Algorithmic control in the online gig economy: findings from the iLabour project

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@ViliLe @iLabourProject

8th Cedefop Brussels-based seminar
Josephine L.
Expert keyboard skills.

$10.00 / hr  $40k+ earned  100% Job Success

I am British working as a full-time freelancer specializing in transcription, data entry and office administration. I have over 30 years’ experience in senior administration, customer service, secret ...

Gonçalo L.
PHP & Laravel Full-Stack Developer / Games Developer

$57.50 / hr  $60k+ earned  78% Job Success

Hi there! My name is Gonçalo and I’m a full stack web developer with major focus on the backend with 7 years of experience and a vast background in Game Development which is my academic course. I’ve d ...

Joel S.
Brand & Graphic Designer with experience in Illustration

$20.00 / hr  $20k+ earned  99% Job Success

⭐ Also specializes in Brand Identity Design

With 5+ years of experience in Graphic Design, Branding, Social Media, Illustration, Photo/Video Editing and other related fields. I’ve started working and studying graphic design back in 2009 when I ...
Online Labour Index (Kässi & Lehdonvirta 2018)
Online Labour Index (Kässi & Lehdonvirta 2018)
Algorithmic management

- Based on reputation ratings and other digital data
- A form of customer management
- Operates at the end of the labour process
Gonçalo L.

📍 Braga, Portugal - 4:14 pm local time

**PHP / Laravel Developer Required To**

**Bug Fix Web App and Add features**

★★★★★ 5.00 Nov 2016 - Aug 2017

Goncalo is a truly excellent developer. One of the things that makes his work stand out is that he anticipates future needs and problems with a project and adjusts accordingly.

**PHP Laravel developer**

★★★☆☆ 3.45 Nov 2018 - Feb 2019

Goncalo knows his stuff, but on the other hand it was a real struggle to get him to do things on time. He was late for work, late with deliverables and so on. So, it really depends what you are looking for in the freelancer. He can do the job, speaks good English, is intelligent, but is often, if not always, late.
Job quality under algorithmic management

- Neo-Taylorism? Not necessarily

- High levels of **flexibility, autonomy, task variety, and complexity**

- But can also result in **low pay, social isolation, unsocial and irregular working hours, and overwork**

Wood et al. (2019)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak dependence on income from gigs</th>
<th>Limited competition for gigs</th>
<th>Lots of competition for gigs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Occasional gigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong dependence on income from gigs</td>
<td>Flexibility both ways</td>
<td>Constantly on call</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Lehdonvirta (2018)*
Monthly earnings by active user account on leading platform

Analysis of data reported in Lehdonvirta et al. (2018)
Rural US counties supplied more online labour relative to population + it was more skilled

Braesemann, Lehdonvirta & Kässi (2019)
Thank you!

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Lehdonvirta et al. (2018)
figure by Otto Kässi

Worker country
– High-income
– Low/middle-income

Hourly rate (log/USD)

Number of gigs completed
Lehdonvirta et al. 2015, Wood et al. 2019
The communication network of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers

Yin & Gray (2016)
Policy challenges of (online) gig economy

- How to address polarization & inequality?
- How to ensure skill development?
- How to maintain social dialogue?
- How to arrange taxation & social protection?
Evolving EU regulatory landscape

• Regulation on Platform-to-business relations (2019)
• Follow-up regulation on platforms and the gig economy?
  • Update to Working Conditions directive to include gig workers?
  • Update to the Directive on ecommerce (2000) to reclassify gig platforms so that they are not just intermediaries with no liability?
  • Follow-up on Platform-to-business relations regulation with more obligations?
  • New regulatory initiatives on social protection and taxation?