

Toward the Governance of Digital Platforms Operating as Social Enterprises: A Systematic Literature Review and Synthesis

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Abstract

To address societal challenges, digital platforms increasingly operate as social enterprises, combining economic and social goals. However, existing platform governance research provides limited guidance for managing settings characterized by diverse actors and plural goals. This study conducts a systematic literature review of 73 articles on governance mechanisms in digital platforms and social enterprises. It identifies distinct functions of governance mechanisms and the governance challenges they address in each stream. Based on this analysis, we develop four propositions: the first two abstract the underlying logic of governance mechanisms, highlighting how behavior-oriented mechanisms support ecosystem stability and structure-oriented mechanisms enable flexibility between competing goals. The latter two propositions synthesize these insights to inform the governance of digital platforms operating as social enterprises. The study advances theoretical understanding of platform governance and offers practical implications for platform owners and policymakers navigating the faces of creating economic and social value.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Governance, Social Enterprises, Systematic Literature Review, Synthesis

1. Introduction

Digital platforms have become a dominant organizational form in today's digital economy (Gawer, 2022), concentrating unprecedented market power and societal influence (van Dijck et al., 2018). Amid growing societal pressure, more platforms adopt socially responsible practices and pursue goals beyond profit (Chamakiotis & Petrakaki, 2025). By blending economic aims with social or environmental missions, these platforms exhibit characteristics of social enterprises (Smith et al., 2013). Digital platforms that operate as social enterprises are viewed as promising organizational forms for addressing grand societal challenges as they mobilize diverse actors across sectors

and institutional boundaries (Nambisan & George, 2024). Examples are Ecosia.de, a search engine that invests its profits in reforestation, and Fairbnb.coop, a cooperative booking platform that supports local communities. These platforms combine economic and social goals, requiring governance approaches that can support this dual purpose (Bruneel et al., 2016).

Governance is particularly complex because platforms operate as meta-organizations that coordinate multiple, often autonomous, actors such as developers, content creators, or service providers (Gulati et al., 2012). When operating as social enterprises, they must also reconcile potentially competing goals (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Effective governance is, therefore, essential to coordinate across the plurality of actors and goals (Brès et al., 2018).

However, existing platform governance research offers only little guidance for such pluralistic contexts. Prior studies primarily focus on how commercially driven platforms coordinate actors to co-create economic value (Halckenhäusser et al., 2020). In contrast, the social enterprise literature offers nuanced perspectives on managing tensions between social and economic goals (Pache et al., 2024). Though this literature usually examines single organizations with defined boundaries, digital platforms as meta-organizations also exhibit traditional organizational characteristics, such as establishing authority structures or pursuing overarching strategies (Kretschmer et al., 2020). This conceptual analogy suggests that digital platforms can learn from governance mechanisms applied in single-entity organizations such as social enterprises. Accordingly, our study aims to enhance the understanding of how social enterprise governance literature can inform platform governance literature. Based on this objective, we pose the following research question: *How can the literature on digital platform governance and social enterprise governance be synthesized?*

This study investigates the research question through a systematic literature review guided by Paré et al. (2016). Drawing on abductive reasoning (Sætre &

van de Ven, 2021), the review identifies the underlying governance logic in each stream by deriving the functions of governance mechanisms and the governance challenges they address. The analysis reveals that governance mechanisms in digital platforms tend to be behavior-oriented, supporting ecosystem stability among heterogeneous actors. In contrast, mechanisms in social enterprises are typically structure-oriented, enabling goal flexibility by providing the structures needed to manage persistent tensions between social and economic goals. Based on a synthesis, we formulate propositions that highlight the complementary roles of behavior-oriented and structure-oriented governance mechanisms in digital platforms operating as social enterprises. In doing so, we extend platform governance literature to dual value creation and offer practical insights for platform owners and policymakers. The remainder of the paper outlines the conceptual background, methodology, findings, discussion, and contribution to theory and practice.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Digital platforms and governance

Digital platforms can be conceptualized as digital infrastructures that enable value-creating interactions among two or more groups of actors (Constantinides et al., 2018). To generate value—whether through transactions or innovation—platform owners depend on third-party actors such as developers, content creators, and service providers. These actors are often considered complementors (Engert et al., 2023). Together with the platform owner, they form a broader ecosystem that contributes complementary products and services essential to the platform's overall value proposition (Jacobides et al., 2018). Due to this structural interdependence between the platform owner and its complementors, platforms are increasingly understood as meta-organizations, that is, organizations constituted by other organizations or semi-autonomous actors (Kretschmer et al., 2020).

Although complementors within meta-organizations may pursue their own interests, these arrangements typically revolve around a shared system-level goal (Gulati et al., 2012). The platform owner shapes this goal in digital platforms by orchestrating decentralized value creation and centralizing value capture (Gawer, 2021). Often, the owner aims for profit maximization through strategies such as expanding market share or fostering long-term engagement of ecosystem participants (Eisenmann et al., 2011). Regardless of whether platforms pursue economic or social goals, governance is a key lever for aligning plural actors toward platform-level objectives.

Platform governance refers to how platform owners utilize rules and inducements to facilitate transactions and complementary innovations (Boudreau & Hagiu, 2009). It shapes which value-generating activities are allowed or restricted on the platform (Tiwana et al., 2010). As platform ecosystems rely on contributions from complementors, governance plays a critical role in coordinating interactions, managing interdependence, and aligning efforts toward shared value creation. Governance mechanisms are the concrete tools through which the governance of plural actors is implemented (Halckenhäusser et al., 2020). Core mechanisms, such as control, incentives, coordination, and trust, serve complementary functions in aligning actors and regulating contributions, yet they are mostly studied in economically-driven contexts (Hanisch et al., 2023). While some studies examine governance mechanisms in socially oriented platforms, they often focus on entirely nonprofit models (Schrieck et al., 2017) or cooperative settings (Zhang et al., 2025). Others highlight the evolution of governance mechanisms in enabling social value (Sanner et al., 2025). However, it remains unclear which governance mechanisms are required and how they should be designed to manage heterogeneous actors while balancing competing economic and social goals.

2.2. Social enterprises and governance

Social enterprises aim to solve societal problems through business ventures. They combine the efficiency, innovation, and resources of for-profit firms with the values and mission of nonprofits (Smith et al., 2013). Rather than pursuing a singular objective, they operate at the intersection of commercial and social logics, striving for both financial sustainability and societal impact. As such, social enterprises represent a hybrid organizational form that integrates plural, often conflicting goals within a single organizational boundary (Besharov & Smith, 2014). This hybridity appears in different structural configurations. Scholars distinguish between integrated structures, which fuse economic and social activities into unified offerings, and differentiated structures, which organize these activities separately but link them strategically (Ebrahim et al., 2014). In both cases, social enterprises must generate income while fulfilling a social mission, resulting in institutional complexity.

Compared to traditional for-profit firms, social enterprises are accountable to a broader range of stakeholders and must continuously justify the legitimacy of their plural goals (Ebrahim et al., 2014). These pressures create internal tensions as leaders navigate conflicting expectations. A well-known risk is mission drift, the tendency to prioritize financial over social goals. Since social value creation is central to

their identity, losing sight of this mission threatens organizational purpose (Cornforth, 2014).

Governance plays a crucial role in managing goal plurality and sustaining a dual mission over time (Battilana & Lee, 2014). It works to align commercial and social imperatives, balance stakeholder expectations, and safeguard the integrity of the mission. Governance mechanisms include multi-stakeholder boards that integrate social and commercial perspectives (Pache et al., 2024), structural safeguards such as legal forms and asset locks (Defourny & Nyssens, 2017), and internal mechanisms such as mission-aligned leadership and culture (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

While we present digital platforms and social enterprises as conceptually distinct, many platforms increasingly operate at their intersection. The boundary conditions under which digital platforms qualify as social enterprises remain underexplored and represent an important aspect of theorizing. This review attempts to conceptualize governance in such platforms by drawing on insights from both literatures. Platform governance typically centers on actor plurality, whereas social enterprise governance addresses goal plurality. In platforms operating as social enterprises, these pluralities intertwine. Combining both perspectives clarifies how governance mechanisms address the dual challenge.

3. Methodology

We conducted a systematic literature review using Paré et al.'s (2016) six-step framework to ensure systematicity and transparency. (1) We began by defining the review plan and objective, focusing on how governance literature on digital platforms and social enterprises can be synthesized. We selected a *broad theorizing review* that aims to “theorize based upon synthesis and description” (Leidner, 2018, p. 555) to integrate and extend theory on platform governance. Specifically, we synthesized insights on governance mechanisms from platform governance and social enterprise governance literatures. While earlier reviews have examined the governance of alternative platforms,

such as cooperatives (Zhu & Marjanovic, 2021) or collaborative forms (Wegner et al., 2024), they do not analyze how governance mechanisms address both actor and goal plurality in digital platforms. To date, no review has integrated insights from the platform and social enterprise literature to inform governance in the face of this complexity.

(2) To build a comprehensive literature base, we developed a search strategy combining the keyword “governance” with “platform*” and either “social enterprise*” or “hybrid organization*.” We included both terms because social enterprises represent a prominent subset of hybrid organizations, and much of the existing literature explores hybridity through the lens of social enterprises. We searched titles, abstracts, and keywords in Web of Science, EBSCOhost, and AIS eLibrary. We restricted the results to A+, A, and B journals in Information Systems (IS) and Strategic Management (VHB Jourqual4), as well as selected journals in social enterprise research (Iswoyo & Narsa, 2023). The search yielded 1,122 articles; after removing duplicates, 845 remained. Our literature review encompasses articles published up to March 2025.

(3) We then applied defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to build the final set. We included articles if they addressed either (I1) governance of digital platforms or (I2) governance of hybrid organizations with plural goals. We excluded studies focused on (E1) end-user perspectives, (E2) public sector hybrids, (E3) regulatory or external governance unrelated to internal mechanisms, (E4) literature not explicitly addressing actor heterogeneity or goal plurality, and (E5) publication types such as commentaries or other literature reviews. (4) Combined with the initial journal filter, the final exclusion criteria ensured a focus on high-quality articles. After screening, 66 articles remained. Two articles were not accessible in full text. We identified nine additional articles through backward and forward searches, resulting in a final set of 73 articles. Figure 1 visualizes this process.

(5) For data extraction, we applied an abductive coding approach. Deductively, we coded articles for governance mechanisms drawing on prior

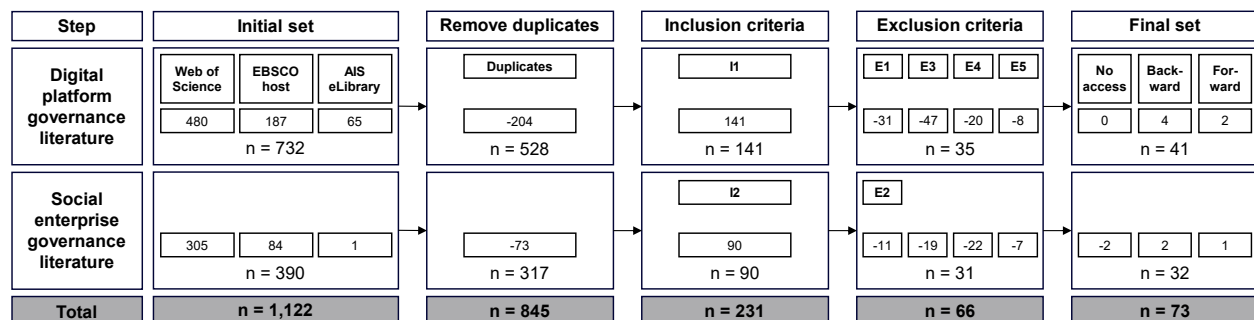


Figure 1. Literature review process.

conceptualizations. This approach enabled us to conduct a comparable analysis of governance in digital platforms and social enterprises, focusing on mechanisms as responses to coordination needs (Cornforth, 2014; Halckenhäusser et al., 2020). (6) We inductively derived two analytical dimensions: the *functions of governance mechanisms* and the governance *challenges* they intend to resolve. These dimensions structure our findings. Later, in the discussion, we abstract our findings to uncover the governance logic in platform and social enterprise settings. Platform literature emphasizes *behavior-oriented* mechanisms to ensure the *stability* of actor relations, whereas social enterprise literature highlights *structure-oriented* mechanisms to maintain *flexibility* between goals. Understanding this contrast helps to inform the governance of digital platforms that operate as social enterprises.

4. Findings

This section presents our findings. We first outline the *functions of governance mechanisms*, starting with how platform governance mechanisms coordinate plural actors, followed by how social enterprise governance mechanisms navigate competing goals. Finally, we outline the governance *challenges* these mechanisms address in each literature stream.

4.1. Functions of governance mechanisms

This subsection outlines what governance mechanisms are designed to do in complex organizational settings. We find three distinct functions of governance mechanisms in platform governance and four in social enterprise governance literature.

4.1.1. Functions of governance mechanisms in digital platforms. The first function in governing plural actors is *enabling contribution*, which involves providing the resources and support for actors to participate effectively. To achieve this, platform owners deploy both technical and social enabling mechanisms. Technical mechanisms provide infrastructure such as application programming interfaces (APIs) and software development kits (SDKs), often referred to as boundary resources. These resources facilitate the provision of complementary goods while maintaining coherence with the platform's system (Engert et al., 2022; Ghazawneh & Henfridsson, 2013). Similarly, modular architectures and leverageable platform design enable contributors to build on standardized components while allowing for diverse innovation pathways (Pauli et al., 2025). In parallel, social enabling mechanisms reduce barriers to entry and facilitate platform engagement through learning and onboarding

processes. Platform owners provide documentation, alignment workshops, and other knowledge boundary resources to equip actors with the capabilities needed to create and integrate complements effectively (Foerderer et al., 2019). Often, platform owners grant individualized support such as onboarding sessions, live chats, or help desks, to facilitate entry and ensure actor engagement over time (Engert et al., 2022; Foerderer et al., 2019). As such, these mechanisms make participation possible and enable the meaningful contribution of diverse actors.

The second function is *steering behavior*, which refers to the targeted direction of actor contributions toward the platform's strategic goal. Platform owners primarily achieve this by relying on incentive and control mechanisms. Incentive mechanisms encourage participation and align individual motivations with platform objectives. For instance, opening core resources to third-party actors serves as an incentive to build complements, steering their efforts towards the platform's value creation logic (Karhu et al., 2018). To foster compatibility and adoption, platform owners incentivize actors through collective governance (O'Mahony & Karp, 2022) or by involving them in the design of boundary resources (Weiss et al., 2023). They also offer financial benefits to attract complementors into target markets and invest in complements that reinforce the platform's strategic goals (Mihale-Wilson & Carl, 2024). Alongside incentives, platform owners apply formal and informal control mechanisms to safeguard the quality of contributions. Formal controls, such as rules or process and outcome monitoring, ensure complementor alignment (Chi et al., 2025; Huber et al., 2017). Actor dedication grows when platform owners apply rules flexibly and benevolently, making governance appear fair and supportive (Hurni et al., 2021). Informal controls, rooted in shared norms and values, foster intrinsic motivation and trust-based collaboration (Chi et al., 2025). Jointly, incentives and control mechanisms steer actors' behavior toward the platform's strategic goals.

The third function in digital platform governance is *providing orientation*, helping actors make sense of the platform's expectations and clarifying their roles. To achieve this, platform owners rely on two types of mechanisms: trust and coordination. Trust-building mechanisms create reciprocity that enables actors to view the platform as fair and reliable. By reinforcing consistent standards, value-sensitive practices, or joint problem-solving, platform owners cultivate trust and shared expectations that orient actors in how to engage with the platform (Huber et al., 2017; Zhong & Sun, 2020). Coordination mechanisms complement this by clarifying responsibilities and helping actors understand the platform's logic. For example, platform owners

apply informational or algorithmic cues to signal priorities (Leong et al., 2024), while strategic updates provide consistency in how the platform operates (Song et al., 2018). In addition, platform owners may exercise power by mandating interactions or by shaping conditions for self-organization, thereby influencing how roles are enacted and how contributions are positioned within the ecosystem (Engert et al., 2025). Together, trust and coordination mechanisms provide orientation to diverse actors by setting expectations and clarifying their roles within the platform ecosystem.

4.1.2. Functions of governance mechanisms in social enterprises. The first function in social enterprises is *formalizing plurality*, which embeds both social and commercial goals into formal organizational arrangements. In operational terms, managers apply legal codification and measure the realization of plural goals through accountability mechanisms. Legal codification entails inscribing dual missions in charters, bylaws, or legal statutes, making the hybrid purpose explicit and enforceable (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Serres et al., 2022). Typically, social enterprises adopt specialized legal structures, for instance, a Low-Profit Limited Liability Company (L3C), to externally signal their commitment to both social and economic aims (Joy et al., 2024). Besides, accountability mechanisms translate these goals into measurable outcomes. These include the use of impact audits, dashboards, key performance indicators (KPI), or external evaluations that concretize performance expectations and reinforce long-term accountability (Mason, 2010; Serres et al., 2022). In doing so, these mechanisms formalize plurality by embedding plural goals within legal frameworks and practices.

The second function in social enterprise governance involves *structuring tensions* by designing organizational frameworks that allow social and commercial goals to coexist within the enterprise. To fulfill this, managers implement separative and integrative organizational structures (Ebrahim et al., 2014). Separative structures assign distinct goals to different units or teams and enable focused action while reducing goal conflict (Ebrahim et al., 2014). In contrast, integrative structures embed both logics into shared roles, joint decision-making processes, or an overarching purpose (Mair et al., 2015; Wolf & Mair, 2019). Often through ‘selective coupling’, organizations purposefully combine elements from each logic, for example, using both financial and social KPIs, to prevent the dominance of one goal over the other (Pache & Santos, 2013). As such, organizational frameworks structure tensions and establish a foundation for hybrid value creation.

The third governance function is *ensuring inclusivity*, which incorporates diverse stakeholder interests and goal perspectives into the decision-making process. Social enterprises implement this through board composition and stakeholder inclusion mechanisms. Diverse boards integrate members from both social and commercial domains, often ensured through balanced boards or other protective structures (Bruneel et al., 2018; Pache et al., 2024). Managers strengthen these arrangements by appointing board members with diverse backgrounds. This diversity enables boards to evaluate both social and commercial performance (Dorado & Shaffer, 2011). Stakeholder inclusion involves giving key actors, such as beneficiaries, employees, or funders, a voice through voting rights, advisory roles, or shared ownership, ensuring their interests shape key decisions (Bandini et al., 2023; Huybrechts, 2010). Together, these mechanisms ensure inclusivity by embedding plural perspectives in governance and creating channels for representative decision-making.

The fourth function centers on *shaping hybrid identity* by fostering the internalization of a dual mission across the organization. This function entails managers applying communicative mechanisms and identity-shaping leadership. For example, managers use purpose-driven communication and the articulation of tensions to foster a shared culture that aligns competing logics and strengthens the hybrid identity (Pinz et al., 2024; Wolf & Mair, 2019). Leaders, often with experience navigating both social and commercial domains, act as translators who align values and practices with the enterprise’s plural purpose (Malhotra et al., 2025; Zhuang et al., 2025). Their role also involves setting expectations that trustees and senior leaders actively integrate multiple logics in their roles rather than compartmentalizing them (Curran & Ozcan, 2025). These mechanisms build a hybrid identity that sustains long-term alignment with plural goals.

4.2. Challenges addressed by governance mechanisms

This subsection describes the challenges governance mechanisms aim to resolve. We identify two main governance challenges in each literature stream that give rise to the described functions.

4.2.1. Challenges addressed by governance mechanisms in digital platforms. The first challenge governance mechanisms address in digital platforms is *securing central value capture* for the platform owner. This involves ensuring that the value generated through decentralized contributions ultimately benefits the platform core (Chi et al., 2025). To meet this challenge,

platform owners implement governance mechanisms that position them as strategic orchestrators (Uzunca et al., 2022). Through mechanisms such as incentives and control, platform owners steer complementors to advance platform interests while offering sufficient benefits to sustain participation (Hukal et al., 2020). Thus, governance mechanisms enable platform owners to balance distributed value creation with value capture at the core.

The second challenge governance mechanisms address in digital platforms is *sustaining ecosystem stability* amid ongoing change. Platforms continuously coordinate expectations and behavior across semi-autonomous participants to enable complementor dedication and their enduring participation (Hurni et al., 2021). Through mechanisms such as boundary resources or trust, platform owners tie together a system of loosely coupled actors (Ghazawneh & Henfridsson, 2013; Huber et al., 2017). As such, mechanisms help reduce friction and foster reliable collaboration, thereby enabling temporary harmony in the meta-organizational ecosystem (Leong et al., 2024). In this way, governance mechanisms confront the challenge of ecosystem stability by coordinating semi-autonomous actors into a coherent and resilient whole.

4.2.2. Challenges addressed by governance mechanisms in social enterprises. The first challenge governance mechanisms address in social enterprises is *managing persistent tensions* between social and commercial goals. Such tensions are inherent to hybrid organizations and often irresolvable in practice (Mason & Doherty, 2016). Rather than attempting to eliminate them, governance mechanisms aim to institutionalize their management. Tools such as inclusive board composition or purpose-driven communication help establish routines for identifying, negotiating, and navigating value conflicts within the organization (Pache et al., 2024; Wolf & Mair, 2019). Thus, governance mechanisms respond to persistent tensions by embedding structures that enable their continuous articulation and management.

The second challenge centers on the need for *reprioritizing goals* over time. As environmental and organizational conditions evolve, social enterprises must adapt while maintaining their commitment to a dual mission (Bruneel et al., 2016). Since mission drift is a central concern for social enterprise managers, governance mechanisms such as legal codification or integrative organizational structures provide the structures to adjust priorities without losing integrity (Cornforth, 2014; Wolf & Mair, 2019). In this respect, governance mechanisms support social enterprises in reprioritizing their goals over time, balancing adaptation with continuity of purpose.

5. Discussion

With the growing prevalence of digital platforms operating as social enterprises (Chamakiotis & Petrakaki, 2025), this review synthesizes governance literature from digital platforms and social enterprises to inform how such platforms can govern complex settings marked by heterogeneous actors and plural goals. Focusing on governance mechanisms, we identified their core functions and the coordination challenges they address in each domain. These dimensions expose distinct governance logics in each domain, offering insights for platforms with dual value aims. Our analysis reveals that platform governance typically employs behavior-oriented mechanisms to stabilize diverse actor ecosystems, while social enterprise governance relies on structure-oriented mechanisms to support goal flexibility. From this abstraction, we derive four propositions (P) on integrating governance mechanisms to address the dual governance challenge of digital platforms that operate as social enterprises.

We begin the remainder of this section by examining the underlying logic of governance mechanisms in each literature stream, that is, how their functions and the challenges they address are characterized (P1-P2). Then, we synthesize these insights to inform the governance of digital platforms operating as social enterprises (P3-P4). Figure 2 offers an overview of the contrasting governance logics in the two literatures and illustrates their synthesis.

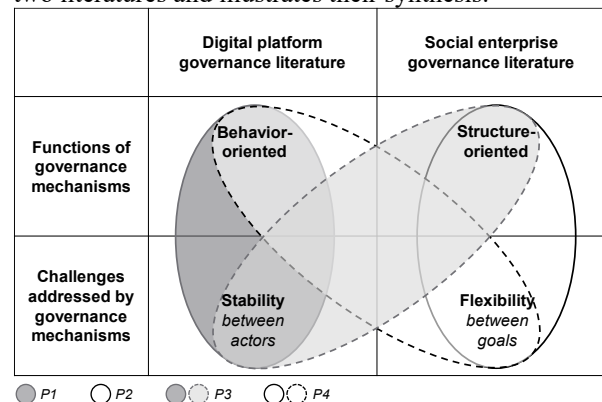


Figure 2. Synthesis of digital platform governance and social enterprise governance literatures.

Findings reveal that in *digital platform governance literature*, mechanisms enable contribution, steer behavior, and provide orientation for managing plural actors. These functions reflect a *behavior-oriented* logic that directs actors' interactions through incentives for participation and coordination around a shared platform understanding. Because platforms bring together heterogeneous actors with diverging interests, governance mechanisms must adapt to evolving

interactions. Prior research confirms that governance in digital infrastructures relies on behavioral mechanisms that steer participation and sustain engagement (Hanisch et al., 2023). Governance mechanisms also address two central challenges: securing central value capture and stabilizing the ecosystem. Their purpose is to create conditions under which ecosystem *stability* can be maintained over time. To enable collaboration among plural actors, governance mechanisms reduce uncertainty, align behaviors, and distribute value in sustainable ways. Crucially, as meta-organizations composed of semi-autonomous organizations and individuals, digital platforms grow through stabilization: by fostering a predictable field of interaction, ecosystems scale, generate value, and cultivate a shared identity (Thomas & Ritala, 2022). Hence, we propose:

P1: *Digital platform governance literature emphasizes behavior-oriented governance mechanisms that seek to contribute to stability between actors.*

By contrast, we found that in *social enterprise governance literature*, mechanisms formalize plurality, structure tensions, ensure inclusivity, and shape hybrid identity to manage plural goals. These functions point to a *structure-oriented* logic, whereby organizations uphold hybrid purposes through mechanisms such as legal codifications and managerial compositions. Because social enterprises pursue multiple goals, governance mechanisms provide the institutional scaffolding for decisions and operations. They hold social and economic goals together that might otherwise fragment the organization (Pache & Santos, 2013). Governance mechanisms also address two core challenges: managing persistent tensions and reprioritizing goals in response to shifting demands. Their role is to embed conditions that make *flexibility* between goals possible. These conditions enable organizations to balance economic viability with social mission while avoiding both mission drift and financial unsustainability. As single-entity organizations, social enterprises rely on flexibility achieved through structure: by accommodating multiple institutional logics within one organizational body, they preserve hybrid coherence (Cornforth, 2014). Therefore, we propose:

P2: *Social enterprise governance literature emphasizes structure-oriented governance mechanisms that seek to contribute to flexibility between goals.*

Digital platforms operating as social enterprises must manage actor heterogeneity, which is central to digital platforms, and goal plurality, which is fundamental to social enterprises. This combination calls for governance arrangements that are not substitutive but complementary, blending behavior-oriented and structure-oriented mechanisms in mutually

reinforcing ways. For socially operating platforms, stability between actors is essential, as value creation and mission fulfillment depend on the reliable participation of diverse contributors. Behavior-oriented mechanisms stabilize interactions by steering participation and aligning expectations. This is particularly important in purpose-driven platform settings, where actors often hold heterogeneous interests beyond purely economic motivations (Addo, 2022). Structure-oriented mechanisms can complement these by enhancing goal clarity and embedding procedural and distributive fairness through, for instance, charters, transparent rule allocation, or shared decision-making (Schrieck et al., 2017). In meta-organizational contexts, their locus shifts from coordinating employees within a hierarchical organization to regulating interactions among semi-autonomous actors at the ecosystem level. By providing shared reference points and legitimacy, such scaffolding attracts and retains contributors, which is critical for generating the network effects that underpin both economic and social value creation. Thus, we propose:

P3: *In digital platforms operating as social enterprises, behavior-oriented and structure-oriented governance mechanisms contribute to ecosystem stability.*

Digital platforms operating as social enterprises also need flexibility between goals. Their long-term viability depends on generating economic value through network effects while upholding the social mission that sustains legitimacy and participant commitment. Structure-oriented mechanisms provide the foundations for this balance, for example through cooperative ownership structures (Zhu & Marjanovic, 2021). In a meta-organizational setting such as digital platforms, however, flexibility must extend to the ecosystem level. Here, behavior-oriented mechanisms such as broadening or restricting access to platform resources translate flexibility into platform operations. They allow platform owners to adjust participation in line with strategic shifts, whether the emphasis needs to tilt toward social or economic goals (Sanner et al., 2025). In this way, behavior-oriented mechanisms can complement structure-oriented ones by providing the necessary re-coordination of central contributors around the platform's strategic focus. Therefore, we propose:

P4: *In digital platforms operating as social enterprises, behavior-oriented and structure-oriented governance mechanisms contribute to goal flexibility.*

The propositions stress the need for a complementary governance approach that integrates behavior-oriented and structure-oriented mechanisms to govern the complexity of actor and goal plurality.

6. Theoretical and practical contribution

This paper makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the governance of digital platforms that operate as social enterprises. Theoretically, the paper synthesizes two previously separate research streams by systematically analyzing and linking governance mechanisms in digital platforms and social enterprises. While platform research has focused on orchestrating plural actors to create economic value (Tiwana et al., 2010), and social enterprise literature has emphasized managing competing goals (Pache & Santos, 2013), this review bridges both perspectives. Applying insights from social enterprise governance enhances the understanding of governance in platform-based environments. It provides a novel foundation for theorizing how digital platforms can be governed when both actor heterogeneity and goal plurality must be managed simultaneously. Furthermore, we contribute to platform governance theory by developing a dual governance logic that explains how behavior-oriented and structure-oriented mechanisms jointly address governance challenges. Rather than viewing governance as a trade-off between generativity and control, we conceptualize it as an interplay between mechanisms that stabilize ecosystems and enable goal adaptation. In doing so, we extend prevailing models of platform governance that primarily emphasize growth, scale, and commercial coordination (Hanisch et al., 2023).

For practitioners, the study contributes to ongoing conversations on platform ecosystems as tools for addressing grand societal challenges. It supports the shift from growth-centric platform models toward digitally responsible, impact-oriented approaches. Specifically, the study provides actionable guidance for platform owners seeking to balance economic and social objectives. It highlights the complexity that arises when platforms operate as social enterprises, where governance challenges exceed typical settings. Owners are encouraged to complement behavior-oriented mechanisms used in meta-organizational platforms with structure-oriented mechanisms such as shared ownership arrangements or inclusive decision-making processes. Additionally, the findings guide policymakers concerned with platform accountability by showing how governance mechanisms can embed social objectives into digital infrastructures. Structural anchors such as legal forms or mandatory social impact measurement can guide policymakers to hold platform owners accountable to their social mission.

7. Limitations and future research

Despite the degree of systematicity, this review is not without limitations. First, while the review develops

conceptual propositions on the dual governance logic of socially operating digital platforms, it does not empirically assess how these logics are implemented or combined in practice. Future research should examine how behavior- and structure-oriented mechanisms function in socially operating platforms, how they interact, and under what conditions they support the governance of diverse actors and the alignment of plural goals. Second, while we build on the analogy between social enterprises as single-entity organizations and digital platforms as meta-organizations, we do not fully account for the structural differences between these forms. Future research should therefore examine how governance mechanisms translate when organizational boundaries shift from single entities to meta-organizations, and under what conditions such translations are effective. Third, the review is limited by its disciplinary scope. Despite a systematic search in IS and Strategic Management journals, relevant work from adjacent fields, such as regulatory studies, may have been overlooked. Interdisciplinary research could further deepen understanding of governance in digital platforms that operate as social enterprises.

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