

BAM 2023 CONFERENCE

US
UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

**BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

Understanding digital labour platforms: A meaning making perspective

Karen Amisah

Aston University, Birmingham

David Sarpong

Aston University

David Carrington

Aston University, Birmingham

Understanding digital labour platforms: A meaning-making perspective

Karen Amissah (Aston University)

David Sarpong (Aston University)

David Carrington (Aston University)

ABSTRACT

The digital platform-based sharing economy has become ubiquitous all over the world. How do digital labour platform ventures and their customers interpret their organizing logic and business models, in terms of creating and capturing value? Developing our contribution in a context marked by weak institutions and under-developed markets—Ghana, we draw on the recent turn to meaning-making in contemporary social theory as a lens, to explore how digital labour platform-based ventures and their users, make sense of and construe meaning, and understanding of the digital platform business model to creating and capturing value. Employing an explorative qualitative research approach, data for the inquiry comes from semi-structured interviews and is supplemented with publicly available data and documentaries on the business operations of the two case organizations. Expected findings from the study will help in theorizing and extending our nascent understanding of the collective contest over how the interpretation of value creation and capture may offer a set of contradictory frames that allow providers and users to assimilate the organizing logic of digital business models into established or new categories of understanding.

1.1 Introduction

Over the past decade, Digital Labour Platforms (DLPs) have played a major role in transforming the world of work. The concept of DLPs emerged in the early 2000s with the objective of "mediating work or services between service providers and consumers." (ILO 2018). Generally, these platforms are internet-based and provide their users with an interface (through a smart application or a website) as the premise of interacting and providing services. DLPs are proliferating primarily because they are replacing the orthodox model of work, the workplace, and the role of workers. They are also addressing valid human, and labour concerns such as workers' desire for flexible working-time arrangements and policymakers' desire for improved labour market efficiency (Zhou 2020). It has further enabled workers who would otherwise be unable to participate in the traditional labour market as a result of disabilities or care responsibilities, the platform to join the labour market (ILO 2018).

In recent years, the potential of developing countries for the global economy has caught the attention of scholars, multinational companies, and policymakers (George et al. 2016, Zoogah et al. 2015), and as a result, has necessitated the shifting of the canon towards examining the role of digital platforms in these regions, and the promises they hold for such countries (Bonina et al. 2021, Heeks et al. 2020). Why this interest? Over the last four years, the growth in Africa's GDP was estimated at 6.9% in 2021, a strong rebound from the aftermath of the 2019 pandemic-induced phenomenon (African Development Bank, African Economic Outlook 2022). Also, noticeable in many African-developing countries, are local variations and unique institutional environments that influence different business models (Kolk and Rivera- Santos 2018, Rivera-Santos et al. 2015). More interestingly, Africa's digital landscape is increasingly exhibiting greater potential for rapid growth (Molla 2021, Taura et al. 2019), consequently serving as an interesting and apt context for studying different dynamism in contemporary theory and practice (George et al. 2016). In line with this call, the interplay of unique market characteristics in developing countries which Khanna and Palepu (2010) refer to as institutional voids must not be relegated to that back if we are to fully realize the developmental implications of the digital platform: such as job creation opportunities, increased efficiencies, and access to both

new and global marketplaces, for many African economies in the future. Institutional voids refer to the absence or underdevelopment of formal institutions that augments the well-functioning of business activities (Palepu and Khanna 1998). We are not by this implying that Global northern countries do not experience these voids, however, their prevalence in the former markets is particularly pervasive (McAdam et al. 2019, Wang and Cuervo-Cazurra 2017).

Nevertheless, the globally most successful DLPs, such as Uber, Lyft, Bolt, and others have their foundations ingrained in well-developed markets and strong institutions (Khanna and Palepu) such as the UK, US, China, and Japan. In this regard, the business logic underpinning these digital platform business models has an organizing architecture that facilitates practices that are largely based on Western marketing, meaning systems and economic models. While these DLPs are born global, they are intended to scale beyond their traditionally developed markets into foreign markets (Monaghan et al. 2020), most of which have taken the forefront. Although they have the potential to facilitate economic transactions across different markets, there are still location -specifics and factors that play a significant role in shaping the functioning and outcomes of these platforms. Now, the challenge is effectively executing such models in a market that lacks such a foundation, not for the short term, but more importantly in finding their way into long-term value-creating, capturing and sustainability of these business models in such markets.

Although research on digital platforms seems to be flourishing, much of the digital platform literature is fixated and positioned primarily in the Global Northern context (Pesole et al. 2018, Zhu et al. 2017), focusing on different directions such as labour and workers' rights (Harmon and Silberman 2019, De Groen et al. 2018) economic and employment policies (Guarascio and Sacchi 2018), the organisational design, infrastructure and governance aspects of platforms (Constantinides et al., 2018), platform workers' perspectives across regulatory structures (Karanović et al. 2021), the cognitive and socio-political challenges of market entry (Garud et al. 2020). Yet to date, literature on digital platforms from the global southern context is rather underexplored except for a few recent studies which have focused on their idiosyncratic features in relation to socioeconomic development (Badran 2021, Graham et al. 2017) and their institutional void-filling direction of digital platforms in these regions (Malik et al. 2020, Koskinen et al. 2019,

Drouillard 2017). This has necessitated calls to focus on the complexities of emerging markets to gain a complete and nuanced understanding of both country-specific and global trends shaping DLPs (Sheth 2022, Heeks et al. 2020, Koskinen et al. 2019). Secondly, research to date has not explored how affordances or “*meaningful interpretations*” by providers and users of DLPs can provide a new perspective to shaping and modifying existing organizing logic, practices, and modus operandi of digital platforms in foreign markets (Daramola and Etim 2022) following the prevalence of market and human shortcomings in many developing countries, specifically global southern markets. Also in line, Bonina et al. (2021)'s assertion that digital platforms are a 'socio-technical phenomena,' supports our study's proposition that even though digital platforms, in essence, are largely framed as technological systems, they cannot be viewed as mutually exclusive from the respective societal context they operate in, as they co-exist in an ecosystem (Cook and Milburn-Curtis 2023) where interactions are built and exchanged through the process of adoption and continuous usage. Also, considering that platforms rely heavily on independent contractors, yet with many existing studies focussing mainly on the platform organisation's perspective (Karanović et al. 2021), this indicates that taking a multilateral approach to digital platforms that encompasses both perspectives is needed. Therefore, it becomes crucial to open the conversation about how these important stakeholders (not only the platform owners/providers) make sense, meaning and interpret the value and downsides of the voids multinational platforms seek to fill in the developing markets. Consequently, the interpretation of digital platforms in developed countries, and in turn, the potentiality of capturing value from them is likely to differ greatly from that of developing countries with weak institutions and underdeveloped markets. This is the lacuna we are seeking to answer. In this paper, we ask, how do digital labour platform providers and users from contexts marked by underdeveloped markets and weak institutions interpret their organizing logic and business models, in terms of creating and capturing value? We answer this following Khanna and Papelu (2010)'s and Heeks et al. (2020)'s call for engaging developing countries through the lens of their void-based conceptualisation. We suggest that the institutional and human voids (McAdam et al. 2019, Wang and Cuervo-Cazurra 2017, Khanna and Papelu 2010) play an inevitably significant role in the different and contradictory meanings and interpretations of the value propositions of the digital platform made by both providers and their users in such environments.

Expected findings from the study will help in theorising and extending our nascent understanding of the collective contest over how the interpretation of value creation and capture may offer a set of contradictory frames that allow providers and users to assimilate the organizing logic of digital business models into established or new categories of understanding.

1.2 Literature Review

1..2.1 Undeveloped Markets and Weak Institutions in Developing Countries

Imperatively, context matters (Sheth 2020, Doh et al. 2017) for both local and international businesses. The different and often conflicting interpretations of the value of digital platforms can be explained by the specific context in which such digital platforms operate. In light of this, understanding digital platforms in developing countries cannot be considered holistically nuanced without highlighting the specificities of these countries in light of their contexts. In this regard, we are talking about their associating concepts of institutional voids (Khanna and Papelu 2010) and human capital voids (Wang and Cuervo-Cazurra 2017). Khanna and Papelu (1998) christened the term *Institutional voids* to refer to the absence or underdevelopment of formal institutions that augments the well-functioning of business activities. Voids are gaps that exist between formal rules and their enforcement in practice (Rodrigues 2013). Through these institutions, the 'rules of the game' (North, 1990) are enforced on business activities by significantly influencing the transaction cost of business. According to Khanna et al. (2015) when multinational companies are scaling their businesses in developing countries, they largely concentrate on conducting country portfolio analysis and political risk assessment, which focuses on the potential profits from doing business in developing countries whilst frequently overlooking the critical role that voids plays in executing their business models in those locations. For example, in countries with lower and relaxed regulations, individuals rely largely upon widely accepted practices or their innate beliefs, whereas more regulated societies require individuals to pay attention to external rules regardless of their opinions (Doh et al. 2017). These voids for instance disturb the smooth functioning of many

multinational businesses that originally come from countries where the latter is much more formalised and stronger.

In Khanna and Palepu's work on "Winning in Emerging Markets" in 2010, they identified six institutions that were prone to experiencing some shortcomings; Information analysers and advisors- *institutions that collect and analyse information on market participants for making informed decisions*, credibility enhancers- *institutions that certify or validate claims made by market participants*, Aggregators and Distributors- *institutions that work as matchmakers between market participants*, Transaction facilitators – *institutions that provide the platform for exchanges of goods and services*, Adjudicators- *institutions responsible for resolving disputes and conflicts* and Regulators- *institutions that are responsible for creating and enforcing appropriate rules and policies for the business industry*. The efficiency and effectiveness of these market enablers are essential for maintaining smooth market operation and sustainable economic growth (Drouillard 2017) without which market inefficiencies, information asymmetry, and reduced trust and confidence (Fu et al. 2022, Zhou 2020, Kim and Song 2017) will be prevalent in the market which can be frustrating for Multinational companies. Existing literature has largely associated institutional voids with negative connotations and has viewed them as constraints (Doh et al. 2017, pp. 302). Therefore, many multinationals that scale into these countries marked by unique market deficiencies do so to fill these voids with their value propositions.

On the other hand, human capital voids are reflected in the people's skill deficiencies at both firm and country levels in underdeveloped human capital ecosystems. (Wang and Cuervo-Cazurra 2017) and as it relates to digital platforms; digital literacy skills (Zhao et al. 2023). These are largely manifested in the marketplace's inadequate and economically costly education and training systems, and as a result, most firms face a labour shortage with the necessary skills and digital literacy skills for engaging for example with digital platforms (Zhao et al. 2023). Even though many digital platforms are internationalising in many developing countries, the challenge of the digital divide is prevalent in many Sub-Saharan African countries (Daramola and Etim 2021, James 2021), thus having the potential influence on the full appreciation of the value of digital platforms in such context.

1.2.2 Digital Platforms in Developing Countries.

In developing countries that are marked by the presence of institutional and human voids, the concept of digital platforms has been largely framed as a means of filling these voids (Malik et al. 2021, Heeks et al. 2020, Drouillard 2017) increasing employment opportunities and income generation, creating more efficient market system as well as enabling greater economic growth and productivity (Zhou 2020, Arkalgud 2011). Even Ng'weno and Porteous (2018) posit that digital platforms can potentially address most of Sub-Saharan Africa's informality problems. Digital platforms are a significant type of market enabler. They are a two-sided or multi-sided platform (McIntyre et al. 2021, Schmidt, 2017) that facilitates the value-creating transaction of services between independent suppliers and consumers (Constantinides et al. 2018). They use technology to facilitate these transactions (Parker et al. 2016). They have flipped around the modus operandi of traditional business models by redefining the role of the work, worker and the workplace to seamless transactions that can occur anywhere, anytime and with a wider consumer base. While there are different typologies of digital platforms, they all serve three distinct functions: *“(1) matching workers with demand; (2) providing a common set of tools and services that enable the delivery of work in exchange for compensation; and (3) setting governance rules whereby good actors are rewarded and poor behaviour is discouraged”* (Choudary 2018). Within this boundary, we focus on the Ridesharing digital platform from the Ghanaian market perspective. This platform provides an internet-based application (Monaghan et al. 2020) that mediates services or acts as a facilitating intermediary between independent contractors or car owners and their potential riders.

In many developed countries, there are readily available market enablers; necessary and reliable infrastructure and support systems as delineated by Khanna and Papelu (2010) which are in place to facilitate smooth business operations and growth, however, they are nascent in developing economies. Ride-sharing digital platforms are hence a special type of market enabler (Drouillard 2017) and an institution that creates value for people in these regions by providing new jobs and efficient ways of transactions. In paralleling them ride sharing digital platform with Khanna and Palepu's (2010) as an institution by which institutional voids, are filled, we observe with

- *Information Analysers* – Ridesharing digital platforms have algorithmic systems that collect and analyse information about both drivers and riders for the purpose of rating performances, matching, price, promotional incentives, and route information (Mitropoulos et al. 2021, Braw and Palazzolo 2021, Rosenblat and Stark 2016).
- *Credibility Enhancers*- Ridesharing digital platforms verify both driver and user identity and provide certification of performance ratings of both drivers and riders (Mitropoulos et al. 2021, Pymnts 2021)
- *Aggregators and Distributors*-The ridesharing platform itself is a two-sided platform that connects their market participants (McIntyre et al. 2021, Schmidt, 2017, Rysman 2009)
- *Transaction Facilitators*- It provides a participative platform that governs the rules of engagement on the platform between the stakeholders in the platform ecosystem (Gawer 2022, ILO 2021, Choudary 2018)

Ride-sharing platform companies perceive themselves as technology companies rather than a traditional competitor to the local taxi business (Kelly 2021, Bales and Woo 2017), therefore are excluded from formal labour rules and policies. In their argument, they explain that they do not employ drivers on a full-time basis because of the multihoming affordance of the ride-sharing platform (Choudary 2018). From this perspective, even though they provide both mainstream and part-time forms of employment to the taxi driver whom they term “independent contractors” (Angrist et al. 2021, Rosenblat 2018, Harvey et al. 2017), they bypass regulatory and labour policies. In this regard, during the process of void filling, they are also exacerbating the creation and maintenance of such voids such as power imbalances, information asymmetry, precarious working conditions and long-term job insecurity (Heeks et al. 2020, Rosenblat and Stark 2016). In the initial stages of adopting digital platforms, they are perceived as a possible solution to some of the voids that exist in the markets currently being addressed by these platforms. In developing countries where unemployment rates are high, they are often viewed as a “saviour” but with constant use and interaction, the downsides of these voids begin to be experienced such as job insecurity, power asymmetries, short-term and low-income freelancers who lack social stability and may become vulnerable to economic exclusion

over time (Heeks et al. 2020, Graham et al. 2017, Schor et al. 2015, Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013). In the process of this two-way reaction effect of this phenomenon, users in these contexts respond by engaging in contradictory practices (Rahman et al. 2019, Jarrahi and Sutherland 2019) that are propelled by their meaning-making and interpretation of the phenomena.

As digital platforms have revolutionised incumbent business models, the value creation and capture mechanisms are also benefitting from their new dynamism. Business models are recognized as being the mechanisms for creating, delivering, and capturing value (Foss and Saebi 2017, Teece 2010). In the traditional linear business model, the idea of value creation depends on the number of sales generated from goods sold to customers i.e., transactions however digital platforms create value through interactions. Furthermore, with digital platforms, there is a concentration on resource orchestration rather than its control (Yrjölä et al. 2021). In the process, transaction costs are drastically reduced (Belleflamme et al. 2016), asset distribution becomes simpler, consumer searching cost reduces and minimised firm's monitoring costs (Pagani 2013). Value capture in digital platforms relies heavily on network effects (or network externalities) (McIntyre 2021) Although the term network effects is not a novel concept (Shapiro et al. 1990), it has become prevalent with the platform business model. A network effect phenomenon occurs when the value of a platform increases as a result of a significant increase in the number of users, thus increasing its appeal to users as a whole (Badran 2021). In the context of a ride-sharing platform, the more drivers and riders that use the platform, the more valuable the platform becomes to both parties, and this is termed as indirect or cross-side effects (De Reuver et al. 2018, Parker et al. 2016). Once this happens the platforms can further capture value through their monetisation technique (ILO 2021, Parker et al. 2016). Digital platforms, therefore, create and capture value by simultaneous coopetition (competition and cooperation) between the demand and supply user groups (Yrjölä et al. 2021). Keeping this discussion in view, thus far, it is worth noting that the dynamics of competing in the original product-country market differs significantly from that in foreign markets. In this light, multinational companies are unlikely to remain competitive or survive for long if they do not develop situated strategies for engaging developing countries across their value propositions.

1.2.3 The Meaning Making of Digital Platforms

With the emergence of new innovative technologies, exploring their adoption, usage, traction, implications, and potential impact of these innovative technologies cannot be overemphasized, especially when they are designed to facilitate an effective and efficient revolution in work and its processes. Against the background is the evidence of different theories and perspectives that seek to explore the nuances or suggest explaining factors influencing engagement with this phenomenon. There is no doubt that these theories possess a great deal of utility, however, they still bear some shortcomings which require further attention and consideration. Popular and extensively utilized theories among many studies include Ajzen and Fishbein (1980)'s Theory of Reasoned Action, Davis (1989)'s Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which, in turn, was extended by Venkatesh et al. (2003)'s Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and Bandura (2001)'s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The application of these theories in understanding how people perceive and use technology, as well their behaviour with it, has been largely focused on the individual's hedonic considerations and the social enabling conditions. The limitations associated with these theories are that, arguably, they do not account and capture for the peculiarities of the wider, macro, and specific context (especially non-western countries) within which the new and innovative technologies and their ecosystem operate.

In the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) put forward the idea that an individual will engage with technology as influenced by their behavioural intention, i.e., their attitudes and associated subjective norms regarding that behaviour. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) assumes that an individual's use of technology is driven by the perceived usefulness of the technology and their perceived ease of use (Davis 1989). This was later extended by the work of Venkatesh et al. (2003) to include more factors; performance expectation, effort expectation social influence and facilitating conditions (Marikyan, and Papagiannidis 2021) resulting in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Bandura (2001) suggests with the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) that an individual's behaviour is determined by their self-efficacy, the expectations of the outcome of their actions and their social environment. Thus, people are much more likely to use technology only if they can use it, if it will result in

favourable outcomes and if their social connections are using it. However, François (2004) argued that although the SCT is useful, it is more suited to Western culture than others. It is imperative to note that engaging with the nuances and implications of the use of technology goes beyond the simplicity of an individual's choice. Keeping the discussion above in view, whilst considering also that our focus is on a non-western country marked by underdeveloped markets and weak institutions, this paper presents a compelling case for shifting the canon to understand digital platforms from the contemporary social lens of meaning-making. In doing this, we account for and capture the inclusion of the broader complexity and diversity of situated institutional context present in our case country, thus far, acknowledging the relevance of the role of both institutional and human voids in the shaping of meanings and interpretations attached to the adoption of digital platforms. Its' ramifications have the potential of providing the space for improvising and innovating the business model for long-term sustained survival and competitiveness in such foreign markets.

Park and Folkman (1997) refer to the meanings as the perception of significances and subsequently how they respond to them (Kurzman 2008). As individuals, we are motivated to make sense of the information and context around us (Baumeister and Vohs 2002) and this meaning-making plays a vital role in how we approach, interpret, experience, and act on our jobs. Meaning-making is also the “collective contests of interpretations” (Kurzman 2008, pp. 6). By this, we imply that meanings are not always predetermined or fixed, but rather emerge as a result of the collective interpretation of a phenomenon. This is a dynamic and ongoing process in which new perspectives are introduced, resulting in new or revised meanings. Institutions, for example, provide individuals with pre-existing frameworks for understanding and interpreting their surroundings. However, it is important to note that these constructs are not static or fixed but are constantly evolving and subject to change. For example, the introduction and the continuous use of the Ridesharing platform come with its organizing logic and practices. Undoubtedly users from a particular context can engage in a collective practice depending on the meanings they choose to associate with the innovative ride-sharing platform over time. These interpretations may be contradictory to ones established by the existing framework. They may also be responses to the downsides of voids (Heeks et al. 2020) Without a meaningful

interpretation of these processes, both providers and users will miss opportunities and possibilities of maximising value. Therefore, we must be open to questioning and challenging these established categories of understanding to develop a more nuanced and informed perspective as we rethink meanings that are too often taken for granted.

Analysing digital platforms using the meaning-making perspective enables us to not only draw from micro (i.e., individual) factors but also the macro and meso implications of user behaviour with the rather multifaceted and complex implication of digital platformization in developing countries, more especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Existing studies on Meaning-Making at the workplace have illustrated how it has positively influenced employee's psychological well-being (Arnold *et al.* 2007), their work engagement (May *et al.* 2004, Van den Heuvel. *et al.* 2009, 2020) their high energy and work commitment (Kanter 1983), managerial effectiveness (Spreitzer 1995) and their job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski 1997; 2003). Although each individual ultimately determines the perception of meaning, it is also influenced by the environment or context in which they live and operate (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, in crafting and constructing meaning, the providers, and users of digital platforms are not only imprinted by their self-habitus, personal factors, or social determinants but also by the wider context of nature and the strength of their institutions and markets.

In this study, we will understand the meaning-making perspective using the strategy of framing. To frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, pp.52). Frames are “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” what happens in the world around them (Goffman 1974, pp. 21). They define which actors are involved, what problems are addressed, how they are defined, and what solutions are considered suitable (Reinecke and Ansari 2016). In this vein, frames highlight some details about a phenomenon that is the subject of communication and interaction, in a way that elevates its meaningfulness to its audience or people involved. In practice, it is a means by which actors interpret information from their environment (Kaplan 2008). When people continuously interact with these frames, they become amplified and subsequently become

institutionalised at whatever level or place it is being practised. Frames also represent the cognitive context within which an individual understands and categorises their sensemaking of a social situation, and thus framing is a process of context production in an ongoing social process (Scheff 2005). As a result of the framing approach, institutions are afforded a more dynamic view, in which individuals or actors are viewed as entrepreneurs of meaning and initiators of patterns that can subsequently become institutionalized.

The meaning-making frame is a theoretical lens that affords the possibility of meanings to be formed and diffused by users from the bottom-up approach (Gray et al. 2015) which is crucial (Berger et al. 1966), and capable of facilitating a deeper understanding of what strategies are possible in a situated practice and influencing the firm to change or persist with certain strategic decisions in a particular context. The positioning of framing supports the bidirectional flow of collective meanings and logic (Purdy et al. 2019) i.e., both the top-down and bottom-up approaches. It is important to understand that the organisation not only influences their actors but is also influenced by them. The interplay between institutions and society creates a mutually reinforcing relationship where changes on one level can have a significant impact and shape each other over time, hence must not be ruled out. Consequently, Suddaby (2014) further postulate that to advance scholarly knowledge on the possibilities of an institution, it would not be reflexive enough, if the flow of processes and actions is largely unidirectional (either from top-down or bottom-up). In this regard, the framing is advantageous because it supports the bidirectional nature of institutional processes that allows both the top level and stakeholders to mutually exist and influence each other. Secondly, a framing strategy presents ideal prospects for understanding how new meanings and practices associated with new or emerging innovative technologies are defined, accepted, gain grounds, and could cause modification in its existing organizing logic in international markets or context (Purdy et al. 2019). As innovative technologies are introduced, various individuals and groups make sense of them in different ways, depending on their interests, values, societal trends, and experiences. For example, a group may collectively interpret the introduction of the ride-sharing platform as an opportunity for progress and economic growth and liberation, while another may interpret it as a threat to the locally existing transportation

services. Also, some platform users can interpret the power dynamic to be unfair to them. Based on their interpretation, they may believe that platform owners are in a position of power, for example, in determining the price for rides, causing them to engage in manipulative and contrary actions that seem to benefit themselves (Reischauer and Mair 2018). These differences in interpretations cause different actions and practices when the users interact with the technology. Furthermore, in using frames, we overcome the cultural bias rooted in frameworks whose logic is based on Western meaning systems. This is because frames allow for the adoption of an emic perspective in capturing meanings more accurately. Therefore, we will be able to observe and account for how meaning is constructed as a result of specific contextual influences of the case country--Ghana.

It is important to note that framing strategy does not ignore the power and structural and political dynamics in shaping the practices to become established or institutionalised. On the contrary, its strength lies in the fact that they recognize that the micro-foundations and macro-level influence are mutually constitutive and shape and influence one another, hence as discussed above the bidirectional perspective on institutions and their stakeholders. Ultimately, the meaning-making perspective provides a framework for organizing coherence out of the contradictory meanings and the interpretations that providers and users associated with the ride-sharing platforms and subsequently, in real terms the organised practices that impede or facilitate the value orientation of the meaning-making process from the context of underdeveloped markets and institutions in Ghana.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Case and Sample Selection

Although there are many digital platforms operationally existent in many developing countries, we chose to focus on ride-sharing digital platforms because of their large-scale proliferating impact in such markets. For example, it is ubiquitous to find at least one of the rides sharing platforms in many global south countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, and Tanzania (Daramola and Etim 2022, Johnson et al. 2020), however, for this study, we focus on the Ghanaian context. Despite being one of the

under-researched global south countries in terms of the "platformization" phenomena (Penu, 2021), it remains one of the main countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that is experiencing the blooming blues of the adoption of ride-sharing digital platforms and its implications (Penu 2021). Furthermore, they have the highest estimate of recorded informal Ghanaian workers among all digital platforms, averaging 100,000 (Anning-Dorson et al. 2021). In addition, Uber and Bolt Ghana dominate the ride-sharing market and are the most popular platforms among the riders' community, which is why we have chosen to focus on these two companies as our case studies.

Our primary data will be sourced from a maximum of 100 semi-structured interviews with 20 Managers from both Platform companies and 80 platform drivers. This will further be supplemented by publicly available data, reports, documentaries on the two case organizations, and popular press reports on their business operations in Ghana. The participants in this study are relevant stakeholders in the ecosystem of ride-sharing digital platforms whose perspectives are pivotal in providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the contradictions and tensions that arise in the process of digital platforms being assimilated into established categories of understanding in the Ghanaian context.

1.3.2 Data Analysis

To provide a robust finding, our data analysis will be done using the NVIVO software. Our coding and data analysis will follow the ground theory approach by Strauss (1987). Data will go through open coding by reading and re-reading the data to become familiar with its content, assigning tentative codes and mapping unto broad categories of meanings. We will then perform axial coding by linking categories and subcategories of data together to identify and build up a dense texture of relationships and connections between them. Inductively and iteratively, these comparisons will provide a clearer conceptual relationship or links between the generally categorised meanings and our frames of meaning from our theoretical lens on how providers and users of DLPs make sense of these platforms in order to capture value for both parties. Finally, we will select the core categories and systematically relate them to other categories, validate their relationships, and develop the storylines we would use to frame our meanings. This analysis process will narrow down the actual situated practices and routines i.e., the doings and actions that

have become established categories of understanding and consequently either facilitate or impede absolute value creation, implementation, and capture in such markets.

1.4 Potential Contribution

The study seeks to offer both unique theoretical contributions and managerial implications. First, this study will offer primary, empirical, and novel contributions to the potential utility of analysing developing country markets using Khanna and Palepu's void conceptualisation of developing countries in relation to the meaning-making of digital platforms. Secondly, by focusing on Ghana as the empirical research context, this study will be the first to explore how stakeholders make sense, and construe meaning and understanding of the digital platform business model towards value creation and capture. It will further answer the call of bringing the peculiarities and affordances of the digital labour platform from the developing market context into management research (Daramola and Etim 2022, Penu 2021, Heeks et al. 2020, Koskinen et al. 2019, George et al. 2016). Ultimately, the findings of this study will provide an opportunity to unpack another perspective on how multinational digital platform companies in Ghana and similar countries in the global south can improve, modify, and adapt their business models to survive and compete in these contexts for their long-term survival in the foreign markets.

REFERENCES

- Arkalgud, A.P. (2011) Filling "Institutional Voids" in Emerging Markets. *Forbes*. Available at: [Filling "Institutional Voids" in Emerging Markets \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com) (Accessed on 8th May 2023).
- Arnold, K.A., Turner, N., Barling, J., Kelloway, E.K. and McKee, M.C. (2007). Transformational leadership and psychological well-being: the mediating role of meaningful work. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 12(3), p.193.
- African Development Bank, African Economic Outlook (2022) Available at; [aeo22_chapter1_eng.pdf \(afdb.org\)](https://www.afdb.org) (Accessed on 5th May 2023).
- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall
- Anning-Dorson, T., Katta, S., Arubayi, D., Graham, M., Boateng, R., & Budu, J. (2021). Fairwork Ghana Ratings 2021: Labour Standards in the Platform Economy. doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.10612.01924.
- Angrist, J. D., Caldwell, S., & Hall, J. V. (2021). Uber versus taxi: A driver's eye view. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 13(3), 272-308.
- Badran, M. F. (2021). Digital platforms in Africa: A case study of Jumia Egypt's digital platform. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(3), 102077.
- Bales, R. A., & Woo, C. P. (2017). The Uber Million Dollar Question: Are Uber Drivers Employees or Independent Contractors? *Mercer Law Review*, 68(2), 6.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual review of psychology*, 52(1), 1-26.
- Belleflamme, P., & Toulemonde, E. (2016). Who benefits from increased competition among sellers on B2C platforms? *Research in Economics*, 70(4), 741-751.
- Berger, P. L., and Luckman, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of. Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

- Bonina, C., Koskinen, K., Eaton, B., & Gawer, A. (2021). Digital platforms for development: Foundations and research agenda. *Information Systems Journal*, 31(6), 869-902.
- Braw, E. and Palazzolo, F. (2021). How Ride-Share Apps Collect and Store Data: A National Security Risk? *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*. Available at: [How Ride-Hailing Businesses Collect and Manage Data: A National Security Risk? \(rusi.org\)](https://rusi.org/publications/2021/05/how-ride-hailing-businesses-collect-and-manage-data-a-national-security-risk/) Accessed on 9th May 2023)
- Choudary, S. P. (2018). The architecture of digital labour platforms: Policy recommendations on platform design for worker well-being. *ILO future of work research paper series*, 3.
- Cook, C. E., & Milburn-Curtis, C. (2023). Sharing for sustainability: relating independent community news management practices within digital platforms. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 1-19.
- Constantinides, P., Henfridsson, O., & Parker, G. G. (2018). Introduction—platforms and infrastructures in the digital age. *Information Systems Research*, 29(2), 381-400.
- Daramola, O., & Etim, E. (2022). Affordances of digital platforms in sub-Saharan Africa: An analytical review. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 88(4), e12213.
- Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *Manag Inf Syst Q* 13 (3): 319–340.
- De Groen, W. P., Kilhoffer, Z., Lenaerts, K., & Mandl, I. (2018). Employment and working conditions of selected types of platform work.
- De Reuver, M., Sørensen, C., & Basole, R. C. (2018). The digital platform: a research agenda. *Journal of information technology*, 33(2), 124-135.
- Doh, J., Rodrigues, S., Saka-Helmhout, A., & Makhija, M. (2017). International business responses to institutional voids. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48, 293-307.
- Drouillard, M. (2017). Addressing voids: How digital start-ups in Kenya create market infrastructure. *Digital Kenya*, 97-131.

- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication*, 43(4), pp.51-58.
- Foss, N.J. and Saebi, T. (2017). Fifteen years of research on business model innovation: How far have we come, and where should we go? *Journal of management*, 43(1), pp.200-227.
- François, P. H. (2004). The social foundations of thought and action as laid down in Bandura's social cognitive theory. *Savoirs*, (5), 51-58.
- Fu, Y., Zhang, L., & Chen, Y. (2022). Coping with institutional complexity and voids: An organization design perspective for transnational interorganizational projects. *Project Management Journal*, 53(1), 49-66.
- Fuchs, C. and Seignani, S. (2013), "What is digital labour? What is digital work? What's their difference? and why do these questions matter for understanding social media?", Triplec: Communication, Capitalism and Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society, 11(2), pp. 237-293
- Garud, R., Kumaraswamy, A., Roberts, A., & Xu, L. (2022). Liminal movement by digital platform-based sharing economy ventures: The case of Uber Technologies. *Strategic Management Journal*, 43(3), 447-475.
- Gawer, A. (2022). Digital platforms and ecosystems: remarks on the dominant organizational forms of the digital age. *Innovation*, 24(1), 110-124.
- George, G., Corbishley, C., Khayesi, J. N., Haas, M. R., & Tihanyi, L. (2016). Bringing Africa in: Promising directions for management research. *Academy of management journal*, 59(2), 377-393.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Gray, B., Purdy, J. M., and Ansari, S. (2015). From interactions to institutions: Microprocesses of framing and mechanisms for the structuring of institutional fields. *Academy of management review*, 40(1), pp. 115-143.

- Graham, M., Hjorth, I., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). Digital labour and development: impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 23(2), 135–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258916687250>
- Guarascio, D., & Sacchi, S. (2018). *Digital platform in Italy. An analysis of economic and employment trends*. INAPP.
- Harmon, E., & Silberman, M. S. (2019). Rating working conditions on digital labor platforms. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 28(5), 911-960.
- Harvey, G., Rhodes, C., Vachhani, S. J., & Williams, K. (2017). Neo-villeiny and the service sector: the case of hyper flexible and precarious work in fitness centres. *Work, employment and society*, 31(1), 19-35.
- Heeks, R., Eskelund, K., Gomez-Morantes, J. E., Malik, F., & Nicholson, B. (2020). Digital labour platforms in the global south: Filling or creating institutional voids?
- ILO(International Labour Office). (2021). The business model and strategies of digital labour platforms. *World Employment and Social Outlook*, 2021(1), 71-102.
- ILO (International Labour Office). (2018). Quality in the Platform Economy, Issue Brief No. 5. Available at : [wcms_618167.pdf \(ilo.org\)](https://www.ilo.org/wcms_618167.pdf) (Accessed on 9th February 2023).
- James, J. (2021). Confronting the scarcity of digital skills among the poor in developing countries. *Development Policy Review*, 39(2), 324-339.
- Jarrah, M. H. and Sutherland, W. (2019). Algorithmic management and algorithmic competencies: Understanding and appropriating algorithms in gig work. In *Information in Contemporary Society: 14th International Conference, iConference 2019, Washington, DC, USA, March 31–April 3, 2019, Proceedings 14* (pp. 578-589). Springer International Publishing.
- Johnson, C., Bester, H., van Vuuren, P. J., & Dunn, M. (2020). Africa’s digital platforms: Overview of emerging trends in the market. *Insight2impact–Cenfri, FinMark Trust & The Mastercard Foundation*. Available at: [Africas-digital-platforms-trends-report.pdf \(cenfri.org\)](https://www.cenfri.org/africas-digital-platforms-trends-report.pdf) (Accessed on 5th May 2023).

- Kanter, R.M. (1983), *The Change Masters*, Simon and Schuster, New York, NY.
- Kaplan, S. (2008). Framing contests: Strategy making under uncertainty. *Organization science*, 19(5), pp. 729-752.
- Karanović, J., Berends, H., & Engel, Y. (2021). Regulated dependence: Platform workers' responses to new forms of organizing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(4), 1070-1106.
- Kelly, J. (2021). U.K. Supreme Court Rules Uber Drivers Are Workers and Not Independent Contractors: The Ruling Could Be an Existential Threat to App-Based Tech Companies. *Forbes*. Available at: [U.K. Supreme Court Rules Uber Drivers Are Workers And Not Independent Contractors: The Ruling Could Be An Existential Threat To App-Based Tech Companies \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkelly/2021/04/18/uk-supreme-court-uber-workers/) (Accessed on 18th April 2023)
- Khanna, T., Palepu, K. G. and Sinha, J. (2015). Strategies that fit emerging markets. In *International Business Strategy*, pp. 615-631). Routledge.
- Khanna, T., & Palepu, K. G. (2010). *Winning in emerging markets: A road map for strategy and execution*. Harvard Business Press.
- Kim, H., & Song, J. (2017). Filling institutional voids in emerging economies: The impact of capital market development and business groups on M&A deal abandonment. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48, 308-323.
- Kolk, A., & Rivera-Santos, M. (2018). The state of research on Africa in business and management: Insights from a systematic review of key international journals. *Business & Society*, 57(3), 415-436.
- Koskinen, K., Bonina, C., & Eaton, B. (2019). Digital platforms in the global south: foundations and research agenda. In *Information and Communication Technologies for Development. Strengthening Southern-Driven Cooperation as a Catalyst for ICT4D: 15th IFIP WG 9.4 International Conference on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries, ICT4D 2019, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, May 1–3, 2019, Proceedings, Part I 15* (pp. 319-330). Springer International Publishing.

- Malik, F., Heeks, R., Masiero, S., & Nicholson, B. (2021). Digital labour platforms in Pakistan: institutional voids and solidarity networks. *Information Technology & People*, 34(7), 1819-1839.
- Malik, F., Heeks, R., Masiero, S., & Nicholson, B. (2020). Digital platform labour in Pakistan: Institutional voids and solidarity networks.
- Marikyan, D. & Papagiannidis, S. (2021) *Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology: A review*. In S. Papagiannidis (Ed), [TheoryHub Book](#). Available at <http://open.ncl.ac.uk> / ISBN: 9781739604400
- May, D.R., Gilson, R.L. and Harter, L.M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 77(1), pp.11-37.
- McAdam, M., Crowley, C., & Harrison, R. T. (2019). “To boldly go where no [man] has gone before”—institutional voids and the development of women's digital entrepreneurship. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 146, 912-922.
- McIntyre, D., Srinivasan, A., Afuah, A., Gawer, A., & Kretschmer, T. (2021). Multisided platforms as new organizational forms. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 35(4), 566-583.
- Mitropoulos, L., Kortsari, A., & Ayfantopoulou, G. (2021). A systematic literature review of ride-sharing platforms, user factors and barriers. *European Transport Research Review*, 13, 1-22.
- Molla, F. (2021). The Great Digital Transformation in Africa. Available at: [The Great Digital Transformation in Africa - Africa.com \(www.africa.com\)](https://www.africa.com). (Accessed on 6th May 2023).
- Ng’weno, A., & Porteous, D. (2018). Let’s be real: The informal sector and the gig economy are the future, and the present, of work in Africa. *Center for Global Development*, 15.
- North, D. C. (1990). Institutions, institutional change and economic performance. *Economic development and cultural change*.
- Palepu, K. G., & Khanna, T. (1998). Institutional voids and policy challenges in emerging markets. *Brown J. World Aff.*, 5, 71.

- Pagani, M. (2013). Digital business strategy and value creation: Framing the dynamic cycle of control points. *Mis Quarterly*, 37(2), 617-632.
- Park, C.L. and Folkman, S. (1997). Meaning in the context of stress and coping. *Review of general psychology*, 1(2), pp.115-144.
- Parker, G. G., Van Alstyne, M. W., & Choudary, S. P. (2016). Platform revolution: How networked markets are transforming the economy - and how to make them work for you, 10- 173. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Penu, O. K. A. (2021). Platform economy research in Africa: A systematic review of themes, frameworks, and methodological approaches. *Africa's Platforms and the Evolving Sharing Economy*, 18-39.
- Pesole, A., Brancati, U., Fernández-Macías, E., Biagi, F., & González Vázquez, I. (2018). Platform workers in Europe. *Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union*.
- PYMNTS News (2021). New Report: Digital Identity Verification Keeps Ridesharing Customers, Drivers Safe. Available at: [New Report: Digital Identity Verification Keeps Ridesharing Customers, Drivers Safe \(pymnts.com\)](https://pymnts.com/news/new-report-digital-identity-verification-keeps-ridesharing-customers-drivers-safe/) (Accessed on 9th May 2023).
- Rahman, H. A., Barley, S. R., Valentine, M., Powell, W. W., and Stanford University. (2019). *Invisible cages: Algorithmic evaluations in online labor markets*.
- Purdy, J., Ansari, S. and Gray, B. (2019). Are logics enough? Framing as an alternative tool for understanding institutional meaning making. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 28(4), pp.409-419.
- Reinecke, J. and Ansari, S. (2016). Taming wicked problems: The role of framing in the construction of corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(3), pp.299-329.
- Reischauer, G. and Mair, J. (2018). Platform organizing in the new digital economy: Revisiting online communities and strategic responses. In *Toward Permeable Boundaries of Organizations?* 57, pp. 113-135. Emerald Publishing Limited.

- Rivera-Santos, M., Holt, D., Littlewood, D., & Kolk, A. (2015). Social entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29(1), 72-91.
- Rodrigues, S. (2013). *Understanding the environments of emerging markets: the social costs of institutional voids*.
- Rosenblat, A., & Stark, L. (2016). Algorithmic labor and information asymmetries: A case study of Uber's drivers. *International journal of communication*, 10, 27.
- Rosenblat, A. (2018). *Uberland: How algorithms are rewriting the rules of work*. Univ of California Press.
- Rysman, M. (2009). The economics of two-sided markets. *Journal of economic perspectives*, 23(3), 125-143.
- Schmidt, F. A. (2017). Digital labour markets in the platform economy: Mapping the political challenges of crowd work and gig work.
- Sheth, J. N. (2020), "Borderless media: Rethinking international marketing", *Journal of International Marketing*, 28 (1), pp. 3-12.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511557842
- Suddaby, R. (2014). Editor's comments: Why theory? *Academy of Management Review*, 39, pp. 407-411.
- Taura, N. D., Bolat, E., & Madichie, N. O. (Eds.). (2019). *Digital Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects*.
- Teece, D.J. (2010). Business models, business strategy and innovation. *Long range planning*, 43(2-3), pp.172-194.
- Van den Heuvel, M., Demerouti, E., Schreurs, B.H., Bakker, A.B. and Schaufeli, W.B. (2009). Does meaning-making help during organizational change? Development and validation of a new scale. *Career Development International*.

- Van den Heuvel, M., Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Hetland, J. and Schaufeli, W. B. (2020). How do employees adapt to organizational change? The role of meaning-making and work engagement. *The Spanish journal of psychology*, 23.
- Wang, S. L., & Cuervo-Cazurra, A. (2017). Overcoming human capital voids in underdeveloped countries. *Global Strategy Journal*, 7(1), 36-57.
- Wrzesniewski, A., McCauley, C., Rozin, P. and Schwartz, B. (1997). Jobs, careers, and callings: People's relations to their work. *Journal of research in personality*, 31(1), pp.21-33.
- Wrzesniewski, A., Dutton, J. and Debebe, G. (2003), "Interpersonal sensemaking and the meaning of work", *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 25, pp. 93-135.
- Yrjölä, M., Mattila, M., Hautamäki, P., & Mikkonen, M. (2021). Digital Platforms as Disrupting Business Models for Internationalisation. In *Business Models and Firm Internationalisation* (pp. 114-133). Routledge.
- Zhou, I. (2020). *Digital labour platforms and labour protection in China* (No. 11). ILO Working Paper.
- Zhu, G., So, K. K. F., & Hudson, S. (2017). Inside the sharing economy: Understanding consumer motivations behind the adoption of mobile applications. *International journal of contemporary hospitality management*.
- Zoogah, D. B., Peng, M. W., & Woldu, H. (2015). Institutions, resources, and organizational effectiveness in Africa. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29(1), 7-31.