Google-Uber-Amazon: Managing Platform Businesses

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Abstract
Ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft both skidded into the public markets in 2018. Rather than celebrating the two companies that disrupted the taxi industry, investors doubted their long-term potential and ability to turn profitable. The Mini-Seminar explores the business model behind these two companies and discusses its opportunities and risks. Both Uber and Lyft are matchmakers; they connect drivers with people needing a ride. Their business is providing a platform that facilitates users' interaction. The success and failure of these business models depend to a large degree on the number of people using the platform, the data generated, and the network effects between them. Understanding these "Platform Businesses," their unique challenges and competitive dynamics is crucial for students interested in a career in business. Platform businesses have a long history and face distinctive entrepreneurial challenges. The seminar will focus in particular on three of them: (1.) the issues when starting a platform business, (2.) different strategies for monetizing it, and (3.) the relationship between platform entrepreneurs and government regulators, which shape current debates from anti-trust legislation to labor laws. The course introduces concepts and frameworks to analyze platform business models and provides a foundation for strategic decision making in them. On day 1 we focus on how entrepreneurs start platform businesses, disrupting established industries and challenging existing regulation. On day 2, we explore monetization strategies for platforms and ask in which situations this business model is most successful. Through case discussions and experiential exercises, students learn to systematically evaluate the entrepreneurial, technological and public policy context for the future of platform businesses.

Faculty Biography
Christina Lubinski is a professor at USC's Lloyd Greif Center for Entrepreneurial Studies. She teaches the undergraduate courses "Founder's Dilemma" about relationship problems in early-stage startups and "Entrepreneurial Imagination" about the long-term impact of entrepreneurship on society and innovation. Prior to joining USC, Christina held appointments at Harvard Business School and Copenhagen Business School.