

> Thursday, March 23<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
14:00 – 15:30  
MIS

# RESEARCH SEMINAR



EMPOWERING CHANGEMAKERS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

## ‘FIGHTING GOLIATH BY PRETENDING TO BE DAVID— PLATFORM GOVERNANCE AS COLLECTIVE ACTION’

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, a few platform owners have become so large and powerful that they dominate their ecosystems of complementors. By governing in a top-down fashion, they set, oversee, and enforce platform rules, seemingly reducing complementors to powerless atomistic rule takers. This study aims to improve our understanding of platform governance by exploring how complementors can change the rules of the game by joining forces. To achieve this goal, we historically reconstruct how various complementors from Apple’s iOS ecosystem were able to collectively force Apple into changing key rules of the iOS platform. Our historical reconstruction builds on a large body of more than 22.000 pages of primary source material most of which has become public because they were presented in a series of court trials and regulatory investigations related to the App Store. This primary source material entails private email communication among and between top executives from Apple and complementors, as well as internal memos and plans. Our primary data also covers official communication from the key actors that were on the frontline of the conflict between Apple and complementors. Our findings unpack how larger complementors, which we refer to as platform activists, mold the collective action process through performative and even deceptive protest activities. However, to be effective in forcing change, platform activists cannot act on their own. Instead, they need the reciprocal support, or at least the appearance of it, from other complementors to legitimize their demands. We synthesized these insights in our model of platform governance as collective action, which has important theoretical implications for research on platforms allows us to outline new approaches to regulation.