

Understanding the Nexus between Digital Platforms, Workers and Clients in Gig Economy

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Abstract: Scholarly interest in the occurrence of platforms has grown substantially in response to the explosive expansion of digital economic activity. There is mounting evidence that digital work platforms are one of the most consequential developments of the last few years, and have effectively assumed the role of major players in labour markets around the world. While the workplace is certainly relevant to this discussion, it is important to note that the consumer realm is also at the heart of this shift. Indeed, novel organizational, divisional, and co-ordinational practices on digital platforms are linked to particular modes of using the services they provide. This paper contends that the systemic and conjunctural arrangements of interconnections among platforms, employees, and customers, in addition to their financial and social repercussions, can be understood through a service relation method. Using this method, we can examine the complex network of relationships among various platform kinds, employees, and customers, and talk about how the dynamics of the platform market are shaping the dynamics of these relationships over time. To create a thorough study of these triangle relations and the difficulties stemming from the distinctions and links between computational and human management, future studies will need to delve into the network of the opinions of platforms, employees, and customers.

KEYWORDS: Gig Work, Human Resource Management, Digital work, Service relation, flexibility

1. Introduction

The literature has a lot to say about the benefits of platform employment, including one dimension: the freedom of movement it affords workers in terms of both time and space. (Anwar and Graham, 2021). It is also noted that platform labour is associated with what some would call insecure situations on the job (De Stefano, 2016). Recent scholarly attention has focused primarily on the lack of job and working situation control within this context (Alvarez-Hernández and Pérez-Zapata, 2021).

Previous studies on platform employment have overlooked the significance of the worker-client relationship within the triangular service connection between platforms, workers, and customers. However, these studies have failed to consider how portals that employ computational management shape the relationship between workers and customers. As a result, workers have had to devise strategies to transform customers from being mere adversaries to valuable allies in their interdependence with the platforms. This study highlights the crucial role of worker-client interrelationships in platform

employment (Tripathi and Tripathi, 2020 a). To delve into how platforms affect task and utilisation, it is helpful to view the articulation between platforms, workers, and customers in support of the perspective of three-way interest alliances. This concept is based on the tripartite service relationship between a platform, a customer, and a gig worker, which is defined by intersubjective, institutional, and spatial-temporal factors. Because they indicate various ways in which the participants are actively involved in one another, inter subjective interactions (Aroles et al., 2019). Institutional because the networks are reflections of the larger institutions in which they exist, spatial-temporal because the interactions between the parties are frequently renewed in space and time through social relationships prompted by specific desires or by the lack of options, rather than being limited to transient interrelationships. (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017). Therefore, the goal of this study is to make the case for the necessity of an analysis framework that takes into account the tripartite nature of the service relationship among platforms, employees, and customers. This is crucial for comprehending the interconnections between the workplace, platform management, and digitalization/algorithm-driven purchasing patterns.

2. Digital Labour Platforms

The emergence of new business models and methods of organizing digital labour and consumption has been facilitated by the growth of the digital economy (Tripathi and Tripathi, 2020b). In the following sections, we will examine various pieces of evidence from recent academic discourse concerning platform work.

3. Diversity of Digital Labour Platforms

Working on a worldwide scale (Bucher et al., 2021) and acting as middlemen between workers and customers (Dunn, 2020), digital work platforms link customers with professionals who can meet their needs.

As previously mentioned these resources can be divided into two categories: web-based and location-based. The former category includes jobs that don't require a high level of expertise and don't necessitate the worker's bodily presence to complete. Work in web-based networks is done by people located in different parts of the world and providing their services online (Howcroft and Bergvall-Kreborn, 2019). These can take the form of micro-task platforms, where jobs of short duration are performed for a fixed price per task, with little in the way of training or experience required, and no direct contact between clients and professionals, or freelance platforms, which require more training and experience, pay by the hour and encourage more face-to-face communication between clients and workers. The primary feature of digital work platforms is the execution of tasks online in the absence of a conventional business framework (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Algorithms replace the functional power structure of a business by coordinating, regulating, and monitoring the work that is then distributed to a large group of people, often of whom are unaware of the ultimate goal of their efforts. This poses a challenge to the established norms of labour control due to the employees' status as independent contractors (Stewart and Stanford, 2017). For example, they don't get the minimum salary, unemployment benefits, paid vacations, medical leave, or maternity leave that are guaranteed by law. Clients of the platform are incentivized to make use of the labour force because they incur no legal or societal liability and save money by not having to provide benefits to the workers (De Stefano, 2016). In turn, consumers live in a networked world of quick and competing services, where they engage in individualised consumption while adhering to the platforms' technical norms. Their purchasing experiences are splintered because they are tied to the completion of numerous, laborious chores (Sadin, 2020).

Platforms, employees, and customers all bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table in the context of work mediated via digital platforms (Florisson and Mandl, 2018) The increasing mediation of work and consumption by these platforms fosters a service connection that helps with the specific co-production of working and consuming circumstances... This is an area that needs to be further researched and integrated with consumer behaviour.

4. Algorithmic management and platform work

Supervisory, managerial, and control procedures under the guidance of algorithms are the hallmarks of what has been called "algorithmic management". Algorithmic choices are made with little to no human involvement while monitoring and evaluating employee behaviour and performance in real-time. However, customers enable the platforms' algorithms to collect a large aggregation of data from their digital footprint by making their data accessible and adhering to various digital apps in a hybrid state of authority and subordination. This aggregation of data facilitates stereotypical consumer profiles and lowers transaction costs for businesses and consumers alike, but it also fosters platform, worker, and consumer power relations that are instrumentalized according to alliances of opportunistic interests. These latter enable the platform to exercise control over a sizable population at minimum expense, as well as to enforce the rationality of standards, and categories.

Nonetheless, it must be emphasised that such studies frequently fail to adequately consider or even disregard the power that employees can have concerning automated supervision. In reality, it is important to include the idea that the use of authority is linked to capability and strength because, on the one hand, it implies unequal relations between actors affiliated with dominant structures and practices. As such, it suggests the existence of both independent and dependent relationships (Giddens, 1984). In the instance at hand, platform employees might engage in preemptive compliance practices meant to evade the platform algorithm, which would ultimately add to the co-construction of the algorithms' dominance (Bucher et al., 2021). Research on the mobilisation and organisation of the app workforce as well as consciousness strategies involving the creation of fresh connotations of platform workers provide further evidence that platform workers' agency is achieved both within and beyond the purview of algorithmic management. Indeed, client-sourced reputational indicators could lead to exposure to various kinds of prejudice (Curchod et al., 2019), but employees also could just set up relationships with customers, for instance, because once they obtain customer confidence and thus are capable of agreeing to delegate work straightforwardly rather than via platform intermediation, making sure benefits for both parties (Jarrahi et al., 2020). The complicated interplay of interests in the platform triangle between employees, customers, as well as the channel itself, which might also demonstrate various arrangements, makes the three-way interest coalition structure crucial to the development of this field.

5. Flexibility and work-life balance

There are two main schools of thought in the literature when it comes to the topic of whether or not digital job platforms offer sufficient freedom of action. Platform work has been lauded for its alleged ability to allow workers greater control over their schedules and incomes. This is because workers can select the hours they work and the tasks they complete. In addition, it promotes individuals working from home, whether that's for health reasons, to alleviate domestic responsibilities, because they prefer to be at home (ILO, 2018), or to save money and time wasted commuting (Wood et al., 2019).

On the other hand, there is a concern in the literature that increased uncertainty, insecurity, and precarity in the workplace could result from such freedom and independence. One of the reasons pros can't do more work is that there isn't enough work accessible on digital platforms, which in turn limits their ability to set their schedules and requires them to be available at odd hours (ILO, 2021). Other disadvantages include employment volatility, financial upheaval, and the dearth of societal rewards (Vallas and Schor, 2020; Masiero, 2021).

In addition, the digital workforce oversupply creates difficulties for workers who feel they must accommodate clients by lowering their wage offers, completing tasks in shorter amounts of time, and sometimes even tolerating improper behaviour on the part of clients (Bajwa et al., 2018). Workers with no prior work history or presence on the site are especially susceptible to this because of the lack of credibility they exude to customers. Thus, they are often enticed by customer scams, taking multiple works for which they are not compensated until after they are finished (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016). It's easy to substitute these experts with others, especially those willing to work for less pay, thanks to the surplus of available employees (Muntaner, 2018; Wood et al., 2019). Adverse working conditions can have negative effects on workers' well-being, including their physical and mental health.

However, such challenges appear not only at this stage of joining the platform but also in the phases that follow. This highlights the importance of future investigation into the ways in which the various platform work cycle phases improve unique circumstances and shape the interactions between platforms, employees, and customers. Additionally, the circumstances of the creation of a consuming process and the customer's experience level when hiring these digital services should be discussed. This process requires consumers to participate in multiple phases of value generation (Dujarier, 2014), which can put a significant strain on their work-life balance.

6. Platforms-workers-clients service relation

To support a unified and comprehensive perspective on digital work platforms, it is essential to draw a diagram of the web of connections between the platforms, employees, and customers that make up the service relation. In truth, it's vital to investigate whether and how the computational management that defines the platform's operation varies with the platform's type and its customers (Vallas and Schor, 2020), and what the consequences of these variations are for this tripartite service relationship. New data shows that there are significant variations in how platforms handle their employees and customers. (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017). However, such variations are linked to one another and require additional study.

Work on a platform, as we saw in the previous part, involves three interrelated entities: the platform itself, its employees, and its customers. As a mode of economic activity, the platform facilitates the meeting of supply and demand through mediation, resulting in a different arrangement of the labour and consuming process. This economic activity relies on a novel structural structure in which platforms retain their strength despite sharing with their customer's aspects of the work process related to the selection, management, and assessment of the workforce.

The practice of power is social and, as such, implies a relationship of liberty and dependency, even if it often stays concentrated in these platforms. Therefore, platform workforce members, sometimes in cooperation with their peers and clients, may create anticipated compliance practices targeted at interacting with the platform's algorithm in a manner that is most advantageous to them, thereby adding to the collaboration of the algorithms' efficacy.

More work is needed to define the working life cycle on the network. And it's not just new arrivals who have trouble keeping track of all their networks and customers; everyone does (Popiel, 2017). Variations in the work-consumer life cycle, classifying distinct stages of consuming, are likely to occur if employees' practices, such as varying modes of involvement in this form of work (Dunn, 2020), shift over time. Because of this, it is critical to problematize how much these shifts are determined by the current shifts in the platform market.

The complicated interaction of interests underpinning the structure of the triangle service relation cannot be grasped if only the relationships between platforms and employees are considered. Because of the inherent ambiguity and complexity in the interactions between platforms, employees, and customers, a service relation strategy must be applied to platform work from a multifaceted perspective. The logic of efficiency and revenue and those of service quality and client happiness are balanced depending on the degree of alignment of interests, which in turn defines the structure of the service relation. Taking this tack, it's vital to investigate the mechanics of routinization in the service relationship and the results it yields, especially in terms of the level of acceptance between workers and customers of the automated administration of the platform.

Particular focus should be paid to the intersubjective, structural, and spatiotemporal aspects of this tripartite service relationship. Because of the social character of the connection and the predominance of electronic means of contact, it is vital to take into account cultural, linguistic, and time zone variations from one another. On the other hand, the institutional aspects highlight the importance of remembering that platforms take their cues from the institutional settings in which they function, and thus the economic, political, and legal variables of the various nations cannot be ignored. Lastly, the spatial and time aspects emphasise the reality that workers are recruited all over the world to provide customers with access to the most diverse prospective workforce accessible, in a network of social relations governed by individual tastes or the lack of alternatives.

A greater understanding of the interplay between platforms, employees, and customers will necessitate further studies that take a service relational strategy. It is also crucial to incorporate a longitudinal thread that allows for inferences to be made regarding the arrangement of these relations across time and space as the platform market evolves, in addition to how employees and consumers connect to the platform at different stages of their respective work and consumption life cycles. With the aid of a service relation strategy, the complexities and power dynamics inherent in the design of these triangles become more apparent, and a more secure and fair platform ecosystem can be fostered for all parties.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the gig economy has transformed the way work is done by facilitating the rise of digital platforms connecting workers and clients. However, this transformation has also resulted in the emergence of new challenges for workers, such as a lack of benefits, job security, and fair pay. While the gig economy offers convenience and flexibility for workers and clients alike, it is important to ensure that the rights of workers are protected and that they are adequately compensated for their labour. Digital platforms, workers, and clients must work together to find sustainable solutions that ensure a fair and just gig economy for all parties involved. As the gig economy continues to evolve, it is essential to stay vigilant and responsive to the changing needs of workers and clients.

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