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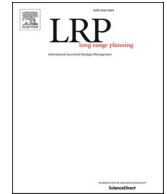
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## The governance of gig platform organizations in developing countries

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### ABSTRACT

A fundamental endeavor for a gig platform organization is the governance of its user network, on which value creation and capture critically depend. Despite the global emergence of gig platform organizations, there is little understanding of the local context in which governance decisions are made. To address this, we explore the role of institutional voids in on-demand platform governance in developing countries. By studying ride-hailing platform organizations in sub-Saharan Africa, we conceptualize enabling and coercive governance modes and uncover distinct patterns within to address institutional voids. We discuss the theoretical implications for platform governance research in developing countries.

### 1. Introduction

“With road accidents set to match HIV/AIDS as the highest cause of death in low/middle income countries by 2030, SafeBoda’s aim is to modernize informal transportation and ensure safe access to mobility” (SafeBoda, n.d.). This is the promise of SafeBoda, an Ugandan ride-hailing platform organization, which epitomizes the numerous gig platforms created recently in developing countries. This phenomenon is inscribed in the global rise of the gig economy, a “new world of work” (Ashford et al., 2018) that leverages digital technology to connect customers with independent workers for the completion of a vast range of short-term tasks, or “gigs”, remotely or locally (Anwar and Graham, 2021; Fayard, 2021; Gandini, 2018; Purcell and Brook, 2022).

For a gig platform organization, value creation and capture critically hinge on the network of independent workers and customers, as well as their activities and interactions that are embedded in local institutional settings. Hence, a fundamental endeavor for a gig platform organization is the governance of users on the supply and demand side. Within the broader body of work on platform governance, scholars have recently switched their attention to how gig platform organizations attract, coordinate, monitor and influence independent workers and customers (e.g., Duggan et al., 2020; Gol et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2021; Veen et al., 2020). Their enquiry has particularly emphasized the widespread deployment of “algorithmic control”. The focus has primarily been on the implications of such a mechanism for independent workers’ job quality and livelihoods (e.g., Connelly et al., 2021; Duggan et al., 2020; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Newlands, 2021; Wood et al., 2019).

Yet, this literature has widely viewed the governance choices of gig platform organizations *in a vacuum*, overlooking the role of the local institutional context in governance decisions. This is a critical gap in the literature for two main reasons. First, platform

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organizations are exposed to (un)written rules of operating in the local environment that need to be managed (e.g., Guda and Subramanian, 2019). These rules affect an organization's transaction costs and risks associated with user interactions (Abdi and Aulakh, 2017; Handley and Angst, 2015; Soundararajan et al., 2021). Second, within the heterogeneous array of gig platforms (Vallas and Schor, 2020), so-called "on-demand" platforms (Guda and Subramanian, 2019) are uniquely tied to the location in which they are active. Indeed, these platforms facilitate the connection between independent workers and customers for tasks that are "rooted in a given locality" (Vallas and Schor, 2020, p. 275). While on-demand platforms' customers and workers connect online, the execution of the gig requires co-location and in-person interactions (Veen et al., 2020). Albeit rare, few studies highlight that on-demand platforms are "local-specific socio-economic structures" (Heiland, 2022) and the "broader political-economic context" is worthy of consideration (Veen et al., 2020). Hence, we contend that gig platform organizations in general, and on-demand ones in particular, need to account for the idiosyncrasies of the local environment in which the governance of their user networks is embedded.

The role played by the local environment, for on-demand platform governance, is particularly critical in developing countries, because they are characterized by institutional voids, i.e., the absence or underdevelopment of institutions that facilitate market activity (Khanna and Palepu, 1997). Institutional voids hinder the mechanisms that allow transacting parties to come together, resulting in higher costs of market activity (Doh et al., 2017). Where there are coordination hazards, it is common for organizations to rely on socially supportive cultural norms and values (e.g., Mair and Martí, 2009; Puffer et al., 2010) to complete transactions. Local on-demand platform organizations in developing countries enjoy a privileged vantage point in this respect. Their local origin grants them a unique knowledge of the local market and social structure. This is likely to be manifested in how they govern their user network and the extent to which this is tailored to the local developing country context. Yet, local gig platforms in developing countries have been underexposed in the management literature, let alone in governance research.

Our study addresses the scant scholarly attention dedicated to the institutional embeddedness of gig platform governance and gig platform organizations established and active in locations characterized by institutional voids. We are particularly interested in the kinds of governance mechanisms gig platform organizations deploy to address institutional voids and in how these mechanisms are used to engage with specific voids. We tackle this research gap by focusing on on-demand platforms, due to their location-bound user network, and by connecting debates in platform governance and institutional voids to answer the following research question: *how do local on-demand platform organizations address institutional voids through governance in developing countries?*

To answer this question, we focus on a sample of 11 ride-hailing platform organizations created and active in sub-Saharan Africa. We adopted an inductive and deductive approach to analyze the institutional voids experienced by the ride-hailing platform organizations. In order to obtain rich insights on the local context, we firstly analyzed the data inductively. In a second stage, to build a conceptual account of the data through established theoretical constructs, we examined the emergent themes in light of the types of institutional voids established in the literature, i.e., regulatory voids, labor market voids, and product market voids (cf. Khanna and Palepu, 1997; Khanna and Palepu, 2010). An inductive analysis uncovered an array of governance mechanisms, distinguished into coercive and enabling governance modes, that are deployed to address various institutional voids in the local environment. In the last stage, we compared the governance mechanisms adopted per type of void and identified relevant patterns.

The study advances gig platform research by illuminating the institutional embeddedness of governance modes and mechanisms. Specifically, it provides three main contributions to the literature. First, it conceptualizes enabling and coercive governance modes. Compared to prior studies (e.g., Heiland, 2022; Newlands, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) the notion of enabling governance is novel in uncovering the extent to which gig platform organizations may deploy governance to empower users, eminently workers. The coercive governance construct instead advances the understanding of the constraining approach (gig) platform organizations may have towards their users (cf., Chen et al., 2022; Duggan et al., 2020; Newlands, 2021) and the reasons for its adoption. Moreover, it sheds light on the relationships between governance and institutional voids (e.g., Gatignon and Capron, 2023) by untangling a set of notable patterns. These patterns suggest that the preference for a coercive-centric or enabling-centric governance hinges on how on-demand platform organizations perceive a void to influence their user network. Lastly, the study conceptualizes the notion of hybrid governance, which entails different degrees and types of hybridity, depending on the combination of coercive and enabling mechanisms adopted to tackle a void. This provides a novel understanding to the composite nature of gig platform governance, compared to prior research (e.g., Kyprianou, 2018; Heiland, 2022).

The study is structured as follows. The following section reviews the relevant literature on (gig) platform governance and the relationship between local organizations and institutional voids. Next, we illustrate the method adopted to answer the research question, followed by the reporting of our findings. We then discuss the theoretical and practical implications and conclude by identifying promising directions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. The governance of gig platform organizations

Over the last few years, management research has assigned increasing attention to gig platforms, defined as digital platforms that connect independent workers (also called independent contractors or complementors), with customers to perform short-term tasks, or gigs (Fayard, 2021; Gandini, 2018; Purcell and Brook, 2022). While the gig platform landscape is highly heterogeneous (Heiland, 2022), two main categories can be distinguished (Kost et al., 2020; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020). "Crowdwork" platforms (also called online labor platforms) facilitate worker-customer exchanges which take place only online (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020), enabling therefore connections across different locations (Anwar and Graham, 2021). Instead, with "app-work" (Duggan et al., 2020), "on-demand" (Guda and Subramanian, 2019) or "work-on-demand via app" (Veen et al., 2020)

platforms, while connections are established on the platform, workers complete their tasks “locally at a specific location and time” (Duggan et al., 2020) and offline (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). Hence, they engage in “real-world exchanges” (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019) with customers. The in-person (Veen et al., 2020), location-bound (Guda and Subramanian, 2019) dimension of the independent worker-customer interaction engenders distinctive dynamics which set on-demand platforms apart from crowdwork platforms (Duggan et al., 2020; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019).

A central concept in platform research is platform “governance”. Although the conceptualizations of platform governance are diverse, they revolve around a set of common traits. At its core, platform governance consists of the mechanisms designed by a platform organization to attract (Gol et al., 2019), cultivate (Wareham et al., 2014), manage (Saadatmand et al., 2019), coordinate (Gol et al., 2019; Kretschmer et al., 2022), orchestrate (Chen et al., 2021), control (Chen et al., 2022), and influence (Karhu et al., 2018) (potential) users and their behavior, in order to attain platform goals in terms of value creation and capture (Chen et al., 2022; Rietveld et al., 2020; Saadatmand et al., 2019; Wareham et al., 2014). Platform governance differs from the governance undertaken by “conventional” organizations because, for value creation and capture, a platform organization depends fundamentally on the behavior of a broad and composite network of independent actors (O’Mahony and Karp, 2022; Saadatmand et al., 2019), on the supply and the demand side. In contrast to a “conventional” organization, which usually has to govern a limited number of dyadic relationships, a platform organization deals with multilateral (Hurni et al., 2021) and polycentric (Constantinides et al., 2018) ties, because it has to govern the supply- and demand-side user network and the relationships between and with these users. Hence, it ought to design a system of mechanisms that balances, and possibly reconciles, the interests of the actors involved, i.e., the platform organization itself, the supply-side and the demand-side users (Kretschmer et al., 2022; Saadatmand et al., 2019).

Stemming from the relevance of governance in the platform literature, recent studies have investigated the governance undertaken by gig platform organizations. Gig platform scholars have identified the governance of independent workers to “advance task performance and organizational goals” (Jabagi and Croteau, 2019, p. 195) as a key conundrum. However, this body of work is still in its early stages. While the platform governance research elaborates on a set of core governance choices, these decisions have been examined to a limited extent in the context of gig platforms. The first choice concerns platform openness, which denotes “the degree to which a platform [is] open and useable by external participants” (O’Mahony and Karp, 2022, p. 533). Deciding on access openness is “one of the most critical platform governance questions” (Kretschmer et al., 2022, p. 412). On the one hand, a platform’s success hinges on attracting a critical mass of users (Rietveld et al., 2020), because this increases the likelihood of transactions (Kretschmer et al., 2022) and, in turn, the value that the platform creates for users due to network effects (Kyprianou, 2018). On the other hand, uncontrolled access may entail shortcomings, such as excessive user heterogeneity (Kretschmer et al., 2022; Rietveld et al., 2020) or crowding leading to products of low quality (Constantinides et al., 2018; Koo and Eesley, 2021; Rietveld et al., 2020). This can increase the platform’s vulnerability (Karhu et al., 2018), making it a challenge to manage (Kretschmer et al., 2022). Platform organizations, thus, have to decide the extent to which access to the platform should be open to potential users and whether restrictions should be in place (O’Mahony and Karp, 2022). Extant research has overlooked the openness-related governance dilemma in the context of gig platforms, except to highlight that openness may vary across platforms and over time (Kyprianou, 2018).

Establishing the degree of (de)centralization of decision rights has been presented as a second critical governance decision: platform organizations have to determine the extent to which they assume full decision-making or relinquish (part of) it to platform users (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Gol et al., 2019; O’Mahony and Karp, 2022; Saadatmand et al., 2019). In the context of gig platforms, a substantial sub-set of the literature posits that gig platforms widely rely on centralized, automated control and surveillance through “algorithmic management”, which replaces direct human control and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Connelly et al., 2021; Duggan et al., 2020; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Newlands, 2021). Referring to “hybrid control regimes”, Heiland (2022) argues that gig platform organizations may combine algorithmic control with another control mechanism, i.e., “temporal control”: gig platforms use working time and flexible scheduling as an additional way to exert influence and power over their workers. Few studies adopt a more nuanced perspective to governance, hinting at a more composite picture. For instance, some scholars contend that the (de)centralization of decision rights may vary across gig platforms (e.g., Gol et al., 2019; Kuhn and Maleki, 2017; Kyprianou, 2018; Vallas and Schor, 2020). Reischauer and Mair (2018) identify three main practices that platform organizations in the sharing economy may adopt to foster user participation, i.e., “scoping community boundaries”, “nudging social relationships” and “steering users”, while Guo et al. (2021) build on the literature on the governance of inter-organizational relationships to conceptualize crowdwork platform governance as entailing “formal contractual mechanisms” and “relational governance mechanisms”.

Studies emphasizing the role of algorithmic control and those suggesting a more varied approach to governance have largely taken these governance decisions as a given, overlooking the context. This is a missed opportunity, because an external environment, as suggested by the literature on inter-organizational relationships, can significantly affect the governance mechanisms an organization adopts by increasing or lowering transaction costs and risks (e.g., Abdi and Aulakh, 2017). The very few studies on gig platform governance hinting at the environmental dimension note that “platform labor is not placeless” (Heiland, 2022) and the characteristics of the local context matter for the governance decisions of platform organizations (Ricart et al., 2020). The institutional context is likely to be particularly relevant for on-demand platform organizations, which facilitate exchanges that take place locally, largely offline. Stemming from these insights, we argue that the governance choices made by on-demand platform organizations are institutionally embedded and, hence, should be explored in their relationship with local institutions.

## 2.2. Local gig platform organizations and the developing country context

The diffusion of the gig economy in developing countries has attracted some scholarly attention. These works have shed light on either the perspective of independent workers sourced by international gig platforms or the perspective of multinational on-demand

platforms in developing countries. The former stream of research discusses the advantages and risks that gig work presents for independent contractors, given, on the one hand, the nature of the occupation and, on the other hand, the idiosyncrasies of the local developing country environment. The emphasis has been particularly on crowdworkers (e.g., [Anwar and Graham, 2021](#); [Graham et al., 2017](#); [Lehdonvirta, 2018](#); [Wood et al., 2019](#)) and on-demand workers (e.g., [Dreyer et al., 2017](#); [Kashyap and Bathia, 2018](#)) of multinational platform firms. In the latter body of work, scholars have uncovered the strategies multinational on-demand platforms adopt when entering developing countries ([Barbour and Luiz, 2019](#); [Uzunca et al., 2018](#)) or the reasons for their failure ([Li, 2019](#)). It is interesting to note that local on-demand platform organizations are not represented in this scholarship despite their burgeoning numbers ([Mourdoukoutas, 2017](#); [Briter Bridges, 2020](#)). Yet, these organizations are also challenged by weak formal institutions and search for ways to minimize the friction between their activities and local regulations and product and labor markets to gain support for their services (e.g., [Punt et al., 2021](#)).

The international business literature recognizes that local firms are generally characterized by familiarity with the local environment ([Miller and Eden, 2006](#); [Zaheer, 1995](#)) and knowledge of the local market ([Li, 2019](#); [Un and Rodríguez, 2018](#)). Although they are not challenged by institutional distance that foreign investors need to overcome (e.g., [Barbour and Luiz, 2019](#); [Marano et al., 2020](#)), local firms may experience liabilities of newness and smallness, i.e., difficulties in competing effectively against established organizations and the lack of resources needed to effectively deploy the routines and structure required to pursue their strategies ([Gimeñez-Fernandez et al., 2020](#)). However, the speed with which they define efficient routines and gain legitimacy is likely to be faster due to their embeddedness in the local context (e.g., [Avgerou and Li, 2013](#)). They can more easily interpret local norms and values ([Kostova and Zaheer, 1999](#)). This suggests that they can rely on building relationships and negotiating norms of exchange and coordination in the local environment to reduce their dependence on inefficient formal institutions or—what [Khanna and Palepu \(1997\)](#) call—institutional voids where written and state-enforced rules of exchange are unpredictable and opaque. These voids can take the form of regulatory voids (absence of a strong rule of law and contract enforcement), product market voids (asymmetry in distribution of product/services and in information on product attributes, including price, quality and delivery), labor market voids (limited availability and accessibility of skills and knowledge and protection of worker rights) and capital market voids (limited availability and accessibility of financial options for investment such as bank loans and equity) ([Khanna and Palepu, 2010](#); [Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2015](#)).

The network of relations and beliefs of these local firms is particularly salient in developing countries, because markets in these contexts commonly lack predictable rules of exchange and transparency over transactions ([McKague et al., 2015](#)). Firms rely on their trust relations and customs to fill the gaps exposed by weak formal institutions (e.g., [Mair and Martí, 2009](#)). In void-characterized contexts, social structure—exchange with nonmarket partners and commitment to nonmarket relationships—assumes greater salience for market knowledge and commitment ([McKague et al., 2015](#)). A firm's initiative and control over its actions are important in these contexts for the extraction of value from resources and capabilities given higher coordination hazards ([Saka-Helmhout et al., 2020](#)). This is particularly critical for local on-demand platform organizations, whose value creation and value capture hinge critically on a location-bound network of independent supply- and demand-side users ([Duggan et al., 2020](#)). Consequently, we unpack how local on-demand platform organizations engage with institutional voids to govern their user networks.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Methodological approach

We adopted an interpretive inductive theory building approach ([Gioia et al., 2013](#)), complementing it with deductively derived insights (cf. [Bohnsack et al., 2021](#)). The choice of an inductive approach is congruent with the research question of this study (cf. [Langley and Abdallah, 2011](#); [Suddaby, 2006](#)), which aims to uncover how local on-demand platform organizations understand their local context and how they interpret the role that governance plays in it. The inductive approach responds to the lack of research on gig platform governance in developing countries. It enables the uncovering of new, relevant concepts and the identification of “new twists” of existing concepts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon ([Gehman et al., 2018](#); [Gioia et al., 2013](#)). It, specifically, enabled us to capture an array of governance mechanisms adopted by local on-demand platform organizations, in particular the more emergent and novel ones. We were able to gain an understanding of the overlooked interplay between institutional voids and gig platform governance through “varied perspectives on the phenomenon” to be captured ([Gehman et al., 2018](#), p. 294), so as to identify the range of relationships. Hence, an inductive approach facilitated our efforts to capture the richness of theoretically new and unanticipated insights ([Langley and Abdallah, 2011](#)), in terms of institutional voids and governance mechanisms. The decision to complement the inductive method with a deductive approach to uncover institutional voids aimed to inscribe the richness of the inductively emerging insights within established concepts in the literature.

#### 3.2. Empirical context and sampling

Our empirical context is the ride-hailing platform industry. Ride-hailing platform organizations provide a digital platform that “connect[s] riders with drivers willing to use their own vehicles to offer on-demand transportation” ([Garud et al., 2022](#), p. 449). We

chose this sector for two main reasons: first, the transportation sector represents the most important sector in the gig economy (Mastercard and Kaiser Associates, 2019); second, at the time of the study, the number of on-demand platform organizations in this sector was the highest in developing countries (Hira, 2017).<sup>1</sup> We selected Sub-Saharan Africa as the geographic context of our study due to the rise of ride-hailing platforms in this region (Mourdoukoutas, 2017). We specifically focused on sub-Saharan countries where the major ride-hailing multinationals, namely Uber and/or Bolt, were active, because they spurred competition that could potentially motivate, among local organizations, proactive approaches to governing their user network.

We conducted purposeful sampling (Nag and Gioia, 2012), which ensured confirmability and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), selecting 11 platform organizations as our units of study. Several criteria guided this selection. First, the organizations had to concentrate on providing a digital platform for ride hailing, matching drivers with consumers' demand for rides. Second, the organizations ought to originate from and operate in a sub-Saharan country where Uber and/or Bolt were active, at the time of conducting the research. Moreover, the focal organizations had to be in operation at the time of conducting the study. Finally, in line with the inductive approach, the sampled organizations had to emerge from multiple sub-Saharan countries, targeting diverse market segments, varying in their geographical presence and transportation offering (motorbike, also called 'boda', and/or car) to ensure richness in the data (see Table 1). The sample size was determined by category saturation where we could not generate further insights from the analysis of the last organization (Suddaby, 2006). As we were sensitive to the competitive context in which these organizations were operating and wanted to incentivize participation, we granted them anonymity within this study. This was ensured by naming the organizations RH1, RH2 ... (see Table 1).

### 3.3. Data collection

The interpretive tradition relies on semi-structured interviews as a primary source of data (Nag and Gioia, 2012), since these enable both "retrospective and real-time" information from actors who experience(d) the phenomenon under investigation (Gioia et al., 2013). We wanted to learn from informants about what was important in their context (Pratt et al., 2020). We aimed to answer our research question from the perspective of the platform organizations, to capture how they experienced the local institutional environment and what governance mechanisms they adopted to address the institutional voids they encountered. Hence, the primary source of data was semi-structured interviews with the founders or managers of the ride-hailing platform organizations, who were treated as "knowledgeable agents" (Gioia et al., 2013). Given their high-level position in small-sized organizations, the interviewees were able to report their organization's understanding of the local institutional context and to make sense of the governance decisions adopted. For all organizations, one interview was conducted, except RH6 for which we interviewed both a founder and a manager. As the interviews were held with the founders/managers, and the organizations were small, they were revelatory of the voids experienced and the governance mechanisms at play. The interviews were held between 2019 and 2021, by phone or online (through Zoom, Whatsapp or Skype) and they lasted between 25 and 52 min. All the interviews were in English, and they were recorded and transcribed. The first author conducted all the interviews, while the second author participated in four of them. The interviews were semi-structured. We kept a common general structure by asking all interviewees questions about the challenges faced in the local environment, how they addressed these challenges and what the implications of being a 'local' firm were. At the same time, in keeping with the recommendations for an inductive approach, we asked specific questions "tailored to the responses and insights of each interviewee" (Pratt et al., 2020, p. 7), to gain an in depth understanding of the relevant points that they raised (Gioia et al., 2013). Besides allowing to answer our research question, gathering these different insights would enable readers to assess similarities with other contexts for transferability or analytical generalizability of the findings, in keeping with the logic of inductive research (cf. Ciulli et al., 2020; Pratt et al., 2020).

Moreover, we collected secondary data on the perspectives of the focal organizations on challenges and actions to address them. These included data from the organizations' websites, media interviews or the transcription of video interviews with the organizations. The media and video interviews were collected by conducting a search using the name of the organizations only (for organizations with unique names) or in combination with 'ride hailing' and 'ride sharing', on Google. The secondary data were used as background information to prepare the interviews and reinforce the information provided by the informants. The details on the primary and secondary data collected per organization are illustrated in Table 2.

### 3.4. Data analysis

We adopted a systematic approach to data analysis to establish confirmability and dependability. This consisted of four main phases.

The first phase aimed at capturing the institutional voids experienced by the focal ride-hailing platforms. In this phase, the data were analyzed by combining an inductive and a deductive approach, as the former allowed to develop context-specific descriptions of the voids, while the latter enabled us to establish a conceptual account of the data through well-acknowledged theoretical constructs. For this purpose, we proceeded in two main steps. In the first step, the raw data were confronted and distilled, *inductively*, into a set of more abstract themes (e.g., "safety risks for workers", "safety risks for customers"). In the second step, these themes were coded *deductively* (cf. Bohnsack et al., 2021) according to the following theoretical dimensions drawn from the literature (Khanna & Palepu,

<sup>1</sup> Hira (2017) includes on-demand platform organizations within the "sharing economy".

**Table 1**  
Description of the sample.

Firm Name	Year of foundation	Country of Origin	Geographical presence	Number of users (in terms of drivers <sup>a</sup> )
RH1	2018	Kenya	City	More than a 1000
RH2	2018	Kenya	National	2000
RH3	2018	Uganda	City	n.a.
RH4	2016	South Africa	National	n.a.
RH5	2016	Kenya	Regional	10,000
RH6	2013	Kenya	Regional	10,000
RH7	2015	Uganda	Regional	2500–3000
RH8	2017	South Africa	National	Over 5000
RH9	2020	Uganda	City	n.a.
RH10	2009	Kenya	Regional	n.a.
RH11	2020	South Africa	City	n.a.

<sup>a</sup> Based on the information provided by the platform organizations.

**Table 2**  
Data collection.

Ride-hailing platform organizations	Primary data		Secondary data
	Informants	Interview length	
RH1	Founder	33 min	RH1 website Media articles (2) Video interviews (4)
RH2	Director	47 min	RH2 website Media articles (3) Video interview (2)
RH3	CEO	25 min	RH3 website Media articles (2)
RH4	Founder	46 min	RH4 website Media articles (5)
RH5	Founder	32 min	RH5 Website Media articles (4)
RH6	Founder	52 min	RH6 website
RH7	Manager	45 min	Media articles (7)
	Manager	34 min	RH7 website
RH8	Managing Director	40 min	Media article (19)
			RH8 website
RH9	Founder	38 min	Media articles (10)
			RH9 website
RH10	Founder	50 min	Media articles (2)
			RH10 website
RH11	Founder	42 min	Media articles (10)
			RH11 website
			Media articles (2)

1997, 2010): “regulatory voids”, “labor market voids”, “product market voids” and “capital market voids”, based on their conceptualizations presented in the theoretical background. For example, the inductively emerged themes “safety risks for workers” and “safety risks for customers” denoted regulatory voids, and we therefore coded them accordingly. The coding of the data did not generate any insights that could be related to the capital market voids discussed in prior literature; therefore, this type of voids was excluded from the further phases of the analysis. The analysis of the institutional voids resulted in the data structure displayed in Fig. 1.

The second phase consisted of uncovering the range of governance mechanisms adopted by the focal ride-hailing platform organizations. We adopted an *inductive* approach to the analysis of governance mechanisms, proceeding in three steps in keeping with the Gioia methodology (Gehman et al., 2018; Gioia et al., 2013). We first recorded statements denoting governance activities undertaken by the ride-hailing platform organizations through open coding (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2010), identifying first order concepts through comparison. By capturing similarities and differences (Gehman et al., 2018), we grouped the first-order concepts into second-order themes through axial coding (Gioia et al., 2010, 2013). Finally, by iteratively comparing the second-order themes and engaging with the literature to reach a higher level of abstraction, we clustered the themes into two aggregate dimensions (Corley and Gioia, 2004). While the second-order themes captured the governance mechanisms adopted by the ride-hailing platforms to address institutional voids, the aggregate dimensions depicted the two governance modes in which these mechanisms were inscribed. We aimed to achieve “a sufficiently rich and stable set of concepts” (Ciulli et al., 2020, p. 306). The second-order themes were identified across at least two organizations, confirming “the presence of empirically meaningful and theoretically stable concepts” (Ciulli et al., 2020, p. 306). We illustrated the steps of this analysis through a data structure to demonstrate its rigor (Gehman et al., 2018; Gioia et al., 2013) (see Fig. 2).

The third phase consisted of connecting the governance mechanisms (and their respective governance modes) emerging from the

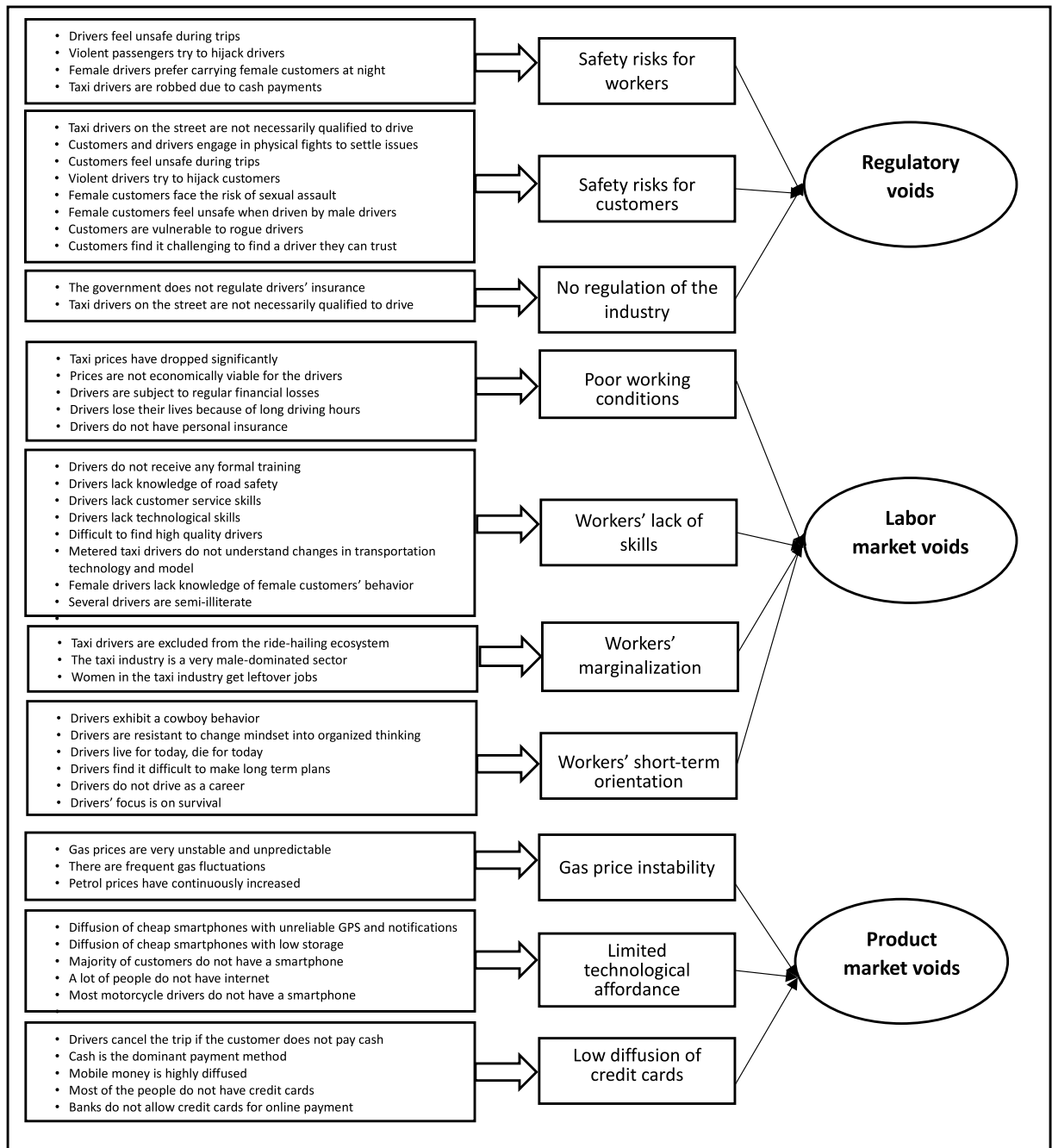


Fig. 1. Data structure of institutional voids.

second phase with the institutional voids captured in the first phase. This analysis was operationalized by iteratively visiting the raw data and the codes to derive how the governance mechanisms and the categories of institutional voids were linked, i.e., which governance mechanism was deployed to address a specific void. Specifically, we appraised, for each platform organization, the connections between the data coded to capture the institutional voids encountered and those coded for the governance mechanisms adopted. When a link could be established, for example when an informant explained a challenge faced in the institutional context and then illustrated the mechanism adopted to address it, or when a statement about a governance mechanism could be logically interpreted as a response to an institutional void experienced by the platform organization, we recorded the connection. In a set of instances, governance mechanisms resulted as not connected to any institutional void, hence they were dropped. For example, RH10 offered an “approval” function, which gave the managers of its business customers the power to approve the bookings made on the platform by their employees. Since this mechanism did not emerge as a response to any institutional void experienced by RH10, it was



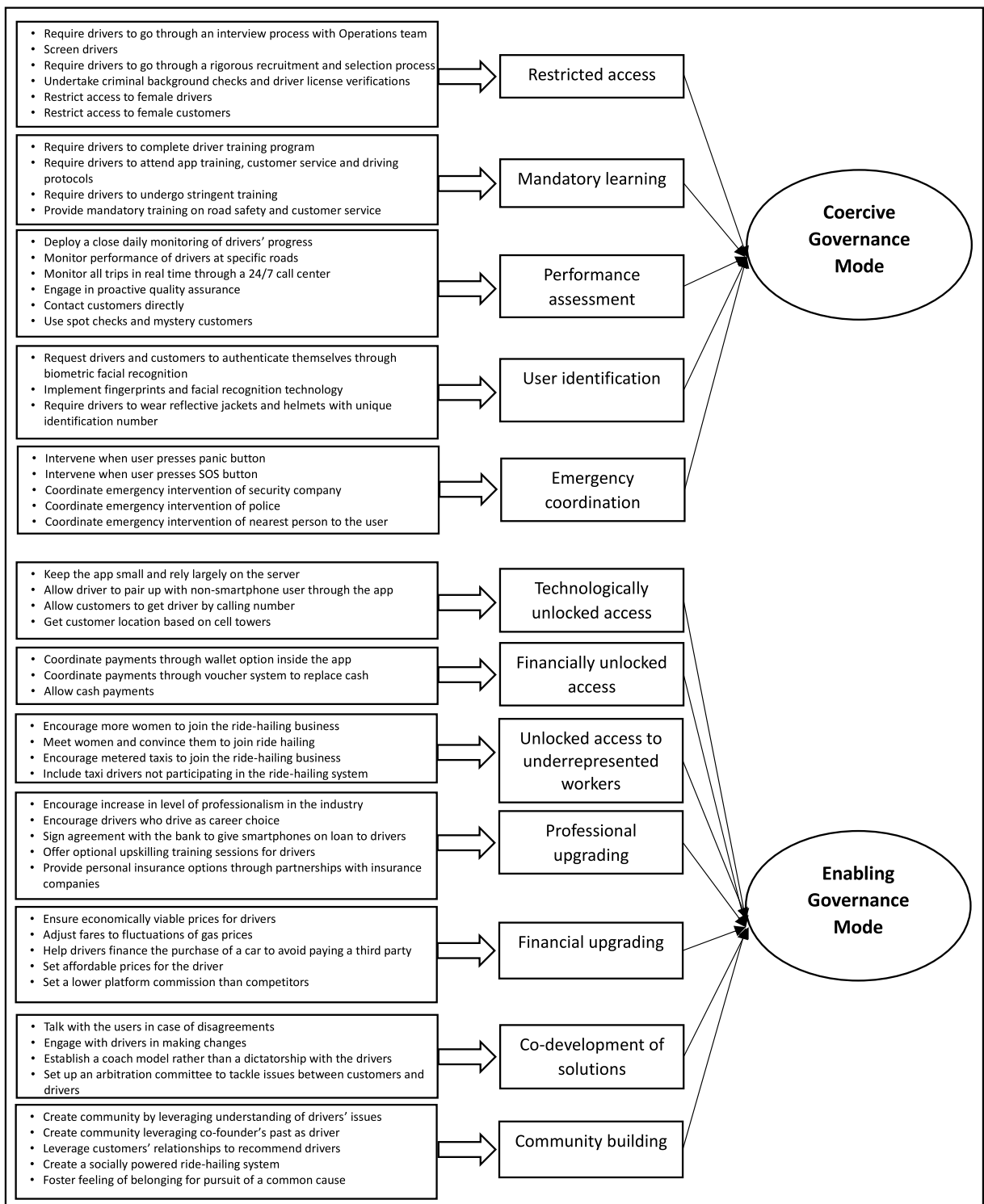


Fig. 2. Data structure of governance modes and mechanisms.

not retained in the analysis.

The two authors coded the data independently to establish data credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The authors' different degrees of familiarity with the gig economy allowed investigator triangulation by minimizing bias and subjective interpretations (cf. Ciulli et al., 2020; Gioia et al., 2010). The independently coded data were compared, revealing similarities and some distinct

**Table 3**  
An overview of the relationship between institutional voids and governance mechanisms.

		Coercive governance mode					Enabling governance mode						
		Restricted access	Mandatory learning	Performance assessment	User identification	Emergency coordination	Technologically unlocked access	Financially unlocked access	Unlocked access to under-represented workers	Professional upgrading	Financial upgrading	Co-development of solutions	Community building
<b>Regulatory Voids</b>	Safety risks for workers	low deployment			medium deployment	high deployment		low deployment				low deployment	
	Safety risks for customers	high deployment		low deployment	medium deployment	high deployment		medium deployment				medium deployment	low deployment
	No regulation of the industry	low deployment							low deployment				low deployment
<b>Labor market voids</b>	Poor working conditions								medium deployment	high deployment	medium deployment	medium deployment	medium deployment
	Workers' lack of skills	medium deployment	medium deployment	low deployment	low deployment				medium deployment	medium deployment		medium deployment	medium deployment
	Workers' marginalization	low deployment							medium deployment				
	Workers' short-term orientation		medium deployment	low deployment						low deployment		low deployment	
<b>Product market voids</b>	Gas price instability										high deployment		
	Limited technological affordance						high deployment			low deployment			
	Low diffusion of credit cards			low deployment	low deployment	low deployment		high deployment					

high deployment
medium deployment
low deployment

interpretations. These divergences were addressed through a discussion between the authors (Smaling, 1992), also through the role of the “devil’s advocate” (Gioia et al., 2013) which entailed a further round of data analysis. These reflexive discussions between the two authors helped address the confirmability and dependability of the data (Ciulli et al., 2020; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The last phase consisted of compiling the results per organization to identify patterns in terms of the governance modes and mechanisms adopted to address each void, in keeping with the goal of the study. For this purpose, we mapped the extent to which each governance mechanism was adopted, across the platform organizations, to address a specific void. Considering the minimum (1 platform) and maximum (5 platforms) number of platforms adopting the same mechanism, we distinguished governance mechanisms

Table 4

Regulatory voids and governance mechanisms: Representative quotes.

	Regulatory voids: Representative quotes	Governance mechanisms: Representative quotes
<b>Safety risks for workers</b>	“There’s number one, the issue of safety and security. The guys are feeling unsafe during trips.” (RH4 – founder, interview)	<i>User identification</i> “Before you request a trip [...]. And the client also needs to [authenticate himself using biometric facial recognition].” (RH4 – founder, interview)
	“Security is of high concern in our country, very, very much concerning ... we would just have to deal with the issues of hijacking and so on.” (RH8 – managing director, interview)	<i>Emergency coordination</i> “We have included a panic button in the app. [...] If you are in an emergency situation, whether it’s a hijack [...] you press the panic button, immediately it shows in our control room and our staff will click on it, it will show your name, your number and your email address and we will call you immediately. [...] We will then call the security company in the suburb where you are and the police and once you press the panic button you pop up on a live GPS. For as long as you have a phone with you, they can lead the police to where you are.” (RH8 – managing director, interview)
<b>Safety risks for customers</b>	“Nobody goes to the side of the road, sticks their hand up and just gets in the car with the first guy that happens to pull over. This is an easy way of getting yourself mugged or kidnapped or worse.” (RH6 – founder, online newspaper)	<i>Restricted access</i> “Any driver that can pass our credentials verification and screening can work with us as a driver partner.” (RH6 – founder, online newspaper)
	“Safety of riders in South Africa is a big concern considering a high number of horrible crimes being committed against riders in the past.” (RH8 – organization’s spokesperson, online newspaper)	<i>User identification</i> “We now have been implementing the fingerprints and the facial recognition technology so that we can be able to identify drivers at a 100% as to who is driving the vehicle.” (RH8 – managing director, interview)
	“The problem that we are having in this ecosystem [...]at times it could be drivers hijacking passengers.” (RH4 – founder, interview)	<i>Emergency coordination</i> “When you are in a trip, and you are feeling unsafe, you can click on SOS button in the app and it will alert the nearest person who can assist you [...] Anyone who has got the ability to, who is a security guard, who is well equipped to assist you in an emergency, comes in and rescues you, whether you’re a driver and whether you’re a passenger.” (RH4 – founder, interview)
<b>No regulation of the industry</b>	“I had read about sexual harassment in Uber vehicles in Uganda on social media, of say young women who had gone out and got drunk or feel threatened and so on, there were very many stories.” (RH9 – founder, interview)	<i>Unlocked access to underrepresented workers</i> “We encourage more women to join the ride-hailing business to help us in this quest to address safety concerns.” (RH9 – organization website)
	“If somebody is upset with a driver, what they end up doing is they think it’s okay to harm a customer in order to tarnish the name of the company for example and ended up leaving customers vulnerable to rogue drivers. [...] And that’s an unfortunate pattern that we’ve realized in Nairobi, if a person is for example, upset with the drive, they will just go in a very vulnerable situation.” (RH1 – founder, interview)	“we negotiate better prices for our female drivers so that they are not forced to work at night if they don’t want. So our prices for the female driver App is higher than the usual taxis.” (RH9 – founder, interview)
	“If you go on the streets, you could get a taxi to take you and you don’t know the driver, you don’t know whether they are qualified to drive. [...] [The traditional taxi companies] would not screen the drivers.” (RH9 – founder, interview)	<i>Co-development of solutions</i> “It is easy to get a hold of us if there’s a disagreement, we like right there, they can get a hold of us, they can talk to us, and we would be able to sort out the situation leaving it much more safer for our customers as well, because the drivers don’t have to now take out their anger and their frustration on the customers instead... I think that’s one of the best advantages we have.” (RH1 – founder, interview)
“Most of the taxis were not insured, most of the taxis are not being, the government didn’t regulate them, from the drivers not having the correct licences, to the cover of being insured.” (RH6 – manager, interview)	<i>Restricted access</i> “For a ride-hailing company like ours, the drivers are screened.” (RH9 – founder, interview)	
“Because of weak institutions, trust is not delivered via any credential or document.” (RH6 – founder, interview)	<i>Professional upgrading</i> “We are helping to improve the industry standard because before the taxi platforms, ... So we basically offer some level of insurance, because they are very vulnerable in places like this, their business will not continue.” (RH6 – manager, interview)	
		<i>Community building</i> “We came up with this concept of a socially powered taxi app that leverages people’s relationships from their phone, from their Facebook and their social media in general, along with other sources of data.” (RH6 – founder, interview)

which exhibited a high (4 or 5 platforms), medium (2 or 3 platforms) and low (1 platform) deployment to tackle a specific void. We then compared the governance mechanisms adopted per type of void, to appraise similarities and differences across voids and identify relevant patterns. The focus was particularly on examining whether the two governance modes, coercive and enabling, were adopted to a different extent across voids and whether the use of specific governance mechanisms diverged across voids.

#### 4. Findings

Local gig platforms face a wide range of regulatory, labor market and product market voids, which they address through an array of governance mechanisms. The data reveal two major insights about these mechanisms. First, they denote two different rationales for the coordination of users' behavior: a "coercive" and an "enabling" one. We conceptualize the coercive governance mode as grounded in the centralization of decision rights, to constrain, monitor and sanction user behavior. Conversely, we construe the enabling governance mode as based on the decentralization of decision rights in favor of the platform users, on social relations and on users' empowerment. Second, the degree to which coercive and enabling mechanisms are deployed varies across context-specific voids and the three types (regulatory void, labor market void, product market void) to which they belong, delineating a set of relevant patterns.

The following sections illustrate these patterns, by illuminating the voids confronted by the local on-demand platform organizations and the main governance mechanisms that were deployed to address them. For a full overview of the governance mechanisms adopted to respond to each institutional void, see [Table 3](#).

##### 4.1. Governance mechanisms addressing regulatory voids

The platform organizations were confronted with three types of regulatory voids, i.e., the safety risks faced by the gig workers, those encountered by the customers of the platform and the absence of regulations of the industry. The *safety risks for workers* void consists of the risk of wrongdoing committed by customers against the drivers, while *safety risks for customers* entails the risk of workers' harmful behaviors against customers. These are both regulatory voids, because they indicate that regulations and enforcement measures that should protect workers and customers are absent or ineffective. *Absence of regulations of the industry*, which appears to be a more marginal regulatory void, encompasses the lack of control by the regulator of drivers' participation in the taxi industry and their professional profile. While both coercive and enabling mechanisms were deployed to address these three regulatory voids, the platform organizations relied mostly on the former, hence exhibiting a coercive-centric governance (see [Table 4](#) for representative quotes of the most adopted governance mechanisms).

When considering regulatory voids, the platform organizations appear to eminently view the institutional context as intertwined with individual users' responsibility. For these organizations, regulatory voids in the local environment translated into the power of individual users to harm others; this hindered customers and workers "to come together" ([Doh et al., 2017](#)), because users on both sides would abandon the platform if they did not feel safe. Hence, users' behavior, for which they had to be held accountable, had to be restricted and closely monitored. This led local on-demand platform organizations to prefer coercive mechanisms, because they targeted users responsible for wrongdoing against other users. As a result, when confronted with inefficient or absent regulations, the local on-demand platform organizations tended to act mainly as regulators, by imposing, within the platform, formal institutions that enforced and constrained users' behavior, from access to the platform to gig execution.

Notably, the most deployed mechanism to tackle safety risks both for workers and for customers was *emergency coordination*. This coercive mechanism, which aimed to protect users from offences committed by their counterpart during the gig execution, was triggered by an "emergency", "SOS" or "panic" button on the ride-hailing platform. When alerted by this button, the platform organization would coordinate an intervention by a partner security company, the police or the closest local security guards. The prominence of this mechanism shows that measures had to be adopted during the gig to deter and, eventually, tackle the occurrence of offences, because pre-gig coercive mechanisms aimed at preventing harmful behaviors could not fully substitute for the missing regulatory institutions to reduce risk for users. A coercive mechanism which targeted the steps immediately preceding the gig execution was *user identification*; for example, RH8 required workers and customers to identify themselves through fingerprints and facial recognition. *Restricted access*, also aimed at preventing wrongdoings, focused instead on regulating workers and/or customers' participation in the platform before any gig had been reserved. As highlighted previously, platform access is a key topic in the wider platform literature, which has emphasized platform organizations' dilemma of opening vs. limiting user access (e.g., [Huang et al., 2021](#); [O'Mahony and Karp, 2022](#)). The high safety risks that specifically women experienced, as drivers and customers in the taxi industry, prompted the organizations to choose the latter. RH1 noted that "some of the drivers [...] prefer carrying female riders because of certain timings for example, after dark" (founder, interview), with the risk of sexual assaults. It also observed "the insecurity fears among [the] majority of women, especially when driven by male drivers" (founder, online newspaper). Hence, RH1 granted exclusive participation rights to female drivers and riders.

Although enabling mechanisms were also adopted as a response to regulatory voids, they appear as complementing the coercive ones. This suggests that the platform organizations considered enabling mechanisms less effective to address regulatory voids. Overall, however, enabling mechanisms were used more to address the safety risks for customers than those for workers. This suggests that, as the problem faced by customers was particularly complex and severe, some platform organizations involved the workers in finding solutions, besides constraining them. Indeed, *unlocked access to underrepresented workers* and *co-development of solutions* were the most adopted enabling mechanisms to tackle regulatory voids. As highlighted by RH1, *unlocked access to underrepresented workers* confronted safety risks experienced specifically by female customers, by helping other women enter the ride-hailing market as drivers. RH2 instead emphasized the importance of engaging users in the *co-development of solutions*: "we realize that there will be times when a

**Table 5**  
Labor market voids and governance mechanisms: Representative quotes.

Type of labor market void	Labor market voids: Representative quotes	Governance mechanisms: Representative quotes
<b>Poor working conditions</b>	<p>“One of the other big problems with Uber [...] is that they partner with the car owners, not the drivers, and the vehicle owners are usually a different person than the driver, which means that the person that accrues the majority of the benefit from working on these platforms is the owner of the car, not the driver. [...] The driver gets paid a small base salary, no matter how much work he does.” (RH6 – founder, interview)</p>	<p><i>Professional upgrading</i>                      “The best drivers come to the top because they get favorite, and they get shown as referrals to their friends of the people that favorite them. And so a driver has a lot more control over his own destiny, and how much business he does, based on the quality of the service he actually provides. So we partner directly with the driver, never with the owner, that’s the person that’s going to be our face to the client. We need to have a relationship with him and he needs to benefit from better providing better service to our clients.” (RH6 – founder, interview)</p>
	<p>“The price for taxi, in the six years since then the price per kilometer has dropped by about 10 times for basic cars.” (RH6 – founder, interview)</p>	<p><i>Financial upgrading</i>                      “That’s absurd to me. We’re not willing to go that low. Drivers can’t make it. [...] We won’t go below a certain price point, because we don’t think it’s economically viable for our drivers to make a living below that price.” (RH6 – founder, interview)</p>
	<p>“Because we are women, we are working hard and some of us as single mothers, taking too much commissions from us is what’s usually is our issue with most of the APPs.” (RH1 – founder, interview)</p>	<p><i>Co-development of solutions</i>                      “When we were about to launch, we had a sitting with most of the people in charge of the Union and we sat with them and say okay, what is the best way to go forward? What would you guys prefer? [...] So, the fact that our commissions are lower is one of the reasons and because we sat down with them and discussed with them initially as well.” (RH1 – founder, interview)</p>
	<p>“We have been subjected to losses each and every day, we have lost our vehicles through auction because we can’t afford to repay them and some of our friends have lost their lives because of long driving hours.” (RH2 – organization, online newspaper)</p>	<p><i>Community building</i>                      “[...] The pillars that brought us together. Pillars of unity, wealth and health. We all belong together in pursuit of a common cause.” (RH2 – organization, online newspaper)</p>
<b>Workers’ lack of skills</b>	<p>“There is no formal training for a lot of boda-boda in Kampala. [...] A lot of them don’t even know what some of the road signs are.” (RH7 – manager, interview)</p>	<p><i>Restricted access</i>                      “What we do as a company is we make sure that we select the best. So they go through an interview process. We have a team, an Operations team [which] consists of all former boda riders, people who have been in the industry for over 10 years. So they do recruitment and they do interviews. So, if it any boda-boda wants to join [RH7], they must go through an interview.” (RH7 – manager, interview)</p>
	<p>“One of our biggest challenges is quality of drivers and vetting that process.” (RH11 – founder, interview)</p>	<p><i>Mandatory learning</i>                      “They are required to complete our driver training program which covers all aspects of the [RH11] service including app training, customer service and driving protocols.” (RH11 – founder, online magazine)</p>
	<p>“Metered taxis, they believe in their model and they are threatened, they don’t understand the technology as it changes, they do not understand the transportation as it changes, they want to remain where they are because that’s what they understand.” (RH8 – managing director, interview)</p>	<p><i>Unlocked access to underrepresented workers</i>                      “As a South African company, we will continue to engage the metered taxis so that they understand that smart mobility is the future, smart technology is the future and we want to assist them to be part of this future, otherwise they are going to be left behind [...] We will continue to engage them and to try and educate them and make them understand that this is the future and they have to be part of it.” (RH8 - managing director, interview)</p>
	<p>“In Uganda, there is no formal training given to boda bodas when on the road and how to be on the road. [...] Because of that particular segment, the majority of them have not had the opportunity to you know, have smartphones or interact with tech.” (RH7 – manager, interview)</p>	<p><i>Professional upgrading</i>                      “We have extra training, extra skills development. People who want to learn English, people who want to learn, first aid, people who want to learn ... So we provide these other skills or other training avenues for [drivers] to tend to grow and to learn new skills. [...] So for someone who chooses to join [RH7], [...] they have access to other trainings that would help them up, upskill them.” (RH7 – manager, interview)</p>
<p>“One of our biggest challenges is quality of drivers [...] And I think in South Africa, that requires a lot more management a lot more oversight than then they’ve necessarily done in other parts of the world.” (RH11 – founder, interview)</p>	<p><i>Co-development of solutions</i>                      “If it appears that it’s something, you know, that’s being done on a regular basis, [...] we will have a chat to the driver, bring them in. And we’ll try and say, okay these are the things clients are concerned about, do you need support, what are we going to do.” (RH11 – founder, interview)</p>	
<p>“If it’s someone that’s not been working and he has financial problems, then you need to find out what can you do to make him earn”. (RH10 – founder, interview)</p>	<p><i>Community building</i>                      “We have some people that have been with us from the start, you know, those guys are basically our family. If he’s getting married we’ll go for his wedding because we know him so well. We know each other, we’ve been through the entire process together [...] we’ve done some arrangements where we’ve assisted drivers to</p>	

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

Type of labor market void	Labor market voids: Representative quotes	Governance mechanisms: Representative quotes
<b>Workers' marginalization</b>	<p>"There's thousands of men in the market, but there's maybe around three to 400 women who are currently drivers. So, they end up getting the leftovers sort of jobs." (RH1 – founder, interview)</p> <p>"It's a very male dominated business." (RH1 – founder, news channel)</p> <p>"And ever since we came into the market there has been a huge production of these issues and fights between Uber and metered taxi drivers because they are not being included in the e-hailing ecosystem." (RH4 – founder, interview)</p>	<p>buy cars and get cars. Also we had a business model before, we wanted very, very many cars, our business model before. But we changed the business model and now we went ahead and sold all these cars to them. So all those guys were the good guys, you know, we knew them and they're part of our family, we just gave them cars." (RH10 – founder, interview)</p> <p><i>Restricted access</i></p> <p>"I came up with this app to give women a chance to drive themselves." (RH4 – founder, online newspaper)</p> <p>"The exclusivity is because [...] women decide they want to choose an option where [...] the drivers are empowered." (RH4 – founder, online newspaper)</p> <p><i>Unlocked access to underrepresented workers</i></p> <p>"The business model is different from the Uber strategy because it's more inclusive than exclusive. We are a more open inclusive service provider than an exclusive one." (RH4 – founder, interview)</p> <p>"We are tackling the exclusion of meter taxi drivers from digital platforms and enabling them with their vehicles to participate in the digital revolution, thereby eliminating the contention that exists between the parties." (RH4 – founder, online newspaper)</p> <p><i>Mandatory learning</i></p> <p>"When [the founder] met with the other two, they thought about [...] creating a platform where boda riders are given training. [...] The benefits of using [RH7] is one, all the [RH7] drivers go through a training process. So for any [driver] to qualify to wear the brand and to work under the company, they must go through mandatory training." (RH7 – manager, interview)</p> <p><i>Performance assessment</i></p> <p>"We have a very close monitoring system where we monitor their progress every day. [...] [We] are based at key particular roads whereby then we monitor the performance of these bodas to see if they have absorbed the new walk or the new way of thinking [...] if there's a guy who is you know, going to get naughty, we pick it up from the early signs of his working." (RH3 – CEO, interview)</p> <p><i>Professional upgrading</i></p> <p>"What you're trying to really encourage is for those drivers who are already professional [...] So what you're seeing is, with this implementation that we've done, we are able to retain more professional drivers, drivers who actually do it as a career, a career choice. And what we're hoping is in the long run, as our ridership increases, and this behavior keeps on being adopted, the level of professionalism in the industry is going to [increase]." (RH6 – manager, interview)</p> <p><i>Co-development of solutions</i></p> <p>"We are very closely bonded with our Bodas. We are in touch with them on a day-to-day business. So, they've got teams who have been assigned. So, who works as coaches with these bodas? So, our model is more like a coach than a dictatorship. So, you know, we engage with them. We hear them out, we understand. The more we speak to them, the more we understand the better changes we drive." (RH3 – CEO, interview)</p>
<b>Workers' short-term orientation</b>	<p>"Boda bodas think it's like cruising; so, when they see a red light they just go through it. People do it, and they get away with it today, they get away with it tomorrow, and then, one day, they get hit [...] When I joined the boda industry, it was really about survival. It was good because I used to get good money. But it was risky." (RH7 – founder, online magazine)</p> <p>"[The main challenge has been] [...] getting them to have a shift in their mindset and their belief. Because I believe bodas live 1 day at a time [...] that is one challenge that I believe we have, and I believe we will continue to face [...] it's the concern of getting people to be consistent in their mindset" (RH3 – CEO, interview)</p> <p>"Drivers are very short-term in terms of [the fact that] they live from hand to mouth mostly. So it's very difficult for them to think about longer term plans or I'm actually building a brand [...] sometimes the drivers are very transactional in nature. So you find that they aren't driving as a career." (RH6 – manager, interview)</p> <p>"Bodas [...] don't have anything called a future. They don't plan. I live for today, I die for today." (RH3 – CEO, interview)</p>	

customer [...] will have issues. And probably as we have seen, even with customers and drivers, engaging into physical fights" (director, interview). To address this issue, RH2 "set up an arbitration committee": if "a customer has had an issue, [...] they either call the office and tell us what is happening. And so, the grievances are handed over to the committee. The committee is now able to look into this. [...] they call the driver, they call the customer, and then they sit down and that they are able to talk over the issues". This approach resonates with the "informal mechanisms" for "conflict resolution" described by Guo et al. (2021) for crowdwork platforms.

#### 4.2. Governance mechanisms addressing labor market voids

The on-demand platform organizations were confronted with four labor market voids, i.e., the workers' poor working conditions, lack of skills, marginalization and short-term orientation. These are labor market voids because they denote the scant protection of worker rights and the limited availability and accessibility of skills and knowledge. Specifically, **workers' poor working conditions** entailed price- and welfare-related issues faced by the drivers, such as, as noted by RH2, the lack of insurance and the long working hours. **Workers' lack of skills** was a highly diffused issue, as most workers did not have the basic competences and knowledge required to perform the gig professionally and safely. Moreover, certain groups of workers, particularly women and traditional taxi drivers,

were *marginalized* from the industry. This resonates with Mair et al.'s (2012, p. 820) description of institutional voids as “an important driver of market exclusion”. The platform organizations also noted a diffused *short-term orientation* among drivers: they lived day by day, which had led them to adopt dangerous and reckless driving practices, such as riding without a helmet or on the sidewalk, as highlighted by RH3.

In contrast to regulatory voids, labor market voids were addressed more through enabling governance mechanisms than through coercive ones, hence indicating an enabling-centric governance (see Table 5 for representative quotes of the most adopted governance mechanisms).

This suggests that the local platform organizations viewed different dynamics at play compared to regulatory voids, as labor market voids were not exploited opportunistically by users on one side of the platform against users on the other side. Also, the platform organizations tended to interpret workers' lack of skills and, to some extent, short-term orientation, as shaped by the lack of supporting institutions in the local environment rather than as the workers' direct responsibility. This understanding is even more vivid in the case of poor working conditions and workers' marginalization, which were perceived as exacerbated by the entry of gig platform multinationals. This connects to Ricart et al. (2020)'s discussion of the negative impacts on-demand platforms may have on local ecosystems and the role governance can play in “rebalancing value distribution”. Since workers bore the main costs of labor market voids, locally embedded on-demand platform organizations felt responsible for them and their livelihoods. Thus, an approach that prioritized workers' empowerment and inclusion was considered more suitable than one constraining user behavior.

Such a preference is clearly articulated for the workers' poor working conditions, which were addressed only through the deployment of multiple enabling mechanisms. Therefore, the platform organizations perceived that this issue harmed workers severely and deemed that, as local actors, they had a unique opportunity and duty to tackle it. This understanding positioned them in opposition to platform multinationals which, in their view, contributed to the problem. Specifically, since *financial upgrading* was the most deployed mechanism, unfair financial conditions appeared as the main issue faced by drivers, whose responsibility, according to RH2, lied in the entry of gig platform multinationals: “the issue [has] to do with the pricing [ ... ] They were not favorable to the driver, and you realize the driver was not getting anything by the end of the day” (director, interview). Financial upgrading, entailed, for example, “set [ting] good prices for the driver”, to ensure “that they don't end up driving these cars for the rest of their lives. We want them to drive for few years and then they can retire and have something to enjoy” (director RH2, interview). *Professional upgrading* was instead deployed to address “welfare-related issues” faced by drivers, for example by granting them insurance. The local platform organizations also valued a relational approach to addressing workers' poor working conditions. This originated from their entrenchment in the social context and was in stark contrast with multinationals' transactional orientation. For example, RH8 articulated the importance of *community building*: “Uber and Taxify [...] are just here to make money and get out. They don't have what we call in our country the Ubuntu spirit, where you think about what I can do for my drivers” (managing director, interview). On the same note, RH5 *co-developed the solution* to poor working conditions with the drivers: “we listen to [the drivers], their problems, we understand what the problems are. We improve the product based on what is happening on the ground” (founder, interview).

With regards to the workers' lack of skills, although the platform organizations deployed some coercive mechanisms (particularly *restricted access* and *mandatory learning*), these appeared insufficient to address the void. Hence, the local organizations were mainly pursuing an enabling-centric governance, which embodied an inclusive and empowering approach to managing the dearth of necessary competences among workers. This choice seemed to stem from the platform organizations' acknowledgement of their responsibility towards the workers, who should not be penalized for their lack of skills, which was conditioned by their local context. In keeping with this understanding, *unlocking access to underrepresented workers* counterbalanced restricted access, with the goal of including workers' who, due to a lack of market knowledge, would be excluded from the platform. For instance, RH9 highlighted that “the female drivers did not believe that [...] our female option would work. [...] they had also some prejudices and myths about female riders”. Thus, RH9 had to “call many of them in a meeting and convince them” (founder, interview). On a similar note, while mandatory learning imposed trainings as a condition to use the platform, *professional upgrading* was centered on creating chances for workers' self-development, by granting them the opportunity, free of any obligation, to enrich skills and knowledge. For example, RH8 engaged with traditional taxi drivers to educate them about the potential of the e-hailing industry and the importance for them to join it. Similar to drivers' poor working conditions, their lack of skills was also governed by a relational approach, which leveraged the organizations' local embeddedness. This resonates with prior literature, which argues that local firms respond to voids by “developing social capital and building a web of trusted connections” (Lashitew et al., 2022, p. 1997). In particular, the platform organizations aimed to strengthen the workers' skills by building a social fabric around the platform, through the *co-development of solutions* and *community building*. As for the former, RH10 explained that they would “talk to [a driver], get to understand him, talk to him. [...] You have to treat them in an individual case” (founder, interview). With respect to the latter, RH7 fostered drivers' upskilling by leveraging the background of one of the founders, who had been a boda driver himself: “for a lot of the boda driver, they felt that they could relate with him, because he was one of them, he is one of them. [...] we focus a lot on the community and the drivers because we understand where they're from, we understand their background, we understand the challenges that they face on the road” (manager, interview).

In addition, the platform organizations perceived marginalization to affect some groups of workers. This was independent from their behavior and, as such, had to be governed with an enabling rationale. Specifically, the local organizations viewed their platform as a digital “space” that would create opportunities for groups of workers that had been marginalized from the industry. For this purpose, they governed the lever of platform access, by expanding access or, to a more limited extent, restricting it, depending on what they considered more valuable for these workers. For example, RH4 explained that the gig platform multinationals were exacerbating the already precarious financial conditions of metered taxi drivers by excluding them from the e-hailing industry, particularly due to their relatively old cars which they could not afford to replace. This was a problem because driving was “their only source of livelihood”. RH4 therefore *unlocked access* to marginalized drivers who were struggling due to large gig platform multinationals: “we, as

RH4 came in and said, ‘[...] We are going to include you instead of excluding you’ ... we’re not going to erase you, we’re going to empower you also to participate in the digital economy” (founder, interview). RH1 instead restricted access to its platform to women drivers, in order to give them work opportunities unavailable in the existing market.

Compared to the other labor market voids, the organizations resorted primarily to the coercive governance mode to address workers’ short-term orientation. They relied heavily on *mandatory learning*, which consisted of prompting drivers to adopt a more responsible behavior by imposing trainings on road safety. As underlined by RH3: “they go through stringent training, and there’s an evaluation process by which we evaluate to understand if these bodas have understood what we’ve trained” (CEO, interview). This suggest that workers’ short-term orientation required a significant shift in the workers’ mindset, hence a stricter governance approach. Interestingly, mandatory learning benefited the drivers albeit it was a coercive mechanism. This suggests a rationale coherent with that adopted for the other labor market voids, i.e., aiming to support the workers’ development.

Overall, to address labor market voids, the platform organizations employed governance mechanisms that facilitated the creation and strengthening of informal institutions, like trust, sense of belonging to a community and social relations, as well as the improvement of the workers’ professional and financial profile.

4.3. Governance mechanisms addressing product market voids

The product market voids experienced by the on-demand platform organizations included gas price instability, limited technological affordance, as well as the low diffusion of credit cards. *Gas price instability* emerged as a critical problem for the workers because they were affected by constant increases in prices, which jeopardized their income. As for the issue of *limited technological affordance*, several potential customers did not have a smartphone and many others did not have an internet connection and/or used

**Table 6**  
Product market voids and governance mechanisms: Representative quotes.

Type of product market void	Product market voids: Representative quotes	Governance mechanisms: Representative quotes
<i>Gas price instability</i>	“[In Western Europe] your gas prices are relatively stable and predictable. For a country like Uganda, which is landlocked also, the prices can change within the next two days. And if a company maintains their fares at a particular rate, the driver won’t be able to make the trips and the money that is necessary for it to be a sustainable business.” (RH9 – founder, interview)	<i>Financial upgrading</i> “I would be able to adjust [the fares] immediately without much bureaucracy.” (RH9 – founder, interview)
<i>Limited technological affordance</i>	“There’s definitely still challenges around smartphone penetration, and a lot of the cheap smartphones nowadays that are coming from China don’t have some kind of reliability issues with key components like, GPS and notifications [...], that make running an app like this on those phones quite difficult. They also have very low storage.” (RH6 – founder, interview) “For the motorcycle taxis that is where the greatest problem is, because the majority don’t have smartphones.” (RH9 – founder, interview)	<i>Technologically unlocked access</i> “You have to keep the apps quite small and put most of the logic on the server side.” (RH6 – founder, interview)
<i>Low diffusion of credit cards</i>	“Many users complained that whenever they make a trip that is not cash then the drivers in the taxi app companies request them to cancel the trip. If the user doesn’t cancel then the drivers don’t drive to the pickup location claiming there is “heavy traffic”, thus leaving the user confused and severely delayed.” (RH10 – organization website) “The reason the e-hailing taxi drivers are robbed is because the criminals know that the people pay cash and the drivers also like to take cash.” (RH8 – managing director, interview)  “We want to make the e-hailing taxi a cashless ride but the problem, people use cash is because the majority of the people in South Africa don’t have credit cards and cheque card and the banks don’t allow credit cards to pay online.” (RH8 – managing director interview)	<i>Professional upgrading</i> “We’ve signed an agreement with the bank to be able to give these smartphones on loan to the motorcycle riders.” (RH9 – founder, interview) <i>Performance assessment</i> “We have a 24/7 call center team in place to monitor all trips real-time; this ensures passenger pick-ups are timely and can address any challenges.” (RH10 – organization website)  <i>User identification</i> “We want to make sure that when somebody, before they get out of the car, there’s a facial recognition and we have their faces so that if there’s any problems that occur, we have the face that can be sent to the police and ... We send it to all our drivers, “Look at this face, never ever give him a ride.”” (RH8 – managing director, interview) <i>Financially unlocked access</i> “So when they choose the payment method, they will choose wallet instead of cash or card. So if you budget for your child for a month, you will put money into the wallet, 3000 rands. They can use [them] over a period of a month, no interest charged because we are not a financial business company. You are just putting your money in the wallet that you can budget for your rides over the period of the month.” “With the voucher system that we have introduced, where you can buy vouchers at the supermarket [ ... ] you can buy a voucher, [ ... ] then you can pay with the voucher instead of paying with cash” “Drivers [...] will be safe because we will be pushing towards a cashless service however convenient for the riders so that there are no more hassles.” (RH8 – managing director, interview)



low quality devices, which did not allow geo-localization, notifications or the download of a ride-hailing platform's app altogether. The platform organizations also noted that payment methods were dominated by cash and mobile money and a very **low diffusion of credit cards**. A shared trait, which characterizes them as product market voids, was the absence of or unreliable access to products (i.e., gas, technological resources and credit cards).

Overall, a fewer number of governance mechanisms were deployed to tackle these voids and the platform organizations relied primarily or exclusively on enabling mechanisms, hence displaying an enabling-centric governance (see Table 6 for representative quotes of the most adopted governance mechanisms).

The preference for enabling governance was particularly evident for gas price instability and limited technological affordances, because the platform organizations viewed users as negatively affected by their institutional environment. This is epitomized by RH1's explanation that "the recent petrol prices [have been] going up. If you are abroad, you don't understand what challenges the driver is going to face, even if it's a small increase that really hurts the pumping of the driver" (founder, interview). Similar to labor market voids, the users were not responsible for the fluctuating gas prices and the lack of a smartphone and an internet connection; hence, the platform organizations refrained from deploying governance mechanisms that would further constrain them. Rather, *financial upgrading*, an enabling mechanism, was the only mechanism deployed to address gas price instability. RH1 articulated: "we [had] a meeting with the drivers, and we even had posted on our social media that our prices will be increased slightly to be able to deal with the price increases of the petrol. And most of the customers are very understanding because they face similar issues" (founder, interview).

By the same token, limited technological affordance was addressed through an enabling mechanism, *technologically unlocked access*, which consisted of granting access to the platform also to users lacking the necessary devices or technology. For example, RH5 operationalized the governance mechanism by allowing customers to "dial a number, we get your location based on the cell towers [...], which is quite accurate. Then the drivers can come and pick you up. So, you don't need a smartphone at all to order [RH5]" (founder, interview). RH6 developed a "light" app, which could be accessible also from less powerful smartphones. Constraining governance mechanisms would not be suitable to address the void of limited technological affordance, because the users had no responsibility for these technological shortcomings and were already penalized by them. Hence, the platform organizations adopted an inclusive approach, enabling drivers and customers to join the platform even when they lacked internet connection or (powerful) smartphones. While prior platform literature has largely considered the decision of opening platform access in terms of the advantages and disadvantages for the platform itself (e.g., Chen et al., 2022; O'Mahony and Karp, 2022), this governance mechanism shows that unlocking platform access may be aimed also at social value creation.

Furthermore, the platform organization relied on an enabling mechanism of *financially unlocking access* to manage the low diffusion of credit cards. Individual users were perceived largely not to be held accountable for the low diffusion of credit cards. Therefore, the local organizations favored an inclusive and empowering approach: they enabled payments with cash and elicited the use of cashless options compatible with the local cash-based economy, by providing a wallet in the platform or vouchers. RH5 elaborated: "There's a wallet inside the app [...]. Just like M-Pesa wallet there is also a [RH5] wallet. So [...] if I am taking a ride every day, I can load the money on my wallet. So I don't have to keep paying every day" (founder, interview). In limited instances where the users were responsible for the non-use of credit cards, and this harmed either the drivers or the customers, the platform organizations resorted to coercive mechanisms. For example, as highlighted by RH10, when drivers requested customers to cancel a trip if they could not pay cash, RH10 adopted *performance assessment* by setting up a 24/7 call center to monitor drivers' behavior and promptly address misconduct.

Interestingly, the two mechanisms highly deployed to tackle two product market voids were not used (technologically unlocked access) or used only to a very limited extent (financial unlocked access) to address voids in other categories. The only mechanism highly deployed for gas price instability, financial upgrading, was used to a high degree only for another void. In contrast, the mechanisms addressing regulatory and labor market voids were largely used across different voids. This approach suggests that product market voids were severe, as the selected governance mechanisms exhibit a high deployment. They also had a different nature from regulatory and labor market voids, which required distinct, targeted governance measures. While regulatory and labor market voids appear to pertain to the social context, as they encompass issues such as lack of safety, low professional profile, exploitation and marginalization, product market voids concern material assets. Hence, the enabling mechanisms deployed were tailored to each material asset.

Based on the patterns observed across voids, we contend that, depending on the kind of void encountered, the platform organizations resort to coercive or enabling mechanisms. The more local on-demand platform organizations view a void as influencing power relations between supply and demand-side users, given the potential to harm or take advantage of users on the other side, the more they tend to adopt coercive mechanisms to address it. These mechanisms lead to the establishment of formal institutions that regulate the platform environment. Conversely, the more local on-demand platform organizations view a void as engendering hurdles for users, the more they tend to deploy enabling mechanisms that create or leverage informal institutions and foster empowerment in the platform environment. Notably, the complex nature of voids may lead organizations to adopt both governance modes, yet their relative importance differs across voids. These insights suggest that on-demand platform organizations can adopt a *hybrid* governance mode, when tackling institutional voids, because they can deploy a bundle of coercive and enabling mechanisms. However, we observe that the *degree of hybridity*, i.e., the extent to which the bundle of governance mechanisms adopted to tackle a void encompasses both the coercive and enabling modes, also differs depending on the institutional voids encountered. For example, poor working conditions exhibit a very low degree of hybridity, because this void is addressed only by enabling governance mechanisms. Instead, workers' short-term orientation displays a higher degree of hybridity, because it is tackled both by enabling and coercive governance mechanisms. Furthermore, the *type of hybridity*, i.e., the extent to which the coercive or enabling mode is preferred, differs depending on the

institutional void tackled. This results respectively in a coercive-centric (as for regulatory voids) or enabling-centric governance (as for labor market and product market voids).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study was set out to investigate how local on-demand platform organizations address institutional voids through governance in developing countries. Stemming from our findings, the study makes three main theoretical contributions.

First, our study shows that the governance deployed by on-demand platform organizations, which are institutionally embedded in a developing country context, encompasses an enabling mode. Extant research on gig platforms largely posits that a governance approach entailing close, direct, “human” connections between workers and platform organizations does not have a place in the gig economy (e.g., [Connelly et al., 2021](#); [Duggan et al., 2020](#); [Jabagi and Croteau, 2019](#)), emphasizing that platform organizations accept minimal responsibility for independent contractors’ working and financial conditions (e.g., [Cornelissen and Cholakova, 2019](#); [Duggan et al., 2020](#); [Fayard, 2021](#); [Gleim et al., 2019](#); [Kost et al., 2020](#)). There are few studies that exhibit some links with the notion of enabling governance. For example, some scholars suggest that platform organizations may engage in fostering social relationships and a sense of belonging on the platform ([Reischauer and Mair, 2018](#); [Zhang et al., 2020](#)), in designing relational and informal mechanisms that guide user interactions towards shared goals ([Guo et al., 2021](#)), in encouraging joint value creation and “rebalanc [ing] power differentials in local contexts” ([Ricart et al., 2020](#), p. 283) and relinquishing control over some activities to users (e.g., [Vallas and Schor, 2020](#)). However, these studies fall short of capturing the extent to which gig platform organizations may leverage governance to foster empowerment and inclusion among users, particularly workers.

Enabling governance also exhibits substantial differences with the incentive-based platform governance, conceptualized by [Chen et al. \(2022\)](#) for platforms in general. Indeed, incentive-based governance is only directed at supply-side users of a platform, whilst enabling governance targets both sides, depending on the hurdles they face. Moreover, incentive-based governance aims to “obtain [supply-side users’] cooperation” ([Chen et al., 2022](#)), for example in terms of participation and expansion of complementary products, to attain the platform’s goals. Hence, incentive-based governance is essentially inward-oriented, to elicit value creation on and for the platform. Enabling governance, instead, is fundamentally outward-oriented, aiming to create value for the users. Our conceptualization of enabling governance is also distinct from how [Cardinal et al. \(2017, p. 570\)](#) describe “enabling control” in an intra-organizational context, where it “provides the means to be productive or creative, has a positive connotation, and functions so as to allow employees to better master their task environments”. With enabling governance, local platform organizations aim to have an impact on workers and customers beyond the specific “task environment”, i.e., the focal platform. Since it is a response to the voids in the local context, enabling governance strives to improve workers’ and customers’ livelihoods, even in the long term.

Indeed, our study shows that, due to their institutional embeddedness, the location-boundedness of their user networks and the distinctive implications of the nature of their work, local on-demand platform organizations deploy mechanisms with the aim to have a substantial impact on their users’ livelihoods, particularly on the workers’ professional and financial conditions. In this respect, the enabling governance mode resonates with the view of institutional voids as “opportunity spaces” ([Mair and Marti, 2009](#)) that allow entrepreneurs to “create value by solving institutional problems” ([Tracey and Phillips, 2011](#)), because the local on-demand platform organizations view these voids as giving them the opportunity to create social value in their community, by designing a range of governance mechanisms that include and empower local users, particularly workers, in different ways.

Second, we add to research on gig platforms by conceptualizing coercive governance. This governance mode resonates with prior research, which contends that platform governance eminently consists of regulating, constraining and monitoring user behavior ([Cutolo and Kenney, 2021](#); [Hurni et al., 2021](#); [Koo and Eesley, 2021](#); [Kyprianou, 2018](#); [Wagner et al., 2021](#)). The literature on gig platforms has largely emphasized the role played by automated, algorithm-based surveillance ([Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019](#); [Newlands, 2021](#)), as “one of the defining features of app-work” ([Duggan et al., 2020, p. 121](#)). Only few studies suggest, from an HR perspective, a more composite system, albeit without exposing its components in a developing country environment ([Heiland, 2022](#); [Meijerink and Keegan, 2019](#); [Norlander et al., 2021](#); [Veen et al., 2020](#)). Our conceptualization of coercive governance has also some connections with the notion of control governance, proposed by [Chen et al. \(2022\)](#) for platforms at large.

Despite the links with extant literature, the coercive governance construct proposed by this study adds to it in different ways. To start with, it shows that, for local on-demand platforms, addressing institutional voids through coercive governance goes beyond (automated) digital technology-based mechanisms to also critically entail human, non-digital control. Local embeddedness prompts on-demand platform organizations to govern their users by bridging the digital to the physical environment. Moreover, while, in extant literature, enforcing mechanisms are targeted only at supply-side users, our findings indicate that coercive measures can be also directed at customers. This underlines the need, for platform organizations, to carefully monitor and constrain the behavior of the two types of users, as both may leverage gaps in the institutional context to their advantage. In a context characterized by voids, this coercive pressure has to be deployed before, during and after a gig. We also add to prior research by showing that, similar to enabling governance, coercive governance can also be deployed to create value for users, be them customers or workers, rather than only for the platform itself.

Furthermore, we contend that connoting the governance mechanisms uncovered by our study as coercive is more appropriate than conceptualizing them as control (see [Chen et al., 2022](#)). Indeed, the gig economy literature has denoted as control different types of governance mechanisms, which are not necessarily coercive, such as “techniques of ‘gamification’” ([Gandini, 2018](#)), as well as incentives and nudges ([Parth and Bathini, 2021](#)). More widely, the management literature on governance tends to interpret “control” in a

more extensive way than the governance mode revealed by our findings. For example, in the context of intra-organizational research, [Cardinal et al. \(2017, p. 559\)](#) define control as “mechanisms that managers use to direct attention, motivate, and encourage individuals to act in ways that support the organization’s objectives”. “Coercive control”, according to [Cardinal et al. \(2017\)](#), is a type of control and it resonates with our conceptualization of coercive governance, because both denote the enforcement of compliance. Indeed, with “coercive” governance, we indicate when platform organizations pressure, discipline and constrain users’ behaviors to elicit compliance with the platform organizations’ rules and requirements, in the absence of formal institutions in the local context. However, our findings differ fundamentally from [Cardinal et al. \(2017\)](#)’s coercive control, which focuses on the hierarchical manager-employee relationship and, inspired by [Adler and Borys \(1996\)](#), negatively characterizes coercion as serving the interests of managers and instilling demotivation among employees. Our findings, instead, show that coercive governance is considered paramount, eminently to protect users on one side of the platform from the harmful behavior of those on the other side. As the goal of coercive governance is not to merely prioritize the goals of the organization, it is not expected to foster demotivation and dissatisfaction, but rather to bring stability and security in a context fraught with voids. Moreover, as highlighted by [Überbacher and Scherer \(2020\)](#), coercion “is an influence mechanism ([Lawrence, 2008](#)) based on the communication of a threat”. In our study, the main threat for local workers and customers is being excluded from the platform. In the specific case of emergency coordination, the eminent example of a “last resort” deterrence mechanism against users’ harmful behavior, the threat is the intervention of the police or security guards.

Third, our study advances the understanding of on-demand platform governance’s institutional embeddedness, by documenting the diversity of voids they face, and by showing that different institutional voids steer the adoption of different governance modes. In this regard, it helps connect research on platform governance with the literature on institutional voids. Indeed, the body of work on voids has demonstrated that the presence of institutional voids matters for the activities of local firms and that “each institutional void is an actionable construct” ([Doh et al., 2017](#)). We add to this literature by articulating how these voids matter for local on-demand platform organizations, and how these organizations act on different types of voids in terms of governance. Moreover, in contrast to previous research on digital platforms that has depicted governance mechanisms which have some links with the coercive or the enabling mode, we expose *when* these modes are deployed in a developing country context.

We particularly suggest that the deployment of different governance modes derives from the distinct effects that platform organizations perceive voids to have on their user network. These effects resonate with the distinction made by [Gao et al. \(2017\)](#) between “counterpart behavioral uncertainty” and “environmental uncertainty” triggered by institutional voids. [Gao et al. \(2017, p. 2155\)](#) argue that a void creates counterpart behavioral uncertainty for a market actor when it engenders “uncertainty regarding whether a firm would abide by the terms of an agreement”. Indeed, voids can influence the power of market actors ([Luo and Chung, 2013](#)) and elicit opportunistic behavior ([Webb et al., 2020](#)). In our findings, on-demand platform organizations view regulatory voids as exposing users on one side of the platform to harmful behaviors by users on the other side. Confronted with these risks, local organizations tend to adopt a coercive-centric governance to substitute for missing or inefficient regulators. These insights shed new light on the relationship between on-demand platform organizations and their regulatory context. According to prior research, these organizations tend to push for changes of existing regulations in their favor ([Garud et al., 2022](#); [Uzunca et al., 2018](#)) or to exploit loopholes in local regulations ([Anwar and Graham, 2021](#); [Basukie et al., 2020](#); [Gleiss et al., 2022](#)). Only [Uzunca et al. \(2018\)](#) hint at a third approach, which consists of acting as a “self-regulator”, by taking on “government regulatory responsibility” for legitimacy purposes. We show that local on-demand platform organizations implement self-regulation in their governance to address the counterpart behavioral risks that threaten users due to absent or inefficient local regulations.

[Gao et al. \(2017, p. 2156\)](#) also posit that voids elicit environmental uncertainty when “environmental shocks [...] pose [...] a threat” to a party involved in a transaction independently from the behavior of the counterpart. In our study, local on-demand platform organizations tend to view labor market and product market voids as environmental hurdles affecting the professional, social and/or financial conditions of certain users, independently from other users’ behavior. Environmental shocks, such as the entry of gig platform multinationals or the frequent changes in gas prices, can exacerbate these hurdles. To tackle these risks, on-demand platform organizations tend to adopt an enabling-centric governance. These findings contradict extant literature arguing that gig platform organizations largely concentrate their efforts on constraining user behavior. Rather, we detail the specific environmental conditions under which on-demand platform organizations prefer a governance approach that prioritizes social bonding and user empowerment. Notwithstanding the different context and practices, these insights connect with [Gatignon and Capron \(2023\)](#), who uncovered a new type of approach of firms to address institutional voids, which benefits different stakeholders and empowers them. However, differently from [Gatignon and Capron \(2023\)](#), the co-creation with external partners is lower, as the emphasis of the platform organizations is on their network of users.

The insights emerging from our study on enabling governance have theoretical relevance also beyond the specific context of gig platforms, because they help scholars recognize and conceptualize the actions undertaken by a platform organization to create value for its users by tackling the hurdles posed by their local context. For example, prior research has explored platforms, established in developing countries, that facilitate the trading of products between small farmers and customers (cf. [Jha et al., 2016](#); [Sengupta et al., 2021](#)). However, while these studies show platform organizations’ commitment to social value creation, they overlook the extent to which and how it is integrated in the governance of the user network.

We also note that product market voids have a different nature, compared to regulatory and labor market voids, which is likely to trigger governance mechanisms that are more distinct than those largely adopted for the other two types of voids. Specifically, we propose that product market voids are “materially embedded”, because they relate to the absence or unreliability of material assets in the local environment. Regulatory and labor market voids are, instead, “socially embedded”, as issues such as users’ lack of safety and marginalization are entrenched in the social context. For this distinction, we build on [McKague et al. \(2015\)](#), who identify “social” and

“material embedding” in the development of a local market’s social structure in a developing country to address “material and [...] social constraints” faced by local market actors. We observe a similar distinction in the challenges faced by the on-demand platform organizations in the local context. Hence, we propose that the material or social embeddedness of voids faced by the on-demand platform organizations elicits different governance mechanisms.

Lastly, our study contributes to conceptualizing the composite nature of on-demand platform governance, by coining the notion of “hybrid governance”. We particularly underscore the relevance of both disaggregating governance, to capture the mechanisms adopted by a platform organization, and examining the combination of these mechanisms, to appraise the degree and type of governance hybridity. Few studies suggest that platform organizations may adopt different bundles of governance mechanisms, yet the bundles they describe largely focus on coercive mechanisms and disregard the interaction with the local context. For example, [Kyprianou \(2018\)](#) distinguishes ‘control of supply-side heterogeneity’ and ‘control of cross-side interaction’, and she contends that each form of control may be exerted to a high or low degree by platform organizations. [Heiland \(2022\)](#) refers to “hybrid” governance, yet his construct encapsulates algorithmic and temporal coercion. While this literature concentrates on the coercive mode, our conceptualization of hybrid governance embraces the multifaceted nature of on-demand platform governance, as positioned on a coercive-enabling continuum. Indeed, our findings show that platform organizations may choose a high degree of hybridity, by adopting a balanced bundle of enabling and coercive governance mechanism, or they may opt for a low degree of hybridity, by selecting a coercive-centric or enabling-centric governance.

### 5.2. Managerial implications

The study has a set of managerial implications for different actors. Our insights are relevant for managers of local on-demand platform organizations in developing countries, because they show how coercive and enabling governance mechanisms tend to be used to cope with regulatory, labor market and product market voids. Our findings are also valuable for managers of gig platform multinationals, because they suggest a need to adapt governance depending on the type(s) of void experienced when entering developing countries. Finally, our study provides useful insights to workers, by suggesting how their participation in an on-demand platform may be governed, based on the institutional context in which they operate. More widely, this study is relevant for platform organizations which aim to create social value in their context, because it alerts them to the importance of carefully balancing coercive with enabling governance depending on the hurdles they observe.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

Our study has limitations that also present avenues for future research.

First, the study shows that different institutional voids tend to be addressed by different governance modes, but it does not uncover the implications of these choices for platform survival and growth. As these are critically dependent on users’ willingness to participate in the platform ([Stofberg et al., 2021](#)), we encourage future studies to conduct data collection among workers and customers of on-demand platform organizations. For example, scholars could explore how the adoption of a coercive-centric governance to tackle regulatory voids influences workers’ willingness to continue using the platform.

Second, our study takes an institutional voids perspective to make sense of the local context. However, to unpack the local institutional complexity, future studies can adopt an institutional logics perspective ([Thornton and Ocasio, 2008](#)). In particular, they can unravel the ways in which the governance mechanisms we identified are shaped by institutional logics. Contradictory institutional logics in the organizational field may prompt organizational reflexivity and set off a search and experimentation process for novel governance mechanisms. Amid such institutional plurality, opportunity spaces may be created for platform firms to reconfigure institutions, i.e., engage in institutional entrepreneurship ([Mair et al., 2012](#)).

Third, our exploratory research design offers invaluable insights but only scratches the surface of the relationship between governance modes and institutional voids. Given the limited data per on-demand platform organization, we would encourage future research to adopt encompassing comparisons where instances of governance modes at various organizations are explained in terms of organizational and institutional characteristics ([George and Bennett, 2005](#)). Future studies could also build on our insights that suggest material and social embeddedness of voids to further investigate the adoption of distinct governance mechanisms to address them.

Finally, our study focused on a specific kind of gig platform emerging in developing countries, i.e., on-demand platforms and, more specifically, ride-hailing platforms. Yet local on-demand platforms are burgeoning in other sectors as well, such as logistics (e.g., Bongen in Mauritius), cleaning (e.g., Chronomenage in Morocco or Eden in Nigeria), reparation & maintenance (e.g., Fundis in Kenya). Moreover, local crowdwork platforms have arisen (e.g., 15ghana in Ghana), which compete with multinational ones. Future research should advance the understanding of the institutional embeddedness of gig platform governance by exploring whether and how it unfolds in other on-demand platform sectors. This can also be extended to unravelling how the governance of local crowdwork platforms differs from that of multinational companies, particularly in the governance mode adopted to tackle specific voids. Moreover, as noted above, enabling governance may be pivotal also for other types of platforms in developing countries, for example those facilitating the exchange of products between small farmers and customers or the sharing of agricultural assets (e.g., Hello Tractor). We encourage further research to adopt the enabling governance concept and explore the mechanisms deployed to tackle the challenges faced by supply/and demand-side users in the local context, in order to empower them.

Despite these limitations, our study’s findings offer a significant opportunity for future research to extend existing governance perspectives on gig platforms by raising awareness of local institutional arrangements.

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**Data availability**

The data that has been used is confidential.

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