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Understanding Peer Endorsements among gig workers

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Research-in-Progress

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ABSTRACT

User-generated content (UGC) is an important feature of the Internet, affecting the behavior of individuals or organizations on digital platforms. Social media websites, e-commerce marketplaces, and other digital platforms rely on both generation and consumption of UGC to remain competitive in the industry. Yet, UGC suffers from an underprovisioning problem because UGC is a public good and is created voluntarily. So, platforms owners need to understand the factors that motivate users to produce UGC.

In this study, we propose to understand the motivation behind endorsements (a type of UGC) on an online labor platform. Online labor platforms like Freelancer, Upwork, Fiverr, and PeoplePerHour connect buyers with sellers (contract workers or freelancers) irrespective of their location to assign various genres of tasks. The quality of workers' skillsets can be acknowledged by the worker community with the help of an endorsement system. In an endorsement system, each user can endorse another user's skills or can receive endorsements from other users. So, endorsements are one type of UGC which are generated voluntarily to help workers improve their gig performance in an online labor market.

The workers participating in the online labor markets compete against each other to acquire more freelancing/gig opportunities and maximize their income. Appreciating the competition in the form of endorsing skills presents an interesting behavior among gig workers. We specifically plan to address the following question: *Why does a gig worker endorses the skills of another worker especially when both of them compete for gig opportunities in the same platform?*

First, we apply the social value orientation (SVO) theory to understand the endorsement behavior among gig workers. Next, we focus on the attributes of workers who are the recipients of these endorsements. Examples of some worker attributes are worker participation, type of endorsement, historical performance, worker location among others. We address our research question by focusing on the endorsements generated in an online labor marketplace. PeoplePerHour.com (PPH) is a global online freelance marketplace that utilizes a reputation system along with an endorsement system to help buyers meet and select the best workers for their tasks or jobs. We plan to apply the decision tree induction approach to determine what attributes attract endorsements from other workers. Tree induction is a data-driven methodology to find out patterns in the form of interpretable if-else rules. Here, we present the worker attributes (predictors) in the form of simple if-else rules that influence the decision to endorse a certain type of worker.

The results from the decision tree would provide the attributes of endorsed workers and can explain how and why endorsements are generated. The potential contributions from this study would contribute to the literature on UGC production and digital platforms. The findings of our study would also have practical implications for online labor markets on utilizing endorsements to engage workers and contribute to the community of freelancing.

Keywords

User-generated-content, endorsements, social value orientation, online labor markets, tree induction