Google, Uber, Amazon: The Management of Platform Businesses (BA-BHAAV6034U)

Autumn 2025   —   7.5 ECTS

1 Instructors

- **Lecturer:** Dr.Siddhesh Rao (sir.bhl@cbs.dk)
- **Lecturer:** Dr.Vera Haataja (vh.bhl@cbs.dk)
- **Course Responsible:** Prof. Christina Lubinski (cl.bhl@cbs.dk)

2 Welcome

This course examines how platform businesses (e.g., Google, Uber, Amazon) disrupt industries, shape markets, and transform strategy and governance. Through Harvard-style case discussions, rigorous readings, and an applied project, you will analyze network effects, monetisation, governance, regulation, inequality, and ethics.

3 Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Define and distinguish platform types and their core characteristics.
- Apply analytical frameworks (network effects, architecture, governance, monetisation, metrics, strategy) to real cases.
- Analyze competitive dynamics in industries with strong network effects and platform competition.
- Evaluate ethical, social, and regulatory implications of platform business models.
- Synthesize theory and practice via a course-long platform development exercise.

4 Key Dates

- Start of teaching: Autumn semester, Week 36
- Exam: Hand-out and submission opens 17-10-2025 12:00:00 and ends 31-10-2025 12:00:00 via exam.cbs.dk
- Re-take:Hand-out and submission opens 19-12-2025 12:00:00 and ends 02-01-2026 12:00:00

5 Course Structure

- Weekly modules combining lectures, discussion of cases, and applied group work.
- Course-long project: *Platform Development Class Exercise* (groups of 5).
- Materials (slides, readings, videos) are provided on Canvas. Harvard cases are available via the Coursepack link on Canvas.

6 Primary Course Materials

The following books constitute the main texts for the course. Students are expected to read the assigned chapters in preparation for each session.

- Srnicek, Nick. *Platform Capitalism.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.
  Theoretical foundation for understanding the rise of platform-based business models.
- Parker, Geoffrey G., Marshall W. Van Alstyne, and Sangeet Paul Choudary. *Platform Revolution: How Networked Markets Are Transforming the Economy—and How to Make Them Work for You.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016.
  Practical guide to platform strategy, scaling, governance, and policy.

6.1 Harvard Case Studies

Available via the HBS Coursepack (https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1328142). These are essential for the exam.

7 Session Plan

Session 1 — Fundamentals of Platforms – Definitions, History, and Network Effects

Essential readings (complete before class):

- Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (2017), Chapter 2.
- Geoffrey G. Parker, Marshall W. Van Alstyne & Sangeet P. Choudary, *Platform Revolution* (2016), Chapter 1.
- Michael A. Cusumano, Annabelle Gawer & David B. Yoffie, *The Business of Platforms* (2021), Chapter 1.
- Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), Introduction.

Supplementary readings (recommended):

- Martin Kenney & John Zysman (2020), "The Platform Economy Matures."
- Donato Cutolo & Martin Kenney (2021), "Platform-Dependent Entrepreneurs."
- Thomas R. Eisenmann, "Platform-Mediated Networks: Definitions and Core Concepts," HBS Note 9-807-049 (2007).

Topics covered in class:

- The rise of platforms and why they matter.
- Defining platforms vs. pipelines, with cross-industry examples.
- Economic and historical context: from industrial to platform capitalism.
- Srnicek's five types of platforms (Advertising, Cloud, Industrial, Product, Lean).
- Why platforms outcompete incumbents.
- Network effects: positive and negative; same-side, cross-side, and component-based effects.

In-class activities (come prepared to discuss):

- **Platforms in Everyday Life:** Identify three platforms you used in the last 24 hours; note user roles, interaction type, and network effects.
- **Pipeline → Platform (Small groups):** Pick a pipeline firm and sketch a platform redesign (user groups, value exchanged, network effects).
- **Classify Five:** Sort popular services into Srnicek's five types; discuss hybrids.
- **Incumbent vs. Platform :** Contrast growth logic and assets in one industry (incumbent vs. entrant).
- **Network-Effect Map :** Draw the sides, positive/negative effects, and risks of imbalance for a platform you know.

Session 2 — Network Effects

Essential

- Parker et al., *Platform Revolution*, Chapter 4 (*Disruption*) & Chapter 12 (*Tomorrow*).

Supplementary

- Davis, G. & DeWitt, T. (2022). "Seeing Business Like a State: Firms and Industries After the Digital Revolution."
- Davis, G. (2023). "The Perils of Navigating the Economy Using Old Maps."
- Lubinski, C., Wadhwani, R. D., Gartner, W. B., & Rottner, R. (2023). "Humanistic Approaches to Change: Entrepreneurship and Transformation."

Topics covered in class:

- Network Effects
- Types of platforms

Session 3 — Platform disruption, influence on Culture and The Penguin Problem

Essential

- Parker et al., *Platform Revolution*, Chapter 3 (*Architecture*) & Chapter 5 (*Launch*).

Optional

- Parker et al., *Platform Revolution*, Chapter 2 (*Network Effects*).

Topics covered in class:

- Platform disruption
- Influence on Culture
- The Penguin Problem
- Strategies to overcome penguin problem

Case

- Netflix case on Influence on culture
- Doghouse - overcoming penguin problem - class excercise

Session 4 — Scaling & Monetising

Essential

- Parker et al., *Platform Revolution*, Chapter 6 (*Monetization*).

Topics covered in class:

- Chicken and egg problem
- Scaling and monetisation strategies

Session 5 — Metrics & Strategy

Essential

- Parker et al., *Platform Revolution*, Chapter 9 (*Metrics*) & Chapter 10 (*Strategy*).

Supplementary

- *The Story of Jeff Bezos* (SunnyV2, 2021) [YouTube].
- *Amazon Empire: The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos* (Frontline, 2022).

Case

- Amazon in 2024.

Session 6 — Winner Takes All Markets

Essential

- Srinivasan (2023). "Winner Takes All Dynamics in Platform Business Models for Executives," pp. 89–105. (See Canvas file.)

Session 7 — Data & Surveillance

Essential

- Cathy O'Neil (2017). "The Era of Blind Faith in Big Data Must End" (TED Talk).
- McSweeney, T. & Joy, S. (eds.) (2019). *Through the Black Mirror: Deconstructing the Side Effects of the Digital Age*:
  - "The Planned Obsolescence *Nosedive*"
  - "Unreal City: Nostalgia, Authenticity, and Posthumanity in *San Junipero*"
- *Philosophize This!* Episode #186 (2023): "Are we heading for a digital prison?"

Case

- "Black Mirror" on Platforms.

Session 8 — Platforms & Inequality I

Essential

- Ens, N. (2024). "*'Sure, I saw sales, but it consumed me': From Resilience to Erosion in the Digital Hustle Economy.*"

Case

- TBA

Session 9 — Platforms & Inequality II

Essential

- Walsh, S. (2021). *The Gig Is Up* (Documentary).

Case

- Uber.

Session 10 — Platform Regulation

Essential

- Parker et al., *Platform Revolution*, Chapter 8 (*Governance*) & Chapter 11 (*Policy*).

Case

- Facebook—*Fake News, Free Speech and Responsibility.*

Session 11 — Platform Ethics

Essential

- TBA

Supplementary

- Bridgman, T., Cummings, S., & McLaughlin, C. (2015). "The Case Study Method as Invented Tradition: Revisiting Harvard's History to Reorient Management Education."
- Bridgman, T. (2010). "Beyond the Manager's Moral Dilemma: Rethinking the 'Ideal Type' Business Ethics Case."
- Rhodes, C. (2023). *Woke Capitalism: How Corporate Morality is Sabotaging Democracy* (chapter).
- Carroll, A. B. (1991). "The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: Toward the Moral Management of Organizational Stakeholders."

Optional

- *The Economist* (2024). "YouTube's Do-It-Yourself Brigade is Taking on Netflix and Disney" (also relevant to Session 2).

Case

- DineTogether—*Discriminating Tastes?*

Session 12 — Taboo Platforms

Essential

- van der Nagel, E. (2021). "Competing Platform Imaginaries of NSFW Content Creation on OnlyFans."

Supplementary

- Robson, K. & Pitt, L. (2018). "Internet Vigilantism and Ashley Madison: Rebranding After a Cyberattack" (case study).
- Wibowo, T. O. (2024). "Account-Sharing Programme: Beyond Piracy Streaming Platforms in Indonesia."

Session 13 — Wrap-Up & Exam Prep

Readings

- Synthesis notes and exam guidance (Canvas).

8   Examination

- Format: Individual written home assignment (2 weeks).
- Length: Max. 15 CBS pages.
- Grading: Danish 7-point scale.
- Submission: via exam.cbs.dk.

9   Platform Development Class Exercise (Groups of 5)

Each group designs a platform concept addressing a concrete market need or social challenge (new build or improvement of an existing platform). Weekly topics guide the work (launch & network effects; monetisation; governance; data & surveillance; inequality; regulation). You will justify design choices with course frameworks and reflect on the evolution of your concept. See Canvas for group formation. Make sure you belong to a group by the second class.

10   Contact

- Siddhesh Rao - sir.bhl@cbs.dk
- Vera Haataja - vh.bhl@cbs.dk
- Office Hours: By appointment

This syllabus can be subject to changes