

**Strategic African alliances: success drivers in platform economies**

20820242

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy.

29 November 2021

## **Abstract**

High expectations exist for Africa's ability to harness the digital wave, while simultaneously making vast developmental strides forward as a result. This qualitative study establishes the key drivers of success in understudied African platform economies and ascertains the developmental contribution of these platform economies to the continent. Findings from engaging twelve established and emerging African platforms with a total operational coverage in twenty African countries reveal the following:

African platform definition of success is shifting gradually towards a shared prosperity model. The underlying African business environment in which platforms exist is largely inhibitive due to infrastructural and regulatory inadequacies, hence the key success drivers for platforms lie in the contextual capabilities of the platform.

African platforms are internally motivated to contribute to continental development, typically as a business imperative, and are not uninfluenced by external developmental agendas such as the UN SDGs. African platform contribution to sustainable development is limited, by topic and by continental impact, and will meet high developmental expectations in the current inhibitive business environment. While a few platforms are strategically committed to developmental outcomes, the developmental impact of African platforms is, overall, inadequately monitored.

## **Keywords**

African platform economy

Capabilities

Inhibitors

Success

Sustainable development

## **Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Sandra TERERAI

29 November 2021

## **Abbreviations**

CSRI - Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives

IP - Intellectual Property

RQ - Research Question

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

UN - United Nations

## **Index of Figures**

Figure 1: Literature Roadmap.....	- 5 -
Figure 2: A Conceptual Model of Coopetition .....	- 12 -
Figure 3: Streamlined Code to Theory Model - Qualitative Inquiry.....	- 25 -
Figure 4: Code Saturation Curves: Bar and Lines .....	- 30 -

## **Index of Tables**

Table 1: Digital Business Models - Success Factors .....	- 6 -
Table 2: Market Scan of Established African Platforms .....	- 21 -
Table 3: Market Scan of Emerging African Platforms .....	- 22 -
Table 4: Research Participant and Platform Overview.....	- 29 -
Table 5: Research Code Saturation Table.....	- 30 -
Table 6: RQ1 Themes and Sub-Themes: African Platform Success Factors.....	- 31 -
Table 7: RQ2 Themes and Sub-Themes: Sustainable Development Contribution..	- 54 -
Table 8: Discussion Flow or Format .....	- 70 -

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Keywords.....	iii
Declaration.....	iv
Abbreviations .....	v
Index of Figures .....	vi
Index of Tables .....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
1. Chapter 1: Introduction.....	- 1 -
1.1. Business Relevance: Background to the research problem.....	- 1 -
1.2. Theoretical Relevance: Definition of the research problem.....	- 2 -
1.3. Research Question .....	- 3 -
2. Chapter 2: Theory, Theorising and Literature Review.....	- 4 -
2.1. Digital Models and Platforms.....	- 5 -
2.2. Success Factors: Digital Business Models .....	- 6 -
2.2.1. Success Inhibitors .....	- 7 -
2.3. Value: Developmental Contribution .....	- 8 -
2.3.1. Social and Economic Development.....	- 8 -
2.3.2. Environmental Development .....	- 9 -
2.3.3. Regulatory Understanding.....	- 9 -
2.4. Reconciling success and sustainable development.....	- 9 -
2.4.1. Theoretical Analysis .....	- 10 -
2.5. Research Anchor .....	- 12 -
3. Chapter 3: Research Question .....	- 13 -
3.1. Research Direction: Literature Consolidation .....	- 13 -
4. Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design .....	- 16 -

4.1.	Research Methodology .....	- 16 -
4.1.1.	Philosophical Foundations .....	- 17 -
4.1.2.	Methodological Assumptions.....	- 17 -
4.2.	Research Setting.....	- 18 -
4.2.1.	Level of Analysis .....	- 18 -
4.2.2.	Sampling Protocol.....	- 18 -
4.3.	Research Design and Method.....	- 23 -
4.3.1.	Data Gathering.....	- 23 -
4.3.2.	Data Analysis .....	- 24 -
4.3.3.	Quality and Rigour .....	- 25 -
4.3.4.	Methodological Limitations .....	- 26 -
4.3.5.	Ethical Considerations .....	- 26 -
5.	Chapter 5: Findings.....	- 28 -
5.1.	Research Participants .....	- 28 -
5.1.1.	Analysis Groups.....	- 29 -
5.1.2.	Code Saturation Curve.....	- 30 -
5.2.	RQ1: Platform Success Factors .....	- 31 -
5.2.1.	Decoding Success .....	- 33 -
5.2.2.	Africa: Underlying Business Inhibitors .....	- 34 -
5.2.3.	Key Enabling Capabilities.....	- 39 -
5.3.	RQ2: Sustainable Development Contribution .....	- 54 -
5.3.1.	Organisational Motivators for a Sustainable Development Focus.....	- 55 -
5.3.2.	Sustainable Development Contribution .....	- 61 -
5.3.3.	Impact Monitoring.....	- 67 -
5.4.	Conclusion .....	- 69 -
6.	Chapter 6: Discussion .....	- 70 -

6.1.	RQ1: Platform Success Factors .....	- 71 -
6.1.1.	Decoding Success .....	- 71 -
6.1.2.	Africa: Underlying Business Inhibitors .....	- 72 -
6.1.3.	Key Enabling Capabilities.....	- 75 -
6.2.	RQ2: Sustainable Development Contribution .....	- 83 -
6.2.1.	Organisational Motivators for a Sustainable Development Focus.....	- 83 -
6.2.2.	Sustainable Development Contribution .....	- 87 -
6.2.3.	Impact Monitoring.....	- 91 -
6.3.	Conclusion .....	- 91 -
7.	Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	- 92 -
7.1.	Principal Theoretical Conclusions .....	- 92 -
7.1.1.	African Platform Economy Success Factors.....	- 92 -
7.1.2.	African Platform Contribution to Sustainable Development .....	- 94 -
7.2.	Research Contribution.....	- 95 -
7.2.1.	Academic Contribution .....	- 95 -
7.2.2.	Practitioner Recommendations .....	- 96 -
7.3.	Research Limitations.....	- 98 -
7.4.	Future Academic Research.....	- 98 -
	References .....	- 99 -
	Appendices .....	- 104 -
A1.	Consistency Matrix .....	- 104 -
A2.	Company Profile Form.....	- 105 -
A3.	Interview Protocol.....	- 106 -
A4.	Assessment Matrix: Non-verbal Communication .....	- 110 -
A5.	Register of Raw Data and Consent Documents.....	- 111 -

## **1. Chapter 1: Introduction**

This research is an exploratory research question on platform economies as a digital business model (Vallas & Schor, 2020) and the related drivers of firm success and developmental contribution, in the context of Africa and corporate strategy. Various authors look at different success factors for platform enterprises, which are widely claimed to have the potential to revolutionise established markets whilst promoting a near-infallible competitive advantage (Shaughnessy, 2016). This is coupled with an inquiry of how platforms contribute to matters of societal and global interest such as regulation and development (de Reuver et al., 2018), with a view to identify potential intersection areas for academic research on platform economies and developmental contribution. Following on from the literature review, a research methodology is proposed for the research focus which is captured in the research question: "How do African platform economies succeed and contribute to the development of the continent?" This research aims to contribute to academic, industry and policy discourse by shedding light on the evolution of successful digital platforms in Africa and their subsequent contribution to community development in the Global South (Bonina et al., 2021).

### **1.1. Business Relevance: Background to the research problem**

Digital technologies are redefining what business competitiveness means through new ways of value creation, delivery, and capture. Key motivators for the adoption of digital business model are typically maximization of revenues through customer engagement and cost reduction (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). In the face of the global economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, platform companies are visibly faring better than most and it would be folly to not consider how to participate in this segment – either by building platforms, participating in them, or both (Choudary et al., 2020). That said, the benefits of digital business models are contextual and differs among industries e.g. retailing, manufacturing, internet, health, and television broadcasting (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). Altman & Tushman (2017) advocate that academic enquiry on digital business model transition considerations i.e., entire or hybrid transitions, and the associated strategic leadership challenges will assist entities contemplating transition to a platform economy.

Parallel to the global corporate interest in digital business models (Lehdonvirta et al., 2019), is the fact that despite Africa's increasing global business importance, very little is known about the continent (Barnard et al., 2017). Unrestricted by lack of robust infrastructure and systems, and propelled by a resourceful youth, the continent is a notable participant in the digital platform economy (Choudary et al., 2020). Though Africa's platform economy consequently requires broad interventions to fully thrive, it is argued that Africa can take a lead on this operating model with much progress already being shown (Choudary et al., 2020).

This research will thus contribute to business by providing insights that propel the imperative growth of more platform economies in Africa, especially among the entrepreneurial youth seeking valuable economic opportunities through technology. Platforms are widely acknowledged as an important locus of entrepreneurial opportunity (Zysman & Kenney, 2018). Additionally, policy makers and investors will benefit from the same insights to inform and dedicate resources and support structures to areas that actively aid socio-economic growth through the thriving platform entities.

## **1.2. Theoretical Relevance: Definition of the research problem**

The social and economic impact of digitization is broad yet on the other hand, the empirical assessment of its value is difficult and complex to achieve (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). Added to the lack of conceptual clarity on specific digital business models is the lack of academic qualification of the developmental impact of such business models in the geographic regions they operate (Davies et al., 2017). The conceptual model of co-competition offered by (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) offers an anchoring framework that brings together two sets of academic research on success factors of digital platform economies and on the developmental contribution of platform economies. The co-competition mechanisms proposed as necessary to achieve value outcomes at firm and broader level (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) can be paralleled to the success factors required for platforms to thrive. The joint value creation and value destruction outcomes, which are also referred to as the dark side of platforms (Bonina et al., 2021), can be paralleled to the developmental contribution of the platform economies.

The digitization phenomenon is a dynamic area of great interest and so there is opportunity for research to contribute to business and social development by shedding

light on digital business models challenges, as well as guidance on how to expedite successful development of both organisational practice and theory (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018).

Existing academic discourse calls for the identification of context specific themes which could expose the complex context that African entities exist in and their strategic responses including recasting cultural and institutional distance, and new hybrid organizational forms (Barnard et al., 2017). (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018) suggests that different combinations of factors influencing firm success can be explored simultaneously and further applied to entrepreneurial entities who have not been the subject of extensive attention in management studies (George et al., 2016)

This research will thus contribute to our understanding of the relevance of existing management theory in Africa, as well as extend or modify these existing management theories specific to platform economies as a digital business model. Secondly, the research will also offer a baseline contribution to the ongoing generation of new theory and frameworks that could shed new light on pressing problems that are prevalent in, if not unique to, Africa (George et al., 2016).

### **1.3. Research Question**

Titled 'Strategic African alliances: success drivers in platform economies', this research seeks to answer the question: How do African platform economies succeed and contribute to the development of the continent?

Research questions can be predictive, explanatory, comparative, improvement focused or descriptive (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). A description of phenomenon approach is taken in this research. Potential sectors identified to explore within the scope of the research are platform success stories as widely cited in both business and academic literature are retail, financial services, healthcare, and telecommunications (Choudary et al., 2020).

---

## **2. Chapter 2: Theory, Theorising and Literature Review**

(Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018) posits that it is important to establish taxonomy in a way that provides a baseline pillar to position future academic research on digital business models. On this basis, a wide range of literature is reviewed to glean an appreciation of the existing expanse of terminology related to digital business models. This is to foster pinpointing of a reference business model and its possible success factors to anchor the research focus on.

To appreciate the current academic debate on the value that platforms economies bring beyond economic value to firm owners (Bonina et al., 2021), recent literature and research agendas for this topic are reviewed. Various authors from various fields allude to the almost total lack of research on this dynamic (Bonina et al., 2021) (Morell et al., 2020), which is only amplified by the broadness and lack of clear concepts on the topic of digital platforms itself (Davies et al., 2017) (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). Concentration of current literary publications on African platforms, of which a large number are on South Africa, affirm the need for an alignment of terms and focus areas for platform research (Penu, 2020).

Figure 1 visualises the main literature clusters that have been considered in this research, which are success drivers for digital business models and platforms for sustainable development. These clusters are juxtaposed against the research theoretical framework and research questions to ensure relevance and alignment.

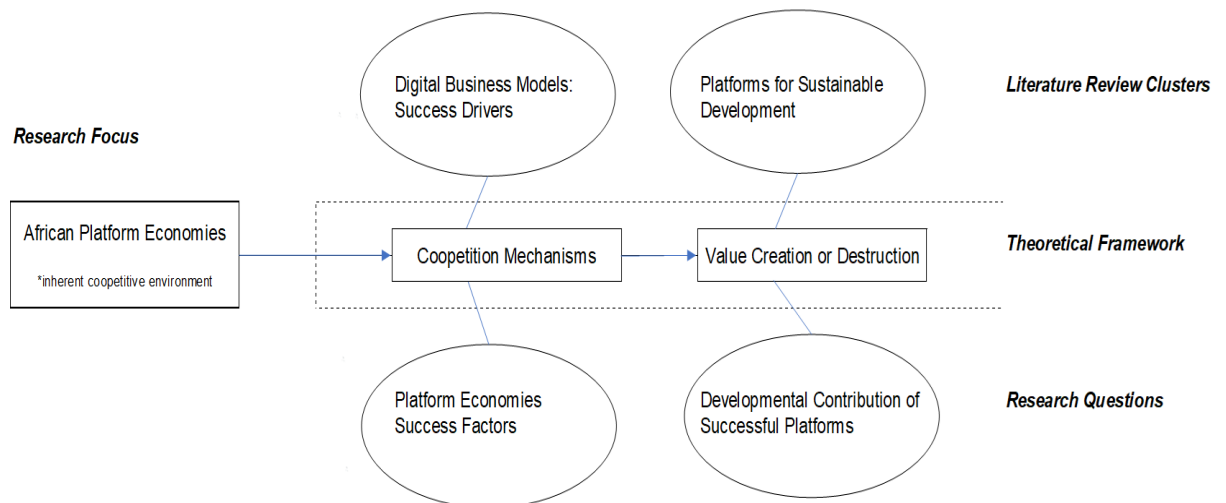


Figure 1: Literature Roadmap

(\*Consolidated by the author)

## 2.1. Digital Models and Platforms

Various types of digital models are briefly discussed below before being paired with success factors in the literature review table that follows, Table 1 in section 2.1.

Jacobides et al. (2018) offer an ecosystem theory with three possibilities, two being: innovation ecosystems that are born around a particular innovation, and platform ecosystems where different entities organise around a platform. In understanding how to thrive in platform economies, Butner (2019) suggests that the right questions to ask should be on the secrets to successfully leveraging platforms, AI and other digital technologies, as well as winning strategies. Shaughnessy (2016), however, argues that foundational understanding of platform business models is poor and lacks a critical mass of deep insights on the complex digital and strategic components of 'ecosystems'. Added to this, is the assertion that the ultimate definition of an actualised platform-based business model is not a universal given despite their ability to transcend traditional geographic boundaries (Davies et al., 2017), but rather that such a definition would mean different things in different market contexts (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). Other views also further call for both policy makers and business owners to engage in relevant empirical research to map out desired and feasible alternatives for the future of the platform economy in all its promise (Dufva et al., 2017).

## 2.2. Success Factors: Digital Business Models

Appreciating the overlap between the platform economy and digital business models, success factors for various digital business models were reviewed and consolidated for ease of analysis in Table 1. Various similarities and nuanced differences were observed depending on the specific digital business model.

Trust considerations, for example, are typically cited in the context of the digital sharing economy, with a lens being cast on matters such as privacy, security, shared value, fulfilment reliability and service recovery (Reardon et al., 2021). On the other hand, literature on certain competitive digital strategy aspects such as the issue of hardware and who controls it (Ikeda & Marshall, 2019) is reviewed and contrasted with literature on the understudied topic of ownership in the virtual platform world (Zhou et al., 2018).

*Table 1: Digital Business Models - Success Factors*

<b>Terminologies Used</b>	<b>Factors Identified</b>	<b>Author/References</b>
<b>Sharing economy; Prosumers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customers as effective providers and consumers;</li> <li>- Trusting business model;</li> <li>- Open mindset;</li> <li>- Win-win situation;</li> <li>- Added value;</li> <li>- Sharing goods and services, digital content;</li> <li>- Urbanity; as well as Changed living conditions</li> </ul>	(Richter et al., 2017)
<b>Platforms; Open/ user innovation; Ecosystems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased external focus;</li> <li>- Greater openness;</li> <li>- Enabling interactions;</li> <li>- Interaction-centric metrics</li> </ul>	(Altman & Tushman, 2017)
<b>Platform-based business models; Disruptive Innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating new entities around asset leverage;</li> <li>- Large transaction engines (money flow);</li> <li>- Externalization and advocacy through ecosystems and superior user experience design;</li> <li>- Breaking the scale barrier;</li> </ul>	(Shaughnessy, 2016)

	- Unlocking new organisational core competencies	
<b>Digital Platforms; Competitive Strategies</b>	- Customer experience; - Strategic use of data; - Service platform; - Hardware (and who controls it) *Different factor combinations possible	(Ikeda & Marshall, 2019)
<b>Ecosystems; Partners; Platforms</b>	- Platform roles: Experience provider, Technology provider, Asset provider; - Collaboration dynamics	(Berman et al., 2018)
<b>Digital Winners</b>	- Navigate digital ecosystems and platforms; - Build trust; - Reimagine customer behaviour; - Curate data; - Create an exponential learning environment; - Cultivate inclusive culture	(Butner, 2019)
<b>Extreme Trust; Competitive Advantage</b>	- Seeing opportunities to create customer value; - Going extra mile to ensure customers does not make errors or overlook benefits; - Not failing to act on opportunities that would give customers significant benefits	(Peppers & Rogers, 2013)
<b>Co-opetition; Simultaneous competition &amp; cooperation</b>	- Mutual pursuits; - Safeguarded resources; - Leverage of resources; - Relevant commitments	(Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018)

(\*Consolidated by the author)

### 2.2.1. Success Inhibitors

While there is a plethora of literature on success factors for various digital models, typically within the realm of operational control or at least response of the digital company, it is worth considering whether there are factors which actively derail the success agenda. In the context of digital entrepreneurship in Africa, it is mandatory to

first and foremost acknowledge Africa as a continent with very distinct country contexts that cannot be casually generalised (Friederici et al., 2020).

### **2.3. Value: Developmental Contribution**

Literature asserts that the current academic discourse on platforms must extend to the impact that such business models have on societal and global issues such as regulation, industry transformation and impact on everyday life (de Reuver et al., 2018). While there are tall expectations with regards to the potential impact of platform economies on the quality of human life as advocated for by the SDG's (Morell et al., 2020), it is argued that, at this stage, this is very much a "politics of hope" (Davies et al., 2017). This is amidst warnings that there is a less savoury side to platforms that has seen the disruption of labour markets, costing ordinary citizens their livelihoods and exacerbating inequality (Bonina et al., 2021). The notion of extractive platform capitalism is discussed in literature (Morell et al., 2020) where firms appropriate financial and economic value for themselves amidst governmental concerns on inability to regulate and protect consumers, tax evasions and more, such as witnessed with uber platforms such as Uber (Davies et al., 2017). Zysman & Kenney (2018) question whether the proliferation of platform economies is not ushering in a new class of elite citizens that are able to benefit from the same.

#### **2.3.1. Social and Economic Development**

Despite the divided academic opinions on the developmental contribution of platform businesses, strong arguments have also been made specifically advocating for the positive developmental contribution of platforms. Davies et al. (2017) asserts that the value contribution can be directly linked to the exact type of digital platform business model. In considering the potential contribution that platforms can make to sustainable development, it is useful to note that such contributions are likely to differ from one platform to the next (Morell et al., 2020). Emerging empirical studies suggest that by design, collaborative and inclusive platforms are posed to inherently contribute to sustainable development, and specifically the SDG clusters of social and economic impact (Morell et al., 2020), while on the other hand contributions to governance and data dimensions are not so pronounced in the SDGs themselves (Morell et al., 2020). Employment creation, an easily identifiable economic impact, via platform service

provision has the potential to enhance worker livelihoods, and yet at the same time pose some risks to digital worker livelihoods (Graham et al., 2017). Risks that could undermine the evident rewards of digital worker livelihoods on platforms include the lack of a worker's voice, such as in unions, difficulty to build ranked profiles and potential exposure to discrimination by employers (Graham et al., 2017).

### **2.3.2. Environmental Development**

Turning to climate change, research on the sustainable development agenda in Africa laments that while environmental preservation is central to the continent's growth, the daily reality is one of uninhibited, perpetual environmental mismanagement (Omisore, 2018). There is a need for stakeholders to make a concerted effort to identify and hold each other accountable for an environmental sustainability agenda which forms about half of the SDG topics (Omisore, 2018).

### **2.3.3. Regulatory Understanding**

Policy makers and regulators on the continent appear to be on the back foot with regards to being able to simultaneously exploit the opportunities presented by platforms while addressing the risks of an extractive capitalist platform economy (Rossotto et al., 2018). On the basis of an understanding of the specific context of African platforms, policy makers and regulators are encouraged to design enabling tools for platform players such as mandating the right to own (Zhou et al., 2018) and transfer personal or organisational information from one platform to the next without requiring platform owner authorisation (data portability), tax incentives and technology subsidies for platform entrepreneurs, local partnership tax breaks for international companies and bridging the internet access gap amongst regular citizens who may be further marginalised with the proliferation of a digital platform economy (Rossotto et al., 2018).

## **2.4. Reconciling success and sustainable development**

International empirical research on the relationship between sustainable development and organisational financial performance suggests that companies with higher levels of financial performance comparatively dedicated more resources to environmental, social

development issues which inevitably causes increased financial performance due to increased reputation and improved stakeholder relations (Martínez-Ferrero & Frías-Aceituno, 2015). While this makes the case for business executives to take investments in sustainable development as investments in organisational performance, limitations to international study of listed international companies may be their inapplicability in the specific context of African countries and organisations (Martínez-Ferrero & Frías-Aceituno, 2015).

#### **2.4.1. Theoretical Analysis**

A plethora of literature mostly touching the surface of topics related to digital business models exists. Literature on the developmental contribution of such business models beyond shareholder gains is however distinctly limited. Platforms, open/ user innovation, and ecosystems represent closely related and oftentimes overlapping strategies that enable external entities to create and capture value (Altman & Tushman, 2017). In the context of business strategy, ecosystems can present as umbrella structures that encompass both platform and open innovation strategies – primarily because firms that manage platform and open innovation strategies inherently create and manage related ecosystems (Altman & Tushman, 2017). Platform strategies are understood to be a specific type of ecosystem strategy where an identified platform manager facilitates interactions and transactions between different members (Berman et al., 2018).

Regardless of the digital business model and/ or strategy suggested, several recurring themes emerge in the proposed success factors for the aspiring 'digital' entity. Key among them being proactive and ongoing realisation of customer value, strategic curation and use of data, fostering an inclusive and exponential learning culture, breaking the scale barrier, building trust and leveraging assigned roles to the capabilities of the firm.

Contribution of platform economies to sustainable development is barely researched beyond the economic value to firms and customer value delivery. Connections to development are weakly implied e.g. in areas of labour creation and opening access to previously unattainable resources. These connections are overwhelmed with misgivings on the unregulated nature of platform economies and inequality wedges created through extractive capitalism.



## 2.5. Research Anchor

To link the two areas of success factors and the developmental impact of platforms, the conceptual model of coopetition (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) is used as a framework.

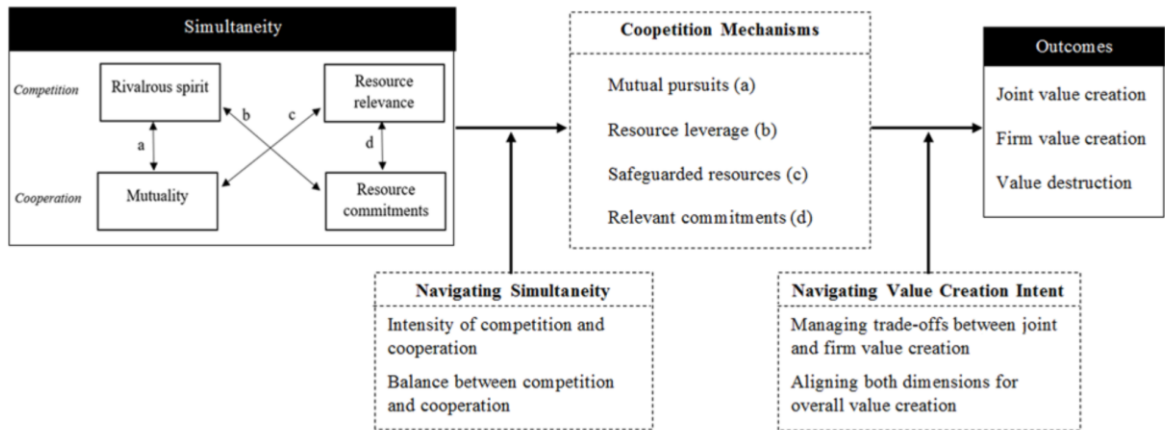


Figure 2: A Conceptual Model of Coopetition

(\*Source: Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018)

The study highlights the nuances of entities that are in a constant state of both competition and cooperation known as coopetition, a dynamic which is prevalent in most platform business models with various sharing mechanisms (Davies et al., 2017). The coopetition mechanisms proposed as necessary to achieve value outcomes (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) can be paralleled to the platform success factors while the value creation and value destruction outcomes can be paralleled to the developmental contribution of the entity. The evolution of platform economies for development in the global South is an understudied area which if explored provides references that can be compared to the Global North (Bonina et al., 2021). This research will contribute to contextual understanding of the theoretical framework by surfacing the success factors that allow platform economies to thrive in an ecosystem where coopetition is central to engagement. The notion of joint value creation will also be enriched by identification of specific developmental contributions made by African platform economies.

---

### **3. Chapter 3: Research Question**

This chapter consolidates and reconciles the literature in the second chapter with the research question posed in the first chapter. A detailed research focus is presented as captured in the research questions defined.

#### **3.1. Research Direction: Literature Consolidation**

The review of literature exposes that there are numerous drivers for success in platform economies as a digital business model, however existing literature authors suggest that there is a lack of depth in understanding the multiple complexities and obscure intertwined concepts in this space (Bonina et al., 2021). Additionally, the exponential growth and popularity of platform economies comes with great, if unproven, expectations of their impactful contribution to the welfare of communities against any number of developmental goals (Morell et al., 2020). Research opportunity exists in exploring platform success drivers and anchoring study of these in a specific market, industry, or geographical region, while simultaneously interrogating the developmental impact of these platforms in their respective jurisdictions.

Barnard et al. (2017) provokes that it is worth questioning established theories and current conceptions of management research in their applications to the context of Africa, because researchers to date have hardly comprehended the actual situation in the continent. By researching African business, this research will attempt to understand some limitations of existing research theories and stress the importance of developing new continental knowledge on platforms as a digital business model, their success factors (Barnard et al., 2017), and overall contribution to the sustainable development agenda (Morell et al., 2020).

As pre-empted in the introductory chapter, this research thus aims to establish the key drivers of success in African platform economies and to ascertain the developmental contribution of these platform economies to the continent. The exploratory research centres around the question “How do African platform economies succeed and contribute to the development of the continent?”

Research questions can be predictive, explanatory, comparative, improvement focused or descriptive (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). A description of phenomenon approach is taken in this research. Sectors identified to explore with platform success stories as widely cited in both business and academic literature are retail, financial services, healthcare, and telecommunications (Choudary et al., 2020).

**Research Problem Statement:**

This research aims to establish the key drivers of success in African platform economies and to ascertain the developmental contribution of these platform economies to the continent.

**Sub-Problem 1:** Establish the key drivers of success in African platform economies.

**Sub-Question 1:** What are the key drivers of success in African platform economies?

This sub-problem addresses the lack of research on the drivers that have led to or been instrumental in the success of African-born platform economies (Barnard et al., 2017). There is a gap in terms of scholarly understanding of the factors that lead to success in platform economies in a broader set of industries, markets and even geographies (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018). The evolution of platform business models in the Global North has been widely studied (Bonina et al., 2021), and the factors contributing to the success of a range of digital business models have been identified (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) (Altman & Tushman, 2017). What is now needed is more academic understanding of these dynamics in the context of African platform economies (Barnard et al., 2017).

**Sub-Problem 2:** Ascertain the developmental contribution of successful African platform economies to the continent.

**Sub-Question 2:** What has been the developmental contribution of successful African platform economies?

This sub-question addresses the lack of academic research on the developmental impact of organisational digitisation, such as through platform economies, on the overall development of community (Davies et al., 2017). This identification of community can be

at a city, national, regional, continental, or global level. There is a global gap in terms of scholarly understanding of the developmental impact of platform ecosystems (Bonina et al., 2021). Specific case studies on the value contribution or lack thereof, have been carried out for unicorn platforms such as Uber and Amazon (Zysman & Kenney, 2018). Arguably theoretical propositions for the potential developmental impact of platform businesses have already been made (Morell et al., 2020); hence what is now needed is a specific examination of whether platform economy successes in Africa have had a tangible contribution to the development of communities therein (Davies et al., 2017).

---

## **4. Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design**

Appreciating that this research is anchored in the discipline of social sciences, this chapter details the research methodology and design for the research focus detailed in Chapter 3. An effort was made to surface the research assumptions about the nature of the reality of African platform economies being studied and how this reality should be studied (Bell et al., 2019) to contribute to the ongoing academic discourse and potentially business practice (Corley & Gioia, 2011) as well as unearthing connections to aid sustainable development (Morell et al., 2020).

### **4.1. Research Methodology**

(Bell et al., 2019) postulates that whatever the original trigger for research inquiry, research data only make a knowledge contribution or hold significance when they are matched to (existing) theoretical concerns. At the same time, business research continues to suffer from significant methodological limitations and gaps that hinder development (Crane, Henriques & Husted, 2018).

Traditional social science research literature views the approaches to gaining knowledge and explaining experiences on/ as a continuum from subjectivist to objectivist, based on the assumptions about reality and human nature (Cunliffe, 2011). Cunliffe (2011) proposes that it is more valuable to view the approaches as distinct but overlapping knowledge problematics – intersubjectivism, subjectivism, objectivism – with distinct ontological and epistemological assumptions and relationship to prevalent research methods.

This research study was well aligned with the subjectivism problematic where social realities and relationships are contextual between people and their environment, and shared meanings are specific to time and place; yet they are experienced as objective, stable, and simultaneously open to change (Cunliffe, 2011). In a context where there is limited management research on the African continent, let alone specifically platform economies, the position to define exploratory research questions in an inductive approach was taken. While most inductive research strategies will not typically result in the development of distinct theory as anticipated, but rather empirical generalisations (Bell et al., 2019) this approach afforded the opportunity for the 'best' explanation to be

made from the data collected for African platform economy's success factors and developmental contribution.

#### **4.1.1. Philosophical Foundations**

Shifting to philosophical foundations, the constructionism ontology was assumed to ask the following question: "How do African platform economies succeed and contribute to the development of the continent?". Researchers have argued for the need to shift from research as a mere scientific technique to learning the craft of research where there is a more exploratory expression of embedded and aesthetic forms of knowledge typical of some subjectivist problematics (Cunliffe, 2011).

If the 'ontological what' was biased towards the assertion that reality is constantly being defined, navigated and revised by its social actors i.e. social constructivism (Bell et al., 2019), it follows that the 'epistemological how' we gain knowledge of that reality was an interpretivism assumption that sought to understand (Bell et al., 2019) the context and dynamics of African platform economies as opposed to explaining them against criteria determined in a different, specifically Western, context. Using an interpretive approach enabled a macro or micro level focus to be taken as needed and for knowledge to be gathered from organic actions, interactions and conversations (Cunliffe, 2011). Without negating the crucial need for rigor, validity, and legitimacy, an interpretive approach also allowed an elusive balance of rigour and beauty (Cunliffe, 2011) where authentic African discourse on organisational success and value contribution was captured through the lens of topical platform economies.

#### **4.1.2. Methodological Assumptions**

To produce coherent and valuable research output, the choice of methodology or research strategy was informed by ontological and epistemological assumptions (Bono & McNamara, 2011). Given a social constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, the most appropriate methodological assumption to take was one of qualitative research (Bell et al., 2019). Qualitative research is a research strategy typically placing emphasis on words and images in data gathering and analysis, as opposed to quantification. This research focus embodied this approach in the exploration of the relationship between digital platform economy theory and research in the African business landscape. It inherently rejected a positivist approach by focusing on how management individuals within successful African platforms interpreted their drivers and

developmental contribution as well as appreciating that this reality was very much in constant iterative existence (Bell et al., 2019).

## **4.2. Research Setting**

The broad research setting was successful platform economies in Africa, a continent understood to be no laggard in the digital platform economy (Choudary et al., 2020). The potential sectors explored, as widely cited in both business and academic literature, were retail, financial services, healthcare, and telecommunications (Choudary et al., 2020). The African mobile-money market gave a shining example of the successful convergence of multiple sectors including telecommunications, financial services, energy and banks. Encouraging developments that spoke to the potential of platform economies included the launch of the eWTP5 (Electronic World Trade Platform) service in Rwanda, Safaricom's Kenyan-born M-Pesa, and New York-listed Jumia which is Africa's leading multi-national ecommerce player (Choudary et al., 2020).

### **4.2.1. Level of Analysis**

The level of analysis of this research i.e. primary unit of measurement and analysis (Bell et al., 2019) was the organisation, specifically organisations that identified or were identified as digital platform economies. The specific unit of analysis was the perception of individuals in management positions at these organisations that were engaged during data gathering.

### **4.2.2. Sampling Protocol**

A key step in this qualitative research was selecting relevant sites and subjects (Bell et al., 2019). The research focused on African-born entities that utilised a platform business model and had demonstrated success in their endeavours as demonstrated by their sustained market presence, market share, revenue and continental footprint. For the sampling criteria to match the research need (Bell et al., 2019) the sample population was drawn from industries that were believed to be poised for turnkey transition to the platform economy in Africa such as retail, healthcare, financial services, and telecommunications (Choudary et al., 2020). For research practicality, the focus was on English-speaking sub-Saharan Africa entities.

Non-probability purposive sampling was applied to pinpoint the most relevant organisations for the study as well as the specific people to be engaged. Depending on the size of the entity, targeted participants were the founder or C-suite managers i.e. executives with a broad range of responsibility and insight into the mechanism of the business such as the Chief Executive, Operations, Strategy or Commercial Officers. Specifically, typical case sampling was applied to select successful platform organisations (Bell et al., 2019) while theoretical sampling was employed to iteratively identify the designations of staff within those organisations that could best contribute to the data gathering process (Bell et al., 2019) on organisational success factors and developmental contribution. While unlikely due to time constraints, the opportunity to extend the theoretical sampling to customers and external stakeholders such as industry and development experts was planned for where relevant themes emerged from initial interviews.

An interesting notion is presented that while qualitative study samples were pitched as purposive, published qualitative studies typically have at least twenty to thirty interviews as a minimum (Bell et al., 2019). That said, (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006) offers a case-based assertion that theoretical saturation is in fact achieved within the first twelve interviews while metathemes could already be derived from as early as six interviews. As such, a minimum of thirteen interviews were targeted for this research; subject to refinement together with the theoretical frame, and the questions that comprised the interview protocol – a phenomena typical in qualitative research (Bell et al., 2019). Saturation was achieved in this research as shown by the saturation curve presented in section 5.1.2.

Table 2 and 3 provides a listing of eighteen top performing African platform organisations across six market sectors that were selected as a consolidation from several sources. A minimum of two executives per organisation for a minimum of half i.e., six of the shortlisted companies were targeted as minimum number of interviewees for the research.

Several sources were used to identify commercial for-profit African platforms, of note being:

- The Centre for Global Enterprise (2016) – The Rise of African Platforms – a Regional Survey. This report gave the top 42 platforms in Africa and the countries they had reach in as well as the sectors of operation.
- App Annie which provided the top-performing apps on mobile across high-growth segments and pivotal markets in each region – on a quarterly basis. Data was accessed in this platform for Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa markets from July to November 2021.
- The Alexa Top Sites service provided access to lists of websites which were ordered by the Alexa Traffic Rank. Using the API, traffic rankings were retrieved for sites across a broad range of popularity metrics including the number of pageviews the site received per million users, the average pageviews per user, and the percentage of internet users visiting the site. Data was accessed in this platform for Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa markets from July to November 2021.
- Standard Bank Report (2020) – Can Africa take the platform economy forward?
- insight2impact Report (2020) – Africa’s Digital Platforms: Overview of emerging trends in the market. This report studied the performance of digital platforms in Africa between 2018 and 2019, detailing the active and non-active ones while differentiating between the homegrown and foreign platforms.
- TechCrunch and CrunchBase which provided current updates on technology company movements of particular interest being investments and market growth updates.

To further select for African platforms that could be identified as successful, various publicly available performance stats were reviewed and collated from July to November 2021 to filter for active African platforms.

- App Downloads: Total number of app downloads on PlayStore and AppStore, for all country apps where applicable e.g. JiJi.
- App Position: App performance position on PlayStore and AppStore, in the country of app/ platform origin as ranked on App Amie.
- Site Position: Web performance position, in the country of origin as ranked on Amazon’s Alexa Top Site.
- Monthly Users: Average monthly users on platform as ranked by insight2impact, 2020.
- Investment: Number and size of successful funding rounds as availed on TechCrunch and Crunchbase.

Table 2: Market Scan of Established African Platforms

<b>Sector Metric</b>	<b>Retail eCommerce</b>	<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Classifieds</b>	<b>Money</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Logistics</b>
	<b>Row # 1</b>					
<i>Platform/ Organisation</i>	<b>Jumia</b>	<b>SweepSouth</b>	<b>JiJi (ex. OLX)</b>	<b>M-Pesa</b>	<b>Iroko TV</b>	<b>Kobo360</b>
<i>Exchange Platform Type</i>	Product Marketplace	Service Marketplace	Product Marketplace	Payment Platform	Content Platform	Service Marketplace
<i>Delivery Channel</i>	Web App	Web App	Web App	Mobile App	Web App	Web
<i>Continental Footprint</i>	Multiple – 7	Multiple - 3	Multiple - 5	Multiple - 7	Multiple - 19	Multiple - 7
	<b>Row # 2</b>					
<i>Platform/ Organisation</i>	<b>Takealot</b>	<b>Brighter Monday</b>	<b>Gumtree</b>	<b>Kopo Kopo</b>	<b>Multichoice</b>	<b>Sendy</b>
<i>Exchange Platform Type</i>	Product Marketplace	Service Marketplace	Product & Service Marketplace	Service Marketplace	Content Platform	Service Marketplace
<i>Delivery Channel</i>	Web App	Web App	Web App	Web App	Web App: DStv, Showmax, SuperSport	Web App
<i>Continental Footprint</i>	South Africa - 1	Multiple - 2	South Africa - 1	Kenya - 1	Multiple - 11	Multiple - 4

(\*Consolidated by the author)

Table 3: Market Scan of Emerging African Platforms

<b>Sector Metric</b>	<b>Retail eCommerce</b>	<b>Classifieds</b>	<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Retail eCommerce</b>	<b>Money</b>
	<b>Row # 1</b>					
<i>Platform/ Organisation</i>	<b>Rabawa</b>	<b>Olist</b>	<b>BlueAvo</b>	<b>PrimU</b>	<b>Alerzo</b>	<b>ImaliPay</b>
<i>Exchange Platform Type</i>	Product Marketplace	Product Marketplace	Service Marketplace	Service Marketplace	Service and Product Marketplace	Service Marketplace
<i>Delivery Channel</i>	Web App	Web App	Web	Mobile App	Web	Web
<i>Continental Footprint</i>	Nigeria – 1	Nigeria - 1	South Africa - 1	South Africa - 1	Nigeria - 1	Kenya - 1

(\*Consolidated by the author)

### **4.3. Research Design and Method**

The research design directly guided the application of the research method through to subsequent data analysis (Bell et al., 2019). While there are no hard and fast rules to matching research design to the research question (Bono & McNamara, 2011), the research methods and/ or instruments used enabled collection of relevant data for the research question i.e., survey and interview protocol. These instruments foster coherence in the relationships among the variables and processes in the research model (Grant & Pollock, 2011). A cross-sectional design, despite its low regard among academia (Spector, 2019), was utilised as the most suitable to cater to the elements of exploring more than one platform organisational case across several industries at a defined point in time as bound by the research timeframe (Bell et al., 2019). It also allowed the establishment of variables and patterns of association i.e., relationships in the success factors identified by the selected case organisations without particularly attempting to order or prioritise them (Bell et al., 2019). The research method and interview protocol were approved by the GIBS Ethical Committee prior to embarking on the research.

#### **4.3.1. Data Gathering**

Within the framework of research ethical compliance, dialogic research methods were best suited for the research specifically narrative & discourse analysis, content analysis, poetry, and participative inquiry (Cunliffe, 2011). Based on the theoretical goal and research focus and allowing customisation for the context (Gehman, Glaser, Eisenhardt, Gioia, Langley & Corley, 2018), the instruments applied in the gathering of data were pre-interview questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with organisational participants. Participants were initially engaged using email and phone and then interviewed via the preferred videoconferencing tool such as Zoom, Skype and MS Teams. All sessions were recorded and then transcribed for analysis using Otter.ai and Office365 as a preliminary effort and as a comparison against the services of a reputable professional transcriber. While videoconferencing hampered, if not eliminated, the ability to observe attitudes through use of interpersonal space (proxemic) which is best observed in person, it was still possible to observe changes in the speed of speech (chronemic), body posture (kinesic), and voice changes (paralinguistic) (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2010) amongst interviewees to add a layer of depth to the communication captured in interviews.

Time did not permit for any relevance established with initial participants to be followed up with questionnaires or social media driven focus groups (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010) to gain more information on specific themes emerging e.g., customer experience per the initial research plan.

#### **4.3.2. Data Analysis**

Different narratives, talk, and text recordings were captured from the interviews and it was important that the right methods were utilised to derive meaning (sense making) and identify the important metaphors and themes that surfaced in the context of African platform economies (Cunliffe, 2011). The commonly used thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to data gathered in this research. The planned starting point was to check for repetition i.e. topics that came up again and again across the selected industry context as well as indigenous typologies i.e. unfamiliar language and expressions that might have been used by African platform organisations. This was then contrasted with existing literature on the success factors of platform economies (Bell et al., 2019) and the sustainable development goals in the case of developmental contribution.

To add depth to the analysis of findings, data gathered in the organisational pre-interview questions and support documents/ reports shared by participants post-interview was consolidated and used to corroborate the main research data findings and provide a form of triangulation.

Coding, using the ATLAS.ti software, was specifically used for content analysis and to reliably identify themes across the relevant level of analysis and samples (Scandura & Williams, 2000). The coding was an interpretive exercise that lent itself to multiple iterations of First Cycle and Second cycle coding to summarise and/ or reduce data for analysis (Saldana, 2016). Identified codes were further categorised across the data sets collected to identify the emergent themes that then informed conclusions on the study (Saldana, 2016) as depicted in Figure , and hence became the basis of the theoretical contribution of the study to management research on African platform entities and their value to the continent. Acknowledging the dynamic that multiple themes beyond the research topic emerge from data analysis in qualitative study (Bell et al., 2019), a pre-meditated decision was taken to not focus on these but rather highlight them as potential areas of further inquiry.

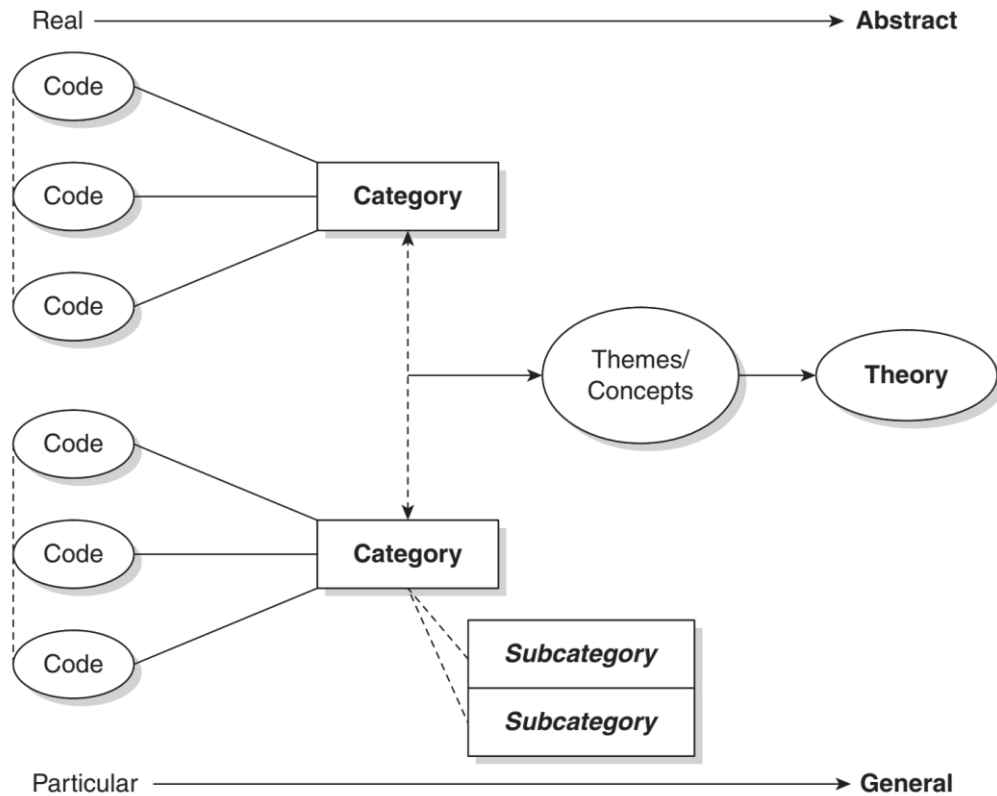


Figure 3: Streamlined Code to Theory Model - Qualitative Inquiry

(Source: Saldana, 2016)

#### 4.3.3. Quality and Rigour

Qualitative research faces a lot of criticism, not limited to its subjectivity, generalisation challenge, replication difficulty and transparency shortfalls (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). Reliability and validity of research are key determinants of the perceived quality and rigour that informs external validity (Sharma & Bansal, 2020). The researcher, who was inexperienced and the interviewer in this study, is noted to be a defining source of bias in any study primarily through their effect on participants and similarly, through the participant's effect on the researcher (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). An attempt was made to conduct a debriefing of the inexperienced researcher by an established researcher on platform economies, an approach that (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010) proposes would aid the researcher to understand their intuition and hence more ably ensure their bias does not interfere with the objective inference of conclusions from the results. This also aided to increase the level of criticality of the researcher's process (Cope, 2014).

To assure credibility of the study; audit trails, engagement and observation methods employed were transparently detailed (Cope, 2014) in the methodology and discussion sections as appropriate. An attempt was made to identify entities in different industries within the continent to assure dependability where the participants might show similar conclusions per industry (Cope, 2014), or not. To ensure that the researchers biases are not perceived to have influenced inferences (confirmability), descriptive extracts of participants verbatim were incorporated into the discussion as quotes to support or highlight emerging themes (Cope, 2014), thus also enhancing the authenticity of the research findings (Cope, 2014). To offer future opportunities for the transferability of research findings, as much information as practically permissible were provided on the nature of organisations and entities engaged (Cope, 2014) which would be applicable for a study anticipated to conclude on generalisations about success factors and developmental contribution of African platform economies.

#### **4.3.4. Methodological Limitations**

Certain limitations to this research can be anticipated given the chosen research methodology. The replicability of this study (external reliability) cannot be assured along with the internal reliability as the research was conducted by one researcher. Furthermore, the internal validity, i.e. congruence of research observation and theory, may have been hampered by time constraints. External validity, on the other hand, may have been hampered by the potentially small number of cases that was engaged (Bell et al., 2019). To conclude on these considerations; trustworthiness and authenticity were alternatively adopted as the main beacons to guide the quality and rigour of this research. This can be achieved through a focus on credibility (internal validity equivalent); transferability (external validity); dependability (reliability); and confirmability (objectivity) (Bell et al., 2019).

#### **4.3.5. Ethical Considerations**

##### **a. Data storage**

All raw and analysis data collected during this research process was archived in a secure cloud location (Microsoft OneDrive) and will be kept for a minimum duration of 10 years. Data was appropriately labelled for ease of reference and retrieval should the need arise. Secure password was applied on the research folder to prevent accidental deletion and/or unauthorised access.

### **b. Data identification**

All data collected during this research process was labelled without any identifiers that may compromise the confidentiality of participating organisations and associated interviewees. Specifically, no organisations and individual names were applied on file names. A date and interviewee sequence protocol were applied on the file names prior to any encryption or archiving. Similarly, no data referenced in the results, analysis, conclusions, or any other part of the report was identified with or linked to specific organisations or individuals. This was achieved by aggregating data as far as possible.

### **c. Confidentiality**

The confidentiality of organisations and individuals was maintained during and post the research project. All participants signed an informed consent form explaining and assuring them of their confidentiality and voluntary engagement rights prior to participating in the research.

### **d. Participant Contact Details**

Participant contact details for the research were sourced through the following channels;

- Contact introductions via the researcher's professional network
- Contact details via publicly available sources such as company websites and professional networking sites.

---

## **5. Chapter 5: Findings**

This chapter introduces the raw data findings gathered in this research. An overview of the research participants engaged and saturation curve of individual codes generated is given as an introductory preface to the results. This is followed by a sequential presentation of the findings per each of the research questions on platform success factors and platform contribution to sustainable development. The chapter concludes with a consolidation of the key raw data findings and an attempt to reconcile the two sets of findings i.e. the interlinkage between platform success factors and platform sustainable development contribution.

### **5.1. Research Participants**

A total of 14 individual interviewees participated in the research which entailed 13 virtual interview sessions covering 12 different African platforms with multi-country operations across the continent. The 14 interviewees were typically founders and/ or C-suite executives in the platforms represented with functions represented including CEO's, COO's, and various Technology, Data, Design, Strategy, Growth, Supply and Marketing portfolios. The 12 platforms represented had continental operations ranging from one to multiple countries. The individual African countries of operation publicly listed on company websites and corroborated against the platform organisational overview form include South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Namibia, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, Ethiopia, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Morocco, and Burkina Faso. The industries or sectors represented, per the categorisation in section 4.2.2, were retail/ e-commerce, workplace/ job, classifieds, media, money/ fintech and logistics.

Table 4 offers a visual representation of the context of the 14 interviewees and 12 platforms represented. The relevance of the categorisations applied is discussed section 5.1.1.

Table 4: Research Participant and Platform Overview

Participant Overview		Platform Overview			
Gender	Portfolio	Maturity	Operational Headquarters	Africanacity	Listing
11 Male	7 Founder	8 Established	2 Kenya	10 African	10 Non-Listed
3 Female	7 Executive	4 Emerging	5 Nigeria	2 Pseudo-African	2 Listed
			5 South Africa		

(\*Consolidated by the author)

### 5.1.1. Analysis Groups

To give a comparative lense, where applicable, for thematic analysis, six categories emerged, post-interview as useful for contextual presentation and discussion of findings for some themes.

For participants, categorisation is made along the lines of gender i.e., male or female and portfolio type i.e., founder or executive, noting that founders holding executive portfolios were counted only as founders.

For platforms, four categorisations were applied. For maturity, platforms were categorised as established if operating for more than five years i.e., founded in 2016 or earlier while platforms founded in 2017 to date were categorised as emerging. For operational headquarters, the operational headquarters of the platform was indicated, noting that is was also typically in the country of registration. The Africanacity category was applied to differentiate between a) African platforms that are independently established on the continent to service the African market, and typically but not always registered on the continent for investment and IP reasons, and b) pseudo-African platforms that are owned and funded by foreign, non-African, global companies yet establishing and maintaining an African operational identity as part of the market capturing strategy. Lastly, platforms were also categorised by their listing status.

### 5.1.2. Code Saturation Curve

The number of codes generated per interview transcript were tracked sequentially to give a saturation curve on research findings. A total of 194 individual codes were generated in the coding of the transcripts, some of which were eventually merged in thematic analysis to give a total of 188 individual codes applied in the research.

Table 5: Research Code Saturation Table

Interview Transcript #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Cumulative # of Codes	63	84	89	108	129	148	160	166	175	182	190	192	194
# of New Codes	63	21	5	19	21	19	12	6	9	7	8	2	2

(\*Consolidated by the author)

The research saturation is represented visually below.

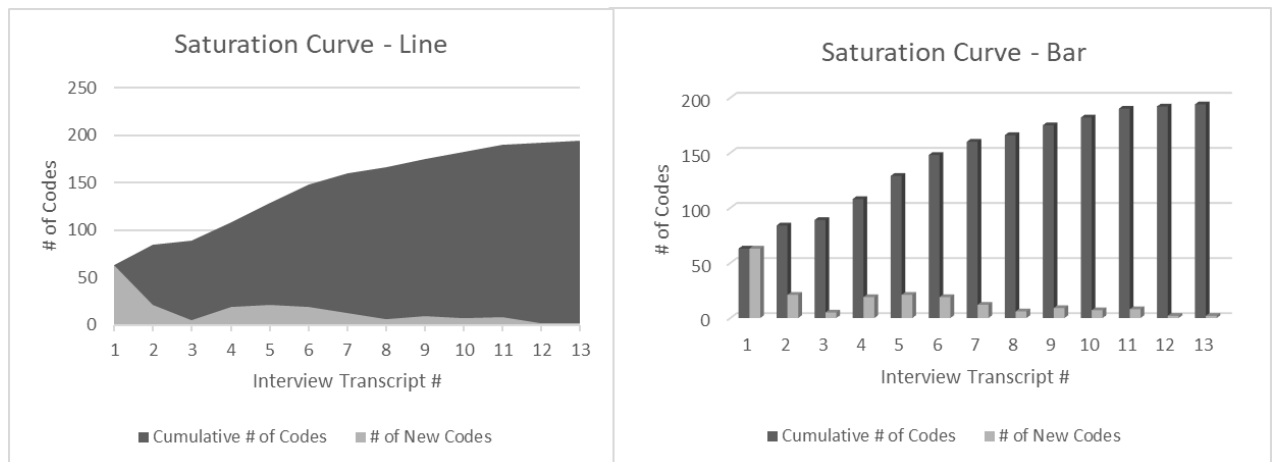


Figure 4: Code Saturation Curves: Bar and Lines

## 5.2. RQ1: Platform Success Factors

The first research question seeks to establish the key drivers of success in African platform economies by addressing the question: What are the key drivers of success in African platform economies? A summary of the themes and sub-themes emerging from this inquiry is given below.

Table 6: RQ1 Themes and Sub-Themes: African Platform Success Factors

Theme	Category Sub-theme	Individual Code Count	Theme Overview Sub-theme Keywords	Interviewee Frequency Count	Quotation Frequency Count
<b>Decoding Success</b>		16	organisational definition and measure of success	14	48
	Definitions of Success	16	platform definitions of organisational success	13	31
	Measures of Success	6	key success measures of organisational success	7	17
<b>Africa: Underlying Business Inhibitors</b>		34	inherent hurdles in the macro business environment	13	107
	Nuanced Market	13	disconnected trade, currency fluctuations, socio- economics/ politics, competition	11	33
	Regulatory Landscape	13	regulatory extremes, erratic changes, lack of relevant incentives	12	41
	Infrastructure	6	road networks, internet penetration and affordability, payment systems, electricity	10	24
	Natural Disasters and Terrorism	4	Covid19 pandemic, extremist movements	4	9
<b>Key Enabling Capabilities</b>		98	contextual capabilities that enable platform success	14	351
	Strategic Partnerships	16	partner availability and compatibility, vendor reliability, vendor affordability	12	41
	Brilliant Technology Solution	11	in-house technology and capability, iterative innovation, technology investor	11	34

	Strategic Use of Data	13	technological data solution, building cost, use cases	13	31
	Building Trust	12	continental distrust, historical antecedence, cost of assurance	12	40
	Agile resilience	9	pioneer agility and resilience, experimentation, success trap	13	45
	Talent and Experience	9	developer talent, leadership and institutional experience, global labour trends	12	45
	Patient Capital	9	compatible market resolute investors, piece-meal funding	13	32
	Other Success Enablers	28	customer experience, hardware, clarity of vision, local presence, operations capability, external validation, aggregation-specialisation differential, service platform, labour management	13	83

(\*Consolidated by the author)

### 5.2.1. Decoding Success

In understanding the key drivers of success for African platform organisations, it was interesting to note the shifting appreciation of organisational success from a traditional commercial perspective to a shared value perspective.

#### a. Definitions of Success

The majority of founders and executives defined organisational success as, primarily, their ability to understand the market and customer and nimbly expand the commercial presence hence profitability of the business.

*“I'd say, building a profitable marketplace, a trusted and profitable online marketplace.” (Executive 2)*

*“I would say it's continuous growth, continuous innovation, strong alignment around strategy.” (Founder 6)*

*“I think what success would look like is... we reach certain numbers of consumers across all the African continent with the level of mobile penetration that is happening now.” (Executive 5)*

Some founders, both emerging and established, were vocal about their positioning of success as shared prosperity that tangibly benefits African communities beyond shareholder value.

*“A lot of these platforms that are coming up, as great as they are, they are what I call value greedy, ... they are not affording people the opportunity to participate in the success that they create.” (Founder 2)*

*“... organisational success is creating a catalyst of successful individuals, entrepreneurs, colleagues, that understand the necessity to build a successful organisation that creates an impact, ... and spreads... social and economic benefits for themselves and for the communities that they serve.” (Founder 7)*

*“The definition of success would be impacting the lives of African [vendor type] I would say.” (Founder 4)*

#### b. Measures of Success

In line with the general definition of organisational success, the identified metrics for success by most interviewees were around market growth.

*“We’re tracking one key KPI, it’s the number of transactions, and increasing that number of transactions is... that success.” (Founder 3)*

*“General growth, we hit about 6 million monthly active users at some point ... super huge milestones.” (Executive 2)*

Despite the growing bias towards shared prosperity as a definition of success, an emerging founder indicated the challenge and lack of clear metrics in this regard.

*“So somehow we need to find a way of supporting the people that we’re working with, or our communities as I call them, and at the same time make sure that you’re running a profitable business.” (Founder 3)*

### **5.2.2. Africa: Underlying Business Inhibitors**

Africa was generally perceived as a market with very high potential, albeit nuanced in various ways that have a direct impact on the ability of an African platform organisation to succeed.

*“Well, in general Africa currently is considered a rapidly growing market with a huge amount of people living there ... so in the near future, it would be more potential customers than in China, so Africa is just [a] hot market nowadays.” (Founder 1)*

*“... and the attraction that the African market has, the appetite the African market has created as a result of young, ambitious, aspiring African entrepreneurs coming into the market with crazy ideas and building...” (Founder 7)*

These contextual nuances extend to socioeconomic and geopolitical factors, regulatory complexity, and infrastructural gaps and natural disasters and warfare. Most interviewees accepted these to be an inherent part of the business environment to be overcome to succeed.

*“So, it’s one of these factors, they are external, and we cannot control them ... we can just adapt...” (Founder 1)*

#### **a. Nuanced Market**

A few established founders and executives lamented on the disconnected state of trade on the continent which presents barriers to much needed inter-country trade.

*“I would say also there’s a disconnect between the African countries, which I know we are trying to resolve with the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement, but I think that would have enabled trade... eventually we will need to think of some better level of integration... there are still trading activities that I can’t do because of several barriers to trading across these countries.” (Founder 7)*

*“We’d love to have a single market, I mean there are of course the right steps being taken but this will still take a while. But we’d just love to see more trade happening, between countries, between businesses, between businesses and consumers, etc.” (Executive 7)*

A few interviewees also highlighted the disruptive impact of currency fluctuations and potential market solutions emerging such as cryptocurrency and mobile money.

*“... and then to grow with crazy fluctuations in the Rand/Dollar, local currency fluctuations... in the economies that we operate in...” (Executive 6)*

*“I actually had that discussion I think a few months ago with a company in Nigeria, they’re working cryptocurrency.” (Founder 3)*

*“But mobile money was always seen as an avenue to reach even more people. They say 97% of all Kenyans over the age of 18 have an M-Pesa wallet.” (Executive 1)*

Several interviewees highlighted the economic and socio-political factors in various countries which impact their capacity to grow.

*“Economic factors, the inflation of currencies in some of our markets, political issues, some of those things create impact.” (Founder 7)*

*“So, the economic climate, and particularly in South Africa where we’ve had stagnant or negative economic growth in successive quarters over the last few years, that definitely negatively impacts our ability to grow and to succeed.” (Founder 6)*

*“But even so that there are so many of our population who really are living off grants and hand to mouth they fall outside of our audience really, and that makes*

*– it's tricky, it makes growth really tough and it's hard to bridge offering those users some kind of support and still driving trade..." (Executive 4)*

A founder shed light on how less tangible aspects such as language barriers also derail organisational progress in some markets.

*"But it works differently when there are other factors that derail your progress or lack of network connectivity. Infrastructure is like poor roads and language barriers because of the multiple language context in Nigerian part of Africa." (Founder 7)*

An executive also highlighted the need for and role of competition within the market.

*"I think success factors, would be a healthy competition that we have from competitors, like almost in every market... So, knowing that we have a competitor, that if we sleep today, someone else can actually take over the ship." (Executive 5)*

#### **b. Regulatory Landscape**

The regulatory landscape was cumulatively and unequivocally presented as a two sided dynamic in Africa, posing different impacts to organisational success depending on the country, and on the industry.

*"That's how I would summarise it, that there's no African answer to this [regulatory impact], every single country is very different." (Executive 7)*

*"There are some countries where we have government backing committees, even inviting us to come and establish - actually taking off some load from us in terms of the levies and fees that we need to pay. There are some markets that the tax that we need to pay is quite high on the other side." (Executive 5)*

*"So, it's kind of a mixed - where they've also really helped in terms of infrastructure and all the taxations in terms of the motorbike [logistics channel]. But on the other hand, being new and being more innovative [platforms], sometimes the government does not know how to manage that very well." (Founder 5)*

Some interviewees specifically called on the need for more regulation, specifically tailored with a view to incentivise and support the growth of African platforms servicing multiple countries.

*“... I think this environment could do with a little more regulation and review.”  
(Executive 4)*

*“And then I think current regulations don’t differentiate enough between a start-up that is high growth and innovative, but often very scrappy in early stage, and a, for example, ... medium size business. And so sometimes the requirements from a regulatory point of view are onerous and I don’t think incentivise start-up businesses enough.” (Founder 6)*

A founder shared insights on the regulatory conundrums experienced in pursuing investor or customer influenced actions such as where to register the organisational intellectual property (IP) or the organisation itself.

*“And then we’re in a weird space because right now we had applied for funding from... [African governmental trade department]. So, one of their requirements to be granted the fund is that your IP needs to remain in the country for about two years... I mean it’s understandable, but as [the company] we are... in a space where the UK government is asking us to move the company to the UK. So... do we take the money and stay, or do we leave?” (Founder 4)*

*“It’s in the business’s best interest to have that IP registered in a country where the economy is more secure and the structures are a bit better, and investor funds are safer. So, it’s that, but there’s no guarantee that if you register your IP in a different country that you will get investment when you’re already looking at potential investment here [home country].” (Founder 4)*

### **c. Infrastructure**

The state of infrastructure on the continent was presented as largely limiting by most founders and executives, cumulatively. Key elements noted are around payment systems, internet penetration and affordability, road networks, and electricity.

A lot of interviewees commented on the impact of the payment infrastructure on the continent, its regulation, and avenues to navigate the deficiency.

*“But another big challenge we’ve had really is moving money out of South Africa, ... Nigeria is a bit more lenient with regards to moving money across Africa...”*  
(Founder 4)

*“And the other things that are smaller but kind of rising up, to build the infrastructure to take payments across the continent, digital payments, means now we have that as a service inside of our business.”* (Executive 6)

Some established interviewees emphasised the low internet penetration coupled with high data costs and the seeming impossibility of offering data free services.

*“Low internet penetration and high data costs, just terrible and at a time when our belief at [the company] is that the internet should be a right, access to the internet shouldn’t be something that you have to pay for.”* (Founder 6)

*“I think data and access to internet is an important barrier, but really I think it could – and we’ve explored it it’s just too expensive to make our service entirely data free - could be a really significant game changer.”* (Executive 4)

Poor road networks were specifically noted to undermine the efficiency and growth possibilities of platform organisations by some interviewees.

*“Well, even Nigeria, which is considered quite [an] advanced country in Africa, is lacking... some infrastructural... stuff, like good electricity supply, good internet. I mean, at least cheap internet, good roads, safety...”* (Founder 1)

*“Infrastructure development tends to be skewed towards the capital areas and the city... – the rest of the places are not really well-developed infrastructure. So, what that does it makes the cost of logistics to be very, very high.”* (Founder 5)

#### **d. Natural Disasters and Terrorism**

A few interviewees inevitably shared differing testimonials on the impact of the Covid19 pandemic to their growth efforts.

*“... I’m still thankful to the Covid-19 pandemic, because it was difficult prior to that to say what we’re doing, and right now it’s very easy to say it.”* (Founder 3)

*“I would say the pandemic affected or impacted our growth, things that are not foreseen... you just have to always be on your feet and think of how to navigate those tough terrain...”* (Founder 7)

An executive commented on the impact of extremist terrorist groups in some countries.

*“I think some factors... are obvious, and they are hindering everything for us all like these pandemics, wars, some economic changes... for example, in Nigeria there is... terrorist organizations like Boko Haram which is making life harder for the Northern people.” (Founder 1)*

### **5.2.3. Key Enabling Capabilities**

Various success drivers for African platforms were surfaced, with the most represented and nuanced in insight being strategic partnerships, brilliant technology solution, strategic use of data, building data, agile resilience, talent and experience, and patient capital.

#### **a. Strategic Partnerships**

The ability to identify and secure relevant, multi-faceted, partnerships was indicated by many interviewees, cumulatively, as an important factor for platform success.

*“We’ve worked with partners both on the customer side and on the [vendor] side to help us scale, and that’s been really important. So, we’ve looked at big retailers, telecoms companies, banks, as channels for faster distribution. And then on the service provider side, on the [vendor] side we’ve had partners who have helped us increase the value adds and offerings to them.” (Founder 6)*

*“... we’ve been very smart in the quality or the type of merchants that – or the type of clients that we have targeted.” (Executive 1)*

*“... one factor is certainly having the right partners when it comes to – for us these are our [vendor] where we have from day one focussed on keeping a good relationship, and I think that good relationship allowed us to really focus on growing their income and the business side of things.” (Executive 7)*

Some interviewees differentiated the ease to secure partners which was seemingly easy for vendors and merchants offering services to consumers on the platform versus brands and businesses offering value adds and enabling distribution for platform vendors.

*“We’re not so concerned about the [vendor] because what we’ve observed so far is that the [vendors] follow the money, right, they really follow the money.” (Founder 4)*

*“So, I’m working on those [brands], I mean they take long, but then I’m also optimistic that if we do succeed, actually when we do succeed, we will see the results of getting that in place.” (Founder 3)*

Interestingly for vendors specifically, A few interviewees highlighted the specific nuance of investment required to enable them to provide their services on the platform.

*“You find a person who’s willing, who doesn’t have a car, who doesn’t have the products and has to carry the [trade tools] via public transport to get to the appointment and all these things.” (Founder 3)*

*“... we’re actually trying to help people improve the conditions or the living conditions of people in the African society, making them business owners without zero capital, or without zero investment.” (Executive 3)*

A few interviewees emphasized the lack of aggressive and formidable partners in the market as well as the difficulty to access certain partner networks.

*“... they [potential partners] are present but they’re just not as visible, they’re not as aggressive, they don’t want to move fast enough.” (Executive 1)*

*“It would be great if we could get into a room with the Stellenbosch mafia, that would be amazing. So, it’s that access... to opportunities through whatever it may be, external investors or partners, business partners... access to the right and strategic partners is a bit of a challenge.” (Founder 4)*

The role of strategic partners, who were also simultaneously competitors in some contexts, was appreciated to extend to driving continuous improvement by a few interviewees.

*“We are in the unique position where our biggest competitor is also our biggest partner... and so [partner] always tries to get better, forcing us to get better.” (Executive 1)*

*“When I talk about the customer in this case it’s not only the end user, it’s also our partners... So just innovating around them has really set us apart because it means we solve the direct problems.” (Founder 5)*

## **b. Brilliant Technology Solution**

Most interviewees unequivocally emphasised having a brilliant, continually updated, technology solution that is compatible with partner technology as a key driver of platform success.

*“We offer the best customer experience with the best tech interface that you will ever find... and we are always building our tech to be better.” (Executive 1)*

*“So, the technology drives a lot of it and I think other platforms have had less of an emphasis on technology. A lot of platforms have actually been basically offline with a little bit of scratch together software from third parties and then [they] call it technology.” (Founder 6)*

*“And obviously the ability to deliver the product, like on a technical level. Like [specific technology] is not for sissies and we’ve been doing it and we’ve had the tech.” (Executive 6)*

Most platforms specifically alluded to the advantage had by building the technology internally and customising it to meet improvement demands constantly.

*“That’s critical... we build everything inside... we have our local tech team in-house, ... we control the end to end.” (Founder 5)*

*“The technology is built in-house, it’s sophisticated and it’s been purpose built for [the company] and contributed to over seven years. So, when you’re trying to catch up it’s like seven years of experience built into the technology, it’s difficult.” (Founder 6)*

*“Then we made very early a decision to keep all the development not just in-house but in country as well, I think that allowed us to build the product and data driven company.” (Executive 7)*

A few emerging founders who were leaning on outsourced technology as a means to an end expressed a desire for internally controlled technology.

*“We have built on a third-party software but started – next year we’re going to be building our own proprietary software.” (Founder 2)*

*“I think the hardest part was also from the tech side, because it was very difficult for me to get what I wanted from them [third-party software providers] and for anything else that I wanted I would have had to pay more.” (Founder 3)*

Interestingly, pseudo-African platforms using internal technology from foreign parent companies expressed no strong views on technology or the innovation around it.

*“... basically [the parent company] is a global business with lots of resources across tech across marketing.” (Executive 2)*

*“So, it was run 100% from the US and it was technology that existed, they extended it to this geography, they registered it, set it up, used performance marketing...” (Executive 4)*

A founder shared how a third-party software provider had invested into the platform on noticing the traction the platform was gaining.

*“They [third-party technology provider] invested with a percentage equity in the company because then they saw the opportunity, and that was just towards the end of 2019, then we were fine getting the technology part done.” (Founder 3)*

### **c. Strategic Use of Data**

All interviewees expressed the strategic use of data, which is typically built into the fibre of the technology solution, as a key factor in fuelling their platform growth and success.

*“Of course, data is the new oil and we realise that.” (Executive 1)*

*“... we also have our little data sets that [we] are collecting, so in that sense pushing us to be more of a data company. Because at every touch point there's data that's being collected.” (Founder 5)*

Most interviewees highlighted the importance of data as an integral part their decision-making process.

*“We build all sorts of dashboards, analytics to... leverage both internal and external data to make decisions. Daily. Weekly.” (Executive 2)*

*“We build or make our decisions based on data, but we also build our products to gather the data. We only use them internally but it's so critical to make the*

*right decisions, without it we wouldn't be where we are, no question.” (Executive 7)*

Some interviewees cited other active use cases of data analytics to include improving the user experience, preventing customer harm, and driving innovation around new customer solutions in the platform ecosystem.

*“Well, yes, they [data] are quite critical, ... we are performing a lot of A/B tests which allows us to decide which functionality, which features are helping our users, our customers, or which are not helping or even harming them. So, we are we constantly monitoring experience of our users, conversions, ... trying to improve them all the time.” (Founder 1)*

*“Data is what informs us on what key things are we doing that provide value to the customers and also value to ourselves as well. And data also on what growth path trajectory we should be looking at - what kind of metrics we should be looking at.” (Founder 7)*

An executive not aggressively using data indicated how this underinvestment in data exploitation posed a significant performance disadvantage.

*“We know what they [users] do on our platform but we don't know a lot about them, and it's a competitive disadvantage again versus Facebook [competitor example] who knows absolutely everything about their users.” (Executive 4)*

A few founders using third-party technology solutions lamented on the prohibitive cost of data solutions, while on the other hand founders with in-house technology expressed satisfaction on the return.

*“We're going to be looking at a lot of machine learning and artificial intelligence, and right now we're not structured to do that obviously because of expertise and because of the cost of building that [data solution].” (Founder 2)*

*“And hopefully, we're paying not much money for this [data] solution. Because if we decided several years ago, to use some commercial solution, we would be currently nowadays spending like maybe 10-fold of what we are spending now.” (Founder 1)*

A few established interviewees shared some insights on the hurdles of data analytics over time to include data overload, outdated legacy data systems as technology rapidly improves, and the difficulty of collecting data in some African markets.

*“But because we’ve been in the market for so long some of our customer data is ... old and it’s challenging because you have legacy data, legacy systems.”*  
(Executive 6)

*“You can even run into the risk of having too much data and not a lot of information. So, what we do is we try to look at... the key metrics that we think are success drivers and we focus on that data...”* (Founder 7)

#### **d. Building Trust**

The interesting notion of building market trust as a key success driver was highlighted by most interviewees to be a nuanced factor owing to the inherent state and history of the African market.

*“I mean we clearly have a trust deficiency in most countries and it’s not about potential of losing trust of the company, it’s really about gaining it. But we don’t start at 100, we start at zero. And getting to 50 is what we aim for.”* (Executive 7)

*“Now, ideally you shouldn’t be thinking about trust as a component because if I’m doing a transaction I don’t need to trust you - I just need to know that you understand the idea of a transaction is I pay for something, I get this... But again Africa is a... very unique market so trust is something that if you want to get a leg up you need to build trust with certainly at least your first few customers.”*  
(Founder 7)

*“And trust doesn’t come cheap in this economy... There’s a time we had customer acquisition costs could get as high as maybe two hundred, three hundred dollars, that’s for the first year... because we needed to get them to try us so we can win their trust.”* (Executive 5)

Several interviewees shared the common perception and experience that, as a market, the African continent has a deep-rooted lack of trust in local online platforms.

*“Actually, [in] African countries, it is the most prominent problem... a lack of trust in online transactions.”* (Founder 1)

*“One of the challenges as well is historical antecedence. A lot of Africans have experienced scams... numerous online businesses have promised one thing and didn’t really deliver.” (Founder 2)*

*“And I think one of the things that we also definitely need to overcome is, so that’s [for] success of the platform, for people to believe in African solutions for Africans and not be quick to run to international solutions for Africans.” (Founder 4)*

*“But the real concern is with regards to personal safety and that is unique to South Africa and there have been instances where people have gone to collect a vehicle or pay for a vehicle and been robbed of their money, robbed of the vehicle, for example.” (Executive 4)*

Most interviewees highlighted actions to gain, assure and maintain trust to be intertwined heavily with vendor quality assurance initiatives.

While vendors and merchants to provide services on African platforms were earlier noted to be easy to secure, the general quality was found to be lacking by some interviewees.

*“Then, of course, there, we also have the issue on the vendor side, where what you see is not what you get.” (Executive 5)*

*“So not everyone [vendor] that applies should qualify, that’s when the verification vetting process comes in...” (Founder 4)*

*“One of the pains with a lot of the current platforms in Nigeria particularly is quality, there’s been a lot of issue of quality.” (Founder 2)*

The ultimate cost of quality assurance to bring vendors and merchants to an acceptable level of quality and professionalism for the platform was perceived to be significant by some interviewees.

*“... they [vetting company] can work against a database that is sitting in the US where they can then go and do that verification and everything else. But then it’s the cost of doing it...” (Founder 3)*

*“... in the process of actually trying to make sure that quality is up to standard you notice that all our time is affected in getting some other things done.” (Executive 3)*

### **e. Agile Resilience**

To succeed as a platform in the dynamic African market detailed in XX above, all interviewees alluded to the imperative need for an inseparable combination of agility and resilience to stay ahead of the curve.

*“There’s no prewritten script for us to follow and... it’s super important to constantly adjust and make sure we take our learning’s, and we make tough decisions... We have come many times to the point where we are like, I guess we’ll just need to try it out because there’s no public data available on industry sizes, business sizes etc.” (Executive 7)*

*“... because for us, it [Africa] is like our whole market. There is no place we can, we cannot change focus, you know, because all other markets are already - they have heavy competition, and we cannot just go away from Africa...” (Founder 1)*

*“And I think the critical success factor there was first-mover advantage, so they were the first player to enter the market in this peer-to-peer space, and the power of some investments.” (Executive 4)*

The invaluable ability to remain open to experimentation and course correcting while carrying the burden of pioneering new concepts in the market was echoed by most interviewees.

*“And I think not being afraid to experiment and fail and say, this was a failure let’s stop working on this or can a product, I think that’s been really important.” (Founder 6)*

*“... some of the key success factors is that we stay focussed and flexible, monitoring the trends and tweaking, failing forward and just making adjustments when necessary.” (Founder 7)*

*“And we can actually see from see the results from [the company] currently, how we came, we educated and were able to scale although put a lot of money on ground, but then we can actually see it has repositioned the tech ecosystem in Africa precisely.” (Executive 5)*

*“I remember in 2014/15 the smartphone penetration was not that much, not so many people knew how to use the app. It was really early so that meant you have*

*to train the customers, and that means the next company can ride on that.”*  
(Founder 5)

A few established executives lamented on how the ability to remain agile can be hampered by the very same success it helps to attain.

*“And so, although it is probably our greatest success factor it also can hold you back that we’re built around a particular model and monetisation model, commercial model and structure can be a barrier to innovation and making big pivots.”* (Executive 4)

*“The one thing that I find challenging is getting agility in the lean software development model, getting agile stuff going is often really hard because of how big the business is and how to an extent you have to really nurture it, you can’t be tinkering with it too much at the risk of breaking it.”* (Executive 6)

#### **f. Talent and Experience**

The vast majority of interviewees highlighted the importance of being able to acquire and retain the right talent early on, a difficult proposition for most it appeared.

*“The ability to acquire and keep talent is very critical. I assume others you spoke to have highlighted the same, if not they’re not in the same market.”* (Executive 7)

*“We were fortunate to attract some of the right people on board very early on, people that were crazy enough to go on such a journey and a mission with us.”*  
(Founder 7)

*“It’s difficult without having being blockbuster funding rounds to bring in great people, and I think you’ve got to be a salesperson and be able to sell the vision to great people, again to get you to that next level.”* (Founder 6)

Some interviewees cited developers as the most elusive talent, noting the impact of global demand on this skillset on labour costs and norms.

*“And then we’re seeing a lot of young engineers that were trained being poached, or have done three or four years in a company like ours, being poached by foreign companies and offering them work visas or better pay or things like that which usually will not match up with what the African market is saying.”* (Founder 7)

*“There is high demand, because here [Europe] you have several outsourcing companies, ... employing like tens of thousands of developers... even junior developers. And then again, given that a lot of companies around the world are currently allowing remote work - some developers now prefer to work remotely for I don't know, Google or LinkedIn or Uber or whatever else.” (Founder 1)*

Some interviewees emphasized the leadership talent as key, typically embodied by the founding team profile four founder-led platforms and managerial capability in more established platforms.

*“... having complementary founders is important as well and has been a real strength for us, the fact that one is a software engineer, the other is more business focussed and operations focussed...” (Founder 6)*

*“I think our leadership, we have a very solid leadership. And we pretty much have an open-door policy where everyone can reach out to the folks at the top and there's clear conversation in teams.” (Executive 5)*

*“Most founders don't have any experience in organisational building, governance, compliance, ... things that make for a well put together organisation, and so you have to learn that on the go.” (Founder 7)*

Several interviewees noted the resulting compromise with hiring foreign talent as a result of the local talent shortages.

*“I think bringing on more experienced talent would be important, both from across the continent but even further afield.” (Founder 6)*

*“For us it means that in some cases we have to compromise or rather by hiring foreign talent in some areas...” (Founder 7)*

A few interviewees shared the high level of investment in training programs to upskill talent to the desired level.

*“We have internship programs for women on the engineering side, so that also falls under the educational aspect. We have provided data for machine learning, algorithms and competitions for people to compete based on our data...” (Executive 7)*

*“We’ve not really got the best and I think it has taken us really long to reach where we are because the kind of talents we have we really need to invest heavily in their training.” (Founder 5)*

#### **g. Patient Capital**

All interviewees highlighted the inevitable need for the right financial investment to support platform growth and success.

*“But I think the biggest thing is probably just funding. We’ve operationalised well, strong marketing playbook, we know what we need to do, we know how to do it, we know how to build it. So, a lot of it is just around making sure that we have the capital at the right economics to do that.” (Founder 6)*

*“... of course, I would say we had the money to. I don’t want to put this to make it look like money was it but then again, we were not afraid to keep going... we had to spend a lot to educate people on the need.” (Executive 5)*

Several interviewees emphasized the particular need to be selective for patient investors who were committed to the African markets and the vision of the platform.

*“We’ve had very patient... venture capitalists who are in it for the long term.” (Executive 1)*

*“Then finally our investors. I would say they have been patient with us, they understand the markets, they understand that Africa is not for the faint of heart and they’ve been supportive all through the journey.” (Founder 7)*

*“I think in general we have investors that are very much strategically aligned with what we do...” (Executive 7)*

Female founders specifically shed light on the unhelpful illusion of funding that was not adequate for tangible platform growth and success.

*“... if you look at all funding... not how many companies are funded, because what often happens is that women get... maybe it’s 20%, but they’ll get tiny cheque sizes. So, I think 2% of the total amount of funding raised in the world goes to women, and I think black women - 0.00 something %.” (Founder 6)*

*“And for [the company] these grants [received] are not a lot, so they’re really small amounts...” (Founder 3)*

## **h. Other Success Enablers**

Additional success factors that surfaced are detailed below. These include customer experience, hardware, clarity of vision, local presence, operations capability, external validation, aggregation-specialisation differential, service platform, and labour management.

**Customer experience:** All interviewees indicated that an obsession with the customer needs and customer experience were a default success factor within their platforms, noting its interdependency with other factors such as trust, innovative use of data and agile resilience.

*“Customer Experience is a major factor and again is it is reliant or dependent on a lot of other factors as well...” (Executive 5)*

*“Our goal is not just to provide customer service, we want to provide amazing service to our users, our vendors, our walk-on customers and our resellers.” (Founder 2)*

Customer awareness actions was cited as an important aspect for platforms to engage in for the cumulative benefit of the customer and platform

*“... because we needed to do a lot of education, to enlighten the people to let them know, ecommerce is pretty much the future.” (Executive 5)*

**Hardware:** Some founder and executive interviewees echoed a similar assertion that hardware was increasingly not in trend with most technological hardware needs being surpassed by use of innovations such as cloud servers. Some interviewees further expanded on the need to not own hardware assets in the platform supply chain network such as vehicles and technician tools e.g. digital content creation tools, but to rather influence the quality and criteria of the same.

*“... what kind of hardware nowadays - hardware is not really in trend... it's more about cloud I suppose.” (Founder 1)*

*“On the hardware side, as a company, we don’t own vehicles - we don’t own many assets in general. We don’t think that’s our strength and we don’t want to play in that space of managing assets.” (Executive 7)*

On the other hand, a few founders deemed hardware to be important and an aspirational company goal.

*“...as a company we hope to evolve to a position whereby we can own our own infrastructure end to end.” (Founder 2)*

*“...hardware is important, and you would see now that even companies like... Amazon have physical stores right now... – even though they started on service the market for a long time... they have their own delivery trucks and trailers and vans and everything.” (Founder 7)*

**Clarity of vision:** Several interviewees emphasized the need for a clarity of vision in promoting the growth of African platforms, typically intertwined with the founding team conviction and understanding of the contextual market need.

*“I think the ability to sell yourself and sell the vision, especially in the early days, and bring on good talent...” (Founder 6)*

*“But we don’t think anything of it [inaccessible market opportunities/discrimination], it doesn’t deter us, it doesn’t discourage us, in fact it’s just motivation to just keep at it.” (Founder 4)*

**Local presence:** Some interviewees, representing both African and pseudo-African platforms, indicated their local presence and experience in specific African countries as a key propellant for platform success.

*“But then they [funded foreign platforms] are still also not dominating with all that money, and it’s because they are taking models that are working in other countries and not working in Africa.” (Founder 3)*

*“... because we’re also on the ground in Africa and are Africans, have explored the continent, we understand some of the challenges.” (Founder 4)*

**Operations capability:** Several interviewees highlighted the need for operations capability to implement feasible and efficient processes while an executive also gave insight on how operations capability in the platform economy can also be gained from global collaborations.

*“Internally always working on building out our processes, improving our processes is a critical component that as we continue to focus on that it adds more benefit and stability to the company.” (Founder 7)*

*“The plus we got was due to the fact that [investor] was our main big backer, that back then they were able to send specialists to us, they were sending folks from Berlin, and we were getting onboarded on new processes, we were creating standard SOPs, with the right outcomes and metrics and all that.” (Executive 5)*

**External validation:** Most of the founders interviewed interestingly shared the motivator role accelerator programs had played in their growth journey.

*“And the story was when we were entering that competition we were like, yeah, let’s try this out, if it goes well and good we’ll do it, if it doesn’t then we’ll all do our [own] things...” (Founder 5)*

*“And it’s Africa’s biggest engineering competition. And that was really validation for what it is that we’re doing the direction in which they were going.” (Founder 4)*

**Aggregation-specialisation differential:** A few interviewees indicated using an aggregator platform approach to better cater to their customers holistic need and propel their continued relevance and growth while on the other hand, a few interviewees cited a niche vertical specialisation as a differentiating and growth strategy.

*“The main way [of differentiation] is that we tend to build all through for the customer just to ensure that the customer can be – it can be very easy for the customer to use the platform from end to end.” (Founder 5)*

*“Where we have differentiated ourselves is [for example] Fiverr and Upwork they are a marketplace for all things... It’s a gig economy for any gig, ... and we’re not touching that - we’re specifically focussed on the creative industry.” (Founder 4)*

**Service platform:** A few interviewees shared their view of platforms as a service as a key success factor, particularly for scaling the platform model.

*“... we’re living in the service-based economy right now so presenting yourself as providing that service... it’s a vital component of the success of a platform. Because the idea of service is that you are making a component of my business, or whatever it is I do, easier by providing that service.” (Founder 7)*

*“We are at a stage where Kenya alone is not big enough, but we also want to expand so for a long time we have been focussed on how do we ensure that our tools, our services that we build are scalable. And I think the service platform might touch on that in a way that we would have a harder time if we would not be focussed on providing these services to the platform, for sure, and automating it...” (Executive 7)*

**Labour management:** The ability to navigate the labour challenges in the platform economy, exacerbated by factors such as immigrant and informal labour and the pressure of labour unions, was cited by a founder as important for the success of platforms enabling individual employment opportunities.

*“... if you’re South African or you [individual vendor] have a South African ID it’s okay because then you take that to SAPS and then they give it to you [verification]. But you don’t want to limit it to people with a South African ID only.” (Founder 3)*

*“... what I know that, more especially with the hailing platforms, [is] that they’ve had challenges with the unions and stuff like that...” (Founder 3)*

### 5.3. RQ2: Sustainable Development Contribution

The second research question seeks to ascertain the developmental contribution of successful African platform economies to the continent by answering the question: *What has been the developmental contribution of successful African platform economies?*

A summary of the themes and sub-themes emerging from this inquiry is given below.

*Table 7: RQ2 Themes and Sub-Themes: Sustainable Development Contribution*

Theme	Category Sub-theme	Individual Code Count	Theme Overview Sub-theme Keywords	Interviewee Frequency Count	Quotation Frequency Count
<b>Motivators for Sustainable Development</b>		11	organisational motivators for sustainable development	14	62
	Strategic Commitment	3	business imperative, codified commitments, definition	13	26
	Investor Expectation	3	financial return, emerging sustainability interest	11	15
	SDG Affiliation	2	active SDG dissociation, coincidental SDG alignment	10	16
	External Expectation	3	regulatory, market, platform partners	3	5
<b>Sustainable Development Contribution</b>		16	platform areas of sustainable development contribution	13	64
	Economic Growth	3	small business economic participation, enabling trade	11	24
	Employment Creation	3	income opportunity, quality of work, formalising sectors	8	14
	Equality	1	discrimination, inclusion, gender, race	4	9
	Climate	4	continental complacency, awareness, green servers, e-logistics	5	8
	Other Contributions	5	food security, education, partnership, media, CSRI	5	9
<b>Impact Monitoring</b>		3	prevalence and extent of sustainable development impact monitoring	7	7

*(\*Consolidated by the author)*

### 5.3.1. Organisational Motivators for a Sustainable Development Focus

Internal motivators for having a sustainable development focus within the platform organisations were the most represented, namely as part of the organisational strategic commitment and as a subtle undertone of investor expectation on the same. The SDG's we largely underlined as a construct that platform organisations did not actively affiliate with or consider in determining sustainable development focus. The absence of external motivators for a sustainable development focus was also lightly represented.

#### a. Strategic Commitment

Most founders and executives from both established and emerging platforms generally identified contributing to the sustainable development of the communities in which they operate to be an important consideration for the business.

*“Yes, that is a critical piece of why we’re in this business in the first place. Because Africa as a whole is seen to have – a lot of people in Africa as a whole, or Nigeria particularly, seem to have been left behind.” (Founder 2)*

*“The [organisational] conversation will come up around how do we make this benefit more people in the community, things that we can do to – instead of importing something can we source it locally from people, that kind of thing. So, I pick up a lot of [organisational] sensitivity towards that and a will to do stuff that helps develop the continent, even if it takes a little bit more effort... It’s kind of baked into our values.” (Executive 6)*

*“Yes, so it is definitely embedded in our strategy because I mean it’s necessary, we can’t do without them [specified contributions to sustainable development].” (Founder 7)*

*“Absolutely, because if the continent becomes really better, it becomes better for [the company] as well.” (Executive 5)*

*“So, we definitely are aligned with the impact side from that [UN funding]. We’ve also come up with a theory of change based on those [SDG’s] as well, and we are hoping that we’ll contribute to the 2030 agenda as well.” (Founder 3)*

The commitment to sustainable development was positioned as an existing inherent part of the platforms ability to thrive.

*“I mean it’s key, it’s basically an underlying assumption that we base our business on that we believe that the growth that we’ll see in certain industries will really enable us to grow with it. But for us that also means the other way around, it’s in our interest and also part of our business to enable these industries.” (Executive 7)*

*“I wouldn’t say we’ve explicitly listed it in our main goals to create sustainable development, but there’s a sense that it’s sort of a base level requirement in terms of how we work with our supply chain, otherwise we’re going to fail.” (Executive 6)*

*“Well, yes, apparently, it is very important because the wellbeing of [the company] as a business depends on the well-being of our customers.” (Founder 1)*

On the other hand, the commitment to sustainable development was admittedly not a deliberate or key consideration for a few platforms.

*“... for now, no. It’s not built into our strategy, and it’s not built into what we essentially try and do.” (Executive 1)*

*“So, I cannot say that we like investing very much besides our main business, into development, or the African countries.” (Founder 1)*

Paradoxically, despite alluding to sustainable development as an important business consideration, most platforms did not have a codified strategic commitment to sustainable development.

*“Well, it is not deliberate in the sense that we have some kind of policy. It is not codified in some core documents.” (Founder 1)*

*“We have not quantified that yet, but as we go forward, as we stabilise the company, I do believe we’re going to be able to put our position statement and be able to specifically indicate our stance in these different aspects, particularly in the area of gender equality, poverty and zero hunger.” (Founder 2)*

*“So, it may not come out clearly in terms of the strategy, but what [we] are doing is in line with those particular SDG’s in one sort of the other.” (Founder 5)*

An executive expressed the challenge with explicitly capturing a strategic commitment to sustainable development where it was felt to be an inherent part of the business model.

*“I think the harder part is the definition of sustainable development... So, I would certainly place that under sustainable development because our goal here is to grow them [assisting small trader growth] because we believe long-term that will benefit us... Do we have the word sustainable development in our strategy? Probably in some form, yes.” (Executive 7)*

Most of the platforms that reported a codified strategic commitment to sustainable development highlighted that it was a retrospective exercise.

*“... we've actually worked on our strategy a couple of times. We find when we started, it [sustainable development] wasn't as glaring as this, as what we have currently. Over time, we have refined to actually capture that.” (Executive 5)*

*“If I said yes, I'd be lying. This wasn't at the core of our formation, it's something that we've kind of – that we identified through processes such as the [innovation competition], because they asked similar questions.” (Founder 4)*

*“Like I noted, we know we're doing that [sustainable development] but we've not intentionally set that – put that in our DNA. But one of our consultants who is an SDG facilitator is already talking about how we can do that.” (Founder 2)*

#### **b. Investor Expectation**

Investor expectation in investing in platform organisations was strongly indicated to be predominantly financial return, coupled with a clear absence of expectation for sustainable development impact.

*“They are driven by return, we will deliver a return, a good return on investment for – and we work hard every day to make sure we deliver our return to our shareholders.” (Executive 1)*

*“Well, in investors, they try to make money. So that is the main, and maybe only goal, you know.” (Founder 1)*

*“Okay, so it’s never been a prerequisite, I don’t think – yeah, no-one that we’ve spoken to so far has been like, so what about these SDG’s, they don’t care. It’s always about revenue, that’s all they care about.” (Founder 4)*

A potentially increasing but subtle interest in sustainable development by some investors was noted, albeit not as a pertinent requirement of the platform organisations.

*“We have investors who are purely ROI focussed, but I think even then, I think just around the world there’s the recognition that at the very least you can’t be doing bad business, and ideally your business should have a positive social impact.” (Founder 6)*

*“Now that also means that they [investors] are of course aligned with our trajectory with our way of thinking of business because they need to see returns, which is natural, but I do believe that some of those aspects we just discussed are part of our investor presentations, yes... Is it a priority? I would not say so, no.” (Executive 7)*

*“... there’s a lot of due diligence that’s done, there’s a lot of prerequisites, there’s a lot of things that they require before the [funding] round is closed. And some of them you will find are also in line with what we are talking about, the MDG’s [SDG’s] and all that.” (Founder 5)*

*“... but the beautiful thing about what we’re doing is that we are attracting investors and buyers to that [organisational commitment to sustainable development] ... we attract organisations and investors that are interested in these 17 sustainable goals.” (Founder 2)*

Impact funding appears to be the commonly identified investment with a specified expectation and prerequisite for sustainable development contribution.

*“I’ve partly mentioned to you that part of the funding we’ve had previously has been from the UN, twice already. So, we definitely are aligned with the impact side from that.” (Founder 3)*

*“...so we have received impact funding which specifically needs us to report on positive impact. So, we’ve received impact focussed funding from a fund called the [fund], we received impact funding from the [fund], and their focuses are all around positive impact.” (Founder 6)*

*“We have investors that are Africa focussed so they want to know that you are really investing your time and your effort in Africa and building Africa. So, yeah, it’s one of those key things that they do, sustainability development and environmental and social due diligence before they invest in companies like ours.” (Founder 7)*

### **c. SDG Affiliation**

Most interviewees from established platform organisations were clear that their commitment and contribution to sustainable development was not actively guided by or partial to the United Nations Global SDG’s.

*“So, I can’t state that I’ve ever done cross-reference or tried to align with those goals, it would be retro rationalisation to be honest. However, I do believe that there are likely to be many that do align with our focus areas in doing business.” (Executive 4)*

*“I mean it’s not our focus really in the true sense of trying to meet SDG’s and that kind of thing.” (Executive 1)*

*“Probably I need to refresh and see what are they and how many and then I can see where do we create an impact on that.” (Founder 5)*

*“I personally haven’t heard people go you know, there’s these 17 things, let’s go and tackle number 8, in that kind of dry manner. But I would guess that those 17 goals are fairly broad and encompass a lot of different areas and there is probably quite a lot of overlap between what we do in those.” (Executive 6)*

Founders were particularly explicit in indicating that their organisational commitment to sustainable development was not driven by the SDG’s, even if actively aligned.

*“So, again like our motivation isn’t, aah, these SDG’s, let’s go for it. Our motivation is fix this problem. Whether the SDG’s are reduced to 15, increased to 25, it doesn’t matter to us, and if more of them align with what we’re doing great. If it doesn’t it doesn’t matter, for us the objective doesn’t change, and that’s our focus.” (Founder 4)*

*“And we want to address those things whether or not they’re part of an agenda or plan, or who’s new plan are we looking at now. The politics is not important to us, we do this because we believe it’s the right thing and because we believe it’s key to South Africa’s ability to win as a country in the long term.” (Founder 6)*

Emerging platform interviewees expressed an active affiliation with the SDG's.

*“So, to reduce - no poverty, goal 1 of no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing...” (Executive 3)*

*“So, it's SDG 5 and SDG 8, so that talks directly to the stuff that we do with the service providers, gender equality and also creating the job opportunities for them. And then the third one is number 17, because having the partnerships and the companies to work with in implementing this is very important.” (Founder 3)*

*“... so, one of them is definitely number 1, zero poverty again... Number 5, gender equality. That is 100%... Number 4, goal 4 is actually also one of the things that we're looking at. Not right now, not immediate, but in the long term, it's quality education... Yeah, reduce inequality, definitely. Decent work and economic growth, goal 8... But yeah, there are several goals that we are aligned with and we are working actively.” (Founder 4)*

#### **d. External Expectation**

Additional insights surfaced on external expectations on sustainable development contribution.

A founder shared the growing expectation for European businesses, where their servers are hosted, to be green.

*“But anyway, nowadays, it would be I think, easier to be green than not to be green in Europe. And this is this ability [opportunity] we are trying to use.” (Founder 1)*

While on the other hand there are no regulatory expectations for the same where they operate.

*“We are not under any pressure from investors or from governments or whatever we're just really trying to be - to operate this way.” (Founder 1)*

Another executive highlighted increasing platform partner focus on sustainability matters.

*“I don't know 100% if that was listed [investor requirement for sustainable development], but I know we have some partners that are currently very strong on sustainability and all that.” (Executive 5)*

Listed platforms did not notice or track any correlation between the share price, as a measure of market expectations, and periodic sustainable development performance.

*“I think our share price is really built – kind of reacts a lot to other company performance factors, like whether or not we hit our half-year targets and our annual targets that we set in terms of growth. The link between sustainable development and our growth is one that I think is intrinsic, so we can't grow if that growth isn't sustainable inside of the communities that help us produce what we do.” (Executive 6)*

*“It's hard to say really whether anyone sits and looks at that link between the sustainability – we take it for granted right, because there's no other way to operate.” (Executive 6)*

*“Well, I haven't 100% done [the exercise] to actually drive the correlation to say yes, we are doing right or wrong, so I haven't gone there.” (Executive 5)*

### **5.3.2. Sustainable Development Contribution**

All interviewees qualified their organisational contribution to sustainable development primarily as either economic growth or employment creation, or both. Contribution to equality and climate action were also noted. Other sustainable development contributions, although minimally referenced, extend to food security, education, partnership, media and CSRI initiatives.

#### **a. Economic Growth**

The size and expansion of platforms into the continent was widely cited especially by established platform interviewees as a key contribution to national and economic growth, particularly through enabling participation of small businesses and entrepreneurs.

*“We are able to onboard over 4 million small businesses across the continent, which is a serious milestone for us. And we've seen how - we see multiple*

*testimonials of how these small businesses were able to move from almost nothing to become something.” (Executive 5)*

*“... we’ve just focussed on building one, a sustainable business, that’s [the company], and two, working towards sustainability of all our clients who happen to be businesses.” (Executive 1)*

*“And it’s the SMME’s that are really the backbone of the economy, they are the ones that are pumping a lot of money into the economy. So, it’s allowing them to stay afloat... we’re very much about pumping back into the economy, building the African and South African economy.” (Founder 4)*

*“On the other hand, we know that we have customers that basically rely on us for conducting business. I think that’s something that really makes us proud that we have enabled businesses to strive to grow and because of the technology and the service we provide they are able to do business.” (Executive 7)*

Efforts to enable trade by addressing specific barriers for small businesses were specifically highlighted.

*“... our main mission is to enable businesses to trade, and we’ve evolved and that has been our why. So, for businesses to trade we’ve seen three components that are critical. One is the markets, logistics and finance.” (Founder 5)*

*“I think the biggest impact that we have is that we’re a free to use platform that has very limited barriers to entry, that can offer somebody selling a service or a good access to a wide audience.” (Executive 4)*

*“But I would say we go certainly beyond the minimum, we provide health insurance that they can take out and insurance for the goods they are transporting, so it’s really peace of mind if you know that something happens etc.” (Executive 7)*

Contribution to economic growth was also positioned to be as a function of improving underlying market dynamics by some interviewees.

*“We inject efficiency into an ecosystem that was previously prone to fraud, theft, insecurity. Yeah, so by injecting efficiency into that system we believe we develop our clients and, overall, a better economy for Kenya...” (Executive 1)*

*“And hopefully, given that we are, our goal is to build the trust among sellers and buyers. I think that we are helping in a way to grow the economies in these countries.” (Founder 1)*

#### **b. Employment Creation**

Direct employment creation was easily quantified as a developmental contribution by most founders.

*“For us that is unemployment or underemployment, it’s lack of digital inclusivity, it’s lack of financial inclusivity, it’s lack of economic growth.” (Founder 6)*

*“It’s almost a 28% unemployment rate [in Nigeria]. So, the goal of [the company] is to cut that number in half, if possible, in the next five years to providing this opportunity where people can start their own businesses.” (Founder 2)*

*“... I think more than 500 people nowadays working for our Nigerian office. But anyway, I found that it’s not really noticeable [significant]. But..., it is work and it allows some people to live.” (Founder 1)*

*“Some start-ups like us have – in some cases we went from zero employees to 200 to 300, and this is creating job opportunities in some of these African markets where unemployment is very, very high.” (Founder 7)*

*“From an employment point of view, I think that’s the biggest thing that we contribute.” (Executive 2)*

The extended impact of employment to family livelihoods and communities was highlighted.

*“So, there’s that, and I mean obviously thousands and thousands of mouths get fed by the money that trickles down from the [company] through into the [specific company supply chain].” (Executive 6)*

*“You are able to build your business well enough to get more tax paying employees and increase their spending power, contribute positively to their families and things like that.” (Founder 7)*

*“And we believe that this should increase the number of ecommerce transactions happening and hope that this will enable a lot of vendors and individuals to make a living off of selling online.” (Executive 7)*

A founder also highlighted the quality of employment opportunities generated that dignify marginalised work.

*“And then also the last thing I would say is helping to professionalise and standardise this type of work so that it’s not just seen as like menial labour and something that anyone can do. It’s actually work that should be valued, there should be standards about how people are treated when they do the work or the hours that they work, what are the minimums that people get paid...” (Founder 6)*

A founder however, also indicated the challenges with formalising individual workers on the platform and building a ranked profile as well as efforts to lean on historical data sources.

*“So, we’re saying the platform allows for the person [vendor] to be rated... But it only starts showing the rating after five [services]... But at this point... our numbers are still very low, so we’re still not... using that... But there’s a company... they have now just come back and suggested that they have got a better way of using artificial intelligence to find a way of rating somebody.” (Founder 3)*

### **c. Equality**

The need for nuanced action on equality and inclusion was echoed mostly by South African interviewees and a Kenyan executive.

*“It’s just kind of stating our values around human rights and supporting previously disadvantaged businesses. And a lot of that aspect I think that has really been becoming more and more – like looking at supporting local businesses that are owned by previously disadvantaged people.” (Executive 6)*

*“... it’s not a race war or anything like that but it’s like let’s just have a space where we can show that... there are really talented people... So, it’s that, the driving factor of ‘Africa as a whole is under looked’ and we’re here to change that. No, not on our watch.” (Founder 4)*

*“On the women empowerment side we have programs within [the company], [programme name] which is focussed on building the number of engineers, female engineers at [the company].” (Executive 7)*

One founder also expanded on the need for diversity and inclusion to sustain the success of the organisation itself.

*“I think diversity, equity, those things are also important in building companies that are sustainable, both in terms of sustainable from a financial point of view but also sustainable from an impact point of view.” (Founder 6)*

#### **d. Climate**

Climate action was a sustainable development area identified by established platform interviewees. The perception appears to be that climate action is an underrepresented and unprioritized topic on the continent.

*“... Africa is, to us, struggling to accept the fact that climate change is real.” (Executive 5)*

*“... and really in South Africa we’ve long felt that earning a living is a more important driver really for most of our users than climate change and better for the environment and trading in second-hand. So, we’ve focussed, not that the two are mutually exclusive, but we focus more on the former than on the latter.” (Executive 4)*

Specific interventions on climate change included education and awareness efforts.

*“So, what we are doing is we are trying to see how we can pull data, then interpret this data, then educate people on the essence of what this impact of the data means to the climate and to our environment, especially to big partners that are within our ecosystem and our markets precisely.” (Executive 5)*

Other interventions were specifically within the organisational ecosystem, particularly with innovations in the hardware and tools used.

*“And now that in the era of climate change and things like that we have to, as responsible business owners, also look to how we can provide better hardware that not just contributes to our business but also the environment.” (Founder 7)*

*“... we have the sustainability aspect. So, we have launched electric bikes, electric vans, electric tuk-tuks, so that’s on reducing carbon emissions.” (Executive 7)*

*“And hardware, we are operating in the green cloud centers... But then again, they [data centres] are operating in Europe. So, it's not much input for Africa in general, but overall, we are trying to be environmentally friendly.” (Founder 1)*

An executive presented contribution as embedded in the business model.

*“So, actually that it's not just setting up for earning a living or building a small business, but actually that we're also promoting recycling and upcycling... is powerful in itself as well.” (Executive 4)*

#### **e. Other Contributions**

Various other sustainable development contributions and focuses were marginally represented to include food security, education, partnership, media and CSRI initiatives.

The investment in education was visibly coupled with platform organisations need for high calibre engineering skills and educated talent in general.

*“And then again, as for education, we've been partnered with a lot of governments, institutions, even private institutions as well, to see how we can make education in the rural communities or communities that need stepping up - how that can actually happen.” (Executive 5)*

*“We have internship programs for women on the engineering side, so that also falls under the educational aspect. We have provided data for machine learning, algorithms and competitions for people to compete based on our data, that's certainly interesting.” (Executive 7)*

On food security, a founder showcased supply chain and logistics initiatives to minimise food waste across the supply chain.

*“So, as I mentioned earlier on, food distribution and food security is a space that we currently play in. To the best of our ability, we are able to contribute to something as serious as food security...” (Founder 7)*

*“We're also working of course around the temperature-controlled logistics area where we're developing our partnership with our investors and partners to develop cooling solutions that are more affordable and increase food security.*

*Because it's reducing the wastage of food in transit as a result of poor logistics conditions and what-not." (Founder 7)*

Another founder passionately referred to CSRI initiatives within the organisation.

*"We've also tried to set up kind of township programs with the different kind of feel so that we're able to provide those day-to-day skills for these interns before they enter the job market." (Founder 5)*

The importance of partnerships for development was also emphasized.

*"So, we had to create a portfolio that would accommodate these types of conversations from partnering with governments, to educating them, to asking for various partnership platforms that we can actually collaborate and see how to make the continent a more sustainable one with the right developments here and there." (Executive 5)*

*"... that [success] has given us the opportunity to be like a guide or a shining light to other incoming entrepreneurs. New founders reach out to us for advice, for comment, for help, for connection and of course that creates a ripple effect." (Founder 7)*

Lastly, continental-centric media was pitched as a development contribution.

*"And then what is the role of media in society? There are a couple of different things that it does, it informs people. The fact that people use us as a channel to find out what's going on in the world, what's going on in their own country, to watch the news, to be able to sit down and just relax after a day of working, be entertained, all of that stuff contributes to the sort of structure and stability of society." (Executive 6)*

### **5.3.3. Impact Monitoring**

The monitoring and measurement of sustainable development performance was an aspect that interviewees sat definitively on either end of the spectrum.

In a preamble to the monitoring of developmental contributions, an executive reflected on the balance between progressive sustainability interventions with small businesses and and singular corporate dependency.

*“I think part of the conversation that I had quite recently actually was around how the challenges some of these small businesses that we invest in the danger is that they become wholly dependent on us for revenue.” (Executive 6)*

A few interviewees indicated that the sustainable development impact was not monitored and or communicated amongst interested stakeholders.

*“So, we haven’t actually gotten those numbers to know actually how many other individuals we’re – some individuals we’re impacting, which would be great to know because then those are great numbers to advertise and just share the impact that we’re doing.” (Founder 4)*

*“No, so it’s not something that has been actively communicated at all, to be honest...” (Executive 4)*

Several interviewees on the other end indicated the nature of monitoring done on sustainable development topics.

*“And so, we need to report on these things officially. And we also work with the Fairwork Foundation who rate us across a number of criteria for platform companies and [the company] consistently ranks top three in the country in terms of their rating. So, we also work with outside partners who evaluate the work that we do to try and make sure that we’re keeping ourselves honest.” (Founder 6)*

*“So, it is monitored actually, we have data of how we the numbers of businesses we’ve actually impacted. We have data on the numbers of businesses that are currently selling on [the company], then we have testimonials.” (Executive 5)*

*“We can share one of our temperature control logistics initiatives that are on-going right now. I mean it’s in the media, but I can share that with you.” (Founder 7)*

Some of the executives and founders who indicated the monitoring of their sustainable development efforts were able to offer a reference document of their commitment to pertinent topics and/ or a report on progress.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

The findings presented reveal three main themes emerging from the inquiry on success drivers for the African platform economy. These are namely decoding success, underlying business inhibitors and key success capabilities. These key capabilities are contextual capabilities that enable platform success. These capabilities must always be understood in the context in which they are required i.e., the African market to ensure there are no futile assumptions or generalisations of meaning.

Three themes also emerge from the inquiry on African platform contribution to sustainable development. There are namely motivators for a sustainable development focus, sustainable development contribution and impact monitoring.

The nuances in these themes across the two research questions overlap visibly with examples being the overlap between decoding success and impact monitoring at a thematic level, and between economic growth contribution and trust (vendor assurance investment) at a sub-thematic level.

---

## 6. Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter consolidates the raw data findings in the previous chapter and weaves them into a discussion of their literary relevance and broader implications of the research findings. The discussion format applied has three main components. A consolidation and summary of the findings per theme or sub-theme is given, followed by a literary reconciliation of the findings against literature and concluded with a statement of possible implications of the research. Table 8 shows the themes identified in Chapter 5 and at what level, theme, or sub-theme, each of the discussion components are carried out.

*Table 8: Discussion Flow or Format*

Theme	Category Sub-theme	Findings Consolidation	Literary Reconciliation	Implications
<b>RQ1: Platform Success Factors</b>				
<b>Decoding Success</b>		X	X	X
	Definitions of Success			
	Measures of Success			
<b>Africa: Underlying Business Inhibitors</b>		X		X
	Nuanced Market	X	X	
	Regulatory Landscape	X	X	
	Infrastructure	X	X	
	Natural Disasters and Terrorism	X	X	
<b>Key Enabling Capabilities</b>		X		
	Strategic Partnerships	X	X	X
	Brilliant Technology Solution	X	X	X
	Strategic Use of Data	X	X	X
	Building Trust	X	X	X
	Agile resilience	X	X	X
	Talent and Experience	X	X	X
	Patient Capital	X	X	X
	Other Success Enablers	X	X	X

<b>RQ2: Developmental Contribution</b>			
<b>Motivators for a Sustainable Development Focus</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Strategic Commitment	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Investor Expectation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	SDG Affiliation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	External Expectation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Sustainable Development Contribution</b>		<b>X</b>	
	Economic Growth	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Employment Creation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Equality	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Climate	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	Other Contributions	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Impact Monitoring</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

*(\*Consolidated by the author)*

## **6.1. RQ1: Platform Success Factors**

The first research question seeks to establish the key drivers of success in African platform economies. Three broad themes are identified in response to this question, namely decoding success, underlying business inhibitors and key success factors.

### **6.1.1. Decoding Success**

In understanding the key drivers of success for African platform organisations, it is interesting to note the shifting appreciation of organisational success from a traditional commercial perspective to a shared value perspective.

The majority of founders and executives defined organisational success as, primarily, their ability to understand the market and customer and nimbly expand the commercial performance hence profitability of the business. On the other hand, some founders, both emerging and established, were vocal about their positioning of success as shared prosperity that tangibly benefits African communities beyond shareholder value.

Not surprisingly, and in line with their general definition of organisational success, the identified metrics for success by most interviewees were around market growth. Despite the emergent bias towards shared prosperity as a definition of success, an emerging founder indicated the challenge and lack of clear metrics in this regard.

These contextual findings provide insight on platform's organisational appreciation of success as predominantly biased towards shareholder return as opposed to network shared value where literature suggests that platform models have an inherent capacity to support multi-actor partnerships, be it for sustainable development (Morell et al., 2020) or profit. The findings implicitly confirm literary concerns that ultimately platforms pursue a commercial agenda at the expense of collective growth and equality (Bonina et al., 2021), while contrarily also confirming the emergence of digital social entrepreneurship within the African market.

The implications of these contextual findings, which must be paired with the discussion on sustainable development, are the potential underappreciation of the inherent value sharing dynamics in platforms that are, interestingly driven by a commercial agenda to thrive financially in African markets.

### **6.1.2. Africa: Underlying Business Inhibitors**

Africa was generally perceived as a market with very high potential, albeit nuanced in various ways that have a direct impact on the ability of an African platform organisation to succeed. These contextual nuances extend to socioeconomic and geopolitical factors, regulatory complexity, and infrastructural gaps and natural disasters and terrorism. Most interviewees accepted these to be an inherent part of the business environment that needed to be overcome to succeed.

The relationship of these findings with existing literature is embedded in the detailed discussion below, followed by a consolidation of implications at the end of the section.

#### **a. Nuanced Market**

A few established founders and executives lamented on the disconnected state of African trade which presents barriers to much needed inter-country trade. A few interviewees also highlighted the disruptive impact of currency fluctuations and potential

market solutions emerging such as cryptocurrency and mobile money. Several interviewees highlighted the economic and socio-political factors in various countries which impact their capacity to grow such as currency inflations and impact of the economic downturn on general population spending capacity. A founder shed light on how less tangible aspects such as language barriers also derail organisational progress in some markets.

These findings confirm literature that alludes to the complexity and uncertainty of the African market as a function of multiple country contexts (Friederici et al., 2020), while adding specific nuances, e.g., currency fluctuations and language barriers, to these complexities when considering the intra-regional trade enabled by continental platforms.

### **b. Regulatory Landscape**

The regulatory landscape was cumulatively and unequivocally presented as a two sided dynamic in Africa, posing different impacts to organisational success depending on each country, and on the industry. Countries such as Kenya were hailed for transparent and accessible legislation while countries like Nigeria were portrayed as prone to schizophrenic regulatory movements. Some interviewees specifically called on the need for more regulation, specifically tailored with a view to incentivise and support the growth of African platforms servicing multiple countries. New insights include the regulatory conundrums faced in deciding investor and customer influenced decisions such as where to register organisational IP or the business itself, the latter of which must be appreciated in parallel with the discussion on trust.

These findings shed light on the extremities of African regulation in general and the erratic nature of regulatory movements that may easily have a positive or negative impact on the platform economy. This adds to the context of literature that suggests that most regulators find themselves out of their depth in the face of the reality of digital markets (Rossotto et al., 2018).

### **c. Infrastructure**

The state of infrastructure on the continent was presented as largely limiting by most founders and executives. Key elements noted are around payment systems, internet penetration and affordability, road networks, and electricity. A lot of interviewees commented on the impact of the payment infrastructure that made it difficult to move money between borders, administration-heavy regulation of money transfers, and

avenues to navigate the deficiency. Some established interviewees emphasised the low internet penetration coupled with high data costs and the seeming impossibility of offering data free services. Poor road networks were specifically noted to undermine the efficiency and growth possibilities of platform organisations by some interviewees by restricting the scope of platform service provision to connected cities only.

These findings confirm widely covered literature of the infrastructural gaps in Africa (Friederici et al., 2020). The findings however extend further insight on how these infrastructural gaps impact the growth of platforms at a very operational level through roadblocks in roads and inadequate payment infrastructures, and ultimately the actual market accessed (Friederici et al., 2020).

#### **d. Natural Disasters and Terrorism**

A few interviewees inevitably shared differing testimonials on the impact of the Covid19 pandemic to their growth efforts. For some, such as those offering mobile grooming services, Covid19 helped make the case for their platform offerings while others expressed general negative association with the impact of the pandemic on their platforms.

These findings add some subtle insights to the body of knowledge on the impact of the prevailing Covid19 pandemic. The findings mirror the research showing the upturns in e-commerce platforms over the pandemic and yet cautioning on the uncertainty of how long this high will last (Reardon et al., 2021).

#### **Overall Implications**

Arguably, the overall findings on the experienced impact of the underlying macro business environment contradict popular optimistic opinions that Africa could leapfrog its way to the front of the digital wave (Choudary et al., 2020), while supporting the literary proposition that digital proposition that Africa is lagging in the digital race with digital platforms such as e-commerce practically growing in constrained fits and starts (Reardon et al., 2021).

The overall implications of these findings thus suggests that the underlying macro business environment on the continent ultimately presents as an inhibitor to the success

of the platform economy. The state of African markets, regulation, and infrastructure inhibits the growth potential and success of platform companies. This implication is simple and yet extremely important to note in considering whether African platforms can contribute significantly to the sustainable development of the continent if their growth is limited to typically urban connected centres. The implications of the inaptitude of regulators to address the dynamic digital market coupled with start-up promotions are for a more rounded and inclusive multi-stakeholder approach to propagate regulatory frameworks that not only support platform success but sustainable development as well (Rossotto et al., 2018).

### **6.1.3. Key Enabling Capabilities**

Various success drivers for African platforms were surfaced, with the most represented and nuanced in insight being strategic partnerships, brilliant technology solution, strategic use of data, building data, agile resilience, talent and experience, and patient capital.

#### **a. Strategic Partnerships**

The ability to identify and secure targeted, multi-faceted, partnerships was indicated by many interviewees as an important factor for platform success. Some interviewees differentiated the ease to secure partners which was seemingly easy for vendors and merchants providing services to consumers on the platform versus brands and businesses offering value adds and enabling distribution for platform vendors. Interestingly for vendors specifically, a few interviewees highlighted the specific nuance of investment required to enable them to provide their services on the platform. A few interviewees emphasized the lack of aggressive and formidable partners in the market as well as the difficulty to access certain partner networks. The role of strategic partners, who were also simultaneously competitors in some contexts, was appreciated to extend to driving continuous improvement by a few interviewees.

These findings echo digital model success factors that emphasize the need and role of different platform players in the network (Berman et al., 2018), while on the other hand they offer new insight on the difficulty of securing strategic partners in African platforms informed by factors such as unproven business models and/ or sectors as well as a

general lack of competitive aggression by market players which can overall propel innovative platform growth as witnessed in e-commerce (Reardon et al., 2021).

These findings imply the need to awaken existing, typically traditional, market players on the continent to the potential inevitability and opportunities presented by tapping into the platform economy.

#### **b. Brilliant Technology Solution**

Most interviewees unequivocally emphasised having a brilliant, continually updated, technology solution that is compatible with partner technology as a key driver of platform success. Most platforms specifically alluded to the advantage had by building the technology internally and customising it to meet improvement demands constantly. A few emerging founders who were leaning on outsourced technology as a means to an end expressed a desire for internally controlled technology. Interestingly, pseudo-African platforms using internal technology from foreign parent companies expressed no strong views on technology or the innovation around it. A founder shared how a third-party software provider had invested into the platform, albeit inadequately/ insignificantly, on noticing the traction the platform was gaining. A founder shared how a third-party software provider had invested into the platform on noticing the traction the platform was gaining.

These findings offer insights on the central role of the technology solution in African platforms, and more specifically the advantage gained by owning and customising it in-house. All established platforms owned their main technology solutions in-house, directly or via the mother company in the case of pseudo-African platforms, while emerging platforms using third-party software expressed seemingly unsustainable challenges with an outsourced arrangement. This is a stark contrast to literature on western platforms that does not seem to shed light on the ownership implications of platform technologies and/ or the relationship with platform success (Zhou et al., 2018).

The implications of these findings are several. Established platforms that have succeeded in the African market have the opportunity to create additional offerings by offering technology tested and viable in multiple African contexts and sectors. This would not only accelerate the growth of platforms in new sectors but also contribute to the SDG goals of fostering progressive innovation (Morell et al., 2020). This could be through

creative collaborative commercial arrangements such as participating in emerging platforms as a technology provider (Berman et al., 2018).

### **c. Strategic Use of Data**

All interviewees expressed the strategic use of data, which is typically built into the fibre of the technology solution, as a key factor in fuelling their platform growth and success. Most interviewees highlighted the importance of data as an integral part their decision-making process. Some interviewees cited other active use cases of data analytics to include improving the user experience, preventing customer harm, and driving innovation around new customer solutions in the platform ecosystem. An executive not aggressively using data indicated how this underinvestment in data exploitation posed a significant performance disadvantage. A few founders using third-party technology solutions lamented on the prohibitive cost of data solutions, while on the other hand founders with in-house technology expressed satisfaction on the return. A few established interviewees shared some insights on the hurdles of data analytics over time to include data overload, outdated legacy data systems as technology rapidly improves, and the difficulty of collecting data in some African markets.

These findings confirm and add an African perspective to platform literature that states the strategic collection and use of data as a success factor (Ikeda & Marshall, 2019) and that such data is typically owned and used by the platform companies (Dufva et al., 2017). The use of platform data to innovate around the customer-consumer experience echoes existing platform literature on the same (Ikeda & Marshall, 2019), while on the other hand, the use of platform data to improve the vendor experience as well as offer them enabling paid services such as financial credit appears does not appear to be reflected in platform literature. This is not surprising as most platform data is difficult to extract (Ikeda & Marshall, 2019) enabled by the lack of holistic policies on data governance in the platform economy (Rossotto et al., 2018).

The implications of these findings on the use of data in African platforms are that African platforms are actively using data to innovate around solutions for vendors as well as end customers. In a context where market players allude to a lack of public data points, it may be that both platforms and developmental agenda's such as the SDG's have not yet quantified the value/ contribution of amassing digital data as a means for identifying

contextual developmental and other focus areas such as financial access gaps to support small business owner economic participation.

#### **d. Building Trust**

The interesting notion of building market trust as a key success driver was highlighted by most interviewees to be a nuanced factor owing to the inherent state and history of the African market. Several interviewees shared the common perception and experience that, as a market, the African continent has a deep-rooted lack of trust in local online platforms. Most interviewees highlighted actions to gain, assure and maintain trust to be intertwined heavily with vendor quality assurance initiatives. While vendors and merchants to provide services on African platforms were earlier noted to be easy to secure, the general quality was found to be lacking by some interviewees. The ultimate cost of quality assurance to bring vendors and merchants to an acceptable level of quality and professionalism for the platform was perceived to be significant by some interviewees.

The nuanced findings on the role of trust in African platforms are a new addition to the existing body of literature on consumer trust in the digital economy which typically addresses trust in the context of the sharing economy (Richter et al., 2017) or otherwise in the general business context of proactively maximising the customer benefit (Peppers & Rogers, 2013). In the sharing economy, trust is intertwined with customers ethical perceptions of the platform with regards to matters such as privacy, security, and fulfilment reliability (Reardon et al., 2021). The findings confirm the trust matters of personal security and service fulfilment reliability to be present in African platforms, while in contrast, the findings do not expose privacy issues or ethical reservations to be a concern amongst consumers. The new trust insights highlighted in extension are the distrust in both online and digital payment systems by consumers as well as the platform owner distrust of vendors who cannot be relied on to be of the standard they purport to be hence triggering massive investments in vendor verification and quality assurance efforts. Additionally, the ultimate investment in enabling and upskilling vendors to be able to participate in the platform economy, even if driven by commercial interests, rejects the extractive platform capitalism perspective that platforms aggravate inequality by promoting 'winner takes all' dominance (Dufva et al., 2017).

The implications of these findings are the potential inadequacy of existing assurance interventions by platforms to meaningfully impact the market, hence the need for cost-effective and efficient verification mechanisms that alleviate the trust deficit amongst both the platform owners and customers. An interesting question arises – how does a continent build internal trust?

#### **e. Agile Resilience**

To succeed as a platform in the dynamic African market detailed in section 6.1.2. above, all interviewees alluded to the imperative need for an inseparable combination of agility and resilience to stay ahead of the curve. The invaluable ability to remain open to experimentation and course correcting while carrying the burden of pioneering new concepts in the market was echoed by most interviewees. A few established executives lamented on how the ability to remain agile can be hampered by the very same success it helps to attain.

These findings extend the importance of organisational agility and resilience to the African platform economy. This finding cannot be trivialised particularly in the dynamic context of the African market where succeeding platforms are typically pioneers setting the precedence for platform viability in the African market (Friederici et al., 2020).

These findings present an opportunity for further research into the agile resilience characteristics of successful African platforms as a guidance for accelerating growth of more successful platforms on the continent.

#### **f. Talent and Experience**

The vast majority of interviewees highlighted the importance of being able to acquire and retain the right talent early on, a difficult proposition for most it appeared. Some interviewees cited developers as the most elusive talent, noting the impact of global demand on this skillset on labour costs and norms. Some interviewees emphasized the leadership talent as key, typically embodied by the founding team profile four founder-led platforms and managerial capability in more established platforms. Several interviewees noted the resulting compromise with hiring foreign talent because of the local talent shortages. A few interviewees shared the high level of investment in training programs to upskill talent to the desired level.

These findings confirm the emerging body of literature that note the elusive nature of entrepreneurial experience that African platforms build as they go (Friederici et al., 2020). While literature notes the need to acquire specialised sector-specific experience (Friederici et al., 2020), interviewees were in contrast more concerned with the acquisition of experience to manage a budding corporate such as governance and organisation building. Not surprisingly, and in line with the continental need to invest in science and engineering talent, these findings add to the literary motivation for the need of such skills investment. Findings on the poor quality of education that also sees developers train themselves and aspire to maintain an independent, work on demand lifestyle confirm the emerging phenomena on Africa's 'self-trained' digital platform workforce (Friederici et al., 2020).

The findings implicate the need to support platform founders with transitional leadership guidance simultaneously with investing in a large, steady pipeline of engineering talent on the continent. There is opportunity to also attract corporate professional via creative incentives into the African platform economy, as a means to bridge the institutional leadership knowledge and experience gap (Friederici et al., 2020).

#### **g. Patient Capital**

All interviewees highlighted the inevitable need for the right financial investment to support platform growth and success. Several interviewees emphasized the particular need to be selective for patient investors who were committed to the African markets and the vision of the platform. Female founders specifically shed light on the unhelpful illusion of funding that was not adequate for tangible platform growth and success.

These findings, particularly from established platforms, surprisingly suggest that platforms were able to pick and choose compatible investors. Almost no reference was made to any of the platforms having benefited from traditional finance such as banks or government loans which may support the question on whether traditional funding in Africa is simply unavailable or inadequate (Friederici et al., 2020). The differing levels of funding between female founders confirms literature that suggests that the level of funding accessed is proportionate to the founders network and net worth (Friederici et al., 2020) – founders who referenced more network associations appeared to have accessed a myriad of investments whereas emerging founders without network access were hanging onto piece meal grant funding. The indication of access to patient capital

as a key success factor is a stark contrast to literature on success factors for digital models in western literature where the ability to access funding does not feature as a pertinent success criteria.

The implications of these findings highlight the need for more inquiries to shed light on the mechanisms African platforms use to secure funding, define criteria for investable platform models, and address any inherent system biases that disfranchise certain categories of platforms as a function of their marginalised founders e.g., on the basis of socioeconomic status (Friederici et al., 2020) or gender.

#### **h. Other Success Enablers**

Additional success factors that surfaced are detailed below. These include customer experience, hardware, clarity of vision, local presence, operations capability, external validation, aggregation-specialisation differential, service platform, and labour management.

These findings largely confirm and add to existing literature on the same as discussed in section 2.2., with a few extensions on some themes such as labour management, aggregation-specialisation differential and external validation which are discussed further below.

**Customer experience:** All interviewees indicated that an obsession with the customer needs and customer experience were a default success factor within their platforms, noting its interdependency with other factors such as trust, innovative use of data and agile resilience. Customer awareness actions was cited as an important aspect for platforms to engage in for the cumulative benefit of the customer and platform.

**Hardware:** Some founder and executive interviewees echoed a similar assertion that hardware was increasingly not in trend with most technological hardware needs being surpassed by use of innovations such as cloud servers. Some interviewees further expanded on the need to not own hardware assets in the platform supply chain network such as vehicles and technician tools e.g., digital content creation tools, but to rather influence the quality and criteria of the same. On the other hand, a few founders deemed hardware to be important and an aspirational company goal.

**Clarity of vision:** Some interviewees, representing both African and pseudo-African platforms, indicated their local presence and experience in specific African countries as a key propellant for platform success.

**Local presence:** Some interviewees, representing both African and pseudo-African platforms, indicated their local presence and experience in specific African countries as a key propellant for platform success.

**Operations capability:** Several interviewees highlighted the need for operations capability to implement feasible and efficient processes while an executive also gave insight on how operations capability in the platform economy can also be gained from global collaborations.

**External validation:** Most of the founders interviewed interestingly shared the motivator role accelerator programs had played in their growth journey.

These findings extend the emerging platform literature on the role of start-up accelerators and incubation programs. Typically guised as an award, accelerator programs are noted to be an inadequate propellant for platform establishment in sub-Saharan Africa (David-West et al., 2018) but perhaps their contribution is rather as a personal motivator and propellant for the platform founders themselves.

**Aggregation-specialisation differential:** A few interviewees indicated using an aggregator platform approach to better cater to their customers holistic need and propel their continued relevance and growth while on the other hand, a few interviewees cited a niche vertical specialisation as a differentiating and growth strategy.

In a world where the most successful platforms are also continually aggregating service offerings and functionality (Dufva et al., 2017), the strategy to specialise in specific verticals contradicts research that presents bundling of various offerings as a mechanism to fast-track diffusion of platforms such as e-commerce (Reardon et al., 2021).

**Service platform:** A few interviewees shared their view of platforms as a service as a key success factor, particularly for scaling the platform model.

**Labour management:** The ability to navigate the labour challenges in the platform economy, exacerbated by factors such as immigrant and informal labour and the

pressure of labour unions, was cited by a founder as important for the success of platforms enabling individual employment opportunities.

This finding contradicts platform literature that suggests that the digital worker is prone to unjust instances of implicit discrimination and profile challenges not necessarily managed by the platform (Graham et al., 2017). It rather adds a new dimension to the assertion that digital work provides an opportunity for individuals to partially overcome negative country images across borders (Lehdonvirta et al., 2019b), by highlighting the formalisation of work opportunities afforded to immigrants typically flooding informal job sectors such as domestic work and the beauty industry in Africa

## **6.2. RQ2: Sustainable Development Contribution**

The second research question seeks to ascertain the developmental contribution of successful African platform economies to the continent.

### **6.2.1. Organisational Motivators for a Sustainable Development Focus**

The overall the findings on platform organisational motivators to pursue a sustainable development agenda are that the motivation is internal to the organisation, typically driven by the sense of mission of the platform founders. Impact investors and platform partners are emerging as the significant external influences adding to the organisational motivation to pursue a sustainable development agenda. External entities such as governmental policy, traditional investors and international agendas such as the SDG's appear to have no tangible influence on the motivation to pursue sustainable development though emerging platforms were able to easily identify their sustainable development in SGG terms. Most platforms do not have an explicit codified commitment to sustainable development while those that do have typically codified this developmental contribution as a retrospective exercise informed by emerging stakeholder demands. The organisational performance, as measured by share price, did not show any noted correlation to the developmental contribution of listed platforms, neither was it a conscious consideration by listed platform executives. The finding on data insights and usage by African platforms, on the other hand, reveal an avenue for identification of relevant contextual sustainable development priorities, or at least pertinent focus areas, for the continent.

The relationship of these findings with existing literature is embedded in the detailed discussion below, followed by a consolidation of implications at the end of the section.

#### **a. Strategic Commitment**

Most founders and executives from both established and emerging platforms generally identified contributing to the sustainable development of the communities in which they operate to be an important consideration for the business. This shed an interesting light on the sense of mission embodied in African platforms, specifically a mission to contribute to the growth of the continent, albeit in multiple different ways. The commitment to sustainable development was positioned as an existing inherent part of the platforms ability to thrive on the continent. This suggests that indeed the effect of bringing or enabling more economic players into the platform network to ensure business performance is an inherent contribution that African platforms make to sustainable development. On the other hand, the commitment to sustainable development was admittedly not a deliberate or key consideration for a few platforms. This is a surprising insight which may perhaps be understood by considering an executive's expression that the definition of sustainable development itself was unclear. If platforms indicated contribution to the economy by enabling small businesses to formalise and access broader commercial networks is taken as a default contribution, for example, then the assertion that sustainable development is not a deliberate consideration of the platform strategy could indeed be a matter of definition. This adds to the research findings that the SDG's are not well attuned to the developmental contribution potential of some digital platforms (Morell et al., 2020) .

Paradoxically, despite alluding to sustainable development as an important business consideration, most platforms did not have a codified strategic commitment to sustainable development. This is congruent with platform leaders' views that the avenues they specifically contributed to were a prerequisite to their success and not necessarily a targeted external outcome. This sentiment was further echoed by listed executives' assertion that because sustainable development is an inherent prerequisite, then continued organisation performance is an implicit indication of the sustainable development contribution. This interesting finding implies that perhaps the definition of sustainable development and its positioning within the business context ought to be reviewed to enable more nuanced contributions and contribution avenues to be referenced and brought to light. Not surprisingly, most of the platforms that reported a

codified strategic commitment to sustainable development highlighted that it was a retrospective exercise that was influenced by growing trends and bias towards demonstrating sustainable development outcomes.

#### **b. Investor Expectation**

Investor expectation in investing in platform organisations was strongly indicated to be predominantly financial return, coupled with a clear absence of expectation for sustainable development impact. On the other hand, it was noted that this perception was shifting as reflected by a potentially increasing, subtle interest in sustainable development by some investors, albeit not as a pertinent requirement of the platform organisations. This was largely through peripheral reporting requirements in investor reports and funding due diligence.

Impact funding appears to be the commonly identified investment with a specified expectation and prerequisite for sustainable development contribution. The impact funding suggests that platforms are then required to align their impact with specified developmental areas such as poverty alleviation and empowerment. The combination of these findings has multiple implications. One is that there is an opportunity for traditional investors to embed a committed contribution to sustainable development as a central funding prerequisite for African platforms, as opposed to a peripheral note. On the other hand, a defined sustainable development focus by investors begs the question – ‘Who informs the African sustainable development agenda?’. An opportunity exists as discussed in section 6.1.3. for African platforms, through their extensive data mines, to shine the light on pertinent sustainable development focus areas for the continent.

#### **c. SDG Affiliation**

Most interviewees from established platform organisations were clear that their commitment and contribution to sustainable development was not actively guided by or partial to the United Nations Global SDG’s. Founders were particularly explicit in indicating that their organisational commitment to sustainable development was not driven by the SDG’s, even if actively aligned.

This active dissociation by most African platforms from defined sustainable development agendas, notably the SDG’s, adds a different angle (Morell et al., 2020) assertion that there is a general lack of appreciation of the digital organisation’s contribution channels

by the SDG's. This implies that there is a disconnect that needs to be bridged between the SDG's and platform organisations if there is to be an aligned way forward on sustainable development. Interestingly, despite the insistence that sustainable development focuses were contextually driven, emerging platform interviewees expressed an active affiliation with the SDG's. The identification of aligned goals on zero poverty, zero hunger, health and well-being, gender equality, partnerships and education supports the notion of these being the key areas in the SDG's that platforms can contribute to (Morell et al., 2020).

#### **d. External Expectation**

Additional insights surfaced on external expectations on sustainable development contribution. A founder shared the growing expectation for European businesses, where their servers are hosted, to be green. Unsurprisingly, this finding confirms general appreciation that the sustainable development agenda is more established and institutionalised in European organisations. Another executive highlighted increasing platform partner focus on sustainability matters. This sheds interesting light on the network pressure within platforms to aspire to higher levels of developmental contribution. Listed platforms did not notice or track any correlation between the share price, as a measure of market expectations, and periodic sustainable development performance. The lack of consideration of the impact of sustainable development on organisational market performance by platform executives could reinforce the identified need for managers to understand that sustainable investments are in fact business performance mechanisms (Martínez-Ferrero & Frías-Aceituno, 2015). The same finding could also alternatively suggest that the relationship between sustainable development and organisational performance is different or insignificant for African platforms, confirming the need for further academic research at country level (Martínez-Ferrero & Frías-Aceituno, 2015). This implies that more research is required on the relationship between organisational performance and sustainable development with a view to find practical relatable recommendations for business practitioners.

#### **Overall Implications**

The overall implications of these findings are that a more inclusive definition of sustainable development, as embodied by the SDG's, is required to capture the

developmental contribution of African platforms and its evolution. Opportunity exists for policy makers and traditional investors to make contribution to sustainable development a prerequisite for platform operation and funding through tailored tax incentives and technology subsidies (Rossotto et al., 2018). This is a proposition which, by their own assertion, African platforms may already be inherently addressing. Further research is still required on the relationship between organisational performance and sustainable development in the specific context of African platforms.

### **6.2.2. Sustainable Development Contribution**

All interviewees qualified their organisational contribution to sustainable development primarily as either economic growth or employment creation, or both. Contribution to equality and climate action were also noted. Other sustainable development contributions, although minimally referenced, extend to food security, education, partnership, media and CSRI initiatives.

#### **a. Economic Growth**

The size and expansion of platforms into the continent was widely cited especially by established platform interviewees as the key contribution to national and economic growth, particularly through enabling participation of small businesses and entrepreneurs. Specific efforts to enable trade by addressing economic participation barriers for small businesses includes offering free to use platforms, zero capital vendor opportunities, and business insurance to mention a few. Contribution to economic growth was also positioned to be as a function of improving underlying market dynamics by some interviewees with the main example being the addressing of marketplace trust issues extending to fraud, theft, and customer safety/ insecurity.

These findings add to research assertion that different platforms contribute differently to economic contribution development goals (Morell et al., 2020).

The implications of these findings suggest that the financial inclusivity gap amongst would-be platform vendors on the continent is yet to be significantly addressed, with much action still required to equip them to show up on digital platforms.

#### **b. Employment Creation**

Direct employment creation was easily quantified as a developmental contribution by most founders. Interviewees easily quantified their growing employee count as well as highlight the extended impact of employment to family livelihoods and communities. A founder also highlighted how the quality of employment opportunities generated dignify marginalised work such as in the context of informal beauty therapists and domestic workers. Interestingly, the challenges with building and maintain customer-acceptable profiles for digital workers were also noted for example in the inadequacy of ranking system algorithms for new digital workers. Encouraging efforts to obtain individual digital workers historical performance to build their platform profiles though accessing their social media and other archives were noted.

These findings are in line with universal appreciation of the employment creation benefit that organisations bring into the economy. Of particular interest however is the platform employment opportunity presented to typically individuals whose craft does not require or enable them to register as businesses e.g. domestic workers, beauticians, bike drivers and creatives. This confirms (Graham et al., 2017) indication that digital workers thrive where platforms promote and incentivise individual entrepreneurship. This is achieved through support actions such as grooming digital workers to understand and meet client needs and building their ranking profiles (Graham et al., 2017) which are noted to be inherent components of African platform vendor quality assurance programmes discussed in section 6.1.3. On the other hand, the findings highlight the risks with digital worker models which include the difficulty to participate due to high data costs discussed in section 6.1.3. This adds to the confirmed digital worker risks identified by (Graham et al., 2017) to be the difficulty to build ranked worker profiles and potentially increased implicit discrimination by employers (Graham et al., 2017).

The implications of these findings are that there is a need to ensure robust digital worker protection mechanisms so that they are not exposed to undue risks such as implicit discrimination which can in turn impeded their ability to strengthen their ranked digital profiles. While efforts to link new digital worker profiles with their social media footprint for example, the implications of cited data access and affordability are that some informal workers remain marginalised at the onset of transitioning to the platform economy.

## **b. Equality**

The need for nuanced action on equality and inclusion was echoed mostly by South African interviewees and a Kenyan executive with the main pain points being the redressing the historically engrained effects of race and gender inequality through education and engagement initiatives. One founder also expanded on the need for diversity and inclusion to bolster the financial success of the organisation itself, and not just a contribution to society.

These findings support the literary notion that, specifically on gender equality, platforms can aid economic gender equality via female participation and platform ownership (Morell et al., 2020). The establishment of educational initiatives to upskill and ultimately absorb trainees into the platform employee pool also confirms the literary view of education as an inclusive economic growth channel (Morell et al., 2020).

The implications of these limited findings on equality are that there may be a need to further research the specific equality nuances in African and position them alongside avenues platforms might take to redress.

## **e. Climate**

Climate action was a sustainable development area identified by established platform interviewees. The perception appears to be that climate action is an underrepresented and unprioritized topic on the continent, with an executive further confirming that they found it to be less of a developmental priority contextually. Specific interventions on climate change included education and awareness efforts extending to government and platform partner networks. Other interventions were specifically within the organisational ecosystem, particularly with innovations in the hardware and tools used such as green cloud servers and electric vehicles for logistics. An executive presented contribution as embedded in the business model via promotion of recycling and upcycling.

These findings confirm the research finding that suggest a persistent lack of regard and/or prioritisation to environmental sustainability topics on the African continent (Omisore, 2018). The adoption of environmentally friendly innovations in platform tools such as green cloud server and carbon-free emission vehicles is in line with (Morell et al., 2020) determination that platforms contribute to environmental sustainability via green energy and sustainable mobility initiatives. Interestingly the incorporation of recycling and

upcycling promotion in a for-profit African platform contradicts international research findings that this is a contribution area predominantly exhibited by non-profit platforms (Morell et al., 2020).

The implications of these findings are that more concerted effort is required in promoting dialogue and partnerships for action with regards to the environmental sustainability agenda in Africa (Omisore, 2018). There is also an opportunity to consider non-profit African platforms and research their role in and contribution to sustainable development on the continent.

#### **f. Other Contributions**

Various other sustainable development contributions and focuses were marginally represented to include food security, education, partnership, media and CSR initiatives. The investment in education was visibly coupled with platform organisations for high calibre engineering skills and educated talent in general. On food security, a founder showcased supply chain and logistics initiatives to minimise food waste across the supply chain. Another founder passionately referred to CSRI initiatives within the organisation which extended to Covid19 relief measures and township sports programmes. The importance of partnerships for development was also emphasized. Interestingly, continental-centric media was also pitched as a development contribution.

The limited depth of these findings and absence of literature detailing platform contributions to sustainable development topics such as food security affirms the literary assertion that different models will contribute differently to the developmental agenda (Morell et al., 2020).

The implications of these findings are the need, once again, to take a more detailed look at various platform models in Africa and how they specifically contribute to the sustainable development agenda. With education and awareness being central propellants for action on sustainable development, there are strong implications to reconsider the role of media platforms in developmental dialogue.

### **6.2.3. Impact Monitoring**

The monitoring and measurement of sustainable development performance was an aspect that interviewees sat definitively on either end of the spectrum i.e. platforms either platforms clearly monitored their developmental contribution and/ or impact or not at all. In a preamble to the monitoring of developmental contributions, an executive reflected on the delicate balance between sustainable small business support and creation of corporate dependencies where 'empowered/ enabled small businesses' were inextricably tied to the corporate platform such that they could not survive outside of or without the corporate platform. A few interviewees indicated that the sustainable development impact was not monitored and or communicated amongst interested stakeholders. Several interviewees on the other end indicated the nature of monitoring done on sustainable development topics to be rated by independent parties such as the Fairwork Foundation. Most of the executives and founders who indicated the monitoring of their sustainable development efforts were able to offer a reference document of their commitment to pertinent topics and/ or a report on progress and this was used to corroborate the research findings.

These findings confirm research that states that the environmental part of sustainable development is an unaddressed focus amongst African stakeholders (Omisore, 2018), and that contributions to economic growth aspects by platform organisations are more visibly quantified and qualified (Morell et al., 2020).

The implications of the status quo on undocumented developmental contributions is a need to study and quantify the unseen contribution of African platforms to the developmental agenda.

### **6.3. Conclusion**

The consolidated implicated discussed in this chapter are translated into the key theoretical conclusions in the next chapter.

---

## **7. Chapter 7: Conclusion**

This research set out to establish the key drivers of success in African platform economies and to ascertain the developmental contribution of these platform economies to the continent. A qualitative inquiry engaging 12 African platforms with a total operational coverage in 20 African countries was conducted. This final chapter summarises the main theoretical conclusions of the research, reconciles the contribution of the research to academia and practise, reflects on the limitations of the research, and concludes with an invitation to potential areas of further research.

### **7.1. Principal Theoretical Conclusions**

The principal theoretical conclusions from this research are reconciled under the umbrella of the two research sub-questions on success factors and contribution to sustainable development.

#### **7.1.1. African Platform Economy Success Factors**

The principal conclusions on African platform success factors are presented in line with the three discussion themes from Chapter 6 namely decoding success, underlying business inhibitors, and key enabling capabilities.

##### **a. African platform definition of success is shifting gradually**

The definition and measure of success for most African platforms is predominantly in line with a shareholder value that is criticised to be at the expense of collective growth and economic equality (Carla Bonina, Kari Koskinen, Ben Eaton, 2021). On the other hand, emerging platforms are insistent on implementing shared prosperity models that distribute returns more equally among all platform players although success metrics for such models are yet to be crystallised.

##### **b. The underlying African business environment is inhibitive**

The underlying business environment in Africa is uncertain and largely inhibitive for the digital platform economy as characterised by underdeveloped infrastructure such as road networks and internet availability and affordability (Friederici et al., 2020) and

divergent, erratic regulatory movements coupled with inter-country trade barriers. This delineates platform activity to connected urban nodes, and renders hopes of platform-induced economic development across a vastly rural Africa as simply unattainable (Friederici et al., 2020). To ensure that the anticipated digital economy gains for the continent (Choudary et al., 2020) are realised, a concerted effort to urgently address these gaps is required otherwise Africa could well remain a constrained laggard, limping along in the digital race (Reardon et al., 2021).

### **c. Key success drivers lie in the contextual capabilities of the platform**

For African platforms to thrive on the continent they require contextual capabilities which are largely internal with some external overlap. These are namely strategic partnerships, brilliant technology solution, strategic use of data, building trust, agile resilience, talent and experience, and patient capital.

**Strategic partnerships:** The ability to not only discern and access the right partners for a platform (Berman et al., 2018), but to do so in a market generally void of interested and/ or formidable market players while striking a precarious balance of profitably supporting the vendor category of partners to participate acceptably in the platform network is a capability that may well be contextual to the African market.

**Brilliant technology solution:** While the ownership implications of platform technologies are understudied (Zhou et al., 2018), the capability to build and control the continual improvement of proprietary platform technology is predominantly a key success factor for African platforms.

**Strategic use of data:** Strategic use of data is central to decision making and innovation around customer experience (Ikeda & Marshall, 2019) and vendor support offerings in African platforms. Additionally, platforms are accumulating a wealth of potentially undervalued data that may have application beyond their commercial interests in a continent with limited public data points.

**Building trust:** African platforms invest in and operationalise mechanisms such as vendor assurance programmes to address the trust deficit against digital platforms in the market, which extends beyond referenced trust aspects such as personal security and delivery reliability concerns (Reardon et al., 2021).

**Agile resilience:** An intertwined combination of agility and resilience enables African platforms to endure the constant beating of experiential learning and continuous improvement that comes with pioneering digital technologies in an uncharted and uncertain market.

**Talent and experience:** The ability to acquire and retain globally in-demand talent such as software engineers is a pivotal success factor for African platforms which are also subsequently investing in educational initiatives to support the talent pipeline.

**Patient capital:** Transcending socioeconomic access barriers to access elusive capital that is committed to growth on the continent is imperative for African platform success in a context where traditional funding channels such as bank and government loans are perceived to be unavailable or inadequate for digital entrepreneurs (Friederici et al., 2020).

Other success factors, which are relatively less nuanced and broadly supported in digital business model and start-up literature are: customer experience, hardware, clarity of vision, local presence, operations capability, external validation, aggregation-specialisation differential, service platform, and effective labour management.

### **7.1.2. African Platform Contribution to Sustainable Development**

The principal conclusions on African platform contribution to sustainable development are presented in line with the three discussion themes from Chapter 6 namely motivators for a sustainable development focus, sustainable development contribution and impact monitoring.

#### **a. African platforms are internally motivated to contribute to continental development**

The motivation to contribute to specified developmental topics is internal for African platforms, typically as a self-benefiting imperative e.g., developing the supply chain network or part of the founding mission. Impact funders and platform partners are the only noted emerging external influencers to the developmental contribution priorities of the platforms.

**b. African platforms currently contribute to sustainable development in a limited way**

The sustainable development contribution areas for African platforms are concentrated in the areas of economic growth, employment creation, equality, and climate action. Other less represented contribution areas include food security, education, CSRI and partnership for the goals. The restricted operational reach of African platforms, as discussed in section 6.1.2, inevitably results in a limited locus of impact of the chosen developmental areas (Friederici et al., 2020).

**c. The developmental impact of African platforms is inadequately monitored**

Few African platformed have structured mechanisms in place to measure their developmental impact, and this may be influenced in part by the developmental contribution being viewed as a business imperative (discussed above) and not necessarily a measured outcome.

## **7.2. Research Contribution**

The research contribution is presented in two parts: academic contribution, and recommendations for practitioners.

### **7.2.1. Academic Contribution**

This research broadly adds to our understanding of existing management theories on the platform economies as a digital business model, and more specifically offers an extension of emerging baseline theory on the intersection of African platform success and contribution to sustainable development (George et al., 2016). The theoretical conclusions of the research confirm that the theoretical framework of coopetition offered by (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) holds as an anchoring framework that brings together two sets of academic research on success factors of digital platform economies and on the developmental contribution of platform economies. The coopetition mechanisms proposed as necessary to achieve value outcomes at firm and broader level (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018) can be paralleled to the key enabling capabilities

required for platforms to thrive. The joint value creation and value destruction outcomes, which are also referred to as the dark side of platforms (Bonina et al., 2021), can be paralleled to the developmental contribution of the platform economies.

### **7.2.2. Practitioner Recommendations**

The implications of these research findings are translated into various practitioner recommendations. An ecosystem view is taken to make calls for action to various players to support and/ or aid the growth of African platforms as an important contributor to the development of the continent.

#### **a. Inter-governmental Agencies**

The research findings highlight the indifference to, and sometimes active dissociation from developmental agendas such as the UN Global SDGs by African platforms which are, coincidentally, self-committed to some agenda-aligned developmental topics. On the other hand, platforms also sense a lack of agency around key developmental topics such as climate change by their African governments. International and regional inter-governmental agencies will thus do well to consider the mechanisms through which developmental priorities are identified and/ or defined from national grassroots through to international stages. This should be done with a view to foster active participation from multiple stakeholders such as governments and industry and buy in for coordinated thrusts of action against both pertinent short-term and long-term developmental pain-points for Africa.

#### **b. Government, Policy Makers and Regulators**

The success of platforms in Africa is heavily constrained from the onset by issues such as poor infrastructural development, lack of access to the internet and inter-country trade barriers. Governments, policy makers and regulators, as applicable, ought to increase the number and size of infrastructure building oriented public-private partnerships and ensure these are closely governed for delivery and completion.

Additionally, it would appear most country regulations are due for a digital economy informed update. Working in tandem with experienced platform practitioners and researchers, policy makers and regulators need to make an urgent review of trade and

start-up incentives, device policies for protection of digital workers, governance frameworks for platform business models, and funding mechanisms that address gender inequalities in investment access.

### **c. Investors and Industry Players**

Platforms thrive on a typically multi-faceted partnership network. The research findings indicate a deficit in relevant, compatible and/ or accessible potential partners in the African market. Considering the gains already made by sustained African platforms, various market players will do well to make a concerted effort to participate aggressively in African platforms across various industries.

Existing African platform companies are navigating an uncharted terrain, continuously learning, and adapting to the market. They will need to further their pioneering effort by taking an active bottom-up participation in informing policy redress around the digital economy and its contribution to development.

Lastly, platform companies are amassed vast technological prowess with custom digital solutions in the African market, which must be exploited to build in regulatory controls such as workers voices and using the wealth of data collected in a market with limited public data points for good.

### **d. Individual Intrapreneurs**

To the individual intrapreneur working in a corporate or self-employed; the African platform economy is on the pioneering edge of digital entrepreneurship on the continent and there is a myriad of participation opportunities. Corporate organisational skills will aid the experience gap in platform companies as they mature and digital work per the gig economy is becoming a reality for those who seek more flexible work arrangements.

Finally, the potential impact of conscious bias to transact and use services and products on African platforms cannot be underestimated. The elusive leap of trust is required from all individuals to give established and emerging African platforms a chance and propel their developmental contribution to the next level.

### **7.3. Research Limitations**

Due to the inherent nature of the qualitative research method applied, the results of this study may not be generalisable due to the limited sample size, and more so considering that the sampled platforms are in different industries.

Secondly, the combination of low sound quality and unfamiliar accents, namely West African accents, on a couple of audio recordings introduced a transcription challenge with both subscription transcription software and a contracted transcriber.

Lastly, the total operational reach of the sampled population is 20 African countries and does not therefore fully represent sub-Saharan Africa nor Africa.

### **7.4. Future Academic Research**

Based on the conclusions of this African platform research, the following invitations are made for future academic research:

Quantitative studies to test the validity of the identified success factors across a broader range of African platforms and participants. This will enable a higher level of generalisation on the success drivers of African platforms.

An empirical review of the mechanisms in place to determine sustainable development priorities at a global level and the extent to which these mechanisms capture the developmental pain-points of Africa as a dynamic, emerging market. This may reveal levers to engage to foster alignment and buy-in on sustainable development agendas.

In-depth industry case studies on how platforms contribute to sustainable development as an inherent component of their business models and to what extent this channel of contribution may hold in the desired future state of a developed African market. This may provide proactive insights on whether inherent platform developmental contribution is a short-term contextual dynamic that will require review in a developed market.

Case studies on the plague of failed African platforms, in a context where there is a high churn rate of celebrated platform start-ups that do not make it past a few inception years. This will offer a new lens through which to appreciate the success factors for African platforms.

## References

- Altman, E. J., & Tushman, M. L. (2017). Platforms, open/user innovation, and ecosystems: A strategic leadership perspective. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 37, 177–207. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0742-332220170000037007>
- Barnard, H., Cuervo-Cazura, A., & Manning, S. (2017). Africa Business Research as a Laboratory for Theory building. *Management and Organisation Review*, 13(3), 467–495.
- Berman, S., Davidson, S., Ikeda, K., & Marshall, A. (2018). Navigating disruption with ecosystems, partners and platforms. *Strategy and Leadership*, 46(5), 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-07-2018-0064>
- Bono, & McNamara. (2011). From the Editors Publishing in Amj — Part 2 : Research Design. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(4), 657–660.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Butner, K. (2019). Six strategies that define digital winners. *Strategy and Leadership*, 47(5), 10–27. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-07-2019-0105>
- Carla Bonina, Kari Koskinen, Ben Eaton, A. G. (2021). Digital platforms for development - Foundations and research agenda.pdf. *Information Systems Journal*, 1–34.
- Choudary, S. P., Lamb, J., & Marais, K. (2020). *Can Africa Take the Platform Economy Forward ?*  
<https://corporateandinvestment.standardbank.com/cib/global/insights/african-platform-business-economies>
- Corley, K., & Gioia, D. (2011). Building theory about theory building: What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 36(1), 12–32. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0486>

- Crane, A., Henriques, I., & Husted, B. W. (2018). Quants and Poets: Advancing Methods and Methodologies in Business and Society Research. *Business and Society*, 57(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650317718129>
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2011). Crafting qualitative research: Morgan and smircich 30 years on. *Organizational Research Methods*, 14(4), 647–673. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428110373658>
- David-West, O., Umukoro, I. O., & Onuoha, R. O. (2018). Platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: startup models and the role of business incubation. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 19(3), 581–616. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIC-12-2016-0134>
- Davies, A. R., Donald, B., Gray, M., & Knox-Hayes, J. (2017). Sharing economies: Moving beyond binaries in a digital age. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 10(2), 209–230. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx005>
- de Reuver, M., Sørensen, C., & Basole, R. C. (2018). The digital platform: A research agenda. *Journal of Information Technology*, 33(2), 124–135. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41265-016-0033-3>
- Dufva, M., Koivisto, R., Ilmola-Sheppard, L., & Junno, S. (2017). Anticipating Alternative Futures for the Platform Economy. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 7(9), 6–16. <https://doi.org/10.22215/timreview/1102>
- Friederici, N., Wahome, M., & Graham, M. (2020). *Digital Entrepreneurship in Africa: how a continent is escaping Silicon Valley's long shadow*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2018). Finding Theory–Method Fit: A Comparison of Three Qualitative Approaches to Theory Building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 27(3), 284–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617706029>
- George, G., Osinga, E. C., Lavie, D., & Scott, B. A. (2016). Bring Africa In: Promising Directions for Management Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(2), 377–393. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4002> FROM

- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>
- Gnyawali, D. R., & Ryan Charleton, T. (2018). Nuances in the Interplay of Competition and Cooperation: Towards a Theory of Coopetition. *Journal of Management*, 44(7), 2511–2534. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318788945>
- Graham, M., Hjorth, I., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). Digital labour and development: impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods. *Transfer*, 23(2), 135–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258916687250>
- Grant, A. M., & Pollock, T. G. (2011). From the editors. Publishing in AMJ - Part 4: Grounding Hypotheses. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(5), 873–879.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Ikeda, K., & Marshall, A. (2019). Strategies for competing in markets enabled by digital platforms. *Strategy and Leadership*, 47(1), 30–36. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-10-2018-0097>
- Jacobides, M. G., Cennamo, C., & Gawer, A. (2018). Towards a theory of ecosystems. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(8), 2255–2276. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2904>
- Lehdonvirta, V., Kässi, O., Hjorth, I., Barnard, H., & Graham, M. (2019). The Global Platform Economy: A New Offshoring Institution Enabling Emerging-Economy Microproviders. *Journal of Management*, 45(2), 567–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318786781>
- Martínez-Ferrero, J., & Frías-Aceituno, J. V. (2015). Relationship between sustainable development and financial performance: International empirical research. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 24(1), 20–39. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1803>

- Morell, M. F., Espelt, R., & Cano, M. R. (2020). Sustainable platform economy: Connections with the sustainable development goals. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 12(18). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187640>
- Omisore, A. G. (2018). Attaining Sustainable Development Goals in sub-Saharan Africa; The need to address environmental challenges. *Environmental Development*, 25(March 2017), 138–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2017.09.002>
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., & Collins, K. M. T. (2010). Innovative data collection strategies in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 696–726. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1171>
- Penu, O. K. A. (2020). *Platform Economy Research in Africa*. 18–39. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3234-8.ch002>
- Peppers, D., & Rogers, M. (2013). Extreme trust: The new competitive advantage. *Strategy and Leadership*, 41(6), 31–34. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-07-2013-0054>
- Reardon, T., Belton, B., Liverpool-Tasie, L. S. O., Lu, L., Nuthalapati, C. S. R., Tasie, O., & Zilberman, D. (2021). E-commerce's fast-tracking diffusion and adaptation in developing countries. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 43(4), 1243–1259. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aepp.13160>
- Richter, C., Kraus, S., Brem, A., Durst, S., & Giselbrecht, C. (2017). Digital entrepreneurship: Innovative business models for the sharing economy. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 26(3), 300–310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12227>
- Rosotto, C. M., Lal Das, P., Ramos, E. G., Miranda, E. C., Badran, M. F., Licetti, M. M., & Murciego, G. M. (2018). Digital platforms: A literature review and policy implications for development. *Competition and Regulation in Network Industries*, 19(1–2), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1783591718809485>
- Scandura, T. A., & Williams, E. A. (2000). Research Methodology in Management: Current Practices, Trends, and Implications for Future Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(6), 1248–1264. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1556348>
- Sharma, G., & Bansal, P. (2020). Cocreating rigorous and relevant knowledge. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(2), 386–410. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.0487>

- Shaughnessy, H. (2016). Harnessing platform-based business models to power disruptive innovation. *Strategy and Leadership*, 44(5), 6–14. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-07-2016-0061>
- Spector, P. E. (2019). Do Not Cross Me: Optimizing the Use of Cross-Sectional Designs. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 34(2), 125–137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-09613-8>
- Vallas, S., & Schor, J. B. (2020). What do platforms do? Understanding the gig economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46, 273–294. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054857>
- Vendrell-Herrero, F., Parry, G., Bustinza, O. F., & Gomes, E. (2018). Digital business models: Taxonomy and future research avenues. *Strategic Change*, 27(2), 87–90. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsc.2183>
- Zhou, M., Leenders, M., & Cong, L. M. (2018). Ownership in the Virtual World and the Implications for Long-term User Innovation Success. *Technovation*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2018.06.002>
- Zysman, J., & Kenney, M. (2018). The rise of the platform economy. *Issues in Science and Technology- Deloitte, December*, 1–6. <http://issues.org/32-3/the-rise-of-the-platform-economy/>

## Appendices

### A1. Consistency Matrix

**Title:** Strategic African Alliances: Success drivers in platform economies

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	DATA ANALYSIS
<p><b>Research Question:</b> How do African platform economies succeed and contribute to the development of the continent?</p>	(Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018)	Interview: Q 3, 6, 9	Frequency analysis on thematic codes to give most identified success factors. Frequency analysis on closed questions to give extent of SDG consideration in strategy.
<p><b>Sub-Question 1:</b> What are the key drivers of success in African platform economies?</p>	(Barnard et al., 2017) (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2018) (Bonina et al., 2021)	Interview: Q 3, 4, 5, 6	Thematic coding to uncover types of internal and external success factors.
<p><b>Sub-Question 2:</b> What has been the developmental contribution of successful African platform economies?</p>	(Davies et al., 2017) (Bonina et al., 2021) (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018)	Interview: Q 7, 8, 9, 10	Frequency analysis on closed questions to give SDG's most identified. Content analysis on open-ended questions to determine quantified developmental impact areas.

## A2. Company Profile Form

Company information survey to be populated post signing of the Informed Consent Letter and prior to the interview to profile company and ensure alignment with the selection criteria.

<b>COMPANY PROFILE FORM</b>	
<b>Company Name</b>	
<b>Industry</b>	
<b>Founder/s</b>	<b>Gender:</b> <b>Nationality:</b>
<b>Year Founded/ Established</b>	
<b>Country of Registration</b>	
<b>Countries of Operation</b>	
<b>Company Size</b> (employees, market share, revenue)	
<b>Information Provided By</b>	<b>Name:</b> <b>Function:</b> <b>Signature:</b>
<b>Date Provided</b>	

### A3. Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	Background/ Contextual Information	Research Question: Continental Success & Contribution	Sub- Question 1: Success drivers	Sub- Question 2: Developmental contribution
<i>To begin the interview, I would like to understand a bit more about &lt;company&gt; and your role as &lt;title&gt; ...</i>				
<p>1. Can you tell me a bit of your professional history and how you ended up at &lt;company&gt;?</p> <p>FO: What is your scope of responsibility at &lt;company&gt;?</p>	X			
<p>2. You indicated you are in the &lt;industry&gt;.</p> <p>What market sector is your firm in? (e.g. transport/ mobility, microloans)</p>	X			
<p>3. May you please share your company's history with me.</p> <p>How and when was it founded and who were the key players (stakeholders) in this growth story?</p>	X	X	X	
<p>4. (Governmental) policy and regulations typically directly impact business in many African markets.</p> <p>What has been the impact of regulation on the growth of the business?</p>	X		X	

<b>Thank you for that context. I would now like to ask you about &lt;success factors&gt;...</b>				
<p>5. &lt;company&gt; has sustained growth in the African market for &lt;specify&gt; years.</p> <p>What would you highlight as your biggest organisational successes?</p>		X	X	X
6. In what way does <company> differentiate itself from other platforms?		X	X	
7. If you were to capture it in a sentence; What is <company's> definition of organisational success?		X	X	
8. What would you say has enabled the company to succeed to date?			X	
9. Which specific factors have contributed to the success of the <company>?			X	
10. What (additional) factors, internal or external, do you think would further enable the success of <company>?		X	X	
<p>11. Literature on Western platform organisations suggests that the following factors are key to their success &lt;list most common 5&gt;.</p> <p>Would you say these factors have played a (pivotal) part in the success of &lt;company&gt;?</p>			X	

<p><b>12. Are there any factors that you would say have hindered the success of the company?</b></p> <p><b>FO: If so, which factors are these and in what way have they hindered success?</b></p>			X	
<p><i>Thank you very much. I would like for us to now explore &lt;developmental contribution&gt;...</i></p>				
<p><b>13. Is contributing to African/ national development an aspect that is important for the company?</b></p>				X
<p><b>14. What is the biggest impact &lt;company&gt; has made to sustainable development in your community/ies?</b></p>				X
<p><b>15. Are any of the &lt;company's&gt; developmental contributions aligned to the SDG's?</b></p> <p><b>FO: If so, which SDG's does the company identify with? &lt;selection of 17&gt;</b></p>				X
<p><b>16. Is sustainable development a deliberate consideration in the company strategy?</b></p> <p><b>FO: Is the incorporation of sustainable development in your company strategy a prerequisite for investors/ shareholders?</b></p> <p><b>FO: You listed your investors, what do you</b></p>		X		X

<p><b>believe were their goals in investing in you?</b></p> <p><b>FO: You are a listed company, is there any correlation between your share price and periodic sustainable development contribution?</b></p>				
<p><b>17. May you kindly share a copy of the company's strategy reflecting the incorporation of sustainable development?</b></p>	X	X		X

#### **A4. Assessment Matrix: Non-verbal Communication**

This matrix will be adapted and used to collect and assess nonverbal cues of participants which will then be analysed hand in hand with the verbal data to give more rounded interpretation.

<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Adapters</b>	<b>Lexical Movements</b>	<b>Symbolic Gestures</b>
<b>Happiness</b>			
<b>Sadness</b>			
<b>Anger</b>			
<b>Fear</b>			
<b>Disgust</b>			
<b>Surprise</b>			
<b>Other</b>			

*\*Source:*

(Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010)

## A5. Register of Raw Data and Consent Documents

#	Document Type	Document Description	Count	Submission Status
1	<b>Consent</b>	MPhil Student- Supervisor Contract	1	Submitted
2		Ethical Clearance	1	Submitted
3		Copyright Form	1	Submitted
4		Certificate of Additional Support	1	Submitted
5		Signed Participant Consent	14	Withheld
6		Signed Transcriber Consent	1	Submitted
7	<b>Raw Data</b>	Interview Transcripts	13	Submitted
8		Interview Recordings	13	Withheld
9		Pre-Interview Organisational Profile	10	Withheld
10		Post-Interview Sustainable Development References		Withheld
11		Atlas.ti Project Bundle	1	Withheld