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Application to Digital Economics and AI Tutorial

Dear organizers of the NBER Digital Economics and AI Tutorial,
Dear Avi Goldfarb and Catherine Tucker,

I am applying to the tutorial on Digital Economics and AI because the topic of the tutorial aligns closely with my own research in which I leverage methods from applied microeconomics and empirical industrial organization to study topics in digital and media economics. In particular, I explore the effects of platform design and regulation on content provision, both in traditional media and in social-media markets. I would be excited to participate in the tutorial to learn more about frontier research in digital economics and AI, interact with senior scholars and meet other young scholars in the field.

I am starting my fifth year as a PhD student in Business Economics at KU Leuven this fall, advised by Mattia Nardotto. My doctoral committee also includes Tommaso Valletti, Luis Aguiar and Jo Seldeslachts. From September to December 2023, I will be a visiting researcher at Columbia University, hosted by Andrea Prat. At Columbia, I aim to obtain feedback and further polish my work, as well as expand my network in the digital (and media) economics community. Since August 2022, I have been based at the University of Zurich, where I will continue as a postdoctoral researcher after finishing my PhD in 2024. I then plan to go on the academic job market in the fall of 2024.

At KU Leuven, I have been able to pursue coursework in IO and digital economics, taking courses in Advanced Industrial Organization taught by Frank Verboven as well as Economics of Network Industries and Digital Markets taught jointly by Frank Verboven and my advisor, Mattia Nardotto. These courses, as well as the substantial exposure to the field through presentations by internal and external researchers, sparked my interest in digital economics. Last summer, I had the opportunity to participate in a Summer School on Digital Platforms, focused on platform theory and jointly organized by Martin Peitz and Julian Wright. At the University of Zurich, I am teaching tutorials in an Organizational Economics course taught by Luis Aguiar. The course focuses on digital platforms as a form of organization. In the Digital Economics and AI tutorial, I am particularly looking forward to the sessions on economics of AI, a topic I have previously been less exposed to.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I study the relationship between platform design, online harassment, and content creator productivity. To causally identify this relationship, I leverage a design change on YouTube that resulted in the dislike count of videos being hidden from public view. First, I show a reduction in "dislike attacks", a specific form of online harassment, following the platform design change. Second, I show that those content providers who were previously most exposed to harassment increase their output after the platform design change. Third, I observe an increase in demand for content from these YouTube

channels. However, the platform design change also reduced users' ability to assess content quality, imposing externalities on content creators unaffected by harassment. I aim to illustrate, analyze, and quantify these trade-offs by leveraging this highly granular data on video supply and demand in a structural model. I plan to make this single authored project my job market paper.

In the second chapter of my dissertation I study the trade-offs implicit in antitrust regulation aimed at reducing power imbalances in the news media industry. Specifically, I carry out an empirical analysis of the impact of the Australian News Media Bargaining Code. This regulation mandates dominant platforms to negotiate payments for news content that they display on their platforms. Using a difference-in-differences approach and detailed web-scraped data on Google News, I show that the regulation significantly impacts the composition of news appearing on the platform. After the regulation, larger foreign publishers increase their share of the content displayed, while their larger domestic counterparts experience a decrease in their share. This is likely due to changes in the relative cost of the different types of content to the platform. I was invited to present this work in a CEPR event focused on news media bargaining codes.

In the third chapter of my dissertation, which is joint work with Enrico Camarda (Copenhagen Business School), Mattia Nardotto (Université Libre de Bruxelles) and Tommaso Valletti (Imperial College London), we build on the analysis of the second chapter of my dissertation. As the Australian News Media Bargaining Code is the first among several similar regulations currently proposed around the world, understanding the full scope of its effects is of first order importance. In this project, we therefore study the effects of the regulation on news consumption, industry revenues and news quality in Australia. Using data on news demand, news media companies' revenues, employment and news content, we aim to quantify the effects of the regulation on the news media market, its participants and overall welfare.

As illustrated above, my research interests closely relate to the topics of this tutorial. I would therefore highly appreciate the opportunity to participate in the tutorial and get to know other PhD students and senior researchers. I thank you for taking the time to consider my application and look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,
Marita Freimane
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