
Sunset Chasers: Life and Labour of Game Service Workers

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Abstract

The digital spaces of online multiplayer video games such as *League of Legends* are increasingly becoming sites for service work due to the proliferation of platform-mediated gig work. Across the globe, a growing number of people increasingly dependent on this work to make ends meet. While organised competitive gaming – known as electronic sports (esports) – has its professional celebrity players, this group of digital workers find different ways to reappropriate the playful spaces that most people turn to for leisure into sites for work through these platforms. Yet, despite its growing importance for an increasing number of workers, and that it has become an integral part of the global gig economy, this form of digital labour is somewhat overlooked in the current literature on platform-mediated digital gig work. In response, this paper examines the spatial and temporal dynamics that shape the life and labour of game service workers. Discussing the difference of two popular game services known as "boosting" and "coaching", the paper analyses how the spatiotemporal organisation of platform-mediated game service work create precarious labour even though this group of digital gig workers who occupy a unique position as "high-skilled" workers. Drawing on 25 interviews with workers as well as six months of digital ethnography on game service platforms, the paper discusses three spatiotemporal techniques that organise platform game workers' life and labour from the global scale to that of the body: 1) The spatial conditions of game service work that makes it highly restricted to place despite being integrated into the global gig economy. 2) The temporal conditions of game service work in which workers' everyday lives are structured according to biological and social rhythms of other places as they shuffle between different time zones. 3) The new time-work discipline emerging as workers' response and adapt to clients' needs and schedules across time zones in attempts to make a living in spaces others use for leisure in their "free time" after having engaged in wage labour themselves. The paper argues that these three techniques show how game service workers do not "follow-the-sun" as many other forms of digital labour but rather chase sunsets in different time zones across the globe in attempts to make a living in the playful spaces of online multiplayer video games.

Keywords: Video games, gaming labour, time zones, global gig economy, digital work, game services, playful spaces

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