Work in the Gig Economy: How Platform Design and Governance Shape Work Success and Satisfaction

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Abstract

The number of crowd working platforms as well as the number of people willing to provide their workforce to these platforms increased significantly during the last years (Alton 2018; Friedman 2014; Kässi and Lehdonvirta 2018). Prior studies on the Gig Economy mainly focused on the motivational factors of gig workers to engage in crowd work (Chandler and Kapelner 2013; Deng and Joshi 2016; Gol et al. 2018; Jiang et al. 2015; Kaufmann et al. 2011; Moussawi and Koufaris 2013; Trenz et al. 2018; Zheng et al. 2011). Despite advantages such as flexibility, job autonomy and equipment simplicity, the overall working conditions on these platforms are often evaluated as unfavorable and exploitative (Deng and Joshi 2016; Friedman 2014).

Recent studies on digital platforms show how task modularization, artificial intelligence and the platform dominance (Rai et al. 2019) shift the focus towards platform providers and their role in shaping interactions. In the same fashion, work in the Gig Economy cannot be sufficiently understood without completing the existing perspective on gig workers with an understanding of the platform operators. Thus, we suggest an investigation of Gig Economy platforms to explore the role of platform design on working conditions and its consequences for users and platform operators: How do digitization characteristics and the arrangements on Gig Economy platforms influence the work on such platforms including the gig worker themselves? How can such platforms be designed in the interests of users and platform operators?

To address these questions, we first conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 gig workers active on nine different Gig Economy platforms to identify the working conditions, expectations and challenges for people who offer their workforce on a Gig Economy platform. In the second phase, we will complement this data with an analysis of the respective platform websites and regulations and finally conduct dyadic in-depth interviews with key players from platform operators. First results indicate that the design and governance of platforms offering digital work (digital labor platforms) follow a strongly different logic than those ones mainly acting as a mediator for work on site (i.e. transportation, food delivery or cleaning services). Moreover, design of the rating system is a very important mean how the platform operator shapes actions and work quality for the users.

Challenges ahead in regard to the platform arrangements are transparency and the question of empowerment especially for gig workers. More detailed results with stronger focus on the point of view of the platforms are expected to complement this picture.

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