Introducing Platforms & Society

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Introducing *Platforms & Society*

Our rationale

Over the past decade, an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to the 'platform' phenomenon, investigating its development as a business model, a technology, an infrastructure, and an organizational form. Studies have demonstrated the structural changes that platforms are bringing to economies and societies around the world —a process that has been termed platformization. Across a variety of research fields, we have seen inquiries into the impacts and (dis)embeddedness of platforms in areas including labor and industrial relations, business management, media and the cultural industries, law and policy, urban and global development, (health)care, statecraft, and finance. These studies tend to mobilize their own set of methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, while being published in journals with distinct disciplinary and/or geographical identities.

Consequently, the current landscape of platform research is fragmented, consisting of silos that lack a shared academic outlet. Outside of academia, meanwhile, platforms have become a focal point in policy debates across continents and levels of government, addressing issues such as privacy, transparency, labor protection, fair competition and antitrust, and digital sovereignty. Efforts to tackle these emerging regulatory challenges would be served by an accessible outlet that aggregates, curates, and consolidates scholarly expertise on platforms.

Responding to the rising scholarly and public interests in platforms, as well as the fragmented state of platform research, we are launching *Platforms & Society* (henceforth *P&S*) with the ambition to become the leading hub for humanities and critical social sciences research on platforms and platformization. Our goal is to provide a space for scholars charting how platforms transform and integrate into economies, societies, cultures, and institutions around the world. *P&S* aims to be a home for a heterogeneous and innovative field of study that so far does not have a key journal tracking and shaping the evolution of its research agenda. We are excited to offer future contributors and readers a dynamic and accessible publication, intent on fostering critical discourse on platforms and how they could be (imagined) otherwise.

Our editorial agenda

Our editorial agenda builds on the contributions of many scholars who have charted the different lineages, characteristics, and operations of platforms, as well as their impacts on various areas of social life. At the same time, it is also committed to addressing critical research gaps. Although a single origin story of the 'platform' concept is hard to determine, by many accounts the notion was initially used in the business management and information systems literatures. Here it was used to describe strategies for the development and design of products, markets, and supply chains —reimagined as 'ecosystems'— which hinged on distributed value creation through the control of information flows. In the context of new media studies, meanwhile, cultural and economic practices associated with gaming, social media, and content creation/moderation have come into focus in the subfield of 'platform studies'. Since these existing accounts largely concern the Global North context (with some important exceptions), there is ample room for further engagement with the historiography of the platform concept elsewhere in the world.

As their ubiquity and power continued to grow, the acknowledgment that digital platforms are reshaping existing economic and social orders also spread to other research fields, where it has animated critical and increasingly sophisticated conversations. While this burgeoning scholarship suggests widespread research enthusiasm, it also reveals the wide range of subjects that merit further inquiry. One such subject area is the unequal material and spatial repercussions of platformization, especially in terms of its gendered, racialized, and (post)colonial trajectories. Sustained efforts to expand on these lines of critique are necessary. Moreover, we feel that a focus on powerful Big Tech firms and large platforms for labor and cultural production has directed attention away from other types of platforms and platformization that exist at the margins of scholarly and policy concerns. More scholarship on non-hegemonic platform practices and trajectories is needed to counter uniform, unilateral histories of platform domination.

We are therefore very keen on hosting a growing body of engaged research exploring ideas and initiatives that posit alternatives to dominant models of capital-driven platformization, including platform cooperativism, worker-owned platforms, data commons, and Just AI. These initiatives are particularly important in light of recent developments in AI, which is rapidly turning into another platform industry dominated by BigTech firms that own the capital, compute, cloud infrastructure, and proprietary training data necessary for developing large language models and the AI services built on them. While we intend to critically track these developments in our journal, we also encourage scholars to foreground how different communities and collectives repurpose or reinvent platforms as well as platform thinking, through alternative infrastructural, legal, organizational and/or economic configurations. In short, we welcome scholarship that unsettles existing assumptions about what platforms are and do, thereby opening up new entry points for study, critique, and debate.

Crucially, this requires that we address the deep asymmetries in academic knowledge production and circulation, which privilege the experiences, voices, and epistemologies of scholars located in the well-resourced universities of Western Europe, North America, and Australasia. Although the platform research community is increasingly diverse, many identities, practices and places still remain 'off the map' analytically. Obviously, a single journal can only do so much to address the uneven geographies of theory and critique that dominate global academia. We nevertheless intend for *P&S* to promote a research agenda that engages the perspectives and epistemologies of postcolonial, decolonial, indigenous, and more broadly defined 'southern' theories on equal footing with those that emerged from Global North contexts. Moreover, given the scale and complexity of platform 'ecosystems' that are reshaping transnational interdependencies, *P&S* seeks to foster a range of comparative, regional and local perspectives. In this way, we hope to contribute to a more widely engaged, pluriform, and polycentric field of platform research.

Our editorial board, commitments, and scope

In our endeavor, we are fortunate to be supported by an editorial board of 50 experts from all over the world, who are at varying career stages and whose work embodies different approaches and disciplinary orientations to the study of platforms. This diverse cohort of scholars will work closely with us to shape the journal's development, ensuring the relevance and quality of its output while also helping to promote *P&S* across geographies and research fields. Every two years there will be an opportunity to welcome new members to our board.

We are committed to ensuring the accessibility of critical scholarship, and it is for this reason that P&S is an open-access journal. Recognizing the many economic, institutional, and geographical barriers to open-access publishing, we aim to be accessible not only for our readership but, crucially, for authors looking to publish in our journal. To uphold this commitment, we will use the waivers available to us to support authors with accepted papers who have no institutional support for open-access article processing charges (APCs). The number of waivers will be subject to yearly review, in order to ensure that —as the journal hopefully gains traction— we will maintain adequate resources to keep P&S broadly accessible.

As an interdisciplinary journal, *P&S* is open to a range of humanities and critical social science approaches that include and combine insights from scholarly fields including organization studies, sociology, anthropology, media and communication studies, cultural studies, labor and industrial relations, human geography, urban studies, information science, management studies, law, political economy, international development, regional/area studies, and science and technology studies. We welcome theoretical, empirical, as well arts-based and policy-oriented research contributions. To accommodate such diverse work, we offer a range of submission formats, including Provocations, Debates & Controversies, and Multimedia submissions —besides conventional research articles.

In closing, then, we extend a warm invitation to platform researchers across geographies and disciplines to join us in shaping *P&S* into a field-defining and path-breaking journal. We look forward to collectively examining the pasts, presents and futures of platforms, addressing the many critical questions that platformization continues to pose, and to inspire changes to come.

Julie Chen
Institute of Communication, Culture, Information & Technology (ICCIT) (Mississauga) and Faculty of Information, University of Toronto Mississauga, Toronto, Canada

Niels van Doorn
Department of Media Studies, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Email: N.A.J.M.vanDoorn@uva.nl

Rafael Grohmann
University of Toronto Scarborough, Toronto, Canada

Andrea Pollio
Department of Urban and Regional Studies and Planning (DIST), Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy

Cheryll Soriano
Department of Communication, De La Salle University (DLSU), Manila, Philippines