, by engaging in public deliberations, collective decisions, and the provision of public goods or the restriction of public bads in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role" (p. 276).

The third phase suggests continued structural changes in the research into the political role of the corporation. The changes manifest differently within the two associational themes in line with their respective stage of development. The CPA associational theme exhibits consistency and stability from conceptual and theoretical standpoints; with the main additions to the conversation being empirical to further measure and test the conceptual and theoretical arguments. Alternatively, the more recent PCSR associational theme continues to undergo conceptual and theoretical development through continued and often intense scholarly conversations and debates. The empirical component remains notably lacking from this associational theme.

2.6   Discussion

To this point, we have argued that research into the political role of the corporation has reached the current moment through a series of reconfigurations to the structure of its logical underpinnings. These reconfigurations over four decades – as per our bibliometric analysis - substantiate the fragmented state of extant research. However, these reconfigurations have also done much to bestow legitimacy upon the subject matter, to extend its impact, and to theorize for broader roles and responsibilities of the corporation. That being said, the bibliometric analysis affirms that more work needs to be done. This section builds on the need for a robust conceptual development and empirical measurement in order to improve our understanding of the political role of the corporation. Our observations are derived – though not exclusively - from the bibliometric analysis as we identify

conversations and common threads. Importantly, these observations emerge from distances and gaps in the networks, which represent potential opportunities for research. We explore four promising directions for future research.

2.6.1 The Trend towards Legitimation

Any account of the development of academic research over a long period of time quickly runs up against institutional factors that have immensely influenced the research into the subject matter (Johnson-Cramer et al., 2021). One of the central challenges inherent in establishing a new research agenda and incorporating into a research discipline is legitimation. This has been very much the case with research into the political role of the corporation, the study of which was deemed "an intellectual backwater" (Baysinger, 1984; Epstein, 1980). It has been suggested that this might have been the case due to the perception that political activities by private corporations are illegitimate by virtue of the normative separation of the economic and political domains (Crane et al., 2008; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011) This reflected in absence of research into the subject matter for the longest period of time (Vogel, 1996). Robert Dahl remarked from a political science standpoint that "for all the talk and all the public curiosity about the relations between business and politics, there is a remarkable dearth of studies on the subject" (Dahl, 1959, p. 1); a sentiment that is still being echoed today (Scherer, 2018).

	Total	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Matten & Crane (2005)	109		81	28
Scherer & Palazzo (2007)	101		66	35
Hillman et al. (2004)	69		45	24
Scherer et al. (2011)	67		35	32
Hillman & Hitt (1999)	67	4	44	19
Palazzo & Scherer (2006)	61		43	18
Matten & Moon (2008)	55		36	19
Scherer et al. (2006)	51		36	15
Suchman (1995)	48		31	17
Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)	48	6	26	16
Freeman (1984)	47	7	34	5
Baron (1995)	46	5	30	11
Donaldson & Preston (1995)	45	4	35	5
DiMaggio & Powell (1983)	44	2	22	20
Oliver (1991)	43		30	12
Mitchell et al. (1997)	43	4	29	10
McWilliams (2001)	42	2	25	15
Margolis & Walsh (2003)	42		33	9
Bonardi et el. (2005)	40		30	10
Schuler et al. (20020	38		29	8

Table 2:5 Publications by Number of Citations (Three Phases)

The issue of legitimacy has been tackled through different discursive approaches as per our research findings. Consider for example Baysinger (1984), the publication that central to Phase One asserts that it approaches the subject matter from a "scientific, nonnormative" perspective and that issues of legitimacy associated with political activities need to be addressed by management researchers through "scientific investigation" that describes the empirical phenomenon (p. 255). In the same vein, several publications within Phase One position their respective publications and research agendas through highlighting the need to further describe, as opposed to prescribe, the increasing involvement of private corporations in the electoral politics and in the legislative and regulatory processes in the United States in order to improve the understanding of the phenomenon (Aplin & Hegarty, 1980; Keim & Zeithaml, 1986; Lenway & Rehbein, 1991).

The evolving co-citation patterns in the following phases highlight two additional legitimation strategies. Within the respective CPA clusters in Phase Two and Phase Three, researchers describe the "indisputable" empirical evidence that private corporations are "among the most prominent political players not only in Washington, D.C. but in capitals across the globe" (Hillman et al., 2004, p. 838). However, they further prescribe corporate political strategies and activities as instrumental to the financial performance of the corporation (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). Several publications in the cluster similarly align with the broader strategic management agenda and creating parallels between economic markets and political markets (e.g., Bonardi et al., 2005). This reflects in the keywords (e.g., "market", "strategy", "financial performance") invoked by researchers within the CPA cluster (green) as identifiers for their publications in Figure 2:4.
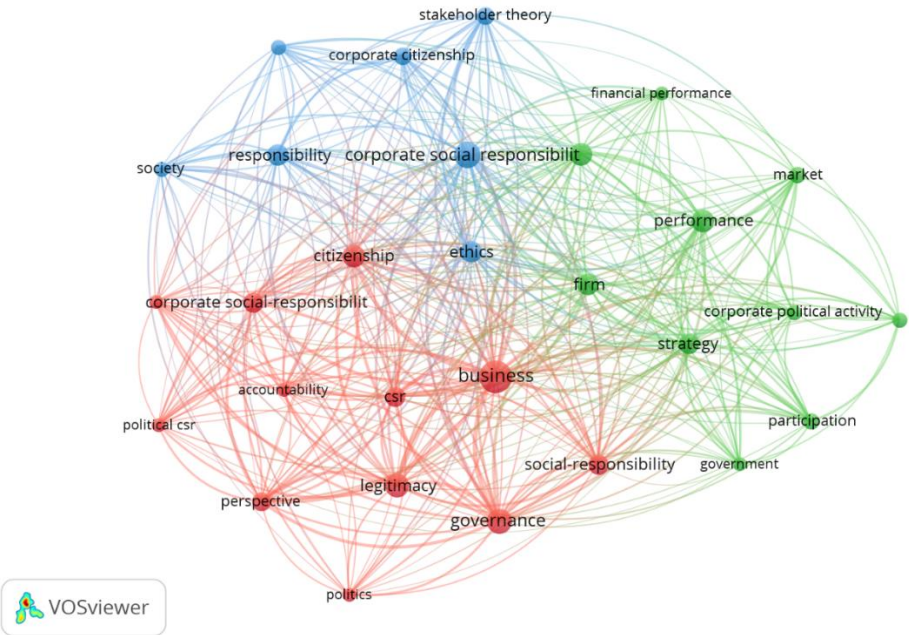

Figure 2:4 Network Map of Co-occurrences (3 Phases)

The third legitimation strategy explores questions of ethics and responsibility around the political role of the corporation; it argues that these questions fit squarely within the scope of social

issues in management field and should be pursued accordingly. This legitimation strategy was adopted by the publications with the PCSR clusters in Phase Two and Phase Three. The co-occurrence analysis of which is illustrated in Figure 2:4 (red cluster) highlights its positioning within the broader social issues of management research. The denoted PCSR publications argue for a prescriptive and normative conception of the political role of the corporations (Matten and Crane (2005) is a notable descriptive exception) that emanates from the notion that corporations are stewards of the public interest when governments are absent or fail (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). This perspective – for the most part - sidesteps the motivations of corporations as self-interested political actors and instrumental considerations (e.g., Willke & Willke, 2008).

Future research might continue to refine the conceptual rigor of the instrumental and normative legitimation strategies. While CPA research has indeed evolved significantly in the past four decades, it is notable that the main publications in the CPA clusters between Phase Two and Phase Three have not witnessed major changes in composition. Moreover, the papers in our datasets that invoked CPA have decreased relative to the other bodies of research as tabulated in Table 2. As it pertains to PCSR research, despite rapid growth, the arguments posed by PCSR publications, have been anything but uncontested (Jones & Haigh, 2007; van Oosterhout, 2005, 2008; Willke & Willke, 2008; Wood & Logsdon, 2008). Future research might revert slightly to legitimation through reflecting on descriptive accounts of the political role of the corporation and the contexts in which they take place for a more robust understanding of the phenomenon.

2.6.2 Towards Bridging the Gaps in the Co-citation Maps

From its earlier phases, extant research has leveraged several management theories and perspectives to substantiate the political role of the corporation. Important contributions were invoked with regularity through co-citations of prominent – though more generalized – publications (Freeman, 1984; Olson, 1965; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). These contributions during Phase One presaged the

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emergence of conversation and clusters that specifically discuss the political role of the corporation in Phase Two and Phase Three across the respective management journals. Today, it appears that research is coalescing around two research streams, both of which have been organic to the subject matter: the CPA cluster with its close exchange with mainstream strategy; the PCSR cluster with its positioning with the social issues in management. These two clusters align with the distinctive legitimation strategies illustrated in Figure 2:4. That said, the degree of separation, which points to limited co-citation patterns between the respective clusters, is notable. This is visually evident in the network map of Phase Three that features two clusters at diametrically opposite positions.

Bibliometric analysis is useful in this regard in highlighting not only the main clusters of co-citations and intellectual underpinnings of the body of research but also gaps and opportunities for furthering researcher. More broadly, the separation between strategy and ethics is emblematic of what Freeman refers to as the separation thesis (Freeman, 1994; Noland & Phillips, 2010; Wicks, 1996). The separation thesis is the view that it is "meaningful to separate the discourse of ethics from the discourse of business" (Freeman, 1994; p. 233). Those who advance this thesis do so based on the premise that the rightful purpose of a business is to maximize profits and that it follows from this premise that all other goals a business may have must be instrumental to this primary end. In the same vein, proponents of the separation thesis argue that ethical considerations should not be corrupted by imbalances in power that are inherent in strategic considerations (Noland & Phillips, 2010; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). Though not postulated ex-ante, the separation thesis emerges in our bibliometric analysis around the political role of the corporation, which points to limited conversations between clusters. As such, there is work to be done in terms of bridging this separation that can be approached through three interrelated paths.

A first path into bridging the separation is through incorporating questions of ethics and responsibilities within the CPA research agenda. To be sure, the instrumental prescriptions of CPA

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have been critically received from within other disciplines. Matten (2009) argues that these prescriptions read largely "like the script book of what major oil companies have tried to achieve for a long time" (p. 574). However, it is notable that critical perspectives around the "largely absent ethical analysis" have been increasingly voiced by CPA researchers (Dahan et al., 2013, p. 367). While issues such as bribery have been traditionally framed as "quid pro quo" exchanges that contribute positively to financial performance (Stark, 1997), there have been calls for integrating the related ethical concerns within the research agenda of CPA and the relationship between non-market strategies and financial performance, as opposed to pointing to ethical concerns tangentially (Hamilton & Hoch, 1997; Weber, 1997). Lawton et al. (2013) call for CPA researchers to pay more attention to the ethical aspects, as failure to do so will "weaken the community conceptually" and thereby undermine its "credibility and legitimacy" (p. 15).

A second path into bridging the separation is through incorporating questions of strategy and instrumental considerations within the PCSR research agenda. In particular, there has been considerable pushback against the normative prescriptions of early PCSR works (e.g., Jones & Haigh, 2007; van Oosterhout, 2005, 2008; Willke & Willke, 2008). The critical accounts have notably emerged within the Social Issues in Management field under the premise of "why would corporations accept public responsibilities beyond business cases …" (Eberlein, 2019, p. 1129). That is, the normative emphasis of PCSR was subject to criticisms since the perspective does not specify scope conditions under which corporations accept certain political roles and responsibilities at the cost of instrumental concerns (Eberlein, 2019; Whelan, 2012). It has been argued that PCSR researchers need to acknowledge that (multinational) corporations are economic actors. As such, positive theorizing on PCSR will be descriptively more accurate, and poses greater explanatory potential, once it is presumed that the various political activities that corporations undertake are predominantly informed by instrumental reasoning (Whelan, 2012).

Third, and perhaps the more generative basis for bridging the separation between the CPA and PCSR clusters is through reflecting on the broader debate around the separation thesis. Noland & Phillips (2010) refer to the separation thesis as a fallacy insofar as it implies that questions of ethics and responsibility have nothing to do with questions of business and strategy. In accordance with this view, ethical strategists (Freeman et al., 2004; Freeman et al., 2007; Phillips, 2003) have argued that the engagement of corporations with their respective stakeholders based on fairness must be integral to their respective strategies if they are to achieve real success. In this regard, the distinction between questions of ethics and responsibility on one hand and strategy and value creation on the other hand is not only necessary but untenable. As such, successful strategies, which are motivated by competitive advantage and financial performance, must inherently encompass what are typically recognized as ethical concerns in-line with the implications of value creation activities between corporations and their respective stakeholders.

As such, the case for bridging the separation that has characterized the research into the political role of the corporation can be approached through multiple paths: responding to recent calls within the CPA cluster to incorporate questions of ethics and responsibility, responding to recent calls within the PCSR cluster to address questions of motivation and strategic considerations, and reflecting on the position assumed by ethical strategists who argue that the separation between strategy and responsibility is untenable. Bridging the separation in our context implies that successful corporate political activities are inseparable from their implications to democracy and collective will formation. To build on this foundation, future researchers might resort to relaxing a-priori positions and engage in positive theorizing.

2.6.3 The Implications of Transitions in the Macro-Environment

Any account of the development of the academic research quickly runs up against the role of broader (political) macro-environment in the evolution of corporate roles and responsibilities. In no small

part, the evolution of research into the political role of the corporation has been influenced by reactive and proactive political strategies that corporations have adopted to defend, maintain, or exploit changes in their broader contexts. During Phase One, the co-citation patterns reflected the responses of corporations to the changes in regulatory and political oversight in the United States and their increased involvement in electoral and legislative processes. During Phase Two, the co-citation patterns reflected the implications of globalization. Extant research has emphasized (or overemphasized as per critical reviews) the implications of the post-national constellation in terms of increasing political responsibilities of the (multinational) corporation. During Phase Three, the co-citation patterns reflected the implications of "another phase of globalization, a post-national constellation 2.0" (Scherer et al., 2016, p. 279). This led to theorizing for a PCSR 2.0 research.

Critical accounts have noted that future theorizing would benefit from nuanced accounts of the relationship between corporations and their respective broader political contexts. In contesting the blanket loss-of-state-power assumptions that denote earlier accounts of PCSR, Eberlein (2019) argues for developing deeper understanding of the vast power and capacity differences and, crucially, different political strategies and activities that related to different national contexts. In response to these calls, we contend that the complex and constantly negotiated relationship between the private and the public sphere (Chenou & Radu, 2019; Davis et al., 2008; Djelic & Etchanchu, 2015) should be further analyzed at multiple levels of analysis:

- National contexts: relationship between corporations and their local governments and relevant institutions (e.g., regulatory, legislative, and electoral processes)

- International contexts: relationship between (multinational) corporations and the different national contexts in which they operate and cross-border dynamics

- Supranational contexts: relationship between corporations and the governance of deterritorialized contexts (e.g., Ozone layer, World Trade Organization, Internet)

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In analyzing the impact of transitions in the macro-environment on the evolution of political roles and responsibilities, researchers may employ a similar taxonomy to the one that we have suggested here to provide a better understanding of the relationship between corporations and public institutions beyond blanket assumptions. The multi-level approach not only furthers our understanding of the determinants and consequences of the political role of the corporation (Crane et al., 2008); it also more accurately describes the relevant stakeholders that impact and are impacted by the value creation activities of corporations across multiple levels.

2.6.4   Digitalization and the Political Role of the Corporation

There is a growing demand in management research for work addressing the implications of digitalization on extant theories and perspectives (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019). The advent of the 'digital age' is exemplary of changes in the macro-environment that have been associated with the evolution of the co-citation patterns in the manner detailed in the previous section. While digitalization has been mostly celebrated for its democratizing and emancipatory implications, there have been recent calls to critically examine the potential negative impacts on free democratic societies and the rights of citizens (e.g., Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Rifkin, 2014; Varian, 2014). It is notable that extant research has yet to take account of the implications of digitalization for the political role of the corporation (Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016; Whelan et al., 2013; Zuboff, 2015). Scherer (2018) argues that digitalization poses an exciting challenge for scholars to explore the consequences of the digitalization of the economy and its political impact on civil liberties and global governance (e.g., Flyverbom et al., 2019).

Digitalization is important not only as a context in which corporations operate but it has also contributed to the emergence and proliferation of the novel forms of organizing. Digital platforms are organized around central software-based technological architectures that serve as foundations for autonomous users to exercise their voice and engage with other users and/or engage with institutions

external to these platforms (Gawer, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). Digital platforms are distinctive in that the participation of autonomous users in value creation activities is fundamental for the viability and competitiveness of the respective platforms. For example, digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Zoom would not have been viable if it weren't for the contributions of users. Platforms are governed by the private corporations (i.e., platform owners) that possess a great deal of discretion in defining and enforcing rules and regulations (e.g., Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Kenney & Zysman, 2016 McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017) in order to instigate and influence participation. The distinctiveness of platforms translates to political roles and responsibilities.

Emergence of Digital Platforms. Digital platforms represent a juncture in which changes in the broader macro-environment lead to changes in the role of the corporation. In particular, the lower costs and higher speeds of digital communications resulting from technological advancements have been instrumental in the viability of the platform form of organizing (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). Similarly, changes in socio-economic behavior in terms of individuals being increasingly connected through affordable smartphones and handheld devices have made the participation of users in digital services, including digital platforms accessible (Papacharissi, 2010). That being said, the emergence of digital platforms has been similarly instigated by political and legal factors in the macro-environment. In particular, section 230 in the Communications Decency Act (DCA) of the United States Telecommunications Act of 1996, has arguably made the development of the Internet possible; pundits have deemed it essential for that to continue (Gillespie, 2018). Section 230 provides a safe harbor for private corporations (i.e., platform owners in this context) from legal prosecution relative to participation of platform users. As David Post notes, "No other sentence in the U.S. Code, I would assert, has been responsible for the creation of more value than that one" (Post, 2015). As such, the emergence of digital platforms is in itself influenced by political changes and similarly highlights political roles and responsibilities for platform owners.

Political Roles. Relative to traditional forms of organizing, the participation of platform users and communities in value creation is not governed by employment service agreements and hierarchical controls nor are they governed by contractual obligations (Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). The decentralization of value creation has been enabled by higher degrees of openness in terms of limited restrictions on who can exercise their voice and what can be voiced by respective users (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009). This distinctive characteristic of digital platforms translates to platform users and communities from diverse backgrounds exercising their voice across a diverse range of topics and interests (including the political exercise of voice). It is not surprising that platforms have been credited with the empowerment of individuals and collectives as they engage and challenge public institutions in a manner that would not have been feasible otherwise with offline public spheres and/or traditional forms of communications. Importantly, the political manifestation of digital platforms and platform owners, by virtue of ownership and governance, is by no means tangential to their business strategies as with traditional conceptions of corporate citizenship. Rather, it is inherently fundamental to the platform form of organizing in which value creation is decentralized to autonomous users who exercise their voice across a multitude of interests, opinions, perspectives, and identities.

Political Responsibilities. Enabling and managing the expansive locus of value creation in digital platforms as to encompass the exercise of voice of autonomous platform users and communities is at the core of platform governance. As noted, platform openness is instrumental to instigating network effects through which participation increases the value and attractiveness of respective platforms which incentivizes further participation (Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). In the past several years, the political implications of users exercising the voices in the context of digital platforms has been subject to scrutiny from policy makers, civil society organizations, and platform users. That is, in conjunction with the expansive locus of value creation that is contingent on the

participation of autonomous individuals and communities, the locus of responsibility has similarly expanded. This expansive locus of responsibility continues to jeopardize even the more established platforms (Gillespie, 2018; Gorwa et al., 2020; Kellogg et al., 2020). This political responsibility of platform owners has entailed problems and issues that have been traditionally beyond the scope of responsibilities and obligations of private corporations (e.g., freedom of expression, marginalization and privilege, misinformation, etc.).

The advent of the digital age has been notably missing from research into the political role of the corporation (Flyverbom et al., 2019; Etter et al., 2019; Scherer, 2018). This reflected in calls for researchers to more closely study the disruptive implications of digital platforms and by association the governance systems and processes put into place by platform owners. Among the motivations for this study was a question on whether existing theories and frameworks that constitute the political role of the corporation readily explain the political roles and responsibilities of platform owners. As per our bibliometric analysis, we argue that the separation thesis that characterizes research into the political role of the corporation poses challenges to applying existing theories and frameworks to the broader context of digitalization. The important insights generated by extant research notwithstanding, further work is needed to extend and bridge the dominant clusters. Moreover, we argue that digital platforms represent an opportunity in this regard due to its public character, which makes access to data more accessible (albeit with novel tools and resources) relative to traditional corporate political practices and activities.

2.7   Concluding Remarks

This study is motivated by a question: How have more than four decades of research into the political role of the corporation brought us to our current moment as we face the disruptive implications of digitalization, among other transitions in the macro-environment? We have argued that one can better understand and assess this body of research by seeing extant research not as a monolithic set of ideas

in a vacuum but rather as attempts to legitimize the study of a research topic that has been treated as illegitimate for a sizable portion of management history. We contend that there have been considerable developments in the way research into the political role of the corporation have been associated and logically configured that has allowed it to increasingly grow in the past two decades. Understood in this light, research with its different disciplines and clusters is perhaps reaching an inflection point in that the political role of the corporation is evident in scholarly discourse where we can (a) pursue specialized insights within clusters to extend the conceptual reach and refine our understanding and (b) identify next steps for creating conversations that overcome the separation thesis through making these ideas more compelling, insightful, and impactful to managers, corporations, their stakeholders, and the communities (local and global) they are building together. Our next steps will likely derive from the kinds of associational reconfigurations that have evolved the research topic with emphasis on empirical research. We have argued that examining the contexts in which corporations are undertaking political roles holds great promise for developing descriptive and normative insights. This article has offered new directions to advance that idea, especially in light of digitalization, which represents the latest of changes to broader political contexts.

It is important to acknowledge limitations of bibliometric analysis. By focusing on citation patterns, the methodology is inherently retrospective and predisposed to highlight patterns involving older citations. The longer a publication is in print, the more opportunity it has to circulate and be cited and co-cited accordingly. Very few of the most cited publications were published during Phase Three. That is, in order for a publication to be considered influential and occupy a central position co-citation patterns, the publication not only has to accumulate citations but has to do so over a period of time. While acknowledging this as a limitation, we also suggest that bibliometric analysis can offer a corrective to recency effects that tend to privilege more recent publications.

Second, insofar as we advance a broader argument about the political role of the corporation,

it is important to acknowledge the limits of solely studying the academic literature as a way to understand how the political role of the corporation has developed and evolved. There is a growing number of non-academic publications of the entanglement of business and politics that continues to manifest in practice (Matten, 2009; Reich, 2007; Klein, 2007). However, we have not studied the interplay of academic and practical logics, whereby the bibliometric analysis and the corresponding discussion has been limited to academic outlets. We suggest that the forementioned interplay would be a valuable extension of current work.

Third, the study's scope within management research does not afford access to the political role of corporations across disciplinary boundaries. Vogel (1996) had argued that the relationship between corporations and governments benefits from the development of respective research agendas within both management and political science research. In our bibliometric analysis, we have focused on the evolution of research within the former; albeit through focusing on a select subset of journals. Given the uptake of political theories being invoked by central publications in our bibliometric analysis that contributed to important insights, future work could explore the manner in which the political role of the corporation is depicted in political science and law journals .

In sum, this review set out to track the evolution of the underlying intellectual structure of a fragmented research topic and suggest avenues for future research in light of recent transitions in the macro environment. The bibliometric analysis and co-citation maps developed here are meant to illustrate the current state of research into the political role of the corporation and how it has evolved over four decades. We hope that this review spurs further research into a topic that has become prevalent in public discourse but remains under-research in management journals.

CHAPTER 3

PLATFORM GOVERNANCE: FROM OPENNESS TO INCLUSION

3.1   Abstract

Extant research into digital platforms has highlighted the challenges that platform owners face in governing the exercise of voice of autonomous platform users within their respective platforms. These challenges have reflected recently in criticism and scrutiny as platform owners were questioned directly and indirectly with regards to their platform governance. The calls for platform owners to address essentially political problems (e.g., marginalization, hate speech, political influence, etc.) have not only reflected in negative publicity, but more critically – for this study - they have been deemed detrimental to the viability and competitiveness of their respective platforms. In this study, I propose a change to underpowered conceptions of platform governance in extant research, with potentially important implications. Invoking power-laden conceptions of governance that account for power relations between different actors underlying recent theorizing around the political role of the corporation, I propose the norm of inclusion as an alternative logic through which platform owners govern the contest that is inherent to digital platforms, as arenas of citizenship. This reasoning is further illustrated through three mini-case studies that assert the challenges of platform governance that is devoid of power considerations.

3.2   Introduction

The implications of digitalization have yet to be fully acknowledged within management research (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019; Scherer, 2018; Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021). Private corporations (e.g., Google, Facebook, Apple, etc.) have increasingly assumed responsibilities that depart from those described and prescribed in traditional management frameworks and theories. By virtue of ownership of digital platforms, these corporations (hereafter, platform owners) act as de facto governments who possess a great deal of discretion in defining and enforcing rules and

regulations that in turn influence and guide the interactions and transactions of legally autonomous platform users (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Flyverbom et al., 2019; Hinings et al., 2018; Whelan et al., 2013). Platform governance, as it pertains to the exercise of voice of legally autonomous users, in particular, presents a challenging task for platform owners due to the elusive and unbounded nature of voice, which entails a broad range of topics, interests, opinions, and identities, and its perceived repercussions for the well-being of the broader public sphere.

Fundamental to research into platform governance, the openness of digital platforms, in terms of restrictions on access and the ensuing forms of participation, has been associated with democratizing outcomes as it affords platform users the ability to exercise their voice and engage with the public sphere with limited restrictions (e.g., Flyverbom et al., 2019; Gillespie, 2018; Whelan et al., 2013). The ability of platform owners to balance the degrees of platform openness is instrumental for the viability and competitiveness of their respective platforms. Platform owners may pursue higher degrees of openness to instigate network effects that increase the value of platforms for users and incentivize participation (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Thomas et al., 2014). Platform owners however may introduce restrictions in order to minimize the negative externalities that emerge as a result of 'bad' actors or 'bad' behavior (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Evans, 2012; Wareham et al., 2014). With that said, the distinctiveness of the platform form of organizing relative to traditional forms lies in its high(er) degree of openness.

Recent withering criticism has, however, lamented the fact that digital platforms do not constitute safe spaces for the marginalized and underrepresented to exercise their voice (Crawford & Gillespie, 2014; Gillespie, 2010, 2018; Gorwa et al., 2020). Moreover, these digital platforms are said to have been populated with influence and subjugation campaigns that are detrimental to less powerful actors (Gorwa, 2019). By extension, platform owners have been subject to pressures and scrutiny from policy makers, civil society organizations, and platform users to improve upon their

governance systems and processes and assume greater responsibility and accountability for the exercise of voice within their respective platforms (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019). Examining these academic and (mostly) non-academic demands points to a notable paradox: digital platforms with higher degrees of openness and almost no restrictions on participation are being scrutinized for not being inclusive enough for users to participate openly.

I contend that underlying this paradox, which has been deemed detrimental to digital platforms, is an underpowered conception of platform openness and platform governance, more broadly. Extant research has not examined the manner in which platform governance relates to the power relations between platform users and how these power relations in turn inform governance systems and processes (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021; Gorwa, 2019; Kretschmer et al., 2022). This is notable considering that much of the criticism that platforms have received relates to power asymmetries between platform users and communities (e.g., marginalization, hate speech, hegemony, political influence, cultural subjugation). In attempting to unpack this conceptual tension, this paper specifically critically examines the extant conception of platform openness; in doing so, I present a power-laden conception of platform governance relative to the exercise of voice within digital platforms.

Informed by the prescriptions of the emergent research around Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR), and more specifically, corporate citizenship, I suggest that the norm of inclusion presents a foundational normative concept for the participation of private corporations in contexts where governments are either unwilling or unable to address governance gaps (Crane et al.; 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). Juxtaposed to digital platforms, inclusion adds nuance to the under-powered conception of platform openness. In bridging the conceptual distance between openness and inclusion, I further argue that digital platforms represent

arenas of citizenship that are ontologically contested in which users exercise their voice and engage with the public sphere while being subject to power relations.

Towards addressing the research question, the paper is structured as follows. First, I briefly review extant research on platform governance, and more specifically, the central construct of platform openness. I then present the challenges that platform owners face relative to their governance of digital platforms. In particular, I argue that underlying these challenges is the underpowered conception of platform openness. Second, I build on PCSR research that argues that private corporations are increasingly undertaking global governance roles and responsibilities. The norm of inclusion, which acknowledges power relations and asymmetries between stakeholders, is central to their theorizing and can inform platform research accordingly. Third, I argue that the underpowered conception of platform openness is attributed to the manner in which digital platforms have been conceptualized. I argue that digital platforms represent arenas of citizenship, which are inherently contested, in a departure from extant research around platform governance. This argument is illustrated through mini case studies. In concluding, I propose an approach to platform governance that bridges the conceptual distance between platform openness and the proposed norm of inclusion.

3.3   Platform Governance

Digital platforms require contributions from autonomous users with diverse interests and motivations (Darking et al., 2008; Gawer, 2014; Jacobides et al., 2018; Nambisan, 2017). Using purposefully designed governance systems and processes, platforms promote and incentivize the participation of individuals and communities to exercise their voice and engage with other users through multiple discursive and non-discursive forms of participation (Chen et al., 2022; Wareham et al., 2014). Fundamental to the research into platform governance and a distinguishing characteristic of the platform business model is platform openness (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Gawer; 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014; West, 2003).

3.3.1 The Construct of Platform Openness

Extant understanding of the openness construct has been informed by research on platform governance that highlights its centrality to digital platforms (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). With roots in multiple academic disciplines, there are multiple definitions for platform openness that span these disciplines. For the purpose of this paper, I merely note that platforms are more open to the extent that they place fewer restrictions on the access of users and ensuing forms of participation (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Eisenmann et al., 2009; West, 2003). Platform openness in accordance with the definition reflects in two dimensions.

First, *openness in terms of platform access* refers the ability of users to access and participate in platforms. As opposed to traditional forms of organizing and even analog platforms (e.g., malls), openness is a distinctive attribute of digital platforms due to their capacity to admit users with almost no spatial and temporal restrictions. Extant research on digital platforms has highlighted the strategic importance of defining and implementing governance systems and processes that foster openness and facilitate participation. Moreover, the prevalence of access technologies and peripherals (e.g., smartphones) have further complemented the accessibility of digital platforms.

Second, openness in terms of forms of participation refers to the different ways in which digital platforms and digital affordances can be leveraged by users, even beyond the initial intentions of platform owners (Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). In traditional forms of organizing, products and services are designed for predefined use cases; their value depends on their standalone features and attributes as perceived by buyers. In contrast, value in digital platforms is jointly created by platform users coupled with the fungibility and generativity of digital technologies (Baldwin & Woodard, 2009; De Reuver et al., 2018; Yoo et al., 2010).

3.3.1.1 The case for a higher degree of openness

Fundamental to the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms is the participation of

autonomous users and the subsequent accumulation of network effects (Gawer, 2014). Network effects dictate that once digital platforms reach critical mass of users, the positive feedback loop between the number and diversity of users and the different forms of participation is reinforced, further enhancing the value and attractiveness of the platforms for users (Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). This dynamic may lead to winner-takes-all scenarios (Anderson et al., 2014; Cennamo, 2018; Hagiu & Spulber, 2013) where digital platforms are expected to eventually achieve or at least trend towards de facto monopolies in their respective market(s).

Extant research has highlighted that platform governance based on higher degrees of openness is one that predominantly lowers the barriers of access for users and incentivizes different forms of participation (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Thomas et al., 2014; West, 2003). This is fundamentally enabled by the technological and functional design decisions (e.g., opening the Application Programming Interface (API)). In tandem, the pricing strategy contributes to higher degrees of openness as platform owners typically subsidize one side or multiple sides of their respective platforms to instigate network effects (Gawer, 2014). In general, the exercise of voice in digital platforms has been fully subsidized (i.e., offered free of charge).

Higher degrees of openness can spur platform growth by instigating network effects, reducing user fears of being locked into particular platforms, and stimulating multiple forms of participation for the aforementioned reasons (Boudreau, 2007, 2010). As such, openness has been associated with leveling the playing field for users to take part in economic or political activities (Runhaar & Lafferty, 2009), spurring innovation and creativity (Boudreau, 2012), and emancipatory and democratizing implications (Tapscott, 1997). The latter is facilitated by limited restrictions on access and participation that make them more accessible for users to engage with the public sphere with limited gatekeeping of media outlets and traditional communications channels (Flyverbom et al., 2019; Gillespie, 2010, 2018; Whelan et al., 2013).

3.3.1.2 The case for a lower degree of openness

Whilst extant research has been marked by a general tendency to privilege and promote the positive feedback cycles associated with higher degrees of openness for the forementioned reasons and philosophical inclinations, it is not all positive. Indeed, extant research has highlighted the challenges that platform owners face with increased participation (Hagiu & Wright, 2018; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). That is, with higher degrees of platform openness, which translate to lower restrictions on access and participation, there are opportunities for 'bad' actors to engage in myriad types of 'bad' behavior, which in turn lowers the value of the respective platforms (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Evans, 2012; Wareham et al., 2014).

As it pertains to the exercise of voice, extant research has provided examples of bad behavior that may manifest in threats of violence, committing personal attacks, misrepresentation, etc. (Evans, 2012; Gillespie, 2018). Moreover, participation within digital platforms can involve behavior that other users find offensive (e.g., unwanted exposure to pornography, violent images, and other objectionable content). The case for lower degrees of openness is thus driven by cost-benefit considerations: when the costs of participation begin to outweigh the benefits, the denoted actor(s) or behavior are said to generate negative externalities, which makes it less attractive to platform users and prospective users (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009).

Platform owners may thus lower the degrees of openness in order to mitigate network externalities. This primarily takes place through platform owners imposing restrictions on platform access (e.g., banning and suspending the accounts of certain platform users or increasing barriers to access) and forms of participation (e.g., banning and removing certain content) that are deemed detrimental to the economic efficiency of the platforms (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Evans, 2012). Moreover, it has been suggested that platform owners adopt lower degrees of openness in order to address the 'lemons problem' of low-quality participation driving out high

quality participation through their inherent 'bouncer rights' (Akerlof, 1978; Strahilevitz, 2006).

3.3.2   Getting the Degree of Openness Right

Choosing the optimal degree of openness is instrumental for the long-term viability and competitiveness of the platform (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Chesbrough, 2003; Eisenmann et al., 2009; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Gawer & Henderson, 2007; West, 2003). Van Alstyne et al. (2016, p. 1) argue that platforms often fail because they do not optimize openness "If platforms are too closed, keeping potentially desirable participants out, network effects stall; if they're too open, there can be other value-destroying effects, such as poor-quality contributions or misbehavior of some participants that causes others to defect". Moreover, the degree of openness is a dynamic decision that needs to be updated regularly by platform owners.

Extant research has identified multiple considerations that influence the degree of openness. In particular, the decision involves trade-offs that are essentially balanced by platform owners: adoption vs. appropriability and diversity vs. control (Wareham et al., 2014; Boudreau, 2007, 2010). First, as already argued, a higher degree of openness leads to further participation. In the same vein, openness makes it easy for users to switch to other platforms, thus making it less feasible for platform owners to maximize their profits (Eisenmann et al., 2009; Van Alstyne et al., 2016). Second, higher openness leads to more diversity of users and forms of participation. However, with plurality and diversity, platform owners may lose control over the quality of participation and face complex governance decisions in which they have to constantly manage trade-offs between granting access to platform users and maintaining control over their respective platforms (Boudreau, 2007, 2010).

Underlying getting the degree of openness right is the acknowledgement that platform owners occupy privileged positions relative to their respective platforms. This is primarily attributed to their ownership of the digital infrastructure and within this digital infrastructure, platform owners have the (legal) right to define and enforce rules and regulations. Platform owners possess a great deal of

discretion in defining and enforcing the rules of the game for platform users, and this power is intrinsic to platform design, technological architecture, and terms of service (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Cutolo & Kenney, 2021). With digital platforms that are more established, platform users typically have two choices—accept the governance systems and processes in place or cease using the platform.

Despite the clear power asymmetries between platform owners and platform users, their effect has been explored only in passing (Gerwe & Silva, 2018; Jacobides et al., 2018; McIntyre & Srinivsan, 2017). Recent perspectives have called for exploring the power relations and have built upon the widely acknowledged notion that power is an attribute of the relationship between actors engaging in value creation activities (Cook et al., 1983; Emerson, 1962) and explored the consequence of this asymmetric distribution of power, detailing the unique risks that users (namely, those seeking entrepreneurial activities on platforms) face and illustrating the balancing responses and strategies developed by users to mitigate that power.

To be clear, power has been invoked in extant research around digital platforms, but scholars have mainly focused on the market power and subsequent competition *between* platforms (Eisenmann et al., 2009; Khan, 2016). Recent insights notwithstanding, I contend the platform governance – in the manner discussed in extant research - is underpowered. While it has been only recently acknowledged that platform governance mediates power relations between platform owners and platform users (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021), the manner in which platform governance mediates power relations between users *within* their respective platforms and how these power relations in turn inform platform governance have been under researched.

This brief review suggests that key assumptions of platform governance warrant further examination and refinement. In particular, the implicit assumption that the degree of platform openness applies to platform users in an equitable manner needs to be questioned under the premise

that power relations exist within platforms between platform users; a notion that has been under-researched in platform governance research within management. This is especially critical as the presumed democratizing and emancipatory implication of digital platforms for marginalized and underrepresented users is being increasingly questioned to the detriment of these platforms.

3.3.3   Critical Reactions and Criticisms

There are several possible manifestations to recent criticisms of the manner in which platform owners govern their respective platforms has received. The predominant question for critics and pundits in practitioner and academic circles has evolved around the implications of platform governance on the exercise of voice *within* platforms. In this section I briefly reflect on these criticisms and frame the proposed response, accordingly, paying particular attention to how the underpowered conception of platform openness may address these criticisms, at least in part.

It has been argued that digital platforms afford platform users the ability to exercise their voice and engage with the public sphere with limited restrictions relative to other forms of organizing and communications. As such, they have been associated with democratizing and emancipatory implications (Whelan et al., 2013). This potential, however, has not be viewed uncritically. In the past few years, there has been a great deal of scrutiny around the exercise of voice within digital platforms and the manner in which platforms may have contributed to broader societal dysfunctions (Flyverbom et al., 2019; Etter et al., 2019). This reflected in digital platforms being increasingly associated with labels of marginalization, hate speech, subjugation, etc.

Platform owners have been held responsible for not providing an inclusive space for users to exercise their voice without being subject to discrimination by other users and collectives or silenced by more powerful actors within, including platform owners themselves. This has culminated in platform owners being subject to Congressional hearings, civil society pressures, and threats of marquee users publicly deserting their respective platforms (Gorwa et al., 2020). Moreover, high-

profile events (e.g., United States Presidential Elections, Covid-19 pandemic, and numerous others) have further shed light on these problems that remain elusive for the owners of even the more established platforms, which deploy state-of-the-art human-led and algorithmic systems and processes.

Traditionally platform owners have contended that they are not legally required to protect or regulate speech and the exercise of voice of citizens in the same way that governments do (Gillespie, 2018). However, it is increasingly evident that these systematic and structural problems are impacting them negatively terms of increased scrutiny different stakeholders (e.g., governments, civil society organizations, media outlets, etc.). Importantly, this has also reflected negatively on the viability and competitiveness of their respective platforms in terms of their value to their users and communities. Recent decreases in the market capitalization and related participation numbers of established platform owners have been attributed to the governance of their platforms. Reflecting on the aforementioned challenges, Twitter's CEO highlighted in an internal memo:

> I suck at dealing with abuse and trolls on the platform and I've sucked at it for years… It's no secret and the rest of the world talks about it every day. I lose core user after core user by not addressing simple trolling issues that they face every day. (Guardian, 05/02/15)

The insufficiency of platform openness – as conceived in extant research as an underpowered construct – has reflected in the statements that established platform owners have made recently in acknowledging the limitations of their governance. These statements, some which are tabulated in Table 3:1, share in common commitments by platform owners to make their platforms more inclusive for users and communities to consume content and express themselves openly. However, these statements present a notable paradox in that these platform owners already adopt high degrees of openness in their respective platforms which pose limited restrictions on who can exercise their voice and what can be voiced by users. This is especially pronounced if one is to benchmark these platforms to traditional forms of organizing and communications channels.

Earning trust is one of our core operating principles, and it begins with how I act. I want people to have safe, inclusive and authentic conversations on Twitter, and I'm working to promote healthy conversations on our service while continuing to grow our audience and our business **(Twitter)**
The opportunity I all have is to make this a more inclusive world and to hold ourselves accountable to that. I think the most important thing I can do as an industry is to be humble and keep learning, and I've got to share stories and learn together **(YouTube)**
Visibility $\neq$ inclusivity. The easiest thing I can do is to simply show a range of faces and body types in our content. But, you can't simply put diverse images in an ad. Truly inclusive work comes from telling authentic stories that challenge stereotypes and honor the lived experiences of the audiences I am focusing on. **(Google)**
Holding ourselves accountable for diversity and inclusion is a critical part of making progress and ensuring I drive actions that have lasting impact at scale. **(Facebook)**
Every voice matters; I'm busy building a safe, inclusive environment where everyone can thrive **(Spotify)**
Our vision is to enable this world with diversity and inclusion, and further to bring positive social impact in our complicated and divided world. Diversity for Social Impact **(Substack)**
Everyone has a right to use Reddit free of harassment, bullying, and threats of violence. Communities and people that incite violence or that promote hate based on identity or vulnerability will be banned. While the rule on hate protects such groups, it does not protect those who promote attacks of hate **(Reddit)**

Table 3:1 Sample Statements around Inclusion

Put differently, the fact that these platforms are being scrutinized for not providing safe and inclusive spaces for platform users and communities to exercise their voice openly needs critical examination considering that these platforms have been repeatedly lauded for being open. Consider for example Spotify's long-held stance that it is "an open platform for artistic expression" that believes "in everyone's right to share their voice" and proclaims that "all creators and content are welcome". Nevertheless, in responding to recent criticisms, Spotify still acknowledged shortcomings (including high-profile recent incidents arounds claims that content producers on the platform have been spreading misinformation around Covid-19 vaccines) and highlighted that more work needs to be done for the platform to be more inclusive and accommodating for vulnerable users and

communities (Mukherjee et al., 2022).

It would be plausible to dismiss the statements in Table 3:1 as a digital version of greenwashing or marketing spins (Crane et al., 2008). Skeptics would argue - with merit - that the language invoked by platform owners merely aligns with the contemporary institutional landscape. With that said, I argue that keywords and language aside the content of the criticisms that platforms have received on one hand and high-profile incidents and events on the other hand do confirm that the exercise (and consumption) of voice in digital platforms is indeed subject to power relations that include attempts for influence, manipulation, subjugation, and dominance. This again asserts the distance between platform openness and the creation of safe, inclusive, and democratic arenas.

In sum, prior theorizing around platform governance has pointed to the primacy of instigating the positive feedback loops from higher degrees of openness while assuming a reactive approach to the negative externalities posed by bad actors and bad behavior. The insufficiency of platform governance – as conceived - has been critically highlighted by policy makers, civil society organizations, and platform users to the acknowledgement of platform owners. With power relations between users denoting many of these criticisms, I propose that these considerations should inform platform governance for platform owners as they do for governments, who have traditionally assumed these responsibilities. I contend that bridging this distance is instrumental for the long-term health and the corresponding competitiveness of digital platforms.

In the next section I substantiate the distinction between platforms being open and platforms being inclusive by shedding light on the latter. Towards doing so, I invoke a research stream within management that has recently argued (descriptively and prescriptively) for government-like roles and responsibilities that private corporations undertake in addressing global governance gaps. The objective is to explore how the power-laden norm of inclusion informs the governance of the exercise of voice of autonomous platform users might improve extant understanding of platform governance.

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3.4   The Norm of Inclusion and Global Governance

The openness of platforms, in the manner conceptualized in extant research, contributed to a relative empowerment of users who exercise their voice in a wide variety of contexts (Gillespie, 2018; Tapscott, 1997; Whelan et al., 2013). However, in light of recent criticism of the manner in which platform owners govern the exercise of voice in their respective platforms that continues to jeopardize the viability and competitiveness of even the more established platforms, I reiterate that the sufficiency of platform openness merits re-examination. I further note that this re-examination should be informed by conceptual and theoretical perspectives that acknowledge that the subject matter (i.e., governance of the exercise of voice by autonomous citizens) is political.

That said, questions around private corporations governing the transactions and interactions between autonomous citizens within the public sphere have been – and understandably so – beyond the scope of traditional management theories. I argue that a starting point for addressing the expansive governance roles and responsibilities of platform owners is research consistent with the "political turn" that corporate responsibility research undertook in the past decades (Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016) as well as recent developments in terms of invoking political science theories within management research. Though I contend that this body of research is by no means monolithic, I refer to it collectively as Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR).

The emergent research of PCSR reflects dissatisfaction with the different conceptions around the role of the corporation that have kept politics at a distance in line with a widely accepted perception of the separation between economic and political spheres. PCSR researchers see an increasing political role for private corporations (namely, multinational corporations) in a globalized economy (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer et al., 2006; Scherer et al., 2014). 'Political' is defined as multinational corporations assuming public roles

and responsibilities, notably regulation and the provisioning of public goods[5], that have previously been the sole prerogative of governments (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 901).

The political role that private corporations undertake in addressing and fulfilling gaps and voids in global governance has placed emphasis on the norm of inclusion under the premise that in (democratic) nation-states, the provisioning of rules and regulations is guaranteed either by procedures of direct democratic decision-making or by the election of representatives by citizens, who will then defend interests of citizens in political decisions (Habermas, 1989; Mena & Palazzo, 2012; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). However, with private corporations not being elected, PCSR researchers have argued that it is imperative for these corporations to facilitate the inclusion of stakeholders in political processes to bestow legitimacy on proposed governance rules and regulations (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Young, 2002).

The benefits of the norm of inclusion are rooted in several philosophical schools of thought. In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989), Habermas documents the manner in which commercial actors (e.g., coffee houses) helped construct the public spheres within which debates, deliberations, and the process of collective will formation took place within Europe from the seventeenth century onwards. The Habermasian conception of the public sphere – which has been influential in PCSR research and has been invoked in the study of platforms - privileges inclusion to ensure that the "force of the better argument" prevails with democratizing and emancipatory implications, while acknowledging power relations (e.g., Habermas, 1996, p. 103). Though, it has been argued that there are other norms that govern a well-functioning public sphere (e.g., political equality, reasonableness, publicity) (Young, 2002), inclusion is emphasized in this paper since it

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[5] The definition of public goods is centered on two characteristics: such goods are non-rival in consumption, and they possess non-excludable benefit. Examples of public goods in the context of PCSR include corporations contributing to peace and conflict resolution and human rights (e.g., Scherer et al., 2016)

relates closely to the construct of openness, which is central to research into platform governance.

Putting a boundary condition on the norm of inclusion can be challenging since the term is loosely defined and used in the current institutional landscape. However, for the purpose of the paper, inclusion is defined as openness (in terms of limited restrictions on access and forms of participation) relative to a plurality of modes of communication while acknowledging power relations between individuals and communities (Mena & Palazzo, 2012; Young, 2002). Critically, an inclusive public sphere recognizes and attends to systematic and structural power differentials (Dawkins, 2015, 2021). Young (2002) argues that having obtained access to the public, citizens *still* find that those more powerful exercise exclusion when they dismiss or patronize their voices leading to the reproduction of privilege and marginalization.

This power-laden approach to inclusion, which incorporates the premise of openness but accounts for power relations, is advocated in PCSR and multiple political schools of thought. More specifically, it has manifested in two broad contexts within management research:

Multi-stakeholder Initiatives. Underlying the motivation behind the emergence of PCSR is the assumption that globalization has eroded the power of nation-states and their regulatory capacity. This post national constellation is said to have left 'governance gaps' (Crane et al., 2008, p. 205), or 'regulatory vacuums' (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 899) that are addressed by corporations (descriptively and normatively) that assume quasi-governmental responsibilities (Valente & Crane, 2010). This is typically addressed through multi-stakeholder initiatives that involve multiple stakeholders including multinational corporations and civil society organizations, among other stakeholders. It is argued that the legitimacy and viability of these initiatives strongly hinge on the norm of inclusion (Mena & Palazzo, 2012) under the premise that as with polities the more inclusive these multi-stakeholder initiatives are, the greater are the chances for their success. Fundamental here is that inclusion accounts for the mediation of power differentials between the different stakeholders.

Corporate Citizenship. Among the research streams that constitute PCSR research is corporate citizenship. Though historically invoked as a metaphor for the responsibilities and duties of corporations as citizens similar to their human counterparts, recent research has argued that with the advent of globalization, multinational corporations increasingly administer rights upon citizens in contexts where governments are unwilling or unable to fulfill their responsibilities and duties (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). These rights consist of corporations facilitating the participation of citizens in the society, supporting their freedom from abuses and interference, enabling their freedom of expression, etc. This extended corporate citizenship acknowledges power relations of citizens relative to "stronger powers" and addresses the ensuing responsibilities of corporations (Matten & Crane, 2005, p. 170). It should be noted that the forementioned descriptive accounts of corporate citizenship broadly mimic those associated with digital platforms.

In light of this line of argumentation, inclusion represents a subtle but significant nuance to the manner in which platform governance is approached. Inclusion is not solely concerned with openness, in terms of access and forms of participation. It further implies that platform owners (1) acknowledge the power relations between platform users and how they relate to the broader political sphere and (2) define the governance systems and processes knowing that they mediate these power relations. Recognizing these different approaches to governance and begin to answer the question, "What are platforms ontologically"? In the next section I argue that the extension of inclusion to digital platforms – not as a keyword but in the manner discussed in PCSR – necessitates a reconceptualization of digital platforms.

3.5   The Contested Arena

Platform governance is a multidisciplinary research topic and has warranted practitioner and scholarly attention because it seeks timely explanations for the complex decisions that platform

owners undertake. Recent advances notwithstanding, platform governance has been found to incompletely explain the challenges that the governance of autonomous users entails, as evident by recent criticism and scrutiny that was discussed earlier. In tackling the conceptual distance between openness and inclusion I contend that the distance can be partially traced to the conception of digital platforms. That is, in order to formulate a more comprehensive understanding of governance, there needs to be a critical examination of that which is being governed. I argue that PCSR, with its attention to power relations, may inform such a critical examination.

3.5.1 Platforms as Arenas of Citizenship

The need for revisiting the conception of digital platforms relates directly to questions around platform governance. More specifically, I contend that the critique of the research around platform governance as underpowered is partially attributed to a similarly underpowered conception of digital platforms. Within management research, the predominant conceptualization of digital platforms has depicted them as multisided markets in which different sides are matched for products and services to be exchanged between (atomized) platform users (Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). Even if the exercise of voice is reduced to a product that is exchanged between buyers and sellers and argue that digital platforms constitute multisided markets of ideas or voice, the metaphor is problematized by the assumption of power symmetries in research around multi-sided markets and research around markets in general (Gawer, 2014). To this effect, devoid of power asymmetries, the concepts of openness and inclusion can be equated. Relaxing this assumption, however, points to a conceptual distance between that I seek to disentangle.

As such, I build on the notion of 'citizenship arenas' suggested by Crane et al. (2008) and propose that in relation to the exercise of voice, digital platforms represent arenas of citizenship, in accordance with the arguments proposed by Whelan et al. (2013). This conceptualization represents a broader footprint than that of multisided markets and relaxes several assumptions associated with

the latter. This association between digital platforms and citizenship entitlements and rights in their different manifestations is further substantiated by three interrelated features (Whelan et al., 2013). First, the subsidization of platforms, declining costs of digital communications globally, and the proliferation of smartphones have facilitated access for citizens (e.g., Flyverbom, 2019). Second, by virtue of the ever-increasing speeds associated with digital communications citizens can exercise their voice in real-time manner (e.g., Christensen, 2011). Third, digital platforms enable their users to engage directly with the public with relatively limited gatekeeping and oversight, ex-ante (Gillespie, 2010; 2018).

Extant research has noted that platform owners play roles akin to that of governments responsible for the transactions of legally autonomous individuals (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Evans, 2012; Hinings et al., 2018). For example, Rochet and Tirole (2004) characterize platform owners as licensing authorities that possess the discretion to impose restrictions on the interactions between platform users. Iansiti and Levien (2004) suggest that platform owners 'regulate connections among ecosystem members' to 'increase diversity and productivity'. Boudreau and Hagiu (2009, p. 187) write in their analysis of negative externalities in digital platforms that "perhaps most *striking* in the analysis was that the regulatory role played in these cases (by platform owners) was pervasive and at the core of their business models" (Italicized for emphasis). The rules, penalties, and restrictions imposed by platform owners to mitigate bad actors and forms of participation are similar to, and in some cases close substitutes for, those adopted by state agencies and public regulators.

Notably, the aforementioned roles of platform owners have not been further generalized in extant research. That said, the conception of digital platforms as arenas of citizenship fits squarely with the recognition that private corporations may indeed construct public spheres in which citizens may fulfill their social rights (e.g., freedom to participate in society), civil rights (e.g., freedom to exercise speech), and political rights (e.g., rights to take part of collective will formation in the public

sphere) when their governments and public institutions are unable or unwilling to administer those rights in comparable manner (Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer et al., 2016; Whelan et al., 2013). As such it is indicative of an expansive role of private corporations through which they undertake political responsibilities. This places platform owners in a 'vertical' relationship with their respective platform users through which they govern their exercise of voice and influence their citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2005; Crane et al., 2008; Flyverbom et al., 2019). In the next section, I further delve into the inner workings of platforms as contested arenas of citizenship from an ontological standpoint, as opposed to alternate conceptions in which conflicts and disputes are incidental and marginal, in order to further substantiate the challenges inherent to platform owners assuming the aforementioned government-like roles relative to their platforms.

3.5.2   Platforms as Contested Arenas

What follows from the conception of platforms as arenas of citizenship is relaxing the assumptions of power symmetries between platform users. This is especially the case when I think of platform users as citizens and collectives who leverage the digital affordances of the respective platforms to exercise their voice and engage with the public sphere and public institutions accordingly. I argue that the implications of this conception (i.e., power asymmetries between users and communities) bring to the fore issues that cannot be effectively managed or governed merely through balancing the degrees of openness in the manner detailed earlier. In contrast to extant research that has characterized negative externalities within platforms as marginal and incidental, I contend that contest is an ontological attribute of platforms. In other words, conflict and disputes within digital platforms need to be perceived as the norm rather than the exception. I begin with three points to substantiate contest within digital platforms.

First, contest is inherent to social life. Young (2002, p. 50-51) for example, argues that in

public discursive spaces the normal condition of democratic debate (is) a "process of struggle". Young joins other contemporary political theorists (e.g., Mouffe, 1999) in endorsing a more agonistic model of democratic process and argues that "in a society where there are social group differences and significant injustice, democratic politics ought to be a process of struggle. Far from a face-off in enemy opposition, struggle is a process of communicative engagement of citizens with one another". Young further asserts that citizens and collectives at historically disadvantageous power positions and in general those with "differing social positions or interests must struggle to raise issues because others may be threatened by those issues" (Young, 2002, p. 51)

Second, the democratizing potential of platforms as arenas of citizenship is realized through the participation of citizens and collectives who might not have the capacity otherwise to exercise their voice openly and engage with alternative offline public spheres and arenas of citizenship. In many cases, the marginalization and privilege of participants are due to structural conditions that stratify social life based on several factors (e.g., class, race, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, religion, etc.). As argued by critical political theorists including those in the feminist tradition (e.g., Fraser, 1990; Young, 2002), underlying these sources of marginalization and privilege are power asymmetries that tend to be historically informed and reproduced. Thus, as users and communities participate in digital platforms these power imbalances and asymmetries are necessarily invoked when engaging with the public sphere.

Third, the conceptualization of platforms as arenas of citizenship depicts them as entailing discursive functions for the exercise of voice. Relative to other public functions (e.g., economic transactions between buyers and sellers) provisioned through digital platforms, the manner in which users communicate among each other and engage with the public sphere tends to be unbounded and unrestricted by an overarching scope or value proposition (e.g., sales of products, completion of tasks, developing applications, etc.). As such, the structural differences between citizens and

collectives are bound to resurface along with the openness and subsequent pluralism that manifests in their respective platforms. In a similar context, Logue and Grimes (2019) argue that the necessary involvement of participants with divergent interests and agendas leads to significant conflict in social mission platforms (e.g., crowdfunding platforms) that are necessarily evident in these platforms.

The platform form of organizing invites pluralism as part of instigating network effects. The line of argumentation presented above points to agonism being inherent to pluralism which ties to a political school of thought that argues that conflict is endemic to society and posits that the creation of agreed upon rules that manage (as opposed to eradicate) conflict should be a democratic ideal. Agonism is derived from the root word agon, loosely translated as struggle (Kalyvas, 2009; Mouffe, 1999). Agonists attempt to structure and utilize dissensus, rather than seeking to eliminate it. Agonistic pluralism has been recently invoked in management research to further extant understanding of PCSR in the context of multi-stakeholder initiatives (e.g., Dawkins, 2015, 2021). Moreover, it has been argued that dissent characterizes corporate – civil society relations with implications for extant understanding of CSR (Whelan, 2013). I similarly argue here that this line of argumentation can be extended to platforms as arenas of citizenship

In summation, with digital platforms representing or at least aiming for representing generalizable microcosms of society, it follows that contest is an ontological feature of the interactions and transactions between platform users. This is especially the case with platforms that are representative of a diverse body of users and forms of participation, which is fundamental to their viability and competitiveness. The contested platform is one where the interactions and transactions between platform users are fraught with power relations (and power asymmetries). These power relations, if left unmanaged, would reproduce structural and systematic privilege and marginalization and/or would have negative implications for the functioning of platforms as arenas of citizenship (Dawkins, 2015, 2021; Mouffe, 1999; Young, 2002). I contend that this has increasingly manifested

in platforms and led to challenges in their governance.

3.5.3   Application of the Argument

Contest in digital platforms manifests in different contexts and across multiple dimensions. Relatedly, platform governance is key to mediating the power relations between platform users and as such has implications for the ability of platforms users to exercise their voice in an effective manner amid contestations and conflicts. My contention here is that higher degrees of platform openness may recreate the power relations that marginalized and underrepresented individuals and communities endure in offline contexts. Moreover, limiting negative externalities through lowering degrees of openness (i.e., suspensions of platform users and/or removal of content) without acknowledging the inherent power differentials may not lead to inclusive platforms; it might also lead to counterproductive outcomes. I exemplify this through three mini-case studies, which are broadly described in Table 3:2, that are leveraged here for the purpose of illustration.

	Mini-case Study 1	Mini-case Study 2	Mini-case Study 3
Research Context	Reddit; BPT Sub-Reddit	Twitter	Facebook
Research Motivation	Study the publicized racial tensions that emerged within the popular community	Study the manner in which political activists leveraged Twitter during a critical political event	Reflects on the objects of the political governance of Facebook relative to Middle East politics
Data Collection Source(s)	Ethnography Data analytics Web scraping	Data analytics Archival data	Manual collection of records of Facebook suspensions on Twitter
Data Collection Period	2014 - 2020	2016	2021 - 2021

Table 3:2 Overview of the mini-case studies

3.5.3.1 Racial contest within Reddit

Reddit is a digital platform with hundreds of millions of users. Founded in 2005, Reddit affords its users the ability to create communities of interest within which users can exercise their voice and participate accordingly (e.g., politics, nba, covid-19, relationship_advice, dataisbeautiful, etc.). Though Reddit Inc. undertakes overall governance roles and responsibilities for the platforms, the governance of communities is mostly delegated to users (i.e., community creators) and to users who

volunteer to assume the roles of community moderators. Reddit exhibits a high degree of openness in that there are minimal restrictions on access and value propositions; Reddit users use aliases and attempts to uncover the real identity of users are sanctioned by Reddit Inc. (Massanari, 2017).

Among the thousands of communities within Reddit, I shed light on a community denoted as BPT. BPT is notable not only due to its popularity but also questions around its governance have attracted interest from mainstream media outlets (e.g., Harmon, 1999). The value proposition of BPT revolves around sharing and discussing "hilarious or insightful" content relevant to Black culture (BPT About Section). In its early days, the high perceived quality of content and subsequent discussions led to the community being promoted and recommended by users within Reddit's more established communities, as per the collected data. The perception of quality coupled with the high degree of platform openness of Reddit contributed to the growth of BPT at an exponentially faster rate relative to other Reddit communities. This feat was celebrated by community moderators. However, it uncovered challenges. Though primarily conceived as a comedy community, racial contest increasingly emerged between users, which led to numerous complaints.

In dealing with racial contest, the governance of BPT was periodically updated by BPT's founders and moderators in stated attempts to balance the degree of openness in order to mitigate the emergent conflicts and tensions, while maintaining growth aspirations. I reflect on these updates in governance that took place over the course of six years.

First phase (2014 - 2015): *restrictions on "low-quality" content.* The rules and regulations were updated to reflect attempts by moderators to remove posts and comments that were deemed low-effort and low-quality. Importantly, it was announced that users who engaged in racial slurs, calls for (offline) violence, or personal attacks were to be suspended or banned from participating in BPT. Moreover, moderators called upon BPT users to maintain a level of respect to each other and utilize the affordances at their disposal to "downvote" low-quality content to the point that it is discarded

(note: downvoted posts and comments tend to be less visible to other users).

> "Please also help us in keeping this post and discussion open by not engaging with trolls" and downvoting /reporting them so I can take appropriate action." BPT moderator (Reddit, 23/03/2015)

Second phase (2015 – 2016), restrictions on political content. With the updated rules and regulations proving to be ineffective in mitigating racial contest, the moderators updated the governance of BPT to reflect a controversial ban on political content under the premise that the community is primarily for comedy and light-hearted content; political content was associated with conflicts and tensions. While some users publicly welcomed the update, numerous users who identified as Black called out the moderators for depriving them of an outlet to discuss matters that are important to them. These users lamented that their marginalization is being re-enacted.

> "Our mothers and fathers constantly worry about our safety every day. The difference is that for us this is never a joke. I cannot turn off the screens of our blackness or unsubscribe from racism." BPT user (Reddit, 04/12/16)

Third phase (2016 – 2019), restrictions on bad faith participation. As it became evident that restrictions on political content were not feasible due to the elusive nature of the exercise of voice, BPT moderators updated the governance to reflect restrictions on 'bad faith participation' that leads to racial disputes. Despite the updates, which were coupled with an increase in the number of moderators, the efforts proved ineffective not only in curbing the racial contest but more critically they led users who identified as Black to complain that they were feeling unsafe in the community. These users questioned the legitimacy and efficacy of the moderators.

> "… I have received many complaints from black users. They feel as if whenever a political topic comes up, white users discredit our experiences or downvote them because reality is too uncomfortable" BPT moderator (Reddit, 03/04/18)

Six years into its creation, BPT was one of the more popular communities on Reddit with millions of highly engaged users. The state of BPT was one where moderators had to constantly intervene in the discussions to remove posts and comments that were deemed as "bad faith participation" to the

point that community discussions were truncated due to imposed restrictions (removed posts and comments were retrieved analytically in the data collection process). Importantly, BPT users who identified as Black lamented the state of the community in which their experiences were being downvoted and discarded as they were in the offline arenas. Following mounting public and private complaints, BPT moderators decided to fundamentally shift their approach to governance beyond balancing the degree of openness by taking the following steps:

- Black users were asked to share pictures of their forearms privately with moderators to prove their Blackness. In an otherwise anonymized context, Black users were "verified" with checkmarks next to their aliases.

- Moderators highlighted those sensitive topics and discussions would be tagged as "country club posts"; these posts would be closed for participation and the exercise of voice except to "verified" Black users.

- Non-Black BPT users who the moderators identified as "allies" would be given an exemption to participate in "country club posts"; non-verified users would still be able to participate openly in discussions in non-country club posts.

The drastic updates to BPT's governance were heavily debated within Reddit (and beyond in mainstream media outlets). The updates were, however, defended by their proponents to the point that they were eventually institutionalized by Reddit Inc. in its broader platform governance.

> "What do the whites propose? for us to take it on the chin, keep it moving, and let massa do what massa want? I welcome yall here and get drowned out by yall sheer numbers and faster internet speeds" BPT user (Reddit, 05/04/19)

3.5.3.2 Political contest within Twitter

Twitter is a digital platform with hundreds of millions of users. Founded in 2006, Twitter affords its users the ability to exercise their voice in 140- and 280-character bursts (i.e., Tweets). In distinction to other platforms, Tweets are public in the sense that they are visible to all platform users in an

instantaneous manner. In terms of openness, Twitter does not have a real-name policy; users have the option of Tweeting through aliases. Moreover, Twitter allows users to coalesce around common interests or events through the hashtag identifier (#). It should be noted that among the emergent features that Twitter Inc. instilled as part of Twitter's affordances the concept of trending topics that captures popular and timely conversations on local and global scales.

Twitter's high degree of openness was credited with providing users with the ability to exercise their voice and mobilize in opposition to oppressive governments in periods of political turmoil. Exemplary of these contexts that proved influential in the evolution of the platform are the several uprisings in the Middle East in the period extending from 2009 and 2011. The uprisings were denoted by mainstream media outlets as "Twitter Revolutions" (Christensen, 2011) due the perceived role of digital platforms in empowering citizens in their respective jurisdictions. While I remain very critical of the technological and political perspectives that inflate the role of digital technologies, I argue that the perception of the role is conceptually important in understanding the corresponding activities of the respective stakeholders.

Among the contexts in which the high degree of openness enabled political activism and mobilization was the Kingdom of Bahrain in which Twitter was leveraged by activists in conjunction with protests calling for the fulfillment of their citizenship rights. The platform was utilized to mobilize internally (e.g., warn activists of security forces in a given neighborhood) and to bypass state-owned media outlets and communications channels. In particular, I shed light on the Bahrain hashtag (#Bahrain) during June 2016 that was leveraged to protest the government's decision to revoke the citizenship of the opposition's spiritual leader and one of the key authors of the country's first constitution among other key figures. The hashtag represented an outlet for citizens to coalesce around the revoking of citizenship and exercise their voice accordingly.

A deep dive into the thousands of Tweets that constituted #Bahrain conversation affirms this

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characterization. Shortly following the initiation of the conversation, the composition of the hashtag was dominated by Tweets conveying the stance of political activists and citizens opposing the government's decision. The participation can be categorized as follows:

- Citizen journalists relaying the news of the decision to revoke the citizenship of the Opposition's leader to the broader public and other related developments

- Political activists and civil society organizations articulating the lack of moral and legal grounds for the government's decision and calling for lobbying against the decision

- Citizens reflecting on the historical marginalization of the Opposition group in the Kingdom of Bahrain and their deprivation of citizenship rights and entitlements

This participation pattern across the different categories coupled with strong engagement from Twitter users led the conversation to be featured in Twitter's Trending Topics in several countries in the Middle East. This reflected in the coverage of mainstream media outlets of the events that unfolded during that time frame. To be clear, the composition of the conversation in the early stages included a minority pro-government Tweets that defended the government's decision.

With that said, analysis of the analytically collected data indicates a sharp and sudden distortion of the composition of the #Bahrain conversation. This reflected in pro-government Tweets effectively dominating the conversation in a highly concentrated manner. The content of these Tweets utilized the affordances of Twitter and participated in the #Bahrain conversation to counter the claims made by the Opposition tweets in terms of discrediting the accounts of citizen journalists, substantiating the decisions of the government, and more broadly undermining the marginalization claims of the Opposition. The Tweets were mostly consistent in messaging and style and not only presented the government narrative but undercut the claims of opposition to citizenship through utilizing a sharp sectarian discourse. The quality of the arguments aside, it was the sheer volume and intensity of the pro-government Tweets that effectively led that narrative to dominate the

conversation, to the point that analysis of the conversation without reflecting on the temporal dimension highlights the dominance of the latter.

To be clear the trend that emerged was notable not because of a mere presence of discourse and counter-discourse in an evidently politically divided context. Rather it is notable because of the manner in which the voices of the Opposition were undermined. Forensic analysis of the pro-government voices and the coordinated participation highlights that they represent state-operated botnets (i.e., automated software programs that pose as users on digital platforms and participate in a highly coordinated manner) (Jones, 2019).

3.5.3.3 Localized contest within Facebook

Facebook is a digital platform that affords users the ability to create, share, and consume content in a social networking context. Founded in 2004, Facebook is accessible, as evident by hundreds of millions of platform users who connect with other users based on "friends" and personal connections or based on broader interests through public profiles that are visible to all "followers". The openness of the platform reflects in the ability of users to engage with different forms of participation. Though it exhibits high degrees of openness, Facebook has, throughout its evolution, imposed restrictions and introduced certain restrictions on access and forms of participation (e.g., Facebook has institutionalized a real-name policy that hinders the participation of some activists).

Due to increasing demands from different stakeholders, Facebook has increased its restrictions on the exercise of voice within its platform(s) in the past few years. These restrictions are emblematic of platform owners lowering the degrees of platform openness through limiting the access of bad actors and forms of participation. To be clear the characterization of "bad" is associated with the subjective interpretation that they lead to negative externalities for platform owners (e.g., due to pressure from governments or investors). I reflect on these restrictions in this mini-case study to further illustrate that in contested arenas of citizenship lowering the degree of openness without

accounting for broader power-laden relations leads to questionable outcomes. Towards this purpose I constructed a dataset with accounts of Facebook users who were either suspended or banned and/or had content removed for commentary related to the political context in the Middle East. These accounts were publicly shared by the impacted Facebook users (activists, journalists, commentators, professors, etc.) on other platforms (namely Twitter).

The complaints of the impacted Facebook users collectively protested and criticized Facebook's governance systems and processes that introduced restrictions upon their exercise of voice. I categorized the complaints in three non-mutually exclusive categories:

First. Censorship (as per the users' wording). Users complained that underlying the removal of their content, suspension of their accounts, and limiting their engagement with other users is the content and substance of their political opinions. This was especially the case during May 2021 during the displacement of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. In this timeframe, hundreds of accounts reported restrictions and were included accordingly in the analyzed dataset. In particular, Facebook's (temporary) suspension of Muna El-Kurd, a Palestinian activist, with 1.5 million public followers, who reported on her own experiences was notable. Palestinian artists and activists reported their posts removed and accounts suspended without explanation.

> "Still can't get over the fact that my dad was suspended for a month from Facebook earlier this year for sharing a Noam Chomsky quote about Palestine." @jennineak

Second. Context. Some users complained that Facebook's restrictions relative to their participation were caused by Facebook's governance systems and processes that did not account for the context of their posts and comments. This was the case made by (often) independent journalists who were merely reporting or engaging critically with an event or development related to their local political landscape. Those users complained that Facebook's governance did not account for context or local political environment in which it is the norm to discuss and debate with different political actors and

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positions. It is notable that these restrictions were not only being enforced on real-time participation but was being enforced retroactively, as stated by a Professor of Political Sciences.

> "Stupid Facebook (based on their stupid algorithm) is alerting me that my posts from 5 or 6 years ago violated "community standards" because there were references—sometimes critical—to Nasrallah or Hizbullah." @asadabukhalil

Third. Utterance. Though overlapping with the former categories, a third subset of users complained that they were being restricted for posts and comments that were not necessarily political. However, they merely included keywords and even background images that were flagged by Facebook's governance systems and processes. The targets of these restrictions included cases as mundane as an outdoor family picture with a political flag appearing in the distant background, an analyst announcing his upcoming interview on a local TV channel, references to a cultural cuisine, etc. The manner in which these users reacted to their participation being restricted was for the most part de-emphasized by most users in their posts and comments. However, for others it was perceived as evidence of political targeting.

> "Facebook … relies on Orientalists to decipher Arabic. This was considered a violation (link to image file of Facebook's messaging)" @4noura

Analysis of the manner in which Facebook has approached platform governance in its inherently contested platform illustrates the limitations of getting the degree of openness right devoid of understanding the political contest and localized power relations between users. The implications emanating from the accounts of impacted users highlighted the implications in terms of (a) fragmenting the political discourse; (b) leading accounts with thousands of followers to (willingly and unwillingly) leave the platform; (c) proving futile as users and their followers attempt to game Facebook's governance. As it pertains to the latter, users utilized multiple tactics:

- Replacing certain keywords with "that which shall not be named"

- Shuffling of letters/Adding dots between letters

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- Using synonyms/phonetics instead of keywords

The three mini case studies demonstrate that platform openness enables the participation of marginalized individuals and communities and provides them with a platform to exercise their voice and engage with the public sphere. However, the same affordances similarly enable the participation of powerful actors within the respective platforms to potentially downplay or drown the narrative of the marginalized through access to superior resources; platform openness may thus lead to the exclusion of individuals and communities. Moreover, the attempts of platform owners (or community moderators) to impose restrictions on participation that do not account for power relations in inherently contested arenas may prove to be inadequate. The next section addresses the implications of forementioned arguments to an alternative conception of platform governance.

3.6   Bridging the Distance Between Openness and Inclusion

Platform openness is central to extant understanding of platform governance as it is deemed conducive to the participation of users; restrictions may be incidentally introduced to mitigate negative externalities. The logic that follows from this approach can be described as follows: platform openness allows supply and demand dynamics to take place within platforms to the point that the better or more appealing products, innovations, or narratives are featured and selected. The greater the number and diversity of users having equitable access to platform affordances, the more efficient these dynamics are in reaching rational decision making and near-consensus positions. While competitive dynamics between platforms exhibit a winner-takes-all logic, platform openness – as conceptualized in extant research - translates to what I refer to as winner-takes-all logic *within* platforms where users are exposed to dominant narratives based on their merits. The winner-takes-all logic within platforms manifests in specific order of search results, content suggestions, and which voices are most visible (Crawford, 2021; Gillespie, 2010; 2018).

The aforementioned logic might be fitting in the context of markets or arenas of citizenship

that are devoid of power asymmetries. However, in the context of inherently contested arenas, dominant and trending narratives are not necessarily the ones that conform to the ideals of the better argument or collective will formation, rather their dominance might be driven by power asymmetries that reproduce (offline) social positions or these might be driven by actors with disproportionate access to resources. As such, the logic associated with platform openness has been linked to problematic trends. This is further problematized by platform owners aligning their commercial interests with this winner-takes-all logic in which users coalesce around trending and viral topics and interests (irrespective of their content). To this effect, platform owners are increasingly adopting algorithmic governance based on machine learning, or what is loosely called artificial intelligence. The technical objective of these algorithms is to increase engagement through promoting dominant narratives irrespective of power considerations (Crawford, 2016).

Bridging the distance between openness and inclusion requires us to revisit this logic that has guided not only algorithmic and non-algorithmic governance systems and processes but also their commercial strategies (Gillespie, 2010, 2018). In line with depiction of platforms as inherently contested arenas, the alternative governance logic based on inclusion translates to platform users having the ability to choose between narrative(s) and different institutional logics that correspond to pluralism. Put differently, bridging the distance between openness and inclusion means that platform users participate in publics in which they can exercise their voice openly or consume the content that aligns with their preferences and dispositions. The practices and activities that denote this alternative governance logic should target the viability and competitiveness of their platforms while providing inclusive spaces for citizens and collectives. In what follows I present three potential avenues for bridging the separation between openness and inclusion that warrant further future research.

3.6.1 Decentralized rules of the game(s)

Political theorists have critically called for acknowledging the power relations that govern the

interactions of citizens and collectives. A proposed solution to power asymmetries and the prospect of reproduction of marginalization and privilege in public spheres (i.e., platforms as arenas of citizenship in this context) lies in moving towards a decentralized mode of governance (Fraser, 1990; Holm, 2019; Young, 2002). Decentralization provides citizens with the ability to evade the rules of the game that tend to favor the more powerful and participate in counter-publics within the broader public sphere (e.g., Black Press in the United States) (Squires, 2002). Juxtaposing this perspective to platform governance translates to the decentralization of the rules and regulations that govern the exercise of voice within digital platforms (i.e., shift in governance logic from defining and enforcing the rules of the *game* to the rules of the *games*).

Though seemingly abstract, decentralized platform governance is a viable technical and strategic choice as evident by recent research (Chen et al., 2021; Crawford, 2016). Through decentralization, digital platforms can enhance the power of platform users while reducing the relative power of platform owners and stronger stakeholders. With decentralization, digital platforms can create governance systems and processes through which platform users can influence, monitor, and engage with the public sphere (Cheibub et al., 2010; Hurwicz, 2008), with the ability to adopt multiple governance logics within the respective platforms (Chen, Pereira, & Patel, 2021). While decentralization may relatively lower the power of platform owners, it might address a need in terms of sharing governance responsibilities. Following the highly publicized ban of the President of the United States from Twitter and other digital platforms at a critical juncture of the U.S. Presidential elections, Twitter's CEO commented on the governance decision.

> "… I feel a ban is a failure of ours ultimately to promote healthy conversation. And a time for us to reflect on our operations and the environment around us… Having to take these actions fragment the public conversation... And sets a precedent I feel is dangerous: the power an individual or corporation has over a part of the global public conversation." (Twitter, 13/01/21)

In the same thread, Twitter's CEO announced an initiative to build an "open decentralized standard for

social media" that Twitter is just one part of and has less centralized responsibility in deciding who and how users and communities exercise their voice.

In general, the move towards decentralization has been associated with providing meaningful measures against government censorship and the protection of the speech of marginalized groups across the globe; thus, leading to a more inclusive arena of citizenship (Holm, 2019; Matney, 2021). Decentralization ties into the conception of platforms as contested arenas and departs from the winner-takes-all logic within platforms that typically selects from divergent perspectives and presenting dominant narrative(s) towards an alternative logic that affords the ability to access ''real alternatives'' (Crawford, 2016). As such, if platform users experience marginalization within platforms, they would have the choice for "backdoor access" through which they can access alternative versions of content that have been moderated by platform owners or disapproved by the majority of users (e.g., similar to the Wikipedia model). While decentralized governance constitutes a promising avenue for bridging the separation between openness and inclusion, the topic warrants further research in terms of strategic considerations and broader implications for the public sphere.

3.6.2 Fairness stakeholder relations; From Fair Play to Fair Fight

Extant research has acknowledged that corporations deal in their transactions and interactions with conflicts and disputes in terms of competing demands from different stakeholders (Phillips, 1997; Phillips & Reichart, 2000). Balancing the demands and interests of their respective stakeholders is a challenging task for focal corporations; the manner in which managers engage with stakeholders is critical from a strategic standpoint (Freeman, 1984). Derived from John Rawls's "principle of fair play," the principle of fairness has been proposed within Stakeholder Theory as a normative foundation for corporations to identify their respective stakeholders and balance their demands and interests accordingly (Phillips, 1997; Phillips & Reichart, 2000). The principle of fairness has been applied and extended to contexts in which corporations and their respective stakeholders are pursuing

value co-creation towards mutual benefits (Laplume et al., 2008).

Value co-creation in the context of digital platforms between platform owners and autonomous platform users who create value through exercising their voice is distinguishable from traditional value co-creation between corporations and their respective stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, customers, employees, etc.) who would typically collaborate towards fulfilling a common value proposition. However, I do argue that the principle of fairness, which constitutes a universally accepted normative ideal (Phillips, 1997), can be extended to platforms as arenas of citizenship that are inherently populated with different demands and interests. In particular, I argue that platform owners through their governance systems and processes should promote the notion of fair fight, which has been advocated by research around agonistic pluralism as applied to multi-stakeholder initiatives (Dawkins, 2015, 2021). The notion of 'fair fight' follows from the proclamations by political theorists that conflicts and disputes are pervasive and may manifest in different contexts that exhibit diversity and plurality. As such platform governance should at the very least acknowledge that marginalized and under-represented stakeholders operate from a disadvantageous position and design the corresponding rules and regulations to relatively level the playing field for these stakeholders, accordingly.

I contend that the notion of 'fair fight' can be extended to the context of digital platforms in dealing with contest and relatedly bridging the conceptual distance between openness and inclusion. In accordance with ensuring that different stakeholders get an opportunity for fair fight, platform owners may mitigate sources of power that certain users can access disproportionately. This can be achieved through decentralization that potentially provides marginalized platform users with the ability to participate in safe and inclusive spaces within the broader platform. It can also be achieved through ensuring that platform affordances are not gamed and manipulated by those with access to financial and technological resources. In the Twitter mini-case discussed earlier, the activism of

Twitter users in Bahrain was effectively downplayed by state-funded botnet accounts with superior financial and technological resources. Incorporating fair fight into platform governance in this context would be for Twitter to identify and subsequently exclude these accounts, many of which operate anonymously or through fake identities, from its platforms in order to relatively level the playing field for political activists to engage with or against the respective governments and public institutions. With that said, it is important to note that fair fight may lessen power asymmetries, but not eradicate them.

3.6.3 Political Model of Corporate Governance

The participation of private corporations in the process of global governance, which translate to definition and implementation of global rules and the provisioning of global public goods and the fulfillment of regulatory gaps that have been associated with globalization (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000; Detomasi, 2007; Reinicke et al., 2000), raises important questions around their responsibility and accountability since corporations are not elected entities who are – in theory - accountable to their respective constituents (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). This potentially problematic notion has led PCSR researchers to affirm the importance for inclusion, as argued earlier (Mena & Palazzo, 2012). Furthermore, the expansive political roles that private corporations undertake in a globalized business context have reaffirmed the calls to revisit the emphasis on corporate governance that privilege the demands and interests of shareholders relative to other stakeholders. While these calls are not new, they have been reiterated to argue that there needs to be concrete mechanisms that aligns decision making with the interests of citizens who participate within digital platforms (Whelan, 2012).

Within management research there have been multiple attempts to rethink corporate governance through proposing a stakeholder model of corporate governance, which includes stakeholders: i.e., to "employees, customers, suppliers, stockholders, members of the local

community" (Evan & Freeman, 1988; Phillips et al., 2008). The case for revisiting the framework for corporate oversight and scope of obligations has been linked to the value creation activities undertaken by the corporation and its respective stakeholders (Jansson, 2005). That is, the locus of stakeholder obligations corresponds to the locus of value creation. In light of the expansive role of the corporation and the globalization of supply chains, Whelan (2012) proposes a political model for corporate governance that includes (variable) civil society representatives: e.g., leading non-government organizations (Crane et al., 2008: 96; Scherer & Palazzo, 2010). I argue that in the same vein, a political model of corporate governance can be proposed for platform owners and information and communication technology corporations, more broadly, that mediate the manner in which autonomous users exercise their voice. In accordance with this model, the manner in which platform owners govern the exercise of would be subject to the accountability of not only shareholders but also stakeholders and civil society organizations. The pushback against the adoption of a political model of corporate governance may stem from the assumption that private corporations would not be motivated to introduce measures that negatively impact their value appropriation and profitability potential (Whelan, 2012). Recent evidence however affirms that platform governance and managing inclusion within an inherently contested arena is a challenging task which may lead in the short run to users leaving their platforms amid increased public criticism and in the long run to the demise of their platforms.

3.7   Limitations

I have used the construct of platform openness as the focus of the study because it is among the most frequently invoked concepts (both implicitly and explicitly) in research into platform governance. However, not all of research around platform governance discusses the construct explicitly. Researchers have indeed examined multiple mechanisms that constitute platform (e.g., decision rights, control mechanisms, pricing decisions, etc.). I have suggested that openness is central and

fundamental to platform governance since any additional mechanisms that have been discussed by researchers typically follow from degrees of openness. I contend that it is unlikely that explicitly discussing the other governance mechanisms would impact the proposed conceptual and theoretical development. That is, the review of the literature suggests that these concepts have been similarly underpowered; this is further reinforced by the notion that as I have argued research on platform governance has not accounted extensively for power relations between platform users due to the conception of platforms that has been for the most part underpowered, with notable exceptions that were referred to in the study.

Another possible limitation is that the underpowered conception of platform openness that is being essentially critiqued in the paper might be an intentional decision, as opposed to an unintended misunderstanding of the context, by platform owners in response to power-related considerations of their own relative to their corporate stakeholders. That is, it may be that platform owners see benefit from the reproduction of privilege and marginalization for commercial interests and/or for alignment of powerful stakeholders (e.g., governments). As such, if I have illustrated the negative implications of Twitter's governance on the political activism of citizens in the Kingdom of Bahrain, I am not accounting for any hypothetical political considerations that Twitter has made on the costs of opposing local governments, for example. Future research could analyze this question on the strategic alignment of long-term viability and competitiveness of digital platforms and the norm of inclusion, in the manner that I suggested.

There are other sources of additional complexity that I intentionally ignored here for the sake of simplicity and theoretical parsimony. These also represent potential limitations. Among them are that I have chosen not to expand upon the debates around the exercise of voice in the context of the public sphere from a political theory standpoint. That is, I have invoked agonistic pluralism to illustrate the challenges inherent to the governance of arenas of citizenship that are fraught with

power relations between users and communities. However, the premise of agonistic pluralism has been debated and its sufficiency (without coupling it with normative arguments) has been discussed recently within management research (e.g., Dawkins, 2021). That said, my purpose was merely to substantiate contest and conflicts in arenas of citizenship.

Finally, the mini-case studies that were discussed for illustrative purposes have been abridged to satisfy this purpose. As such, certain details and nuances were not expanded upon in the paper. That being said, the main takeaways were presented accordingly (with minimal elaborations in the form of quotes or specific examples). Moreover, considering that the examples represent specific mini-case studies discussed in a qualitative manner, they do not have generalizability potential; though I contend that they represent opportunities for further research and theory building around the subject matter.

3.8   Conclusion

In the present paper, I have made three key contributions. First, I have argued that extant research on platform governance has emphasized an underpowered conception of platform openness; I argued that the recent criticisms that platform owners have received in the last few years relate to this limitation. Second, I have noted the resonance between the digitalization of the economy and extant PCSR research that accounts for the involvement of private corporations in global governance. In particular, I have argued that the power-laden norm of inclusion can address the limitations of extant platform governance research. Third, I have argued that if contest is not accounted for explicitly by platform owners, then structural marginalization and underrepresentation of individuals and groups may in fact be reproduced in digital platforms irrespective of the degrees of platform openness. Additionally, I have used throughout the analysis illustrative examples of contest within digital platforms and the implications that contest presents for extant understanding of platform governance.

CHAPTER 4

GOVERNANCE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS: A CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP PERSPECTIVE

4.1   Abstract

Traditional conceptions of the political role of the corporation have detailed the practices and activities through which corporations engage directly with the political sphere to further their competitive advantage and financial performance. In contrast, we know little about how corporations *mediate* the engagement between autonomous citizens and collectives with their respective governments and public institutions towards fulfilling their own citizenship rights. The digitalization of the economy, and more specifically the proliferation of digital platforms, has amplified the theoretical and empirical significance of this limitation as private corporations (i.e., platform owners) possess a great deal of discretion in terms of mediating interactions of autonomous stakeholders. We address this research gap through a longitudinal study of a leading digital platform in which communities coalesce around a plethora of interests including those conducive to the fulfillment of their social, political, and civic rights. We argue that platform owners influence these engagements through the practices of *intermediation, augmentation, and restriction*. We further argue that these practices and their orientation are contextualized by factors such as *citizenship*, *institutionalization*, and *commercialization*. Our study helps to refine our understanding of the practices and contextual factors that denote the roles and responsibilities of platform owners as political mediators. It also adds nuance to the emergent research stream denoted as Political Corporate Social Responsibility, which theorizes for state-like roles and responsibilities for corporations in provisioning public goods and global governance.

4.2   Introduction

Critics and pundits have contended that corporations engage with the political sphere, in the form of governments and public institutions, motivated by competitive and financial considerations (Bonardi

et al., 2005; Hillman & Hitt, 1999; Hillman et al., 2004). While lobbying, fundraising, and grassroots mobilization have been extensively researched, among several others, as political practices and activities through which private corporations engage directly with the political sphere (e.g., Baysinger, 1984; Hillman & Hitt, 1999), there has been limited attention to the question of how private corporations influence the manner in which other citizens and collectives engage with the public sphere for their own interests; a question that has become even more pressing with the advent of the digital age (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019).

One notable paper (Whelan et al., 2013) draws on this novel context to argue that digital platforms, as arenas of citizenship, afford participating communities the ability to mobilize around issues pertinent to the provisioning of public goods (e.g., corporate – society relations) and alter pre-existing power relations that dictate these engagements. Within these privately-owned arenas, focal corporations (hereafter, platform owners) possess custodial capacities to impact the manner in which citizens and collectives engage with their political sphere, more broadly (Gillespie, 2018; Flyverbom et al., 2019; Etter et al., 2019). Due to their ability to influence the political engagement between platform communities and respective political sphere through their governance systems and processes, we contend that platform owners act as political mediators. In this study we are concerned not with the question of why platform owners assume this role, which we contend is inherent to the platform form of organizing, but how platform owners engage in political behavior.

By virtue of ownership, platform owners possess a great deal of latitude with their governance to the point that they can influence not only who participates within their respective platforms but also the manner in which they participate (Boudreau, 2007, 2010; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). Understanding the political mediator role of platform owners and the practices and activities that this role entails contributes to strategic management research into platform governance, which has noted that platform governance is instrumental for the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms.

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Moreover, under the premise that digital platforms represent arenas in which the participation of citizens is mediated by platform owners, understanding the practices and activities that they undertake is critical in terms of its broader implications (Whelan et al., 2013). In shedding light on this political mediator role, this study contributes to the social issues of management that has called for a critical examination of the expansive roles and responsibilities associated with platform governance (Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016).

This study contributes more broadly to our understanding of the business-government relations, which have been traditionally characterized as transactional (Hillman et al., 2004). Researchers in the Corporate Political Activity (CPA) research stream have produced an important body of research that has detailed the importance of controlling political resources and capabilities (Keim & Baysinger, 1988; Schuler, 1996; Baysinger 1984), the attractiveness of political markets (Pittman, 1976; Zardkhoohi, 1985), and importantly the practices through which corporations engage with the political sphere (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). As such, we know more about the political practices and activities through which corporations as "demanders" transact with governments and public institutions as "suppliers" of political resources (Bonardi et al., 2005; Schuler, 1996) than we do about the practices and activities through which corporations influence, both positively and negatively, the capacity of citizens and collectives to access political resources.

This study examines a new venue for business-government relations in which corporations do not merely engage directly with the political sphere, but they also function as mediators for citizens and collectives to pursue their own interests. Our contention that platform owners are political mediators relative to their platforms as arenas of citizenship aligns and contributes to an emerging research into Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR); a research stream that addresses questions around the increasing roles and responsibilities of corporations in filling governance gaps, providing public goods, and – importantly - administering citizenship rights to individuals and

collectives where governments are unwilling or incapable to administer those rights (e.g., Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). As such, delving into the political practices of platform owners relative to their privately-owned arenas of citizenship has implications for understanding their political responsibility.

Before proceeding to the substance of the study, we note two terminological conventions adopted. First, we use the term "communities" to denote collectives who participate in their respective digital platforms. Communities are the focus of our study in terms of the political practices that platform owners adopt; this is representative of the value creation dynamics within digital platforms that depend on collectives for growth and evolution. Second, we distinguish analytically between the platform owners and the platforms to denote the context of the study; we have chosen to do so because it is the governance of platform owners relative to the stakeholders of the platform that we are interested in. Moreover, most platforms (e.g., Facebook, Uber, Amazon) are named after the corporations who own them (e.g., Facebook, Inc., Uber Technologies, Inc., Amazon.com, Inc.); thus, increasing the risk of terminological conflation.

Having contextualized our research, we articulate our specific questions as follows: (1) what are the practices pursued by platform owners, as political mediators, that govern the engagement between platform communities and public institutions? and (2) what are the factors that influence the decision making of platform owners in choosing among the political practices? We note from the outset the boundary conditions of our investigation: we are not investigating the different forms of participation within digital platforms, rather we are studying the exercise of voice platforms by which platform communities input their opinions, information, and content. We are studying the manner in which platform owners govern the exercise of voice within their respective platforms. We do, however, develop broader insights into what has become a feature of the contemporary public life (i.e., communities participating online and engaging with the public sphere).

Based on our analysis of the data collected for the purpose of constructing a case study focused on the governance of digital platforms, we contend that the political mediator role of platform owners comprises of multiple practices and underlying activities. By drawing on the denoted political practices (intermediation, augmentation, and restriction) along with the discursive strategies adopted by platform owners, we highlight the manner through which platform owners influence the engagement between platform communities and the political sphere. We further theorize that the choice among the different political practices adopted by platform owners is contextualized by three primary factors that emerged in the research findings: citizenship, institutionalization, and commercialization. The decision making of political owners and their governance updates are thus the result of the interplay between these contextual factors and the related interests and demands of the respective stakeholders.

Having given this brief overview of our findings, we now turn to a summary of the literatures that inform our work. After this review, we describe our methodology and the theoretical insights that comprise our research findings. We conclude with a discussion of the implications for the unpacking of the political mediator practices of platform owners on extant understanding of platform governance. We further reflect on the implications for our broader understanding of the political roles and responsibilities of private corporations with the advent of the digital age.

4.3 Research into the Political Role of the Corporation

Among the different forms of participation within digital platforms, the exercise of voice has attracted critical attention from policy makers and civil society organizations due to its perceived influence on the public sphere (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019). While digital platforms have been predominantly conceptualized as multi-sided markets in which communities transact with other stakeholders (Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Rochet & Tirole, 2003, 2006), recent perspectives have called for conceptualizing digital platforms as arenas of citizenship (Whelan et al.,

2013). This conceptualization is motivated by the notion that platforms represent public discursive spheres where citizens and collectives exercise their voice on a global level at unprecedented reach and speed of dissemination (Gillespie, 2018; Tufekci, 2017). Importantly, they enable participating communities to speak "truth to power" in a way that amplifies voices in contexts where their voices are otherwise restricted (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 6), but also spills out of the online medium into "offline" public spheres (Stohl et al., 2017). Within these arenas of citizenship, platform owners assume a de-facto government role as they possess significant governance discretion in influencing the political participation of users (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021; Etter et al., 2019; Hinings et al., 2018).

For this we turn to the research into the political role of the corporation. Review of the literature within management points to two research streams that theorize for the engagement of private corporations with the political sphere: Corporate Political Activity (CPA) and Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR). CPA research has catered predominantly for the direct engagement of corporations with the political sphere in the form of governments and public institutions to further their competitive positioning and financial performance (Baron, 1995; Baysinger, 1984; Hillman et al., 2004; Hillman & Hitt, 1999). The more recent PCSR research stream accommodates for corporations assuming political roles in lieu of governments, who are unable or unwilling to fulfill their roles and responsibilities (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). Despite important advances in research into the political role of the corporation, management research has yet to account for the implications associated with the advent of the digital age and the proliferation of digital platforms (Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016). We contend that this warrants further theorizing along two inter-related questions, which are critical for our understanding of platform governance and its political underpinnings.

What are the corporate political practices? The realization that government policies have implications for the competitive landscape has led corporations to expand their strategies and related

practices in order to affect public policy decisions (Baysinger, 1984). It has been argued that if the government is important to a corporation's competitive position, political activities must be a strategic priority (Keim & Zeithaml, 1986; Yoffie, 1988). As such researchers have studied the variety of ways in which corporations try to influence public policy, electoral processes, and legislative decision-making (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). Research into the "how" has uncovered multiple practices and activities through which corporations engage with the political sphere: information strategies (e.g., lobbying) (Aplin & Hegarty, 1980), financial incentives strategies (e.g., contributions to government officials, politicians, and parties) (Hillman et al., 1999), and constituency-building strategies (e.g., mobilization of communities) (Baysinger et al., 1985; Hillman & Hitt, 1999).
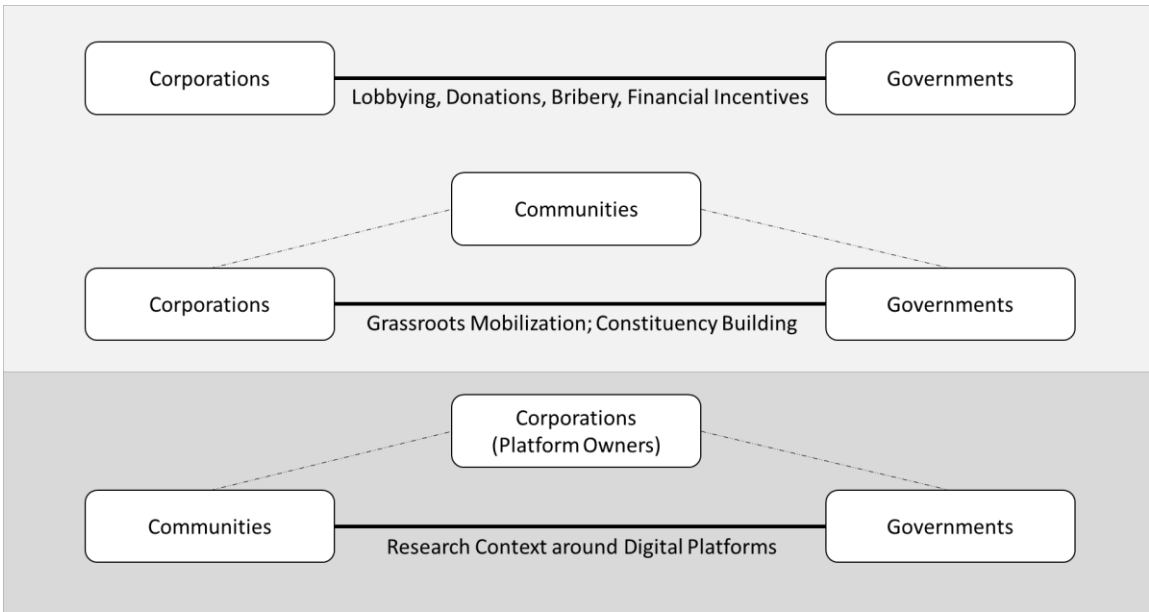
Figure 4:1 Positioning of the Different Approaches to Political Practices

Constituency building strategies are notable since they are the closest parallel to our research question as they translate to corporations targeting political decision makers *indirectly* through engaging with their constituencies. Through constituency building, focal corporations influence and mobilize local communities to support policies that are favorable for their competitive positioning, which in turn incentivizes political decision makers to adopt them. In this manner, constituency

building represents corporations using *communities as mediators* to engage with the political sphere. Our research question alternatively looks into how *corporations as mediators* act on behalf of communities through their governance systems and processes. This sentiment has been (implicitly) the focus of PCSR research that emerged in response to contexts where powerful multinational corporations act on behalf of citizens, communities, and other organizations through providing them with social, political, and civic rights. The distinction is schematized in Figure 4:1.

While PCSR, and more specifically corporate citizenship, aligns with our study of platform owners as political mediators, the relatively recent research stream, unlike its CPA counterpart, has not delved into the question of "how". That is, despite the importance and sensitivity of the positions that corporations continue to occupy, the specific practices that corporations adopt as they engage in PCSR have received relatively little attention, as opposed to other debates (e.g., Matten, 2009; Scherer et al., 2013; 2016; Scherer, 2018). With the significance and near-ubiquity of digital platforms, we need a better understanding of the governance decisions that platform owners undertake as they influence the manner in which their participating communities engage with the political sphere themselves. We now turn to these questions of the factors that inform or contextualize the choices that platforms owners make.

What factors influence the corporate political practices? The theoretical foundations, contextual conditions, and adopted research methods of corporate political activity are consistent, resulting in a relatively homogeneous body of research (Lawton et al. 2013; Scherer, 2018). Corporations — in this tradition —engage with the political sphere by pursuing multiple practices and activities, as we highlighted earlier. It has been hypothesized by CPA researchers that the engagement between corporations and the political sphere fosters their economic ends as these activities aim "to shape government policy in ways favorable to the firm" (Hillman et al., 2004, p. 837). As a consequence, the corporate engagement with public policy is considered vital for the

corporate bottom line. Thus, the decision making of corporations in terms of political strategies and activities revolves around purely instrumental calculations. This emphasis on competitive and financial performance in the decision making of managers has reflected in parallels that CPA researchers have proposed and expanded upon between economic markets and political markets, in which corporations transact with government officials and institutions to access and acquire political resources (Baron, 1995; Bonardi et al., 2005).

As opposed to CPA research, the PCSR research stream remains fragmented with multiple perspectives co-existing under the umbrella term of PCSR (Scherer, 2018). Despite these differences, the instrumental perspective of CPA, in which shareholder interests and cost-benefit considerations have been overemphasized, has been subject to criticism from PCSR researchers who descriptively and normative underscore the political responsibility of business in addressing gaps in global governance (Mantere et al. 2009; Matten 2009; Rasche 2015; Scherer & Palazzo 2011; Scherer et al., 2016). In accordance with the different perspectives within PCSR, there have been multiple arguments with regards to what drives the decision making of managers. While a number of publications argue that when managers engage in PCSR, they are driven by concerns for the public good irrespective of strategic calculations and instrumental considerations, others have called for further investigation. For example, Matten and Crane (2005, p. 173) suggest that corporations might take on political duties and responsibilities as a result of their being influenced by motivations that extend from "altruism to enlightened self-interest . . . [to] plain self-interest." Thus, PCSR remains inconclusive in relation to corporate motivations for decision making.

To summarize, extant literature continues to build on the political roles and activities, whether through CPA or more recently PCSR. The former has built for nearly four decades an impressive body of research in which corporate political strategies and activities have been studied in numerous contexts, which allowed for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that has been sidelined within

mainstream management research. That said, CPA does not extend its focus beyond the direct engagement of corporations with the political sphere and for clear outcomes. PCSR has usefully opened the venue for acknowledging the indirect role of (multinational) corporations through delving into questions around how corporations engage in PCSR. Taken as a whole, however, extant research stops short of answering the question of how platform owners, as political mediators, influence the engagement between communities within their platforms and the political. We thus undertook the study outlined below.

4.4   Research Methods

In the past decade, digital platforms have reached a level of prominence to the point that their role and implications for the provisioning of public and common goods cannot be denied. Digital platforms involve autonomous users who co-create value for themselves and others through their participation around a multitude of interests and value propositions. Conceptualized as markets, arenas, or ecosystems, digital platforms – especially as it pertains to the exercise of voice – have emerged as sites for political discussions, deliberations, and activism on a global scale. Within these platforms, while autonomous users are instrumental for value creation, platform owners occupy privileged positions relative to platform users by virtue of ownership.

Twitter, in particular, has evolved to be one of the more renowned digital platforms with a notable global presence. Among its many uses, the platform has been associated with several uprisings and political protests, which have been labeled as "Twitter Revolutions" by Western media outlets (Christensen, 2011). That is, the platform has been credited with enabling its communities to engage with or (importantly) against their "offline" governments and public institutions. With hundreds of millions of users dispersed globally, Twitter provides its communities with a medium in which they engage with their local and global institutions. Unlike some other digital platforms, Twitter relies primarily on communities coalescing around interests and trends (including political

interests), as opposed to friends and connections. Yet similar to other digital platforms, Twitter is a platform in which communities are given an arena for exercising their voice that might have been otherwise constricted with traditional media and "offline" public spheres; thus, it is an appropriate context for addressing our research questions.

4.4.1 Research setting

Twitter has been highly publicized since its inception (namely, by technology media outlets). Details and updates about Twitter's governance decisions were thus accessible and widely discussed and analyzed. Importantly, Twitter – similar to other technology startups in Silicon Valley – heavily leveraged its official blog(s) and different communication channels to share updates and developments on a daily basis; these were often authored by Twitter's co-founders and executives. As such, we consider the posts and statements voiced by Twitter representatives of Twitter's activities and rhetoric regarding the governance of the Twittersphere.

Data collection for this project primarily combines data from Twitter's official blog and official channels in addition to data from media outlets. Moreover, supplemental data includes community participation posted to Twitter's digital platform (i.e., Tweets) following critical changes in Twitter's governance. That is, at certain inflections and milestones, we retrieved Tweets that characterized the sentiment. Furthermore, we referred to several books and biographies that tracked the evolution of Twitter. Overall, the collected data captures the aforementioned sources from 2006 till 2013; thus, capturing the stages of Twitter growth to mainstream status.

In accordance with our research questions, we tracked Twitter's governance in terms of key developments and discursive practices relative to the growth and evolution of the Twittersphere. We also collected several twitter.com pages pertinent to governance through web scraping techniques (e.g., Terms of Service, Frequently Asked Questions, etc.). Records of the changes in these pages were also noted. The collected data, from which we present several exemplary quotes in the research

findings, amounted to a 589-page single-spaced document.

We pause here to highlight a key distinction regarding the archival data that will inform the analysis. Because Twitter, as the platform owner, is also a participant in the discourse around governance taking place *on the Twitter platform*, it is important to distinguish between Twitter Inc., as a corporation, and Twitter's digital platform, often referred to as the *"Twittersphere," "Twitterverse,"* or commonly *"Twitter."* To highlight this distinction, we use "Twitter" to refer to the corporation and "Twittersphere" to refer to the platform, which Twitter owns, and those participating and impacting the platform through their participation.

Data Analysis. The analysis and interpretation of the collected data was an iterative process, with the goal of building and refining theory from a single case study that is an extreme instance of co-creation (e.g., Siggelkow, 2007). The iterative process comprised of interpreting and revisiting our emergent interpretations until reaching sufficient interpretative convergence and theoretical saturation. Moreover, the process was supplemented by collecting new data to further illustrate the implications of key governance updates. Following other scholars (e.g., Mathwick et al., 2007; Muniz & Schau, 2005; Schau & Muniz, 2007) we adopted qualitative conventions in our analysis, moving among Twitter's Official Blog, announcements, statements as well as Twittersphere discussions and mainstream media coverage to add context.

Our approach involved five steps that can be analytically separated: (1) forming a temporal understanding of the evolution of Twitter and the governance systems and processes defined and implemented within Twittersphere from 2006 to 2013; (2) creating first-order categories relating to the activities that Twitter undertook within the Twittersphere and the implications thereof; (3) abstracting second-order themes from these first-order codes; (4) abstracting aggregate theoretical dimensions around the political practices from the second-order themes and (5) identifying patterns of the determinants and contextual factors among these abstract theoretical dimensions.

Figure 4:2 Data Structure Diagram
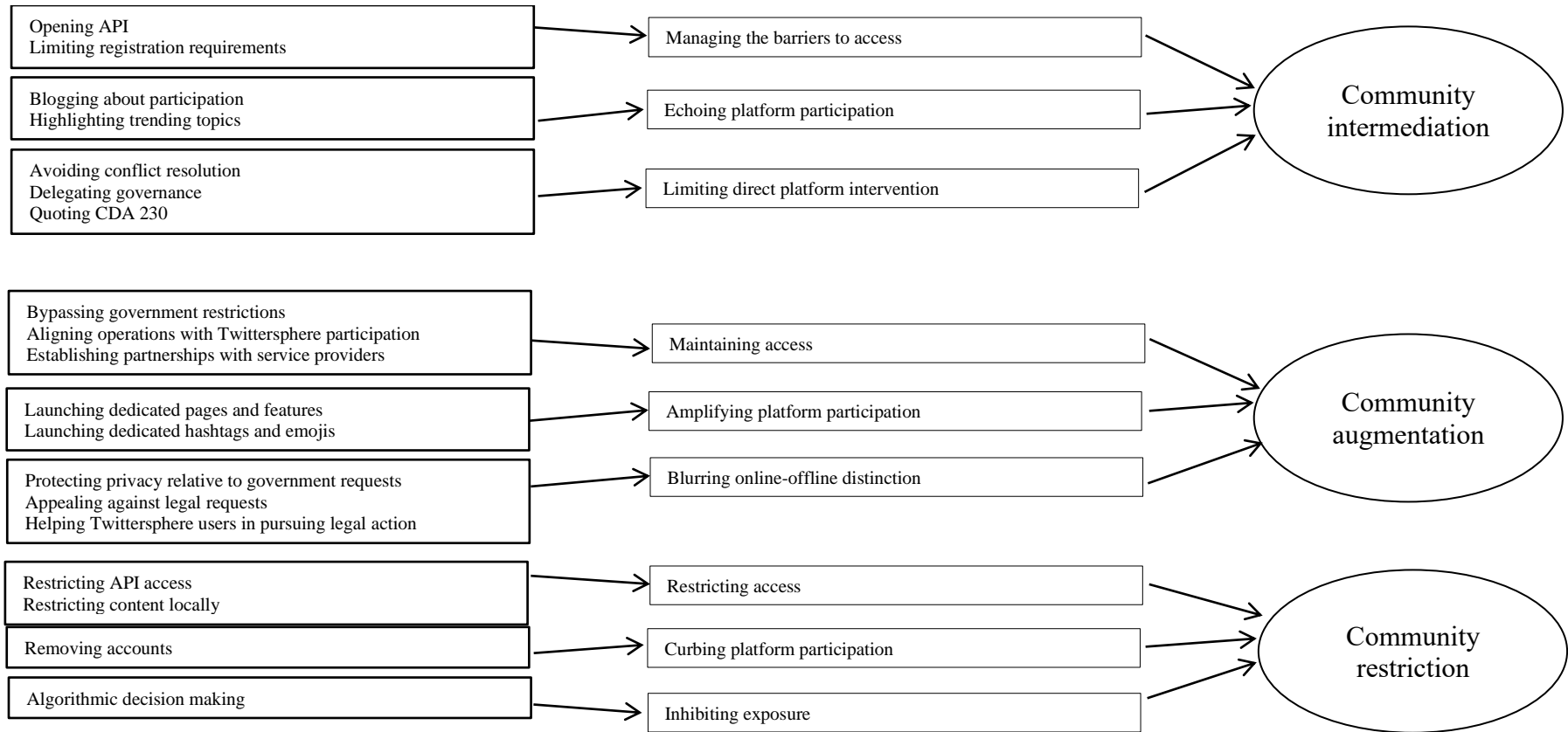
First-order categories	Second-order themes	Aggregate theoretical dimensions

4.5   Research Findings

Our findings are organized into two sections. The first section deals with the practices that platform

owners, as political mediators, adopt through their governance towards influencing the political

engagement of platform users and communities with their respective public institutions. The data

structure of the research findings is illustrated in Figure 4:2. The second section identifies the

contextual factors that influence the decision making of platform owners among the different

political practices in different instances and milestones.

4.5.1   Political Practices of Platform Owners as Mediators

There is abundant evidence that when corporations seek political resources and transact in political

markets, they adopt a variety of individual and collective political strategies and activities (e.g.,

Hillman & Hitt, 1999; Hillman et al., 2004; Schuler et al., 2002). These not only target the

furthering of the competitive advantage of corporations, but they also help corporations create and

capture value from relationships they form with governments and public institutions (Hillman et

al., 2004). Implicit in the discussion is the direct relational or transactional relationship between

corporations and governments and corresponding institutions.

While Information and Communications Technology corporations do engage with

governments in the manner that the CPA research stream suggests (e.g., lobbying and political

funding), the platform form of organizing presents a new medium that necessitates further

conceptual development. Given that digital platforms serve as arenas of citizenship in which

platform owners, as political mediators, influence the engagement of citizens and collectives with

the political sphere (i.e., governments and public institutions), we analyzed the collected data to

understand the different practices through which platform owners mediate the participation within

the platforms that they own and govern. Our analysis suggests that the mediator role manifests in

practices and activities that go beyond platform owners engaging themselves with the political sphere for self-interest. Rather, the three identified political practices influence the political engagement of platform users and communities with the political sphere through: *community intermediation, community augmentation, and community restriction.*

Community Intermediation. In "offline" public spaces, the participation of communities in the process of collective will formation (Matten & Crane, 2005) has been extensively studied within social sciences (e.g., Smelser & Swedberg, 2005). These spaces, which date back to as early as ancient Athens, serve as means for communities to engage in decision making pertinent to public policy (e.g., Swedberg, 2005), corporate relations (e.g., Whelan et al., 2013), and democratic deliberation. (e.g., Habermas, 1989). Juxtaposed to the online context, Whelan et al. (2013) argue that – despite skepticism from influential philosophers such as Habermas (2009) - platforms serve as equivalent arenas that potentially alter the power imbalance between communities or societies and corporations in terms of the strategies and practices of the latter. That said, the private status of these arenas means that platform owners occupy privileged positions in terms of governance as to incentivize and facilitate the participation and interaction of individuals and communities (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009; Evans, 2012; Gillespie, 2018).

Community intermediation occurs online and within digital platforms where participating communities are geographically dispersed (often on a global scale), technologically networked, and united by shared interests or relations, including those pertinent to the political exercise of voice which is the focus of our study. Within the Twittersphere, Twitter took several activities towards community intermediation. Those included *limiting the barriers to access* to the Twittersphere for respective stakeholders. As such, Twitter made public its Application Programming Interface (API) that enabled the open participation of developers, entrepreneurs, and

hobbyists with limited restrictions or interventions from Twitter. This openness increased the attractiveness and the reach of Twittersphere as a digital platform, which in turn made it more accessible across multiple peripherals and modes of communications:

> "Some smart folks out there on the series of tubes we call the Internet have been putting together interesting projects like this map and this page without any help from us so we thought it was high time to release an API." (Twitter, 20/09/06)

Twitter importantly lowered the barriers to access for Twittersphere users through posing almost no restrictions on entry and participation. Twitter waived any requirements for Twittersphere users to use their real names, profile pictures, or phone numbers; not to mention that Twittersphere access was fully subsidized by Twitter (i.e., offered free of charge).

> "Other services say you have to use your real name because they think they can monetize that better and get more information about you…Twitter is wedded to people being able to use the service as they see fit." (Wired, 08/09/11)

Clearly, these governance decisions were embraced by Twittersphere communities (users and complementors/developers/hobbyists). It also proved instrumental to the instigation of network effects through which digital platforms become more attractive and valuable for other users as they grow in number of users and publicity in a positive reinforcing feedback loop (Gawer, 2014).

Like limiting the barriers to access, *echoing platform participation* played a role towards community intermediation. That is, Twittersphere – for the most part – was presented by Twitter as an open space where the scope of participation and value propositions were left to participating communities. Twitter did not (and could not be due to the elusive and unbounded nature of the exercise of voice) capture the value proposition of the Twittersphere. Rather the arena was offered for individuals and communities to coalesce around common interests and concerns that they deemed relevant to them and others. Twitter echoed the participation of communities as to endorse the emerging uses in that it publicized and provided the seal of approval to the different new uses

of the Twittersphere through its official blog and official account:

> "These were two updates I found yesterday in close proximity to one another on the public timeline: Wendy: I used to love lying on the grass as a kid, but now I realize there are bugs in there; jzam: not wearing any pants!
>
> As always, the meta data completes the story: Wendy updated from the web and jzam updated from mobile!" (Twitter, 19/09/06)

Not all new uses were as mundane as the former example shared by Twitter's then CEO. Other instances in which Twitter echoed the participation of the Twittersphere were evidently more critical in nature and highlighted the role of the Twittersphere in broader political contexts.

> "On the other end of the spectrum, from this week's Mumbai attacks arose the hashtag #here2help in support of those who were affected. By clicking on the hashtag in a Tweet or doing a direct search, you can see all the Tweets flowing in from those who are there as well as others who are sharing information and offering aid to those looking for missing family members or even medical assistance." (Twitter, 15/07/11)

Echoing platform participation signaled the implications of Twitter's community intermediation role as the Twittersphere evolved to be inclusive of all forms of participation and value propositions, from the critically political to the more mundane.

> "Discussion on topics from geopolitical events to wardrobe malfunctions make Twitter both important and fun. Providing the tools that foster these discussions and following the policies that keep them alive is meaningful work for us." (Twitter, 28/01/11)

The political uses of the Twittersphere were furthermore associated - chronologically - with the evolution of the Twittersphere to be inclusive of "offline" celebrities, politicians, government organizations, and political activists. Public figures represented "marquee users" (Parker & Van Alstyne, 2014) who further instigated network effects and made the Twittersphere more attractive for communities to join and subsequently for other public figures in a virtuous cycle. Twitter similarly echoed the emergent participation forms:

> "This AP story points out that Mr. Obama is harnessing the real-time power of Twitter to mobilize his followers to vote. I can just picture the tweet come November: "Hoping you'll go make me president—right now!"" (Twitter, 20/08/08)

Moreover, community intermediation also comprised of Twitter's reluctance to intervene directly in the Twittersphere. That is, in conjunction with limiting the restrictions on Twittersphere access and echoing the subsequent participation, Twitter attempted to *limit direct intervention* within the Twittersphere beyond the governance systems and processes put into place. An example of Twitter's reluctance to intervene directly in the Twittersphere - in matters that have traditionally been beyond the role and responsibilities of private corporations - took place early on when a blogger claimed that she was being harassed by another Twittersphere user. The blogger requested the user's account to be banned from further participation. Twitter's CEO took a legalistic standpoint on Twitter's unwillingness to "get involved" in resolving the dispute.

> "Apologies for the delay here. We've reviewed the matter and decided it's not in our best interest to get involved. We've tasked our lawyers with a full review and update of our TOS. Thank you …and good luck with resolving the problem." (Waldman, 23/05/08)

Twitter's co-founder Biz Stone addressed the incident while emphasizing that Twitter was reluctant to expand its responsibilities to policing voices within the Twittersphere

> "Twitter recognizes that it is not skilled at judging content disputes between individuals. Determining the line between update and insult is not something that Twitter, nor a crowd, would do well." (Wired, 22/05/08)

This statement nicely illustrates Twitter's reluctance – for the most part - to intervene in the participation of the Twittersphere communities. Twitter argued at multiple instances that it could not intervene directly in in the tens of millions of Tweets issued within the Twittersphere on a daily basis since these Tweets are within the personal space of users who fundamentally "own their Tweets" (Twitter TOS). Essentially, community intermediation involved creating the enabling conditions for Twitter to create an arena for political engagement among its communities and the political sphere, among countless other use cases.

   Community Augmentation. Community augmentation constitutes the second practice for

platform owners as political mediators; it is defined here as the active empowerment of communities relative to governments and corresponding institutions. Although platform owners have typically argued that platform governance is politically neutral (Gillespie, 2018), augmentation represents platform owners explicitly taking sides in the engagement between Twittersphere communities and the political sphere. This practice aligns with the descriptive accounts around the political role of multinational corporations in which they actively administer citizenship rights to local communities and enable them to participate in political processes (e.g., Matten & Crane, 2005). Research on extended corporate citizenship suggests that multinational corporations undertake these roles when governments are unable or unwilling to do so (Crane et al., 2008; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer et al., 2016). In our research findings, community augmentation manifested in multiple activities that attempted to empower the Twittersphere communities.

Twittersphere communities, driven by Twitter's forementioned intermediation practices and activities, discuss a plethora of topics and interests around the clock from all over the globe in a real-time manner. With the instigation of network effects and the evolution of the Twittersphere, the exercise of voice has become increasingly inclusive of political discussions, deliberations, and activism. In our research findings, community augmentation took place in several notable cases when Twitter decided to further amplify the participation of Twittersphere users and communities and support their engagement with the political sphere beyond mere intermediation. With augmentation, Twitter drew selectively on emerging political interests within the Twittersphere on a case-by-case basis; this manifested in several activities that Twitter adopted and reflected accordingly in its rhetoric and discourse: *amplifying community participation*, *maintaining access*, and *blurring online-offline distinctions*.

First, Twitter provided additional support to Twittersphere communities as it *amplified* certain discussions and trends within the Twittersphere towards greater interaction and reach. For example, while interest in the Presidential Elections of 2008 emerged organically within the Twittersphere driven by the participation of the respective communities as well as the participation of political candidates and corresponding campaigns, Twitter took the executive decision to launch a dedicated elections page and started publishing its own set of statistics and tracking data from within the Twittersphere to highlight the level of engagement that certain candidates (and their platform) garnered within the Twittersphere both negatively and positively. Moreover, Twitter partnered with Current TV, then owned by an ex-Presidential candidate, towards augmenting Twittersphere participation around the Presidential elections.

> "As Twitter users tweet throughout the course of the live broadcasts, Current and Twitter will collect comments regarding the debate and layer the individual messages over the debate feed." Why stop at the web and mobile when we can create a new features for democracy? (Twitter, 16/09/08)

As it pertains to political discussions with the Twittersphere, augmentation also manifested initiatives in which Twitter proclaimed that it would support marginalized or underrepresented Twittersphere communities. In several cases, Twitter identified communities that historically occupied power asymmetrical positioning relative to their respective governments and public institutions. Twitter – as part of community augmentation – attempted to amplify the visibility of these communities within the Twittersphere and reinforce their participation in a collective fashion. For example, Twitter launched emojis (i.e., special-purpose illustrations) to accompany certain discussions and trending topics within its platform in order to make certain political movements more visible to other Twittersphere users and respective stakeholders (including media outlets). To be sure, augmentation does not necessarily translate to impact. That is, Twitter may indeed intend to positively (or negatively) impact community participation. However, the tangible

impact of their political mediator practices has been challenged (Christensen, 2011).

Second, another form of community augmentation manifested in Twitter's attempts in *maintaining access* to the Twittersphere in politically critical contexts. For example, the Twittersphere was perceived as instrumental for supporting the protests that followed the Iranian Presidential elections in 2009 (Grossman, 2009). The protests led to government restrictions in terms of limiting access to media outlets and traditional communication channels. Alternative arenas of citizenship such as the Twittersphere were subsequently leveraged for sharing updates about the protests, mobilizing protestors, and disseminating news in light of government restrictions. In line with earlier comments, the impact of the Twittersphere in supporting the Iranian protests among others has been subject to debates and disputes (Weaver, 2010). However, our research findings highlight that Twitter reacted to the perceived role of the Twittersphere in terms of discussions within the Twittersphere and other stakeholders that went as far as proclaiming that the Iranian protests represented a "Twitter Revolution" (Christensen, 2011). It is critical to note that we are not suggesting here that Twitter augmented the community participation merely because the Twittersphere was leveraged to disseminate news and updates on the protests in Iran. Rather, it is because Twitter took deliberate and discretionary actions to support the respective Twittersphere communities in Iran and globally. Twitter undertook the "presumed impossible if not extremely difficult" decision to reschedule a critical network maintenance in order not to disrupt Twittersphere access ahead of planned protests in Iran (Twitter, 16/06/09).

> "When we worked with our network provider yesterday to reschedule this planned maintenance, we did so because events in Iran were tied directly to the growing significance of Twitter as an important communication and information network. Although presumed impossible if not extremely difficult, we decided together to move the date. It made sense for Twitter and for NTT America to keep services active during this highly visible global event." (Twitter, 16/06/09)

Broadly, the Twittersphere and Twitter, by extension, were subsequently lauded by their respective

stakeholders for empowering Iranian citizens and collectives who were presumably able to leverage the Twittersphere to bypass the restrictions imposed by their government.

Community augmentation was similarly evident in relation to uprisings in several countries in the Middle East (i.e., the "Arab Spring"). Twittersphere communities similarly mobilized and shared news around the "revolutions" that unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, etc. The Twittersphere in that regard was perceived as instrumental for bypassing traditional government gatekeepers and offline public spheres. Not only did the "Arab Spring" reaffirm the role of the Twittersphere as an arena where communities participate towards engaging with their political sphere (i.e., community intermediation), it also reaffirmed Twitter's role in community augmentation. When the Egyptian government disconnected the Internet in order to disrupt communications around the nation-wide protests, Twitter partnered with Google to circumvent the Internet disconnect and provided Twittersphere communities with the ability to Tweet.

> "Like many people we've been glued to the news unfolding in Egypt and thinking of what we could do to help people on the ground … we came up with the idea of a speak-to-tweet service—the ability for anyone to tweet using just a voice connection." (Google, 31/01/11)

Overlapping with the previous examples, community augmentation manifested in Twitter's *blurring of the boundaries between online and offline* arenas of citizenship, as it attempted to support Twittersphere communities *outside* of the Twittersphere in their local offline jurisdictions. That is, as the Twittersphere evolved and expanded so did the demands from governments and corresponding institutions who became more critical of several aspects of community participation online. Twitter was notably treated by governments and public institutions as the central gatekeeper of the Twittersphere and demanded that Twitter discloses private information regarding Twittersphere users, such as their personal email addresses, phone numbers, and private messages (GigaOm, 01/08/11). This was problematic as Twitter had proclaimed repeatedly that

Twittersphere users "own their tweets" as well as the right to freedom of expression, privacy, and security. This led, for example, to the first notable contestation between Twitter and the United States government when the Department of Justice served Twitter with a court order requesting the private information of the WikiLeaks Twittersphere account(s). The court order was sent under seal to Twitter and other platform owners. Notably, Twitter set a precedence among its counterparts by refusing to comply and appealing the court order in which the corporation argued that the Twittersphere users needed to be informed of the DOJ request and get the opportunity to defend their right to privacy in court:

> "We went back of our own accord and argued for the right to let those four people know that their information was being requested so that they could fight it. We provided these users with the ability to fight this request and I think a bunch of them are still doing so." (GigaOm, 18/10/11)

Community Restriction. With the aforementioned practices and the activities that they entailed, Twitter enabled and empowered Twittersphere communities through augmenting their participation relative to their local governments and public institutions. Twitter reinforced these activities discursively by reiterating that the "Tweets must flow" irrespective of government demands. In contrast to community augmentation, Twitter occasionally resorted to community restriction as it took the side of the governments and other corporate stakeholders. This practice involves Twitter posing limitations on the participation of the Twittersphere communities in terms of their views, opinions, expressions, and discussions, especially that their participation becomes public experience within the Twittersphere as soon as it is issued.

Exclusions and *curbing platform participation* were always present in Twitter's rules and regulations (i.e., Terms of Service); however, they were for the most part loosely defined and enforced, especially early on. Restrictions were mostly associated with copyright infringements and content deemed universally inappropriate (e.g., child pornography, phishing, scams, etc.). In

accordance with the arguments put forward by Whelan (2019), these forms of restrictions are indeed political in that they are rooted in the political, legal, and institutional frameworks of the United States. With that said, our findings point to Twitter being reluctant to restrict the political engagement of communities in terms of imposing restrictions on political discourse and public engagement, especially considering that the previous two practices were dominant in the study of Twitter. However, it became customary for governments to file complaints to Twitter with regards to the participation of Twittersphere communities within their local jurisdictions, which often entailed different interpretations of freedom of expression. Twitter received these requests from governments through their respective institutions as well as through court orders.

Thus, community restriction took place in the instances when Twitter complied with requests from governments and their institutions. Chronologically, Twitter was unwilling to comply with government demands and had repeatedly dismissed many demands as inconsistent with intermediation and augmentation practices (including Twitter's reaction to the WikiLeaks court order). With that said, the increase in intensity of demands and lawsuits filed against Twitter within the United States and globally culminated in Twitter's declaration that it has introduced the functionality to restrict participation locally from the Twittersphere based on the location in which it originated. That is, governments were granted the ability to ask Twitter to restrict participation based on the geolocation of Twittersphere communities.

> "Starting today, we give ourselves the ability to reactively withhold content from users in a specific country — while keeping it available in the rest of the world. We have also built in a way to communicate transparently to users when content is withheld, and why." (Twitter, 27/01/12)

An example of community restriction took place in France in relation to Tweets that were categorized as anti-Semitic by several civil society organizations. Twitter was pressured to "take responsibility" under the threat of legal action in France, to which it complied and removed the

content locally in France. Thus, the Tweets in question were no longer visible for users accessing the Twittersphere in France. Moreover, related lawsuits against Twitter requested that the corporation discloses the private user information of the Twittersphere users in question. The legal dispute persisted for nearly a year before Twitter agreed to disclose the *"data that may enable the identification of certain users that the vice-prosecutor believes have violated French law."*

Community restriction not only manifests in constraints on Twittersphere participation, but it also includes *restrictions to platform access*. For example, a request from German authorities to remove the account of a political organization *"immediately and without opening a replacement account"* under the premise that it is characterized as far-right. Twitter commented on the request that it eventually complied with:

> "(we) never want to withhold content; good to have tools to do it narrowly & transparently … We announced the ability to withhold content back in Jan … We're using it now for the first time re: a group deemed illegal in Germany."

Along with community restriction whether applied to certain forms of participation or access, Twitter has typically attempted to assert its commitment to community intermediation and augmentation despite restrictions:

> "… we believe the new, more granular approach to withheld content is a good thing for freedom of expression, transparency, accountability— and for our users. Besides allowing us to keep Tweets available in more places, it also allows users to see whether we are living up to our freedom of expression ideal. One of our core values as a company is to defend and respect each user's voice. We try to keep content up wherever and whenever we can, and we will be transparent with users when we can't. The Tweets must continue to flow." (Twitter, 26/01/12)

In this statement, the tension between the different mediator political practices is evident. The practice of community restriction has been mostly acknowledged and presented by Twitter in its rhetoric as a last-resort practice. That said, our research points to another manifestation of community restriction that Twitter dismissed as non-factual, which we denote as *inhibiting*

exposure. Among the influential features that Twitter introduced to showcase certain discussions within the Twittersphere was "Trends," which highlights the top trending topics. In multiple instances, Twitter was accused of removing certain discussions from the list of Trends to inhibit their proliferation within the Twittersphere and beyond. Accusations of inhibiting participation were voiced by political activists, users, and even researchers who used data analytics to prove that Twitter was in fact complicit. This led Twitter to respond on multiple occasions:

> "This week, people are wondering about WikiLeaks, with some asking if Twitter has blocked #wikileaks, #cablegate or other related topics from appearing in the list of top Trends. The answer: Absolutely not. Twitter Trends are automatically generated by an algorithm that attempts to identify topics that are being talked about more right now than they were previously." (Twitter, 08/12/10)

The discussions, which surfaced along with key political instances such as WikiLeaks, Occupy Wall Street protests, Gaza attacks, and others were attributed by Twitter to the inner workings of the algorithm and the manner in which it was intended to function. In response to further scrutiny from researchers and data scientists, Twitter noted that the accusations are not justified since *"they (i.e., researchers) don't have access to our trends algorithm and may not have access to the full firehose of tweets."* Essentially, our findings point to participation inhibition as being the by-product of algorithmic decision making; the risks and concerns about the issues that reliance on blanket algorithms to drive the collective will formation have been recently invoked by management research (e.g., Bishop, 2019; Collins et al., 2020; Crawford, 2016; Gillespie, 2018; Gorwa et al., 2020).

To summarize the analysis thus far, we have argued that at least three practices represent the manner in which platform owners, as political mediators, influence the engagement between the communities and governments. As has been established in prior work, corporations are increasingly conducting business in contexts in which they not only engage directly with the

political sphere on their own behalf and for self-interest, but also have a say in whether citizens can access "political resources" as they engage with the political sphere. The analysis thus far helps to provide insight on the practices which focal corporations adopt in their respective platforms. To understand the rationale between the platform owners choosing different practices, our analysis suggests it is necessary to consider the contextual factors based on which platform owners adapt their governance decisions and pursue particular practices.

4.5.2   Contextual Factors for Political Practices of Mediators

As evident in the research context that we studied, platform owners as political mediators undertake multiple practices that result in distinctive evaluations of their roles. The argument here is that platform owners do not merely have to decide whether to engage with the political sphere or not or whether to actively interfere in the platform (augmentation and restriction) or not. Rather the political mediator role involves a complex set of decisions. This in turn may lead to different reactions from stakeholders. Consider for example the reaction of civil society organizations to one of Twitter's community restriction activities highlighted earlier.

> Oliver Basille, the director of Reporters Without Borders, stated "By finally choosing to align itself with the censors, Twitter is depriving cyber dissidents in repressive countries of a crucial tool for information and organization." (WSJ, 28/01/12)

Twitter acknowledged that its practices may entail inconsistencies. In its official communications, Twitter often attempted to reconcile its decision to adopt different practices in different contexts. Broadly, PCSR research has assumed – though not without critiques – that corporations take (or should take) the side of communities (or citizens) as they fill governance gaps; CPA research by contrast has consistently assumed that corporations adopt political practices that contribute to its competitive advantage and financial performance. Our research findings reflect the complex decision-making picture for platform owners. We distinguish analytically between three primary

contextual factors that platform owners account for as they decide among the political practices; these are *citizenship, institutionalization, and commercialization*.

    Citizenship. The mediator role of platform owners is paradoxical in that corporations intermediate, augment, and restrict the engagement of platform communities with the political sphere while being themselves subjugated to the legal and institutional rules and regulations of their respective localities. Indeed, an early utilization of the citizenship metaphor depicted corporations as citizens with rights and responsibilities comparable to their human counterparts (Crane et al., 2008; Logsdon & Wood, 2002; Matten & Crane, 2005). While not without limitations, the metaphor helps in understanding the context in which the political practices of platform owners take place. For instance, the community intermediation role of Twitter is evidently rooted in its own citizenship in the United States, as a San Francisco based startup. The following exchange reflects Twitter's stance on its own citizenship when questioned about the potential of facing legal and political pressures from international governments:

> "We tell them, 'We're a U.S. company, we have C.D.A. 230 here, and you're welcome to come and try your hand at suing us here,' referring to the Communications Decency Act, which says Web companies are not liable for what their users post." (GigaOm, 05/03/11)

    The forementioned exchange was by no means singular in our data analysis. The platform form of organizing has been essentially enabled by (Communications Decency Act) C.D.A. (Section) 230, which asserts that intermediaries enjoy safe harbor from prosecution regardless of how users utilize them (Crane et al., 2008; Moon et al., 2011). This legal and political legislation by the US government has been credited with the emergence of innovative products and services in Silicon Valley (Gillespie, 2018). It is thus not surprising that Twitter's first Terms of Service reflected this premise from legalistic standpoints in terms of roles and responsibilities. Notably, the first terms of service document were mostly adapted from a fellow platform owner – indicating

the commonalities between these startups in terms of their citizenship - in that they were *"inspired,*

with permission, by Flickr."

> "You are solely responsible for your conduct and any data, text, information, screen names, graphics, photos, profiles, audio and video clips, links ("Content") that you submit, post, and display on the Twitter.com service." (Twitter TOS)

Notably, Twitter's augmentation of Twittersphere communities mostly took place in

relation to governments and public institutions with whom Twitter had almost no legal,

institutional, and political affiliations (e.g., Iran, Syria, Egypt, China). Twitter highlighted its

commitment to empower Twittersphere communities as they engaged with governments whose

"very being is against what we are about" (Wired, 27/01/10). Twitter's CEO, for instance, made

public the platform owner's stance against the governments of China and Iran and its

corresponding augmentation of Twittersphere communities in these jurisdictions.

> "We are partially blocked in China and other places and we were in Iran as well…The most productive way to fight that is not by trying to engage China and other governments whose very being is against what we are about. I am hopeful there are technological ways around these barriers." (Wired, 27/01/10)

The implications of Twitter's lack of citizenship relative to these governments and related

institutions resulted in adversarial relationships that resulted in Twittersphere access being

restricted altogether in China. Notably, these relationships arguably resulted in "geopolitical"

Denial-of-Service attacks that led to severe service disruptions. Twitter, however, proactively

associated these attacks with its augmentation practices within the Twittersphere.

> "The ongoing, massively coordinated attacks on Twitter this week appear to have been geopolitical in motivation. However, we don't feel it's appropriate to engage in speculative discussion about these motivations. The open exchange of information can have a positive impact globally and our job is to keep Twitter services running..." (Twitter, 07/08/09)

Notably, in its initial (albeit generic) Terms of Service document, Twitter had highlighted that

Twittersphere communities should all abide by the laws of their respective governments in their

local jurisdictions (with no exemptions noted). This position was not maintained with Twitter's stance on the protests in Iran, for example, where Twitter augmented the respective communities against their government, as highlighted earlier. In the course of community augmentation, it became evident that Twitter's citizenship had political manifestations. That is, as opposed to the use of the citizenship metaphor to reflect merely the legal rights and responsibilities of corporations in their respective jurisdictions (Moon et al., 2008). As such, it was later revealed that Twitter's lauded network maintenance delay during the Iranian protests in 2009 was motivated by a request from within the United States Department of State to an executive of Twitter.

> "The U.S. State Department said it had contacted the social networking service Twitter to urge it to delay a planned upgrade that would have cut daytime service to Iranians who are disputing their election." (Reuters, 16/06/09)

Twitter's citizenship of the United States and its lack thereof in countries such as Iran, Egypt, China, Syria, etc. where it augmented the participation of communities influenced its choice of political practices and activities. In the same vein, the influence of Twitter's citizenship on its corresponding political practices was also evident in community restriction practices and activities in other contexts. As Twitter expanded its corporate presence internationally, Twitter's citizenship in other countries such as the UK, Germany, and India, among others, had implications for its political practices. Community restriction was thus associated with the legal and political obligations that Twitter was subjugated to as it expanded its operations.

> "As we continue to grow internationally, we will enter countries that have different ideas about the contours of freedom of expression. Some differ so much from our ideas that we will not be able to exist there. Others are similar but, for historical or cultural reasons, restrict certain types of content, such as France or Germany, which ban pro-Nazi content." (Twitter, 26/01/12)

Despite being responsible for governing a transnational entity (i.e., the digitally enabled Twittersphere), Twitter's discretionary embeddedness in multiple contexts influenced its choice of political practices, both legally and (importantly) politically.

Institutionalization. Institutional perspectives on the "digital age" noted that powerful platform owners typically act as de facto "governments" within their respective platforms; their governance decisions serve to maintain order among the different stakeholders who have integral roles in value creation (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Hinings et al., 2018). Platform owners as owners of digital infrastructures seek to infuse norms, values, or institutional logics into their respective infrastructures (Gawer & Phillips, 2013; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). The greater the alignment between the institutional logics and those of the platform stakeholders, the greater the degree institutionalization (Marquis et al., 2007). Zucker argues that the "greater the degree of institutionalization, the greater the uniformity of cultural understandings" (1991, p. 103). Just as platform owners are themselves embedded in institutional and political contexts which in turn influence the choices of political practices that they adopt, the institutional and political contexts within the respective platforms have implications for said practices.

In our context, Twitter's infusion of openness into the Twittersphere was notable during its early stages in what was deemed an extreme case of value co-creation (Fischer & Reuber, 2017), even when compared to other digital platforms. The institutionalization of the Twittersphere around these principles as well as their extreme dependence on the participation of communities across different forms of participation constitute the second contextual factor. Through its openness, Twitter essentially invited application developers, hobbyists, users, and public figures, among others who collectively helped evolve the Twittersphere.

> "Our openness made it all possible…Twitter is very open. As a result, thousands of different applications, web sites, and mobile interfaces have been created by developers. These different approaches add variety and relevance to Twitter" (Twitter, 26/05/09)

That said, Twitter took things steps further in terms of its discursive practices in conjunction with community augmentation. Twitter repeatedly lauded the "democratizing effect" of the

Twittersphere to the point that the corporation proclaimed itself as the "freedom speech wing for the freedom party". An exemplary representation of norms and logic that Twitter infused is a prominent statement by Twitter titled "The Tweets Must Flow":

> "Freedom of expression is essential. Some Tweets may facilitate positive change in a repressed country, some make us laugh, some make us think, some downright anger a vast majority of users. We don't always agree with the things people choose to tweet, but we keep the information flowing irrespective of any view we may have about the content." (Twitter, 28/01/11)

Twitter proclaimed that it held itself *responsible* for keeping the Tweets flowing irrespective of its stance on community participation.

> "Our goal is to instantly connect people everywhere to what is most meaningful to them. For this to happen, freedom of expression is essential…The open exchange of information can have a positive global impact. This is both a practical and ethical belief." (Twitter, 28/01/11)

To be clear, Twitter did not impose this "belief" upon the Twittersphere; rather, it was for the most part intermediating the participation of communities, who coalesced around political and non-political interests. However, Twitter raised the bar in terms of its commitment to the freedom of expression ideals. Reflecting on its actions and rhetoric, it is evident that Twitter's position here goes beyond the technical openness of the API or limited restrictions on access and participation to more substantive commitments to the ideals of democracy and the open exchange of information.

While Twitter's citizenship was indeed influential for the choice of political practices, the institutionalization of the Twittersphere was similarly instrumental. The significance of the latter was evident in multiple instances; that said, the WikiLeaks case stands out as being one of the earliest in which Twitter's citizenship of the United States clashed with the institutionalization of the Twittersphere around openness and the freedom of expression ideals. We pointed out in the previous section that Twitter's citizenship of the United States proved to be a baseline for its

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political practices, both from legal and political standpoints. However, as opposed to merely complying to the orders of the Department of Justice to hand over the private user information of WikiLeaks related accounts, as per the implications of Twitter's citizenship in the United States, Twitter decided to appeal the court order under the premise that it respects the right of said accounts to freedom of expression and privacy. Notably, had Twitter complied it would not have reflected negatively on the corporation as the court order was under seal. However, Twitter successfully appealed the court order and received the permission to inform the corresponding Twittersphere users and provided them with legal recommendations to defend their right to privacy in court. Though it was forced to eventually comply with the court order, Twitter's practices and activities highlighted that institutionalization factored in Twitter's decision making.

Further, the high degree of institutionalization of the Twittersphere around openness and inclusiveness reflected in Twitter's community restriction practices and activities being confronted with resistance from within the Twittersphere, mainstream media outlets, and even Twitter's employees. This is consistent with the implications of the high institutionalization, which is associated with a higher "resistance to change" (Zucker, 1991, p. 103). Take for example the reaction to Twitter's decision to restrict community participation based on the jurisdiction from which they are participation. The following sentiments were voiced by several Twittersphere users:

> Twitter's new policy on tweet censorship will make it increasingly difficult to not be seen as a tool of US-foreign policy during unrest. Chanders (@Chanders) January 27, 2012 ;

> #TwitterCensorship. Dear Twitter, I face so much censorship in Sudan as a journalist, you were my free and safe space. I'm grieving now. (@ReemShawkat) January 27, 2012

Similar was the reaction voiced by several complementors and developers who sensed that Twitter's community restriction goes against the institutionalization of the Twittersphere around the ideals of openness and freedom of expression.

"I don't want to develop on an API which contains a 'withheld_in_countries' field. What's next, a 'for_your_own_good' field?" He added: "I helped develop a Twitter client that Chinese pro-democracy activists used. Guess that's dead now. Thanks, Twitter." (Twittersphere, 27/01/12)

Within Twitter, the community restriction practices and activities were associated by the departure of a lead long-tenured engineer who cited among the reasons for his departure his discontent with the leverage that Twitter, as a platform owner, has over the Twittersphere.

"The call for a decentralized Twitter speaks to deeper motives than profit: good engineering and social justice. Decentralization isn't just a better architecture, it's an architecture that resists censorship and the corrupting influences of capital and marketing" (TechCrunch, 16/09/10)

The long-term impact of the "backlash" that Twitter faced following community restrictions could not be effectively measured, but Twitter was wary of the conflicting messages it is sending through imposing restrictions on the Twittersphere, which has long been institutionalized on the ideals of freedom of expression. Twitter was often apologetic in the statements and announcements that followed community restrictions. The corporation attempted to maintain that it is not going against its long-held positions despite having to act differently in certain instances.

"… we believe the new, more granular approach to withheld content is a good thing for freedom of expression, transparency, accountability— and for our users. Besides allowing us to keep Tweets available in more places, it also allows users to see whether we are living up to our freedom of expression ideal." (Twitter, 26/01/12)

Commercialization. The commercial interests for corporations have always been deemed the basis upon which they choose to engage with the political sphere (Baysinger, 1984; Hillman & Hitt, 1999; Hillman et al., 2004). Critical perspectives on corporate motivations have deemed the commercial interests potentially detrimental to the public good, namely in the context of political deliberations. As such, the compatibility (or lack thereof) between the commercial interests of corporations and their political roles and responsibilities have been subject to debate (Scherer, 2018; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011). With that said, commercialization, which

translates to the manner in which platform owners monetize their platforms, emerged in our study as an important contextual factor that influences the choice of political practices that platform owners adopt, albeit in a rather nuanced manner relative to extant literature. Prior studies have highlighted that (narrow) self-interest (in the form of financial performance and competitive advantage) motivates corporations to engage with the political sphere and adopt their practices accordingly. (e.g., Hillman et al., 2004). Our findings suggest that while the commercial interests of Twitter, as a private corporation, had clear implications on its political mediator role, the relationship is complex and interrelated with the aforementioned contextual factors.

The broader management literature suggests that digital platforms with high uncertainty ex-ante may adopt different paths in terms of monetization. This involves subsidizing one or more sides of the platform in order to increase the attractiveness of the respective platforms and instigate network effects (Gawer, 2014). Twitter followed the same suit with the Twittersphere as it offered access to the platform free of charge. This was facilitated by "patient capital" from Twitter's founders and early investors, which in turn allowed Twitter to sustain its operations and expand despite the absence of meaningful revenues for a prolonged period of time.

> "Stubborn insistence on a slow and thoughtful approach to commercialization—one which puts users first, amplifies existing value, and generates profit has frustrated some Twitter watchers." (Twitter, 13/04/10)

Similar to our discussion in the previous section, Twitter's statements and announcements after it "finally" decided to monetize the Twittersphere highlighted the corporation's attempts to reconcile community restriction practices (relative to the developer communities) with the institutionalization of the Twittersphere around openness and freedom of expression.

> "It is important to keep in mind that Twitter bears all the costs of maintaining the network, protecting the Tweet stream against spam, supporting user requests, and scaling the service… In order to continue to provide clarity, our guiding principles include: We don't seek to control what users tweet. And users own their own tweets." (Twitter, 24/05/10)

Among the several takeaways from Twitter's rhetoric as exemplified by this statement is the Twitter's insistence that commercialization was presumably not going to be a factor impacting Twitter's adopted political practices relative to the exercise of voice within the Twittersphere. In response to the criticism that Twitter faced upon announcing its monetization plans, Twitter repeatedly reassured Twittersphere communities that this development would not influence their respective engagements with the political sphere.

Our findings, however, suggest that commercialization influenced the political practices adopted by Twitter in its governance of the Twittersphere. This can be illustrated with the acquisition of TweetDeck, a mobile application that a significant portion of Twittersphere users used to access the platform. Although Twitter had for years reacted favorably to the emergence of TweetDeck and similar applications developed by entrepreneurs, application developers, and hobbyists, this sentiment evidently changed following the announcement of Twitter's monetization plans. The plans led Twitter to promote Twittersphere access through its official mobile applications to maximize its revenues. Since TweetDeck was too popular for restrictions, Twitter acquired its parent company, whose offices were located in the United Kingdom. This in turn led Twitter to be a "citizen" of the United Kingdom with now-acquired offices and resources. As such, Twitter received multiple local court orders to disclose public and private user information for Twittersphere users for different reasons. Moreover, the United Kingdom was one of the countries in which Twitter agreed to restrict and withhold community participation locally based on the requests of its government and public institutions. As such, Twitter's community restriction practices in the United Kingdom were partially caused – during that time period - by its acquisition of TweetDeck in line with its commercial interests.

Moreover, during the study period several employees decided to leave Twitter in a rather

public manner. Reflecting on their statements and subsequent commentary, they lamented the notion that commercialization was increasingly driving the governance decisions that Twitter was undertaking in the Twittersphere, which has reflected in internal discussions between Twitter employees around the notion of decentralizing the platform and relatedly its governance.

> "The fact that Twitter (the business) can't separate itself from tweeting (the medium) is a "large part" of what lead to my decision to leave. The call for a decentralized Twitter speaks to deeper motives than profit… it's an architecture that resists censorship and the corrupting influences of capital and marketing" (TechCrunch, 16/09/10)

Overall, our analysis of the political practices that Twitter undertook within the Twittersphere, as well as the contextual factors that have influenced the respective practices in different contexts suggest that the political mediator role of platform owners is (a) not a binary decision of whether platform owners should act as mediators or not; rather it is manifests in multiple practices and activities that are inherent to the platform form of organizing (b) contextualized by multiple factors that include the interests and demands of corporate stakeholders and the stakeholders of the digital platforms (i.e., users, public figures, developers, etc.).

4.6   Discussion

We began this research with the observation that in adopting the platform form of organizing, private corporations are increasingly leveraging digital communications to provide autonomous citizens and collectives with the ability to exercise their voice and engage with governments and public institutions. Our objective in this study was to understand the practices and activities that denote this political role of platform owners. Towards this end, we conducted a detailed study of Twitter, a private corporation that owns and governs one of the more globally renowned digital platforms. We believe that our findings, based on analyses of diverse accounts of the evolution of the platform, make three important contributions to our theoretical understanding of platform governance. First, we substantiate a political mediator role of platform owners as a novel

theoretical construct relative to traditional direct political roles in which corporations engage directly with public institutions. Second, we detail the different practices that constitute the mediator role in terms of different manifestations of managing the degrees of access, value propositions, and level of exposure. Third, we offer potential explanations for why platform owners might adopt the different practices in different contexts. In this section, we discuss these contributions and the avenues they suggest for future research on platform governance. We also consider broader questions around our understanding of the political role of the corporation.

4.6.1 The Political Role of Platform Owners as Mediators

As indicated earlier, prior research on the political role of the corporation has detailed different types of practices and activities through which corporations engage with public institutions to further their competitive advantage and financial performance: offering financial resources to politicians directly or through Political Action Committees (e.g., Aplin & Hegarty, 1980), leveraging information to affect public policy preferences in a manner favorable to the focal corporation through lobbying (e.g., Lord, 1995), and engaging in constituency building through appealing to citizens who in turn express public policy preferences to political decision makers (e.g., Hillman & Hitt, 1999). Hillman et al. (2004) define these practices as corporate attempts to shape government public policy in accordance with the commercial interests of the corporation (p. 838). In this study we have sought to extend our understanding of the practices that constitute the political role of the corporation by studying the manner in which platform owners influence how other autonomous citizens and collectives engage with their respective public institutions to pursue their own interests, a context that has been under-researched in extant literature.

Crucially, our research findings have led us to substantiate what we refer to as the political mediator role of platform owners. The political mediator role refers to the manner in which the

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governance systems and processes put into place by platform owners to influence the exercise of voice within their respective platforms. In our research findings, this role reflects in platform owners adopting different practices and activities towards managing the degrees of access, value propositions, and exposure of the respective engagements of platform users and communities. In analyzing the data through the lens of corporate citizenship (as an initial condition), we were able to further our understanding of how private corporations influence the manner in which citizens engage in discussions and deliberations, collective will formation, and the realization of democratic ideals that emphasize the participation and representation of citizens in the public sphere. This increasing entanglement between digital platforms and political processes and implications has been evident in the discourse around the roles of platform owners. This has reflected in calls for critical examination of platform governance that we build upon in this study (e.g., Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019).

In highlighting the different practices that constitute the political mediator role of platform owners, we identify intermediation as the de facto practice adopted by Twitter. Intermediation refers to the governance systems and processes that Twitter put into place to facilitate participation in a predominantly laissez-faire manner. It aligns with the sentiment that platform owners assume a neutral role relative to platforms that merely match make and connect users and communities to transact and interact accordingly (e.g., Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Gillespie, 2018). Our research findings identify two additional practices: augmentation and restriction. These practices highlight a notable agentic role that Twitter assumes within the Twittersphere. To be clear, it has been acknowledged that platform owners intervene in their respective platforms to mitigate bad behavior (e.g., copyright infringements) (Evans, 2012). However, restriction and augmentation – in the manner discussed in our research findings - are different in that they

comprise of Twitter intervening in the engagement between autonomous citizens and the political sphere based on the quintessentially political content of the engagement.

4.6.2   Governance Spillovers and the Conceptualization of Digital Platforms

Previous research has emphasized the market attributes of digital platforms, in terms of price mechanisms, demand and supply dynamics, and transaction-level mechanisms (e.g., Jeppesen & Frederiksen, 2006, 2010; Wareham et al., 2014). This reflected in research within economics and strategic management depicting digital platforms as multi-sided markets in which users interact and transact in light of the governance decisions and systems adopted by platform owners as buyers and sellers or innovators and users (e.g., Gawer, 2014; Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). That said, we had set a boundary condition in this study by which we focused on the exercise of voice relative to other forms of participation towards extending our understanding of the political mediator role of platform owners. As such we deemphasized economic transactions and related forms of participation (exchange and innovation) that may take place within digital platforms in-line with our quest to understand the political practices and identify contextual factors that influence the corresponding political mediator role of platform owners.

Our research findings entail important theoretical additions to our understanding of the inner workings of digital platforms. Fundamentally, these additions were informed by an alternative conceptualization of digital platforms, not as markets of transactions or innovation but as arenas of citizenship – akin to Habermas's concept of the public sphere – that incorporate discussions around public issues of interest, mobilization to influence decision making, and reasonably structured deliberations that contribute positively to the process of collective will formation (e.g., Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005). While acknowledging that Habermas has voiced his skepticism that digital platforms can live to the ideals of deliberative democracy

(2009), Whelan et al. (2013) argues that digital platforms – as arenas of citizenship – may empower individuals and communities as they engage with corporations; and thus, relatively alter the power asymmetries that govern the business-society relations. This line of argumentation is consistent with our findings that the Twittersphere has afforded its communities the ability to engage with their respective institutions and potentially alter existing power asymmetries. In this respect, platform governance is instrumental in maintaining, reversing, or amplifying power asymmetries; this explains the recent calls for a critical perspective on platform governance vis-à-vis citizenship (Scherer, 2018; Scherer et al., 2016). With that said, in this study we are agnostic with regards to tangible impact of the engagement of platform users with their respective institutions. We are more concerned with the political practices adopted by platform owners and the contextual factors that influence these practices. For example, we find Twitter's decision to augment the participation of local communities in Iran in 2009 to be notable as it reflected and reinforced Twitter's perception of its political role. However, the tangible implications of Twitter's governance on "Twitter Revolutions" have been subject to critique (Christensen, 2011). As such, a question for future research is that of impact on citizenship; the measurement of which would further inform the theorizing around the roles and responsibilities of platform owners.

Critical approaches to the research into the political role of the corporation have lamented the strict separation between the economic and political spheres within management research (e.g., Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007); this has reflected in the discourse around digital platforms being depicted either as markets for economic transactions or arenas for citizenship for political engagement. Though we are complicit in that our starting point has been to isolate the political forms of participation in accordance with the latter depiction, other forms of participation proved influential in understanding the political mediator role of Twitter. The Twittersphere

included not just communities exercising their voice relative to public institutions but also a vibrant marketplace for application developers, entrepreneurs, and hobbyists who developed and offered products and services to platform communities. Our finding that the platform governance adopted by Twitter within the Twittersphere, as an arena of citizenship, has been influenced by commercialization makes a theoretical contribution to our understanding of the political mediator role of platform owners. More specifically, we argue that digital platforms exhibit what we refer to as *governance spillovers* through which the governance of economic forms of participation lead to intended and unintended implications for the governance of political forms of participation. Indeed, there have been multiple notable governance updates in which Twitter introduced restrictions to the exercise of voice within the Twittersphere as a result of restrictions that it had introduced earlier on the participation of entrepreneurs, application developers, and hobbyists for commercial considerations. Governance spillovers were even evident in mundane cases. For example, Twitter infamously suspended the account of a journalist who was critical of MSNBC's coverage of the Olympics. This suspension was notable considering that Twitter had established a commercial partnership with MSNBC as it pertains to the latter's coverage of the Olympics.

Taken together, governance spillovers highlight that any presumed boundaries are likely to be porous between the different forms of participation in digital platforms in which value creation is primarily undertaken by autonomous communities. Notably, governance spillovers, as per our research findings, are bidirectional. That is, not only have changes in the governance of the economic forms of participation led to intended and unintended implications for the governance of the political forms of participation, but the reverse was also true. For example, upon Twitter imposing restrictions on the exercise of voice on a selective basis, several renowned application developers announced that they would no longer develop products and services based

on Twitter's API. This bidirectionality suggests that future research should study platform governance relative to the different forms of participation in tandem. For example, Twitter in its prospectus offers different value propositions to its different classes of stakeholders (i.e., users, platform partners, data partners, advertisers). The question of how these value propositions complement and conflict with one another and how platform owners manage the corresponding spillovers would further our understanding of platform governance.

An additional implication that follows is related to the conception of digital platforms. That is, in light of the discussion around governance spillovers, we argue that digital platforms approximate agoras of citizenship due to their incorporation of different forms of participation that are closely interrelated from a governance standpoint. In the ancient Greek tradition, the agora constituted an open place of assembly where citizens would gather to transact in a vibrant marketplace, hear civic announcements, engage in sports and cultural events, or discuss politics (Camp,1986; Forsdyke, 2000). The open architecture of the agora meant that it could be used for different purposes with traditional presumed boundaries blurred between politics and markets. Through depicting platforms as agoras, we do not merely want to introduce another signifier. Rather, we argue that this has further implications for the theorizing around the political role of platform owners relative to the different forms of participation afforded by their respective platforms, beyond the strict separation between the political and economic domains.

4.6.3 The Question of Motivations and Contextual Factors

Previous research into the political role of the corporation, namely in the Corporate Political Activity (CPA) tradition, has emphasized the instrumental benefits of political strategies in terms of access to political resources (e.g., Bonardi et al., 2005), competitive advantage (e.g., Hillman & Hitt, 1999), and financial performance (e.g., Hillman et al., 2004). Underlying CPA research is the

notion that corporations engage with governments and public institutions to influence policy decisions in a manner favorable to the firm, which in turn has been associated with improving competitive advantage and financial performance (Hillman et al., 2004). Alternatively, research in the Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) tradition has mostly suggested that private corporations may assume government-like roles irrespective of competitive or financial considerations (e.g., Eberlein, 2019; Scherer, 2018; Whelan, 2013). Juxtaposed to the context of digital platforms, our research findings contribute to understanding whether the political mediator role of platform owners is primarily informed by instrumental considerations.

As part our research questions, we identified multiple contextual factors (Langley, 1999) in order to understand the determinants of the different political mediator roles detailed earlier along with their different inclinations. As such, we argued that commercialization has been indeed influential in the political practices that Twitter adopted in different instances. Evidence of the influence of commercialization is evident both in early stages when Twitter did not meaningfully monetize the participation within the Twittersphere and in later stages when Twitter introduced a revenue model based on advertising. Broadly speaking, our findings point to a strong "correlation" between Twitter's lack of a revenue model and its increased adoption of augmentation practices on one hand, and Twitter's introduction of a revenue model and increased adoption of restriction practices on the other hand. However, as has been shown in the Research Findings section, the primacy of commercialization is challenged by the influence of other contextual factors.

We note that interplay between the three identified contextual factors adds nuance to our understanding of the political mediator role of platform owners. This can be illustrated through reflecting on Twitter's blurring of the distinction between online and offline participation following the WikiLeaks court order that was issued to Twitter and other platform owners. From

an instrumental standpoint, Twitter was evidently emphasizing its commercial interests during that time frame following the announcement of its plans to monetize the Twittersphere and subsequently expand its corporate footprint within the United States and internationally. As such, Twitter could have in accordance with the commercialization and citizenship contextual factors highlighted in the research findings complied with the court order. However, in light of the institutionalization of the Twittersphere around the ideals of freedom of expression and the open exchange of information, Twitter decided to augment the participation of the respective communities through contesting the court order.

The WikiLeaks case was not singular in challenging the primacy of commercialization. In multiple occasions, Twitter underplayed commercial interests in countries whose "very being is against what we are about" (Wired, 27/01/10). Twitter's citizenship both legally and politically in certain countries (e.g., United States, Germany) as opposed to others (e.g., China, Iran) had important implications for the adopted governance decisions. We contend that Twitter's political mediator practices are contextualized by the interplay between multiple factors. The assumption that commercialization supersedes the other contextual factors needs to be critically scrutinized in accordance with the research findings. In multiple milestones that proved influential in the evolution of the platform, Twitter deprioritized commercialization relative to institutionalization and/or citizenship. While this has not been always the case, we contend that the three contextual factors were present (and often acknowledged discursively by Twitter) in communicating its adopted practices. The different contextual factors have presented Twitter with sometimes conflicting demands.

Corporations may face conflicting demands from their respective stakeholders who take part (or are impacted) by the value creation activities. Stakeholder theorists have argued that

underlying a good strategy is the ability of managers and corporations to balance stakeholder interests and allocate scarce resources to accordingly (Freeman, 1984; Phillips, 1997; Phillips et al., 2003). In the context of digital platforms, stakeholder engagement takes place at analytically distinctive levels: corporate level (e.g., governments, investors, etc.) and platform level (e.g., users, developers, etc.). Twitter attempted to balance stakeholder interests and demands throughout its evolution in accounting for the three identified contextual factors. An important question for future research is regarding the manner in which platform owners prioritize different stakeholder interests and demands at the different analytical levels. Moreover, does the participation of legally autonomous stakeholders within platforms and the related political manifestations lead us to revisit the footprint of stakeholder theory towards the interests of citizens impacted by value creation activities within platforms. A related question is regarding the role of time in amplifying the influence of certain stakeholder interests and demands at the expense of others. For example, does the influence of institutionalization decrease with time as platforms grow and become less dependent on the marginal participation of individuals.

The observation that Twitter has not always prioritized commercialization relative to the other contextual factors ought not be conflated with Twitter acting against or irrespective of its best interests. Indeed, Cennamo (2021) argues that competing in digital markets has shifted the criteria of success from the individual corporation to the ecosystem comprising of a broad range of stakeholders. This is consistent with our research findings that in accounting for the different contextual factors, Twitter has attempted to balance the interests and demands of different stakeholders towards the best interest of the Twittersphere. However, it is not consistent with the political manifestations that cannot be separated from the economic or market forms of participation, which means that the best interest of the Twittersphere necessarily incorporated

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political roles and proclamations. Therefore, we believe that the debate around the instrumental implications of the political mediator role of platform owners benefits from further research, with research questions related to the link between political roles and the health of the platform.

4.6.4 The Political Responsibility of Platform Owners

Our study highlights that in contexts where corporations have the ability to influence the engagement between citizens and collectives their public institutions, the governance systems and processes that these corporations adopt are instrumental in (relatively) reversing the power asymmetries that would have otherwise persisted. Needless to say, digital platforms are not representative of all public contexts through which citizens engage with the political sphere (e.g., Whelan et al., 2013). However, digital communications have enabled users to interact in a real-time accessible manner driven by the ubiquity of low-cost Internet access technologies, and bypass traditional bottlenecks within analog media (e.g., newspapers, TV, radio, advocacy groups, etc.). This is not to suggest that digital platforms do not include other forms of gatekeeping; rather, we contend that digital platforms create a relatively more open arena – with limited restrictions - for engaging with public institutions relative to traditional forms of organizing. The realization or non-fulfillment of this potential has brought to the forefront questions around the political responsibilities and obligations of platform owners (e.g., Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019)

Our study was not designed to develop a theory for the political responsibility of platform owners. Our data analysis sought to detail the political practices and contextual factors that denote the political mediator role of platform owners. However, questions around responsibilities and obligations emerged in our findings in a manner that warrants reflection in this section and future research. That is, in communicating its governance systems and processes in place, Twitter both explicitly and implicitly referred to its responsibilities and obligations as part of its decisions

making process relative to demands from different stakeholders. In order to fully capture the determinants of the political mediator role that platform owners assume, we believe that it is important to think about possible sources of political responsibilities that may be further investigated. Therefore, we take a step backwards in this section to reflect on broader calls for theorizing for the political responsibility of the corporation (e.g., Matten, 2009; Scherer, 2018). However, we relax the normative inclinations of Political Corporate Social Responsibility research to merely describe the manner in which Twitter framed its decision making while making references to its acknowledgement of political responsibility.

The first of these sets of references relates to Twitter's ethos of the Twittersphere based on the ideals of freedom of expression and the quest towards the positive and profound global impact in Twitter's rhetoric. These references were invoked by Twitter in its statements and announcements as responsibilities, duties, and missions. The diffusion of political responsibility into Twitter's rhetoric was notable relative to its initial purpose at inception of serving as a tool to sharing a "status" with friends. However, as the Twittersphere evolved and was credited by stakeholders (e.g., media outlets, policy makers, Twittersphere users, etc.) for democratizing implications, Twitter embraced its (political) responsibilities to the point that Twitter's executives referred to the corporation/platform as the "the free speech wing of the free speech party" (Guardian, 22/3/12). Twitter's proclamations of responsibility extended to the jurisdictions in which individuals and communities participated in the Twittersphere and even to jurisdictions where access to the Twittersphere was blocked (e.g., China). Twitter's co-founder had claimed that in light of its responsibilities to facilitate the free flow of information it was going to work with developers to bypass China's great firewall (Wired, 27/01/10). Fundamentally, Twitter assumed political responsibilities beyond the governance of interactions and transactions within

its platform:

> "Over the last six years, we've seen Twitter become a powerful political tool around the globe. Even in a democratic country like the U.S., Twitter offers citizens and candidates alike a unique platform to make their voices heard in new, transformative ways" (March 27, 2012).

The second set of references relates to Twitter's stance on its commercial interests and how they are not at odds with Twitter's proclamations around maintaining the value of the Twittersphere and realizing the positive global impact that the participation in the Twittersphere entails. As argued earlier, commercialization has been influential in Twitter's decision making in as it pertains to the adoption of different political mediator practices in different instances. That said, in Twitter's communications of changes and updates in its governance of economic forms of participation, it maintained the commitment to its proclaimed political responsibilities around the notion that "Tweets must flow" (Twitter, 28/01/11). This has been notably consistent at different stages in our study period. First, in its early stages Twitter did not have a revenue model in place. This lack of commercialization, which was made possible by patient capital from venture capitalists and investors was notable due to its prolonged duration. In explaining the persistent delays in disclosing its revenue model, Twitter often argued that its priority was value creation for Twittersphere users. Moreover, Twitter would reaffirm its commitment to "making a real impact around the world as people, companies, and organizations everywhere discover a powerful new way to communicate" relative to short-term commercial gains. Twitter's executives repeatedly reiterated that any future commercial interests would not limit the accessibility of the Twittersphere to users, nor would it impact the openness of the Twittersphere. Second, as Twitter introduced its revenue model and introduced several updates to its governance systems and processes, this led to governance spillovers that reflected in restrictions on the exercise of voice within the Twittersphere. That being said, the discourse of political responsibility persisted in

claiming that Twitter was still committed to realizing its positive impact: "Stubborn insistence on a slow and thoughtful approach to monetization—one which puts users first … It was a great chance for us to share our passionate belief that the open exchange of information can have a positive global impact" (Twitter, 22/06/11).

The third set of references relates to the implications of Twitter's legal and political citizenship. Twitter has assumed or disavowed political responsibility on the basis of legal and political context that it aligned itself with both by virtue of physical corporate presence and political alignment. In our research findings, we highlighted earlier that Twitter's citizenship in the United States has influenced its choice of political mediator practices. It also reflected in its discourse around its political responsibilities. Twitter invoked its adherence with the First Amendment in the constitution of the United States in terms of protecting the freedom of expression of Twittersphere users around the world. Even as Twitter entered other countries, it still maintained that any imposed restrictions are out of (legal) necessity as the company remains committed to the notion that the "Tweets must still flow". In his study of Google and issues of digital copyright, Whelan (2019) argues that Google is born political in the sense that its relationship to copyright have been influenced by broader legal, cultural, and institutional contexts. We similarly argue that Twitter and platform owners, more broadly, are born political even as they adopt 'neutral' intermediation practices, which have been made possible by the legal and institutional frameworks that govern Silicon Valley (Gillespie, 2018). As such, the political responsibilities should follow from the adoption of the platform business model and leveraging the value creation of legally autonomous users.

There are multiple and diverse avenues to explore the scale and scope of the political responsibilities of platform owners. To be clear, Twitter's references to its responsibilities and

obligations can be discounted as a marketing spin to further the attractiveness of the Twittersphere to users and other stakeholders and the legitimacy of Twitter. However, we note that the political responsibilities and obligations that Twitter assumed in its announcement and statements reflected in its choice of practices, though in varying degrees along with other factors. As such, Twitter's stance around the freedom of expression and the open exchange of information was framed as "both a practical and ethical belief" (Twitter, 28/01/11) that Twitter associated with its strategy and value creation. This approach to responsibility can be evidently distinguished from the other activities that Twitter undertook (e.g., giving back to the community through donations and contributions to the open-source community). It has been argued that traditional approaches to CSR encompass the latter approach but fall short from encompassing the expansive scale and scope of responsibility in which private corporations administer citizenship rights in contexts where governments are unable or unwilling to so. This limitation has led to the emergence of PCSR. We believe that in an era where digital technologies are growing in sophistication and ubiquity, greater scholarly attention needs to be paid to the subsequent responsibilities of platform owners to further our understanding of platform governance, as well as the theorizing around the political role of the corporation, more broadly.

4.7   Concluding Remarks

Our objective in this study was to understand the practices and activities that denote the political mediator role of platform owners as well as the contextual factors that influence the practices and activities. Towards this end, we conducted a detailed study of Twitter, a private corporation that owns and governs one of the more globally renowned digital platforms in relation to the exercise of voice. Of course, like any research, ours has limitations. The findings, derived from a single case study, are likely limited in generalizability to other types of digital platforms. Moreover, the

duration of the study has been restricted to the period between 2006 and 2013, as to uncover the political activities and practices and their contextual factors from the inception of the Twittersphere until it achieved mainstream status. With that said, extending the duration of the study beyond 2013 could have uncovered additional insights into the contextual factors that influence the choice of political activities and practices. That is, post-2013 changes in the institutional environment, executive turnover, the execution of the Initial Public Offering, and evolution in the composition of the Twittersphere while they would fall into one or more of the contextual factors identified in the study could have nevertheless added further nuance to the findings. We raise this note to indicate both a limitation of our own work and an opportunity for future research. Similarly, as noted above, our insights help to describe and explain the practices that denote the political mediator role of platform owners in the context of Twitter. Another opportunity for future research then rests in comparative analysis of governance practices between several digital platforms.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1   Research Summary

In the dissertation, I examine platform governance amid the increasing digitalization of the economy by focusing on the role of the platform owners in influencing the exercise of voice in their respective platforms. Specifically, I (i) substantiate the political underpinnings of platform governance through studying the limitations of an apolitical conception of platform governance and propose an alternative, (ii) unpack the political roles and responsibilities underlying platform governance, and (iii) reflect on the intellectual structure and evolution of research into the political role of the corporation and discern the implications of digitalization accordingly. In this final chapter, I summarize the findings and discuss potential implications for research and practice.

The first essay considers the increasing entanglement between platform owners and political discourse in the public sphere. With digitalization as a backdrop, I conduct an exhaustive review of articles within select management outlets that have invoked an agentic political engagement between private corporations and the political sphere, in the form of governments and public institutions. Using bibliometric techniques applied upon a dataset collected from Web of Science, I track the evolution of research into the political role of the corporation across different disciplines and reflect on the current state of development of the respective research streams. In doing so, I highlight gaps and opportunities in extant research; I further argue that the proliferation of digital platforms challenges the current state of research, while suggesting avenues for future research,

The second essay examines the political underpinnings of platform governance through

reflecting on the limitations of platform governance, as conceptualized in extant research. In particular, I unpack the construct of platform openness that has been deemed central to the manner in which platform owners govern the exercise of voice within their respective platforms. I further argue that the underpowered conception of platform openness partially explains the recent criticism and scrutiny that platform owners have received in the last few years that continues to jeopardize the viability and competitiveness of established digital platforms. The essay illustrates the conceptual arguments through three illustrative mini-case studies and proposes an alternative conception of governance based on the politically informed norm of inclusion.

The third essay examines the political practices and activities through which (political) platform governance mediates the exercise of voice of platform communities and their respective engagements with the political sphere. The essay argues that while there has been an impressive body of research into the practices and activities through which corporations engage with the political sphere, the political mediator role has been under researched. Using an inductive study of the evolution of Twitter and the corresponding governance of its digital platform, I detail the different activities and aggregate those into three main practices through which Twitter has governed its platform in addition to identifying related contextual factors. These practices notably deviate from the notion that platform governance is politically neutral or apolitical.

5.2   Implications

The dissertation contributes to the platform literature as well as the political role of the corporation literature. In this section, I examine key implications of the findings of the three essays.

5.2.1   The Political Underpinnings of Platform Governance

The dissertation engages with two broad literatures. More specifically, the dissertation proposes

a political dimension to platform governance through invoking research into the political role of the corporation in order to study the political (mediator) roles and responsibilities that platform owners undertake within their respective platforms. The essays frame platform governance in accordance with the 'political turn' within management research through pursuing different lines of conceptual and empirical development towards detailing the political underpinnings of platform governance (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011; Scherer et al., 2016). The dissertation argues that platform governance is political by virtue of influencing the exercise of voice of essentially autonomous citizens and collectives as they engage with the political sphere, among other types of engagement. Essay 2 substantiates the necessary confluence between platform governance and the political role of the corporation through arguing that an apolitical approach to platform governance that does not account for power relations between citizens and collectives is misaligned with the ontological nature of digital platforms. This in turn has been associated with criticisms and scrutiny that platform owners have received in the past few years that have been associated with tangible negative implications on the respective platforms. As such, the dissertation is collectively at odds with the notion that platform owners can (or should) assume an apolitical approach to governance.

With the political underpinnings of platform governance substantiated, the dissertation sheds light on the critical political mediator role of platform owners that has received limited attention in extant research in terms of unpacking the "how" aspect (i.e., political practices and activities). Essay 3 focuses on the identification of the political practices that denote platform governance through which platform owners mediate the exercise of voice by autonomous communities. Emergent from the research findings is the notion that platform owners may purposefully and explicitly take sides in the political engagement between communities and their

respective governments and public institutions. So, if essay 2 conceptually argues for a political conception of platform governance based on the norm of inclusion that accounts for power relations within digital platforms, essay 3 highlights some of the comparable practices and activities (i.e., community augmentation). Towards further understanding the political practices and activities that denote platform governance, the dissertation discusses the contextual factors that influence the decisions that platform owners undertake within their respective platforms. The contextual factors that were identified both conceptually (essay 2) and empirically (essay 3) reflect the interests and demands of corporate stakeholders and platform stakeholders. Overall, the dissertation approaches platform governance in alignment with calls for integrative research that incorporates multiple perspectives in the study of digital platforms (Chen et al., 2022; Gawer, 2014).

5.2.2   Bridging the Separation Thesis

The discussions around platform governance throughout the dissertation contribute to the emergent scholarship on the political responsibilities of platform owners (Flyverbom et al., 2019; Gillespie, 2018; Scherer, 2018). More broadly, I contend that the locus of corporate responsibility has historically followed the locus of value creation in management research and in practice, albeit with temporal lags. For example, the local and global disaggregation of the value chain has reflected in the expansion of the locus of responsibility and obligations of focal corporations to encompass networks of suppliers and distributors (Phillips, 2010; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016). This manifested in corporations being called upon to assume responsibilities beyond direct liability claims (Phillips & Schrempf-Stirling, 2016). This trend similarly applies to the platform form of organizing and its expansive and decentralized locus of value creation.

The essays in the dissertation respond to calls for a better understanding of the political

responsibilities of platform owners relative to their governance of their platforms (Etter et al., 2019; Flyverbom et al., 2019). As demonstrated in essay 1, research into the political role of the corporation has trended through four decades towards a strict separation between research into political activities and strategies and research into political responsibilities of private corporations. Essay 1 substantiates the case for bridging the separation between political roles and responsibilities by reflecting on research streams with different philosophical inclinations that nevertheless share in common calls for integration. Throughout the dissertation, I reiterate notion that the separation between political roles and responsibilities is untenable in the context of digital platforms.

In essay 2, I reflect on the criticism and scrutiny that platform owners have received in recent years for essentially political problems associated with their respective governance of their respective platforms. Fundamentally, the arguments illustrated conceptually and empirically highlight that platform governance is effective to the degree that it not only instigates network effects and incentivizes participation but also accounts for questions of power asymmetries and broader societal dysfunctions that may resurface in the context of digital platforms. It is notable in the research findings in essay 2 and essay 3 that platform owners have to an extent embraced the discourse and rhetoric of political responsibility in line with demands that they have received from various stakeholders. For example, as highlighted in essay 3, Twitter maintained its commitment to freedom of expression ideals and democratic principles consistently along with communicating and enforcing updates to its respective platform governance. This has been more pronounced with established digital platforms that exhibit winner-takes-all monopolistic tendencies that further emphasize their importance for platform users engaging with the public sphere.

5.2.3 Conceptualization of Digital Platforms

The conceptualization of digital platforms has been a central issue in the research into digital platforms within management research. With the platform form of organizing giving rise to an expansive and decentralized locus of value creation independent of hierarchical controls and contractual commitments, there have been several depictions of digital platforms in extant research. Two conceptualizations have been primarily invoked within strategic management: platforms as multi-sided markets in which buyers and sellers exchange goods and platforms as ecosystems in which complementors and users participate in the context of innovation platforms (e.g., Gawer, 2014; Cennamo, 2018, 2021; Jacobides et al., 2018). I contend that for the most part the conceptualization of platforms has followed the form of participation that researchers were interested in studying conceptually and empirically (i.e., researchers studying exchanges in platforms such as Amazon would be more likely to invoke the former conceptualization relative to research studying innovation in the context of TopCoder).

The dissertation has studied platform governance relative to the exercise of voice within digital platforms. The three essays in different capacities invoke the alternative conceptualization of platforms as arenas of citizenship (Crane et al., 2008; Whelan et al., 2013) in line with the form of participation of interest to the dissertation. With that said, among the implications of the essays is highlighting the 'fluidity' inherent to leveraging the participation of autonomous platform users towards value creation. In essay 3, I highlight the notion of governance spillovers that emerged in the respective research findings through which the governance of the (political) exercise of voice is interrelated with the governance of the (economic) participation of platform users and communities. As such, I have suggested that a holistic conceptualization of digital platforms (e.g.,

as agoras inclusive of economic and political forms of participation) is instrumental for understanding the challenges and complexities associated with platform governance. Moreover, I argue that this has further implications for broadening the research around platforms in strategic management that over-emphasizes the participation of economic communities in value creation (Gawer, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014). This dissertation sheds light on a new approach to the conceptualization of digital platforms and thereby contributes to platform governance research.

5.2.4 Digitalization as a Research Context

The essays in the dissertation draw from multiple research streams with emphasis on platform literature and the political role of the corporation literature in accordance with the respective research questions. While the dissertation and subsequent research projects that would hopefully follow from its contributions and limitations relate primarily to platform governance, there is a portion of the dissertation (namely, essay 1) that caters for the increasing academic interest in research into politics within management research. In studying the evolution of research into the political role of the corporation within management research, I further utilize bibliometric analysis to highlight gaps and opportunities in the scholarly conversations and associational themes. In addition to the forementioned separation thesis that has denoted extant research, there has been a notable dearth in empirical studies in the co-citation network maps. This is further substantiated with the notion that among the first critiques to Matten and Crane (2005) was titled "Corporate Citizenship: An Idea Whose Time Has Not Yet Come" (van Oosterhout, 2005). Though entailing a considerably greater number of empirical publications, Corporate Political Activity (CPA) researchers have similarly lamented the quality of available data sources the denote political activities and strategies considering the sensitive and confidential nature of these activities in traditional contexts (Hillman et al., 2004; Lawton et al., 2013).

The dissertation – across the three essays – has highlighted that digitalization and the proliferation of digital platforms furthers the research into the political role of the corporation through providing rich empirical research contexts that scholars can access towards theoretical and conceptual refinement. The context of digital platforms and digital technologies, more broadly, presents empirical opportunities for data collection and analysis through various advanced methodologies that have been growing in capabilities and sophistication.

5.3   Limitations

The dissertation is not without limitations. First, the review of the literature used in the three essays has been confined to management research; in essay 1 it has been further confined to management outlets that were selected on a discretionary basis. Whereas additional insights might have been garnered through invoking adjacent disciplines within the social sciences. For instance, the study of digital platforms, as a phenomenon, may benefit from studies within information systems, political science, and new media studies. In the same vein, the study of the political role of the corporation may benefit from referring to studies and reviews conducted within political science literature. Second, it has been widely acknowledged that platform governance is central to research around digital platforms since the construct is instrumental to the viability and competitiveness of digital platforms. With that said, the dissertation did not measure the tangible implications of successful or unsuccessful platform governance for the desired outcomes for platform owners. In essays 2, for instance, I have argued that the underpowered conception of platform openness was detrimental to the viability and competitiveness of platforms based on recent academic research and empirical evidence that suggested this effect. This, however, poses opportunities for future research. Third, the dissertation studied the political underpinnings of platform governance without specifically distinguishing between manual human-led moderation and algorithmic governance.

Though, the underlying arguments and potential pitfalls for platform governance – as discussed in the three essays – apply to both modes of governance, there are nuances inherent to algorithmic governance that warrant further research. Fourth, with an aim to study platform governance and its political underpinnings, the essays invoked multiple case studies, abridged in essay 2 and expanded upon in essay 3. The case studies were analyzed differently (descriptively and inductively) in accordance with the respective research questions and ex-ante conceptual development. With the said, there are inherent limitations associated with invoking case studies in terms of generalizability and applicability to other digital platforms. Although the adopted approach was suitable for the objective of the respective essays, the findings need to be contextualized accordingly.

5.4   Scope for Future Work

In this section, I identify avenues for future research in three distinct areas building upon the proposed approach to the topic of platform governance and the findings of the dissertation.

5.4.1   Platform Governance Beyond the Exercise of Voice

The boundary condition that this dissertation adopts in relation to platform governance was set due to the critical nature of the exercise of voice and the degree to which it deviates from business-as-usual practices and activities for private corporations. Despite treating the exercise of voice as a form of participation present in most digital platforms (e.g., review sections in Amazon's marketplace) and arguing that the boundaries between the different forms of participation within platforms are fluid and blurred, there are benefits to studying other forms of participation and other digital platforms (i.e., beyond those that emphasize the exercise of voice). In particular, the extant understanding of platform governance can be furthered through investigating whether the arguments posed in the dissertation can be further generalized to other forms of participation (i.e.,

innovation and exchange) or whether further theorizing is needed. For example, the initial success of the eBay platform was driven by the participation of small sellers (individuals and small companies); a notion that eBay Inc. lauded as "leveling the playing field" for platform users. However, as eBay further evolved it was joined by major retailers who leveraged the openness and respective affordances of the platform to transact with buyers. At the time, the small sellers of eBay complained to the platform owners that they are at a power asymmetrical position to major retailers due to the differential access to resources. However, eBay did not modify its governance and alternatively furthered its openness for major retailers. I highlight this example (the data for which was collected through the course of the dissertation) to argue that the findings of essay 2 and the line of argumentation posed may apply to transactions in marketplace platforms. However, there are benefits in further nuancing the theorizing in different contexts.

Furthermore, whereas the dissertation demonstrates that platform governance incentivizes and influences the participation of platform users, it is important to understand the role of temporality in the political mediator practices that platform owners undertake relative to different forms of participation. The dissertation's findings – namely with illustrative mini case studies in essay 2 and the inductive study in essay 3 – that as platforms evolve and grow so does the platform governance. Future studies can build on the finding that platform governance is influenced by several contextual factors (i.e., commercialization, institutionalization, citizenship). A promising line of research involves exploring not only the interplay between the different contextual factors relative to different forms of participation and different types of digital platforms but also how this interplay evolves over time. Perhaps a distinguishing factor associated with the exercise of voice relative to the other forms of participation is that platform owners are unlikely to participate in the digital platforms and compete with other platform users in the case of the former. However,

it has been argued that as digital platforms evolve over time, platform owners are likely to compete with other platform users in terms of economic exchanges and innovation.

5.4.2 The Political Responsibility of Platform Owners

Throughout the dissertation, I reflected on several statements and announcement by platform owners and managers making lofty statements around the political responsibilities that they are acknowledging in their respective platforms, and beyond. The statements included commitments by these (private) corporations to maintain civil discourse and adhere to the ideals of democracy within their respective platforms and across the globe. To be clear, it would be naive not to recognize that platform owners are also publicly traded with responsibilities to their shareholders and with evident commercial interests. This has reflected in the assertion throughout the dissertation, namely in essay 2, that platform owners should attend to the reproduction of marginalization and privilege within their respective platforms because these issues are evidently jeopardizing the viability and competitiveness of the respective platforms. In the three essays, I have called for bridging the separation for strategy and responsibility in terms of platform governance, and more broadly within research around the political role of the corporation.

With that said, there are important avenues for future research for substantiating the political responsibilities of platform owners through invoking political theories and philosophies. In critiquing PCSR, Whelan (2013) argues for a 'political' (as opposed to Political) Corporate Social Responsibility theorizing that acknowledges multiple political perspectives towards understanding the engagement of private corporations with the political sphere. While I alluded to the benefits of invoking agonistic pluralism in furthering extant understanding of the ontological attributes of digital platforms as arenas of citizenship, there are further research opportunities that arise from this approach. For example, one line of argumentation is through

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invoking agonistic pluralism to argue that the exercise of voice is fundamentally a depletable common-pool resource that if not governed effectively would lead to contest that is detrimental to the respective platforms (Dawkins, 2015, 2021; Mouffe, 1990; Young, 2002). As such, assuming the political responsibilities of governing contest within digital platforms is instrumental to their viability and competitiveness and is of strategic important for platform owners accordingly. Whereas much of the literature in the PCSR research stream has focused on normative theorizing of political corporate responsibility, there is scope to examine how political responsibilities align with the instrumental considerations of platform owners. Such an inquiry is important not only for understanding platforms governance but the political responsibilities of private corporations, more broadly.

5.4.3 Platform Governance and Corporate Governance

The debate around which class of corporate stakeholders should be prioritized by corporations has been central to the agenda of management scholars and practitioners. Conceptions of research into corporate governance has emphasized what Friedman refers to as the "great virtue" of the shareholder wealth maximization because "it forces people to be responsible for their own actions and makes it difficult for them to 'exploit' other people for either selfish or unselfish purposes." (Friedman, 1970, p.5). Alternative conceptions have noted that private corporations must deal with much broader relationships between a firm and its multiple stakeholder groups (Freeman, 1984) and the associated creation and distribution of value across them beyond the singular emphasis on shareholders and their narrow economic returns (Amis et al., 2020). This latter perspective – central to Stakeholder Theory – fundamentally aligns question around governance with those of value creation in that it is in the best interest of the focal corporation to attend to the demands and interests of the stakeholders that take part in value creation in addition to those

impacted by value creation (Amis et al., 2020; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984). With digital platforms constituting novel forms of organizing in which value creation is decentralized to legally autonomous platform users and communities, it only follows that the forementioned debate around corporate governance would be furthered by future research into platform governance both conceptually and empirically.

Notably, the relationship between platform governance and corporate governance has not been addressed systematically, as per a review of the literature – with a notable exception (Fenwick et al., 2019). As such, it constitutes an opportunity for future research that is critical in nature, as is research into corporate governance. More specifically, Essay 2 and Essay 3 essentially argue the platform owners attend to political responsibilities relative to platform users and communities since it serves their interests in instigation participation within their respective platforms while addressing increasing criticism and scrutiny. That is, the notion that platform owners should promote the value of their corporations, as per the premise of corporate governance research, stands. The question however is what constitutes the best interest of platforms in which value creation is primarily delegated to platform users and communities and what indicators measure the long-term health of the platform ecosystem. This warrants future research that disentangles the manner in which platform governance relates to corporate governance.

5.4.4 Platform Governance and the Mode of Governance

Throughout the dissertation, I have reflected on platform governance at a broader level in terms of the challenges inherent in influencing and guiding legally autonomous users and communities as they exercise their voice in the manner that they deem appropriate. As highlighted in the Limitations section, the research questions posed in the three essays did not afford delving specifically into the nuances of human-led moderation and the increasingly prevalent algorithmic

governance. The arguments advanced in the dissertation have implications for both modes of governance. In Essay 2, I have argued that there are pitfalls and challenges in designing governance systems and processes that do not acknowledge the inherent power imbalances between users and communities within platforms. These pitfalls would similarly apply in cases where platform owners enforce their governance through moderators and/or through machine learning and artificial intelligence algorithms. That being said, algorithmic governance poses an important avenue for future research into platform governance and its political underpinnings. Among the main arguments posed throughout the dissertation is that the separation between the strategic motivations of platform owners and their respective political roles and responsibilities is untenable. Algorithms complicate questions around responsibility since they mostly offer little visibility or accountability into the governance decisions that they undertake within digital platforms (Crawford, 2016). The inherent opacity of machine learning and artificial intelligence algorithms has been associated with problematic tendencies around search results, rankings, and recommendations (Gillespie, 2018). This opacity warrants further conceptual and empirical research into the implications of algorithmic governance to the political roles and responsibilities of platform owners.

5.4.5   Empirical Opportunities with Advanced Data Analytics

Future research can adopt analytical techniques to collect and analyze unique datasets to study platform governance and its different implications, including those related to platform performance and related measures. The link between the different underpinnings of platform governance and platform performance is one that warrants further theorizing and investigating among other relationships. With that said, I have noted earlier that among the challenges that researchers across the CPA research stream and the PCSR research stream have emphasized is

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the limited access to 'political' data that would further the understanding of the political role of the corporation. With several digital platforms providing access to their Application Programming Interfaces and offering developer and academic licenses, future research might utilize data analytics to collect data that might be otherwise difficult to access. In essay 2, the mini-case studies and the corresponding insights presented were made possible through such techniques. For example, building the mini-case study around the governance of the BPT community with Reddit involved compiling the participation of BPT users in real-time in order to preserve any posts and comments that would have otherwise been removed by algorithmic governance and/or human moderators. Fundamentally, extant understanding of platform governance and its political underpinnings can greatly benefit from innovative approaches to data collection and data analysis amid the increasing availability of related tools and resources.

In conclusion, the dissertation studied the political underpinnings of platform governance in the context of digital platforms. The essays collectively highlighted the political roles and responsibilities that underly the manner in which platform owners govern the exercise of voice within their respective platforms. In examining an alternative conception of platform governance that incorporates the political dimension, this research highlights the need for a more integrative approach to the study of digital platforms that addresses questions of strategy and responsibility in assuming that platform owners essentially target the viability and competitiveness of their respective platforms. As we further our understanding of the important and complex phenomenon of digital platforms, I believe that three essays and research contributions that are advanced in the dissertation are beneficial to gaining a holistic understanding of platform governance. These contributions I hope also shed light on the co-expansion of the locus of value creation and the locus of political responsibility in the context of digital platforms.

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APPENDIX A

Overview	Data has been collected from the BPT sub-reddit (community) in the Reddit platform between 2014 and 2020 through the following data sources: - Ethnography/Netnography - Posts and comments collected through Python - Coverage of BPT in mainstream media outlets
Sample Data Quotes	"We ask that if you are coming to this subreddit from /r/all or /r/popular that you keep your comments civil and to please acclimate yourself with our subreddit rules." (mod) "Different opinions are allowed, but bad faith posting is pretty visible. Moderators will use your posting history to get an idea of what you are like, and if it becomes obvious quickly if that a user is attempting to derail the natural flow of the sub" (mod) "Hey folks, your friendly mods just want to remind everyone that while this is a humor sub, we do allow serious conversation to take place here. That being said, we just ask that everyone remain civil and not make anything personal" (mod) "This is a very large and very active subreddit…That means that we need your help. So, should you see any of comments that break our rules or are participating in bad faith, please report them to us" (mod) "Black people are not here purely for your own entertainment … If you cannot deal with an influx of political/social issues posts, feel free to leave the sub" (user) "Don't complain about AAVE (African-American Vernacular English) or slang: Report the comments with people saying "this isn't english" or "i can't understand/read this" (mod) "… the rest of Reddit can be overwhelmingly toxic and racist, and when this site continues to host dozens of actual white supremacist communities… Reddit is full of mostly white subreddits. We have blackpeopletwitter." (user) "Our mothers and fathers constantly worry about our safety every day. The difference is that for us this is never a joke. We cannot turn off the screens of our blackness or unsubscribe from racism." (user) "Over the past few months we have received many complaints from black users. They feel as if whenever a political topic comes up, white users discredit our experiences or downvote them because reality is too uncomfortable for memes. (mod) "Hopefully these checkmarks will remind you that you are replying to someone who is actually black instead of someone performing digital blackface" (mod) "its satire mocking racist whites only country clubs"; "we can't even have a fake virtual country club without y'all tryna tear it down. YALL HAVE REAL COUNTRY CLUBS, go there …" (user)

Table A:1 Data Points - Mini-case Study 1

Overview	Data has been collected from Twitter (Bahrain Hashtag) during June 2016 to track the political upheaval that Bahrain experienced through Tweets with the following dimensions: - Content - Political affiliation - Tweet details
Sample Data Quotes	"Another clip from #Bahrain this eve sent by a friend. Revoking of Sheikh Issa Qassim nationality causing much anger" @DominicKavakeb "It's weird that someone can have their citizenship removed on national security grounds but not be arrested #Bahrain" @marcowenjones "Dear @FatiimaHalwachi, my thoughts are tomorrow with you & your father. I hope #Bahrain will #FreeKhalilAlHalwachi" @CiLuna27 "NATURALISED #Iran PROXY radical cleric NATIONALITY revoked. #Bahrain clearing RUBBISH" @Mohammed_Riffai "The protests continue now front house of shaikh Isa Qassim in Duraz village #bahrain" @iHussainRadhi المزيد من المسيرات لا زالت تنطلق الليلة في #البحرين @glorybahrain 1962 APPLICATION from Isa Qassim for #Bahrain citizenship he was Persian @fredwillie460 While #Bahrain hits its "darkest days" since 2011. The British Ambassador hangs around with his "friends" #BHUK200 @NABEELRAJAB 1000s surround chief #Shia clerics house who's citizenships been revoked. Chanting "We don't want a #BAHRAIN without Sheikh Issa Khasim! @TaraAOGrady Well, that's one way to handle opposition ... #Bahrain revokes top Shia cleric Isa Qassim's citizenship @CecilyHilleary No one is above the law in #bahrain #اسقاط_الجنسية_عن_عيسى_قاسم #البحرين @SawsanTaqawi للعلم #الشيخ_عيسى_قاسم هو أحد من وضعوا دستور #البحرين 1973 ومن سحبوا جنسيته هم المجنسون ومراجع الصهيونية بالخليج @nezar_alabadi

Table A:2 Data Points - Mini-case Study 2

Overview	Data has been collected from Twitter to collect complaints from Facebook users regarding moderation of their posts or suspension of their accounts between Jan 2021 and Dec 2021
	- Tweets collected manually on Twitter
	- Comments collected manually on Twitter
	- Coverage of Facebook restrictions in mainstream media outlets
Sample Data Quotes	المفارقة أن الليبراليين العرب حين يريدون الإشارة إلى القمع يذكرون كوريا الشمالية كمثال (ومعلوماتهم عادة مستقاة من البروبغاندا الغربية) بينما هناك منصة بين أيديهم اسمها فايسبوك تتحكم بالمحتوى وتفرض حظر على بعض الكلمات (حرفيا) وتطرد من لا ينتمي لتوجهها السياسي.
	@zisisIbrahim
	للمرّة المليون: لا. انا لم أحجبكَ أو أحجبكِ عن صفحتي على فايسبوك. أنا مطرود شرّ طردة مِن فايسبوك الصهيونيّة.
	@asadabukhalil
	رغم انتهاء فترة حظر حسابي على #فايسبوك الا ان الاخير لم يسمح لي بفتحه من جديد متذرعاً بمراقبة مضامينه ومحذرا من الغاءه تماماً..الحساب انشأته قبل عشر سنوات وهو بمثابة مساحة توثق العديد من المنشورات والصور والذكريات ! @HawiZeinab.. ارهاب زوكربيرغ لا حدود له
	#انقذوا_حي_الشيخ_جراح
	هذا الإسرائيلي يحرض علنا و صراحة على ابادة اهل غزة و فلسطين و لكن لا يتم حظره من طرف فايسبوك و يتم حظر محتوى من يدعم و يدافع عن فلسطين.
	بعض النصائح لتجنب حظر حسابك او تعليقك على تويتر أو فايسبوك، عندما تعلق على #GazaUnderAttak العدوان الغاشم @SonOfTheChosenM
	بالنسبة لي تويتر افضل من فايسبوك كثيرا في كل شيء حرية التعبير و الأخبار والمساواة بين كل مستعملي المنصة لقد فتحت حساب تويتر منذ تقريبا أربع سنوات واجده راقي جدا مقارنة مع فايسبوك الذي مجرد ذكر اسم فلسطين أو الإساءة إلى الكيان الإسرائيلي المحتل نجد أنفسنا أخدنا حظر @Mohamed00684952
	عودة صحفتنا الرئيسية على فايسبوك بعد حظر دام شهر كامل بسبب التبليغات صفحتنا التي يتعدى متابعيها 200ألف متابع @DetaineesHirak
	"الذكاء" الإصطناعي في شركة فايسبوك أو الموظفين "الأذكياء" لديها قاموا بوضع حظر محدود على حسابي @KaissarNassar الفايسبوكي بسبب بوسط قمت بنقله من تغريدة على تويتر ورد فيها: نشكر الفلان الفلاني إلخ
	حظر حسابي على فايسبوك 30 يوما
	و تقييد صفحتي الرسمية على الفايسبوك
	حرب ضد كلمة الحق
	@g2eVEcBXCTC6UMj
	بعد حظر صفحة #الحزب_الشيوعي_اللبناني الرسمية على #فايسبوك بسبب دعمها لانتفاضة الشعب الفلسطيني، تابعوا الصفحة الجديدة لـ
	@lc_lcparty
	@PierreABISAAB

Table A:3 Data Points - Mini-case Study 3