



A context in mutation: How the gig economy is changing the rules of the game for entrepreneurship?

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Abstract

Considering rapid digital transformation and recent changes in the macro-level “rules of the game” in entrepreneurship, we aim to problematize and understand the progressive encounter and new relationship between opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurs within the context of the gig economy. In such a setting, both traditional entrepreneurial roles and the very division between them are brought into question. Their encounter implies a deviation from the basic assumptions of what entrepreneurship entails: being the bearer of risk, taking on uncertainty and individual responsibility, and pursuing unlimited profit potential. This deviation results in a change in the rules of the game. Consequently, we learn more about how the context of moving from a pre-gig economy toward the gig economy has implications for our societal understanding of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon.

Keywords Gig economy · Opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship · Rules of the game

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1 Introduction

The recent changes seen in the economy (Friedman 2014; Piketty 2014; Ravenelle 2017), arising from the prior financial crisis (2008–2010) and presently strengthened by the circumstances invoked by the COVID-19 pandemic (Galindo-Martín et al. 2023; Emami et al. 2022), have led to the extraordinary development of the gig economy (see Ahsan 2020; Wood et al. 2023; Woodcock 2020). The gig economy is broadly defined as a labor market characterized by short-term, flexible jobs or “gigs” where individuals are hired for specific tasks rather than full-time and long-term employment. It refers to the organization of an economy where independent workers engage in short-term work arrangements and is often seen as a chance for the formation of new businesses and a novel style of working (Ravenelle 2017). Although the phenomenon of doing “gigs” is not particularly new, the unprecedented availability of digital technology (Martins and Rodrigues 2024) has significantly reduced barriers to entry for many people all over the world. According to the Gallup Institute (2018), 36 percent of U.S. workers participate in the gig economy through their primary or secondary jobs, and almost 7.5 percent of households earned platform income in 2019 (January 2020, JP Morgan Chase & Co). In the European Union (EU), around 24 million people (or 11 percent of the EU’s workforce) are estimated to have provided services via on-location or online labor platforms at least once (Joint Research Centre, European Commission, 2021). The EU estimates around 43 million platform workers by 2025, a growth of 52 percent in three years (European Union 2024).

The rise of the gig economy is presently associated with entrepreneurship (Ahsan 2020; Schor 2017; Woodcock 2020). However, the relation between entrepreneurship and the gig economy is not clear. On one hand, the gig economy is seen as a part of the growing platform economy that is materializing as a prosperous context for entrepreneurial opportunities and business model innovation (Berman et al. 2024; Kraus et al. 2019; Nambisan 2017). On the other hand, it is tied to policies often described through capitalistic function (Cockayne 2016; Woodcock 2020) and a decline in entrepreneurial activity as platforms provide jobs. There are also recent insights about the transformative and destructive sides of digitalization when addressing the role of opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurship (Fossen and Sorgner 2021). Fossen and Sorgner (2021) conclude that while transformative digitalization provides fertile grounds for opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, it may also lead to increased levels of necessity entrepreneurship. In this increasingly dynamic but unclear digital landscape, our paper seeks to further explore the interconnection between opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurship within the context of the gig economy.

We claim that the rise of the gig economy has impacted the macro-level rules of the game for entrepreneurship (Baumol 1996) and build on the idea of evasive entrepreneurship (Elert and Henrekson 2016) when problematizing the intertwined relationship that is starting to emerge between opportunity-based entrepreneurs and necessity-based entrepreneurs. By referring to the rules of the game, we draw from Baumol (1996) and his view that entrepreneurship can be productive, unproductive, or even destructive. Building on the work of Baumol, we also include recent ideas on evasive forms of entrepreneurship (Elert and Henrekson 2016), explaining how individuals engage in entrepreneurial activities to evade regulatory, economic, or social

constraints for financial gain. We build connections between innovative development (the gig economy and digitalization) and the roles that different entrepreneurs may play when challenges to established norms are being made. Our problematization is based on the contextual change that has occurred when moving from a less platform-oriented pre-gig reality toward the gig economy, which has created a deviation from the basic assumptions of what entrepreneurship implies, such as being the bearer of risk and taking on uncertainty to reap potentially unlimited profits (Ahsan 2020; Knight 1921), along with individual responsibility (McClelland 1961). We focus our discussion on these important changes at the intersection of opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurship within the digital context, particularly regarding the potential role of disruptive and transformative digitalization in shaping entrepreneurial practices (see also Fossen and Sorgner 2021). We formulate the following research question: *How and why does the gig economy change the rules of the game for entrepreneurship and, in particular, the relation between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs?*

While the literature on the effects of the gig economy on employment is abundant (e.g., Ravenelle 2017; Schor 2017; Woodcock 2020), the novelty of this paper rests on addressing the changing implications for basic concepts used to define entrepreneurship as well as the clash between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship given the mutating context provided by the digitalized gig economy. The paper makes at least two contributions. First, it contributes to and further develops the discussion and insights brought forward by Ahsan (2020) on the closed glass ceiling of profits and the grand illusion of the model of economic exchange that is presented as a democratic and societally value-creating innovation. Our point of departure is the assumption that no traditional employment relationship is recognized in a large part of the gig economy discourse (Ravenelle 2017; Schor 2017; Stewart and Stanford 2017; Woodcock 2020). These new rules of the game can be recognized through the observation of the fictive lack of subordination in the relationship between the parties (opportunity and necessity entrepreneurs), which nurtures the idea that the person works as a self-employed individual by her/his own choice (Friedman 2014; Moisander et al. 2018; Peticca-Harris et al. 2020; Woodcock 2020), often tempted by the fake vision of entrepreneurial independence, rather than in a regulated employment relationship for the owner of a platform. Second, we provide another viewpoint on the issue of evasive entrepreneurship and how it has created a strong tie between opportunity- and necessity-based entrepreneurs (on a macro level as regulations in different countries make the service provider—i.e., the gigger—either an employee on dubious contracts or a freelancer/entrepreneur). However, in our problematization, we seek to discuss the intertwined relationship from the viewpoint of the opportunity-based entrepreneurs and their striving not to provide an employment relationship type of formal contract to any of the service providers.

2 Theoretical framing

2.1 The shift from productive to unproductive entrepreneurship

In his seminal work, Baumol (1996) develops the idea that regardless of time, the allocation of entrepreneurship in society is fairly stable but will yield different ratios of productive, unproductive, or even destructive entrepreneurs depending on the “rules of the game” within the institutional framework. What Baumol further argued is that the institutional dependency of entrepreneurship is twofold: not only does the behavior of entrepreneurs depend on rules, but also, the creation of social value by means of productive entrepreneurial activity largely depends on the institutional framework and the various prevailing regulations. This was recently addressed and further problematized by Lucas and Fuller (2017), related to the power of rules in helping predict the entrepreneurship-driven social value that benefits society. As such, Lucas and Fuller (2017) explain that we cannot say *ex-ante* if an entrepreneur will engage in productive or unproductive forms of entrepreneurship because the outcome of her/his engagement can only be understood *ex-post*. While it may indeed be difficult to state *ex-ante* whether entrepreneurs’ engagement in positive value-creation activities will benefit society, the distinctions among productive, unproductive, and destructive entrepreneurship have been found critical for understanding social value creation by the means of entrepreneurship (Acs et al. 2013; Baumol 1996; Murphy et al. 1991) as social value constitutes the main difference among these three types of entrepreneurship (Acs et al. 2013).

Building on Baumol’s understanding, we propose that the lack of social value in the movement from a pre-gig to a gig economy has severely challenged the rules of the game as we knew them. Consequently, the well-known and simple differentiation among productive, unproductive, and destructive entrepreneurship has developed into a form of evasive entrepreneurship (Elert and Henrekson 2016) that has occupied the space within which the entrepreneurial gig activities operate. Elert and Henrekson (2016: 96) define evasive entrepreneurship as “profit-driven business activity in the market aimed at circumventing the existing institutional framework by using innovations to exploit contradictions in that framework.” In other words, it is a profit-driven activity that introduces technological or organizational innovations to work around the existing rules and regulations. A typical example of evasive entrepreneurship is cryptocurrency (such as Bitcoin, enabling peer-to-peer transactions that avoid many of the restrictions imposed on banks and other financial institutions). In the gig economy realm, an example of evasive entrepreneurship is Uber, operating in the area between less regulated private ownership and the heavily regulated taxi industry.

The environment where the rules of the game have started to mutate has brought a deeper division between the entrepreneur and the self-employed into the equation with implications for both the form of entrepreneurship and the social value it produces. A main difference that can be identified is the reduced social value creation that trickles down to society in the gig economy, where platform owners take on the role of arbitrageur, thus limiting the potential profit for the service provider and, in the long term, for the service receiver (the customer). At the same time, the gig economy and the large platform intermediaries have brought an abundance of busi-

ness model innovations and new business models (Calderon-Monge and Ribeiro-Soriano 2024; Felicetti et al. 2024; Kraus et al. 2019), but these innovations have so far failed to provide a dual societal value for both the service provider and the customer (Richter et al. 2017; Wegner et al. 2024) since the potential living wage of the service provider has been severely questioned in recent studies (Ravenelle 2017; Woodcock 2020). We attempt to address the divisions between the entrepreneur and the self-employed in the contextual change of the gig economy by conceptualizing the relationship between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship, as presented in the next section.

2.2 Opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship

Since the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) introduced the concept of opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship in 2001, researchers have attempted to identify factors underlying their variation and their consequences for economies and societies as well as for individuals. The core difference between these two entrepreneurship groups rests on the entrepreneurs' motivation (Bosma et al. 2012). In the first case, individuals choose to become entrepreneurs and are willing to exploit their ideas, while in the second, they are pushed into becoming entrepreneurs and feel forced to start up their own businesses (Emami et al. 2022). Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs take advantage of a business idea they find promising, whereas necessity-driven entrepreneurs decide to start up a business as they see no other option to obtain an income for themselves.

This distinction soon became one of the key topics of entrepreneurship, with the junction of entrepreneurship and economics being especially developed (Acs 2006; Wennekers and Thurik 1999). Studies applying this approach investigate economic and institutional conditions that are more favorable to the development of entrepreneurship and its links to growth and job creation (Angulo-Guerrero et al. 2017; Carree et al. 2002). They search for a relationship between economic development and the rate of startups (Wennekers et al. 2005) or seek the link between the entrepreneur's contribution and an economy in its phase of economic development (Gries and Naudé 2010). Systematically conducted research has found that opportunity-driven entrepreneurship leads to more successful, innovative, and growth-oriented enterprises (Acs 2006; Acs and Varga 2005; Wong et al. 2005) as well as more satisfied entrepreneurs (Larsson and Thulin 2019).

However, the idea of opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurship has recently started to receive growing skepticism. What is mainly questioned is the limited and reductionist differentiation between these two types of entrepreneurship based solely on the motivation aspect as opposed to viewing it as a heterogenous and multi-level concept that has contextual implications (Angulo-Guerrero et al. 2017; Dencker et al. 2021; O'Donnell et al. 2021; Shantz et al. 2018). The literature challenges this simplified approach, pointing out the importance of autonomy as a vital component of entrepreneurial orientation (Lumpkin et al. 2009; Carsrud and Brännback 2011) and noting the fact that entrepreneurs are motivated by both internal factors (such as mastery needs, work orientation, the need for stimulation, the need for achievement, and fear of failure) and external factors (such as economic profit, prestige and social

status, power, and social influence). It also seems that necessity-driven entrepreneurship has historically been more connected with its role of distinguishing itself from opportunity-driven entrepreneurship than being an empirically verified standalone phenomenon (O'Donnell et al. 2021). Given that the concept of necessity-driven entrepreneurship has been seen as an add-on to explain the other side of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship and is usually not treated as a separate and distinct concept (Dencker et al. 2021; Fairlie and Fossen 2018; Nikiforou et al. 2019), there is also the growing interaction with opportunity-driven entrepreneurship that becomes more evident when starting to discuss the changes in the rules of the game given the emergence of the gig economy context.

Consequently, it must be noted that from 2019 onward, the GEM expanded the Adult Population Survey to better capture the nuances of entrepreneurial motivations, beyond the traditional opportunity vs. necessity framework (Bosma et al. 2020: 44). The updated survey acknowledges that individuals start businesses for a variety of complex reasons and often a combination of them. The new motivations include making a difference in the world, achieving significant financial success, continuing a family tradition, or earning a living because of the scarcity of jobs (which is the closest idea to the necessity-driven entrepreneurship concept). Nevertheless, new GEM reports still provide information that can be aggregated to analyze necessity-driven entrepreneurship (“earning a living because jobs are scarce”) and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (“becoming wealthy or earning a high income” or “making a difference in the world”).

Therefore, we follow previous research calls questioning the simplistic dichotomous view of opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurship (e.g., Puente et al. 2019). However, we do not argue against its existence and call for other concepts but rather seek to problematize the rising complexities with their interdependence in the gig economy context. As explained in the next section, with the birth of the gig economy, the rules of the game for these two types of entrepreneurship have changed because of the deviation from the basic assumptions of what entrepreneurship implies, such as being the bearer of risk or uncertainty, taking on individual responsibility, and reaping potentially unlimited profits (Ahsan 2020; Knight 1921; McClelland 1961). As the two sides of the entrepreneurial coin collide, the rules of the game start to mutate for both sides, which also changes the way we should approach the concept of opportunity and necessity entrepreneurship.

2.3 The transformational context of the gig economy

The gig economy refers to a work environment in which temporary jobs are commonplace and companies tend to hire independent contractors or freelancers instead of full-time employees. Although “doing gigs” is not a new phenomenon (see, for example, Gawer and Srnicek 2021), its presence is continuously increasing all over the world, and since the financial crisis of 2008, it has been the subject of growing interest in the public arena. The gig economy is also related to fast-growing, successful, global-level companies with innovative business models (Parente et al. 2018) that popularize their services through online platforms. Its unprecedented rise is connected to the development of information technology (IT) (Hamari et al. 2016)

and the Internet boom, resulting in the shift from products to services (Murillo et al. 2017). While the gig economy has revolutionized the labor market, offering flexibility and new opportunities for workers, it also raises significant ethical and social concerns. Despite the initial admiration when it was seen as a vehicle for entrepreneurial activity as well as a path to a decentralized economy (Martin 2016) and societal progress, the gig economy raises more and more questions, in particular from an ethical perspective. Its values—such as economic progress, work flexibility, and better resource exploitation efficiency—become problematic when considering the employment conditions that it creates, contributing altogether to an increase in poverty and inequality in societies (De Stefano 2016; Spigel 2020). In this regard, one of the central ethical dilemmas is the responsibility of platform owners to ensure the welfare of their workers (such as health and social security or minimum wage guarantee) when these are not guaranteed by the laws of the country where platform operators work. In practice, they have failed to do so; many have found that gig economy platforms prioritize profitability over fair treatment of workers. Additional issues that the gig economy has raised include a lack of adequate regulation (leading to the disruption of markets) and how it contributes to increasing income inequality in society (Churchill et al. 2019) as well as the low level of social value that the gig economy startups create (Spigel 2020). Income disparities within the gig economy are stark, with platform owners earning very high incomes, while lower-skilled workers struggle to earn for living. Additionally, Gawer and Srnicek (2021) discuss in their report for the European Parliament whether the gig economy is supplementing existing work or may be seen as a primary job. Gawer and Srnicek (2021) argue with support from prior work that the gig economy may be seen as a symptom of a broader dysfunctional labor market where gig platforms provide supplemental job opportunities for workers who take on multiple jobs and gigs to make a living. A brief conclusion that can be made is that there is a new complex reality that has developed with the rise of gig platforms that act as supplementary functions for workers to make ends meet, but the platforms also reshape labor markets that challenge employee–employer relations and more stable systems seen in welfare states.

As a contextual lens, the gig economy provides a foundation to problematize how the rules of the game in entrepreneurship have mutated and the potential ripple effects this might have on the relationship between opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and the necessity-driven self-employed. The gig economy (and, in particular, its entrepreneurial side) involves not only the owners of the platform but also the actual service provider, the self-employed gigger who is often portrayed as an equal partner who is independent and potentially prosperous as an entrepreneur rather than an employee. The relationship between the platform provider and the giggers is the foundation of the gig reality, without which the economy would not exist in its current form. However, through the abandonment of employees and the increase in independent contractors and freelancers, a majority of whom are self-employed entities, the platform providers—such as Uber, Lime, and TaskRabbit—decrease their individual responsibilities (e.g., McClelland 1961) and labor costs. They also reduce their risk and the uncertainty associated with the entrepreneurial process (e.g., Knight 1921), previously described as key parts when viewing entrepreneurs as drivers of societal development and job generators (Birch 1979), where productive forms of entrepre-

neurship could create positive social value for society at large through entrepreneurs' innovation (Baumol 1996).

2.4 The change in the rules of the game

The birth of Airbnb and Uber radically changed the rules of the game for how to address what entrepreneurship might imply in this largely unregulated new space—the gig economy. Prior to 2007, the entrepreneur, regardless of whether she/he was opportunity- or necessity-driven, saw no ceiling for potential profits (Ahsan 2020), only differences in the ability to actually go past the ceiling. There also appeared to be no dependent relationship between these two types of entrepreneurs.

Currently, the two sides of the entrepreneurial coin seem to collide within the gig economy, where the rules of the game have mutated for both sides. This mutation explains how the notion of individual responsibility and risk that an entrepreneur assumes for reaping a potentially unlimited profit is slowly being pushed from the opportunity-driven entrepreneur (often the platform provider) toward the necessity-driven entrepreneur (often portrayed as either a gigger or self-employed). The gigger (the necessity-driven self-employed individual, often with a sense of being a first-time entrepreneur) becomes the bearer of risk and dependent on the rules set by the opportunity-driven entrepreneur but is deprived of unlimited profit potential (Ahsan 2020; Knight 1921). Within this mutation, promoted by a neoliberal governing structure (Harvey 2005), two parallel processes have been turned into an intertwined relationship, where the potential profit ceiling is decided by the opportunity-driven entrepreneur. In this manner, neoliberal policy enhanced through the gig economy has started to contribute to changing the initial productive form of entrepreneurship toward a more unproductive distribution of entrepreneurialism. Baumol (1996) implies this by the arbitrage seeking unproductive and less innovative entrepreneurial pursuits that do not benefit and create societal value. The emergence of the new context of the gig economy and the digital platform as task providers has also brought increased use of gig work by entrepreneurs to reduce staff (Cherry and Aloisi 2017; Prassl 2018).

In the following section, we will seek to conceptualize the aforementioned parts in relation to risk, profit, uncertainty, and responsibility as well as the contextual changes that the gig economy has brought to opportunity and necessity entrepreneurship.

3 An illustrative conceptual model

Building on the above literature and addressing the identified problem of the interplay between opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and necessity-driven self-employed individuals within the gig economy requires a model that takes multiple levels of analysis into consideration (Griffiths et al. 2012). Four key constructs at play are influenced by the mutating relationship between opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurs and have been touched upon in previous sections—namely, risk, uncertainty, profits, and responsibility. Historically, each of the four constructs has had a central position in the entrepreneurial process and the agency that we associate with the entrepreneur. The meaning of the four constructs has been altered by

the mutation brought about by the gig economy. In particular, Knight's (1921) idea, where an entrepreneur takes on risk or uncertainty for potentially unlimited profits—also discussed in terms of residual claimancy (Klein 1980) for both profits and losses—could, in the current day and age, be argued to involve taking entrepreneurial responsibility not only for the positive sides but also for the negative aspects of entrepreneurial action. The focus on individual entrepreneurial responsibility is also echoed in the call by McClelland (1961: 331) on the ethicality of the entrepreneur in terms of taking responsibility for her/his actions (see also Hägg et al. 2024; Vallaster et al. 2019), which resembles the famous argument by Friedman (1970) on the responsibilities of companies. In the pre-gig era, the rules of the game were clear, and when moving on the risk–uncertainty continuum, the profit potential was deemed to increase, and responsibility was tied to all actions, irrespective of entrepreneurial form. The necessity-driven entrepreneur operated on a more risk-associated level but with higher predictable outcomes leveraging lower profit potential, while opportunity-driven entrepreneurs took more uncertain action for the benefit of higher profit potential. However, the two forms of entrepreneurship operated in parallel and sometimes engaged in exchange.

This exchange has largely changed with the emergence of the gig economy structures (creating a change in the rules of the game as visualized in Fig. 1) and the domination of platforms as intermediaries between the end customer and a service provider. The opportunity-driven entrepreneur is seen here as the platform owner and the necessity-driven self-employed individual (as the assumption of unlimited profits

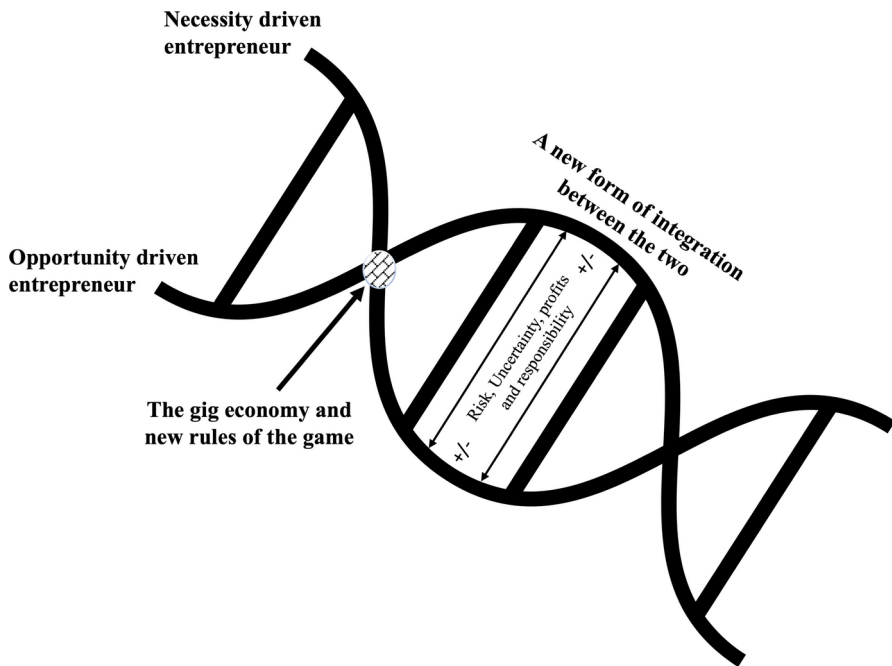


Fig. 1 Conceptualizing the interdependence of necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs in the gig economy

is now closed by algorithms and does not require the necessity-driven individual to be addressed as an entrepreneur) as the service provider (e.g., Woodcock 2020). The end customer is still the same, but the intertwined relationship between opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and necessity-driven self-employed individuals has increased the benefit for the opportunity-driven entrepreneur, who takes on uncertainty to reap unlimited profits, but reduces the risks by placing the entrepreneurial responsibilities on the self-employed gigger, who performs the main service that constitutes the key part of the physical business idea (if we take out the data that is stored and repackaged to be sold). Our argument is that the four constructs and their division between the two parties have changed dramatically as the previous division between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship relied on the premise of what entrepreneurship meant. The intertwined relationship that can be seen today is altering these foundational claims on the essence of what entrepreneurship entails and is captured within Fig. 1 as an altering scale where each of the four constructs may increase or decrease because of the interdependence between the necessity and opportunity entrepreneur and the changes in the rules of the game.

When considering the above, there are also regional differences related to gig economy dynamics. The gig economy operates differently across countries as a result of variations in labor markets, regulatory frameworks, and welfare systems. In some developing economies, necessity-driven entrepreneurship dominates as individuals rely on gig work for survival, whereas in more developed economies, opportunity-driven entrepreneurship is more prevalent, with gig work serving as a flexible choice both out of opportunity and from necessity. Despite geographical differences, we argue that our model—with its focus on how risk, uncertainty, profits, and responsibility mutate through changes in the rules of the game—has explanatory power but may offer different insights for developing and developed countries as the interdependent relation alters the scale of the four constructs.

4 A case illustrating the changes in the rules of the game—from the taxi industry to uberization

To exemplify the above problematization and the illustrative conceptual model of the intertwined and mutating relationship between those who seek out an opportunity and those forced by necessity, we employ one of the most well-known platform economy innovations that we relate to the gig economy (see, e.g., Woodcock 2020). In this example, we consider the founders as opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and the giggers as necessity-driven self-employed individuals who often regard themselves as entrepreneurs. Our argument on Uber being part of the gig economy is taken directly from the words of the CEO Dara Khosrowshahi in the opinion piece published in the *New York Times* on August 10, 2020 (The New York Times 2020). Acknowledging systemic differences between countries and their competitiveness policies, as a comparison, we refer to the regular taxi industry of the pre-Uber era.

To compare these two contexts of treating opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship (1) as two parallel processes and (2) as one interdependent process, we use three fundamental entrepreneurship concepts—namely, risk, uncertainty,

and profits—building on Knight (1921), and add a fourth ethical dimension to our analysis: individual (entrepreneurial) responsibility, building on McClelland (1961). Following the classical approach, we assume that entrepreneurs differ from non-entrepreneurs by a higher level of take on risk and responsibility but, in turn, reap more profits as a potential reward for taking on uncertainty, which is a key characteristic inherent in entrepreneurship as a phenomenon.

Risk (and being prone to risk) is a key characteristic of whether individuals decide to enter entrepreneurship (e.g., Palich and Bagby 1995). Those who are able to take risks and see more opportunities increase their chances of an entrepreneurial career. What is the distribution of risk in the case of Uber? Most of the risks are on the side of the drivers who need to have cars as well as pay insurance and other costs to become Uber drivers, without any certainty about how the business will develop as the algorithm that decides who is visible on the app is based on the ratings and availability of the driver as well as competition with other drivers (see Woodcock 2020 on a similar note about Deliveroo). At the same time, the founders of Uber reduce the risk when adding a new driver to the fleet as it does not incur any fixed costs, such as labor costs. In the traditional taxi industry, the company guarantees that all drivers are insured and that the rate will cover both costs and salaries. In the case of Uber, the founders provide the technology and mainly live from the commissions paid by drivers but do not take responsibility for the vehicles that are being driven. All responsibilities for customers, safety, and vehicles are on the side of the drivers. Uber is able to claim that it is not responsible for the poor quality of individual services, which was not previously possible for the taxi company. In fact, we face a form of responsabilization process (Rose 1996) as the giggers are rendered individually responsible for activities that were previously the duty of the taxi company. This shift in risk and responsibility also has a direct consequence for those who carry entrepreneurial uncertainty in this intertwined relationship. Although uncertainty still exists for the founders (in particular in the initial phase of launching the business), over time, it is pushed toward the drivers. Within the traditional discourse, this situation would imply a possibility for an unlimited profit potential on the side of the risk, responsibility, and uncertainty bearers. However, the main share of the profits is reaped by Uber as a platform, whereas the drivers have difficulties surviving as they cannot upscale their business given the time and resource constraints of the service provided. The impossibility of business upscaling for the self-employed giggers directly implies that the profit ceiling for them is not potentially limitless but determined by, in this case, the owner of the platform. The drivers are fed with the tempting vision of autonomy, flexibility, and self-dependence, although they are usually forced by life to choose this job option (Peticca-Harris et al. 2020; Woodcock 2020). The entrepreneurial illusion is full of empty promises of social upgrades that do not bring any substantial economic or social benefit to the majority of giggers. It is a veil to cover the present exploitation of the necessity-driven self-employed individuals at the bottom of the gig economy marketplace. In fact, it reinforces the glass ceiling for giggers, especially when following the rising inequality seen today (e.g., Piketty 2014).

The case of Uber illustrates well how the gig economy and online platforms blur the boundaries between opportunity-driven entrepreneurship and self-employment by necessity. Uber drivers bear most of the costs and risks of running the business,

while the platform benefits from their work. Following Fig. 1, the case of Uber presents change in the rules of the game, where online platforms shift (increase) risk and responsibility to the necessity-based self-employed while limiting and decreasing their opportunities for growth and profit. In many countries, Uber drivers, while encouraged by visions of autonomy and flexibility, are in fact often forced into this form of work and do not gain relevant economic or social benefits (e.g., Peticca-Harris et al. 2020).

5 Discussion and conclusion

The radical innovation of the platform technology to which the gig economy is tied has altered the rules of the game, thus changing the form of entrepreneurship. We no longer refer to productive, unproductive, or destructive forms of entrepreneurship as in previous eras or contexts (Baumol 1996), but instead, we have seen them mutate into forms that combine both productive and destructive elements, showing patterns closely related to what Elert and Henrekson (2016), departing from a Schumpeterian view, have described as evasive entrepreneurship. We are witnessing a weakening governing structure, opportunistic norm- and rule-breaking behavior on the rise, which challenges conventional business practices and existing business models on how to see the links among risk, individual responsibility, uncertainty, and profits. Since the 1970s, governmental changes in rules and regulations have gradually opened up the phenomenon of rent-seeking and arbitrage forms of entrepreneurship, which seems to produce less beneficial outcomes for society at large as income inequality is on the rise (Piketty 2014).

As argued by Bruyat and Julien (2001), the creation of social value is a core link between the entrepreneur and the opportunity. Instead, we see, in some sense, value being created and delivered through the struggle of the gigger, who collects and delivers food, charges electric scooters, or drives people to their destinations, but with less influence on when to work or what to earn (i.e., value capturing) (Amit and Zott 2001). On the other hand, a large proportion of the value capture is allocated to the entrepreneurs behind the platform technologies, where Uber charges partners around 25 percent on all fares (Uber 2022), but little value is created that is actually novel or innovative for society at large (people offering rides has existed for a long time). The previous interplay between the value created and the value captured is now becoming more and more divided between the two actors. The combination of neoliberal policy and the gig economy has created this unprecedented situation of an intertwined but unbalanced relationship between the opportunity-driven entrepreneur and the necessity-driven self-employed.

In this process, the relationship between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs brings about obvious inequity and inequalities for the latter, whose ceiling for profit is regulated by their counterpart, the former. Within a classical view, very much propagated by the GEM, opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurship have developed almost separately from each other. Research has treated them as two separate phenomena and focused on highlighting their differences, where the superiority of the former is underlined (Acs 2006; Bosma et al. 2012;

Larsson and Thulin 2019). The differences between the two are clear and primarily relate to the resources and sources of entrepreneurial activity (Wong et al. 2005). In line with the theory of the firm (Coase 1937), both types of entrepreneurship involve risk-taking and coping with uncertainty, with a view on reward in the form of profits. This dual view of entrepreneurship does not reveal any conflicts, competition, or even any kind of deeper interaction between the two actors, only basic business transactions between them. They exist in silos and do not confront each other. One can live without the other.

In our problematization, we argue that such a discourse is currently mutating given the rise of the gig economy as a perfect playground for deregulated transactions. These changes are also potentially altering the discourse of what the necessity-driven counterpart actually is (i.e., self-employed and not an entrepreneur per se). However, we do not claim that the division between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship makes no sense. On the contrary, we strongly acknowledge their existence both in socioeconomic practice and as a unit of research. Nevertheless, the macro situation has changed worldwide but mainly in liberal economies, illuminating a new and additional phenomenon related to entrepreneurship where these two types of entrepreneurial activities meet and become intertwined.

As a result, in the gig economy context, opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship mutually depend on and cannot exist without each other. Their mutual dependence reveals a complex picture in which, when performing her/his tasks, the self-employed gigger is subordinated to the owner of the platform while, at the same time, acting as a bearer of risk and responsibility. If their relationship had been recognized as a regular employment relationship, the owner of the platform would be responsible for the gig worker and would bear all the costs deriving from such employment, including potential insurance in case of work-related injuries. However, the platform owners are liberated from responsibility for the other party, with most of the value capture on their side and paradoxically having the power to decide the profit ceiling for the self-employed gigger.

This conceptual discussion on the changes in the rules of the game should not be treated as purely academic as the consequences are practical in nature. The potential consequences of the shift from the pre-gig to the gig economy context are multi-layered as they relate to society and the economy as such but may also influence the basic conceptual understanding of entrepreneurship. We synthesize these possible consequences in relation to the previously discussed theoretical concepts and contexts in Table 1.

Starting from a societal level, the shift may contribute to strengthening the neoliberal model of the functioning of society, where increasing social contrasts, enhanced by higher uncertainty and responsibility in terms of undertaking any actions, result in growing dissatisfaction and resistance. In an economic sense, the deepening asymmetry of capital and accumulation of information influences economic inequalities, which are strengthened by a clear profit ceiling for many entrepreneurs-to-be, including young ones, which may reduce the willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activity. On the research level, the shift might result in some difficulties in grasping the essence of entrepreneurship. Given the intertwined but unbalanced relationship between the opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneur, we may face a funda-

Table 1 Potential consequences of the shift from the pre-gig to the gig economy

	The pre-gig economy	The gig economy	Potential consequences of the shift
BAUMOL: rules of the game, types of entrepreneurship	Productive, unproductive, or destructive forms of entrepreneurship do not collide. Clear “rules of the game”	Productive, unproductive, or destructive forms of entrepreneurship mutate. “Rules of the game” blurred	Emergence of evasive entrepreneurship Ethical controversies around entrepreneurship
GEM: OPPORTUNITY- VS. NECESSITY-DRIVEN ENTREPRENEURS	Separate and independent concepts, although the opportunity-driven entrepreneur is considered superior	Dependent concepts Intertwined but unbalanced relationship between the opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneur	Changes in one of the basic assumptions in entrepreneurship theory
○ INEQUALITIES	Necessity-driven entrepreneurship as a tool to reduce inequalities	Deepened inequalities between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs	Social and economic consequences Growing dissatisfaction in society Strengthening the neoliberal model of the functioning of society
○ PROFITS	No ceiling for both the necessity- and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs' profits	Ceiling for the necessity-driven entrepreneurs' profit, regulated by the opportunity-driven entrepreneurs	Growing economic and social inequalities Deepening asymmetry of the capital accumulation Strengthening the neoliberal model of the functioning of society
○ RISK AND UNCERTAINTY	On both sides: opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs	Risk is higher on the side of the necessity-driven entrepreneur. Elements of uncertainty appear on the side of the necessity-driven entrepreneur.	Retreat from entrepreneurship in society Deeper polarization of entrepreneurship-related phenomena
○ SOCIAL VALUE	Created, delivered, and captured by all	Created and delivered by necessity-driven entrepreneurs Mainly allocated to the opportunity-driven entrepreneurs	The risk of intensified arbitrage entrepreneurship Social disagreement
○ RESPONSIBILITY	On both sides: opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneur	Limited individual responsibility of opportunity-driven entrepreneurs	Retreat from entrepreneurship Deeper polarization of entrepreneurship-related phenomena
PERCEPTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP	Rather realistic picture of entrepreneurship, closer to a true-to-life practice	A distorted and misleading picture of entrepreneurship	Social misconception of entrepreneurship

mental change in one of the basic assumptions in entrepreneurship theory. The division between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship may grow stale. A deeper polarization of entrepreneurship-related phenomena will call into question the way we understand entrepreneurship today and how we investigate and interpret it in

research. The concepts of arbitrage entrepreneurship, evasive entrepreneurship, and unproductive entrepreneurship (e.g., Baumol 1996; Elert and Henrekson 2016; Fossen and Sorgner 2021; Lucas and Fuller 2017) will then become part of mainstream entrepreneurship research, thus changing the basic nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The general perception of entrepreneurship, now usually regarded as positive because it is argued to bring social and economic value, is also at risk. It is likely that entrepreneurship will start to be seen as unfair, deepening social and economic inequalities, and controversial on an ethical level, which, in turn, may lead to its misconception, ultimately leading many aspiring entrepreneurs to abandon entrepreneurship. All the abovementioned social, economic, and research-level consequences will not occur immediately but are long-term processes. However, one can already begin to imagine that even part of this bleak scenario will become a reality in the near future.

5.1 Conclusions

In the introduction, we posed the following question guiding our problematization: How and why does the gig economy change the rules of the game for entrepreneurship and, in particular, the relation between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs? To answer it, we illustrated how the new context may potentially change “the rules of the game” in entrepreneurship. We argue that the meaning of who an entrepreneur is has largely mutated through the redefinition of the previously held boundary conditions when discussing what entrepreneurship entails. We introduced the idea of the gig economy as the playground in which opportunity-driven entrepreneurs (usually owners of digital platforms) and necessity-driven self-employed individuals (the gig workers fed by the vision of being entrepreneurs) are intertwined.

The resulting relationship has been fostered through the lack of formal employment regulations and, in general, the legal vacuum within which the gig economy operated and still does in many geographical contexts (e.g., Friedman 2014; Ravenelle 2017). In this relationship, the opportunity-driven entrepreneur, as a holder of capital, has been freed from many risks and responsibilities at the expense of the necessity-driven gigger while, at the same time, capturing most of the profits (Peticca-Harris et al. 2020; Woodcock 2020). On the other hand, the amount of profit the self-employed gigger can capture is limited by the size of the gig market and the physical conditions bound by time and space, even though she/he assumes a disproportionate risk and huge responsibility in the uncertain environment (Mazzucato 2021). In this paper, we take this one step further and argue that we are in the gig economy facing a situation where the bearer of risk is denied the potential profits that previously followed acceptance of future uncertainty. Here, the idea of transformative digitalization as explained by Fossen and Sorgner (2021) might not only be as productive as they acknowledged since the efficient use of technology in the gig economy has created a more efficient connection between underutilized services and potential customers (the intermediate platform technology) but also simultaneously create closer ties between opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurship. Since the ones performing the services are often being claimed as independent contractors,

the platforms seek to argue the case of being a technology platform that mainly connects the two parties and charges a fee for that intermediate service.

5.2 Theoretical implications

Our paper contributes to entrepreneurship theory in the following manner. First, we are initiating research to address the encounter and clash between opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and necessity-driven self-employed individuals in the gig economy context influenced by neoliberal policy. Our problematization relates to the insights addressed by Fossen and Sorgner (2021) and, in a similar argument, calls for scholarly work on how platform entrepreneurship alters the rules of the game based on the efficiency promoted through digitalization. Second, by following the shift from the pre-gig to the gig economy, we demonstrate the transformational power of context and illustrate how context in mutation is influencing entrepreneurship. It also exemplifies the complexity of the interplay between agency (entrepreneurs) and structure (created by the gig economy). Third, we combine research on entrepreneurship, economics, and ethics to address the complexities of the modern entrepreneurial landscape that is increasingly located in a platform economy that warrants further exploration to understand the relationship between workers and owners (e.g., Kerikmäe and Kajander 2022; Peticca-Harris et al. 2020). The discussion led us to the conclusion that the problem is also tied to the entrepreneurial responsibility that entrepreneurs are supposed to assume, which, if one follows the growing inequalities (e.g., Friedman 2014; Piketty 2014), is not only very relevant but also alarming in the current political, social, and economic situation in many countries.

It is difficult to determine whether it is already a disturbance of a classic entrepreneurship theory or just a temporary and marginal phenomenon, but the rapid growth of gig workers and the platform economy (see, e.g., European Union 2024; Gallup Institute 2018) provides empirical evidence that it is not merely a disturbance but a growing context where business activity takes place. However, the consequences in terms of increasing social and economic inequalities as well as the deepening asymmetry of information and capital accumulation might be long-term and, if persistent, could lead to social dissatisfaction or even revolt. Moreover, with the changed relationships among different actors on the entrepreneurial stage, our understanding of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon is mutating, and these potentially new mutations warrant further scrutiny as, in the long run, they might alter how we view and address the overarching phenomenon of entrepreneurship. Going back to early discussions by Knight (1921), Schumpeter (1934), and Kirzner (1979), entrepreneurship is often described as a capitalistic function. Today the capitalistic function is specified as contributing to the rising economic inequalities (Piketty 2014), where a division can be seen between those who prosper and those who engage in low-paid and precarious work (e.g., Friedman 2014; Ravenelle 2017). We notice that the analogous division might be visible within entrepreneurship, where entrepreneurship is labeled opportunity- or necessity-driven depending on the entrepreneurs' motivation to start a new venture (Bosma et al. 2012; Larsson and Thulin 2019).

5.3 Practical implications

The study offers several implications for both platform-based companies and policymakers within the gig economy. Platform owners and gig economy entrepreneurs can apply these insights to balance risk, uncertainty, profits, and responsibility by designing business models that integrate both economic efficiency and ethical considerations. Following the insights from other scholarly work on the development of the gig economy and its role as either supplementing other work or acting as the primary job (e.g., Gawer and Srnicek 2021; Ravenelle 2017), an implication toward policy is to carefully consider the interdependent relation that this study acknowledges and how it changes the independence of the weaker part in the platform and gig economy compared to the traditional market where network effects and the intermediary position that platform owners play were not as evident. Here, regulations to safeguard the necessity-based entrepreneur are key, and with the new EU platform workers directive (European Parliament 2025), steps are taken, but they are mainly to help precarious workers become employed and not to create autonomy for those who want to stay self-employed. Hence, measures are being taken, but the heterogeneity of the gig economy context also needs to be acknowledged by new regulations to not decrease flexibility for those who need and want it.

Our research also emphasizes the importance of understanding how changing social and economic contexts affect the entrepreneurial landscape. Platform managers and policymakers should continuously assess and respond to these contextual changes by modifying business models, policies, and practices to meet economic and societal expectations. A main issue emanating from this study is how to understand the growing evasiveness that is being seen in entrepreneurial pursuits today in a more and more digitalized economy as well as its impact on both necessity and opportunity-based entrepreneurs. Although the definition of evasive entrepreneurship and its focus on circumventing existing institutional frameworks (Elert and Henrekson 2016) are illustrative for the growth of the gig economy and platform owners' attempt to leverage arbitrage opportunities (Kirzner 1979), it has practical implications for those attempting to enter these markets either as service providers or as new entrants when developing new intermediary platforms. Here, alternative forms of economic models, such as cooperative, may be visible as a means to balance the four constructs of risk, uncertainty, profits, and responsibilities among opportunity- and necessity-based entrepreneurs.

5.4 Limitations and future research

We recognize some limitations and simplifications in the reasoning presented in this article. First, we are aware that regulations to improve the status of employment of the giggers start to be seriously discussed and even executed in some European countries such as Germany or the Netherlands and that there is a lawsuit in California related to Uber drivers' right to be employed. However, the regulations and laws are still very much debatable, and there is an ongoing discussion in the EU on how to regulate the gig and sharing economy (Kerikmäe and Kajander 2022). Also, the increasing size of the gig economy and loopholes that still exist and enable to circumvent the system,

with no adequate public attention to the changes in the entrepreneurial landscape and social value of entrepreneurship, may result in further attempts to strengthen evasive entrepreneurship (Elert and Henrekson 2016). The upcoming economic crisis can only increase societal consent for the further development of less ethical forms of entrepreneurship. Second, we are aware of the simplistic equating in the text “self-employed” with giggers and necessity-driven entrepreneurs. We realize that these terms do not always share the same meaning and appear under different names in different countries. However, this simplification helps illustrate a wider phenomenon of potential deviation in entrepreneurship and the undesired increase of its evasive form. Moreover, we noticed that in the context of the gig economy, the self-employed are a sought-after workforce; therefore, to increase its uptake, the vision of the gigger as an independent entrepreneur is being spread.

The above limitations suggest future directions of scholarly work. Future research could explore the evolving legal frameworks and regulations regarding the gig economy. Understanding how these regulations impact gig workers’ rights and their entrepreneurial behavior would be valuable. Additionally, studies could delve deeper into the distinctions among self-employed individuals, gig workers, and necessity-driven entrepreneurs to clarify their roles and experiences across different countries and industries. As the gig economy continues to grow, research might also focus on how ethical forms of entrepreneurship (e.g., Fairbnb.coop, Green Taxi Cooperative) in the platform and gig economy might work to prevent the exploitation of workers and the rise of evasive entrepreneurship.

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