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PhD thesis title:

National Platforms in a Globalized World: Competitive Strategies and  
the Role of the State in the Case of Russian Digital Platforms

SUMMARY

Digital platforms are data-driven, software-based firms that mediate transactions. Effectively, platform markets are monopolies driven by network effects and the "winner-take-all" outcomes. Globally, only a few countries, such as China and the United States, have developed populations of competitive national firms. American platforms dominate the majority of national consumer markets and what has been termed the "platform economy" in many nations, excluding China. This dissertation aims to answer *how local platforms can emerge and mature outside major economies and successfully compete with global competitors*. Situated primarily within the strategic management approach, this thesis demonstrates how firms' strategies for creating and leveraging network effects may stem from a social, economic, and political context.

The empirical setting for this Ph.D. project comes from the Russian internet scene. In contrast to many Western countries, Russia is one of a few national internet segments that produced domestically competitive platforms in key segments such as search, social media networking, and e-commerce. The study explores Russia's success in breeding domestically competitive and technologically advanced platforms.

Drawing upon archival research, interviews, company reports, and case studies of Russian platforms, this qualitative study examines empirical and theoretical issues in three papers. Paper 1 investigates the role of a national environment in fostering a population of competitive platforms. By analyzing case studies of Yandex, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Ozon, the paper explores the reasons Russia was able to develop platform companies that survived the entry of the US firms. Paper 2 is an in-depth analysis of Yandex's long-term strategy and the evolution of competitive dynamics against Google. Paper 3 investigates the role of national policy and politics in fostering the indigenous platform industry and protecting firms in network markets.

The in-depth analysis of the Russian case demonstrates the conditions under which national platforms emerge outside major economies and makes several contributions to existing platform

research, primarily focused on American and Chinese platforms. First, the case offers a more nuanced understanding of network effects that stem from the social, political, economic, and regulatory environment and comments on a niche platform strategy. Second, the thesis comments on the industry conditions that underlie the development of platform populations, such as access to technology and capital, access to a homogenous internet user base, and the need for institutional entrepreneurship that will transform and adapt existing institutions and create demand for platform services. Third, this study elaborates on the role of policy and politics in fostering domestic firms and explains the economic and political considerations behind policy instruments.

Overall, studying Russian platforms extends academic research on digital platforms and contributes to the emerging studies of platform capitalism and its country-specific variations. While Russian platforms stem from another social, political, and market environment, the case demonstrates the conventional character of platform organizational form that spans different economic and political systems. Further analysis of platforms as the dominant organizational form and their consequences are necessary for understanding capitalism as a socio-economic system.