
From Riders to Influencers: The "Gigfluencer" Phenomenon in Ridesourcing DLPs

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Abstract

Previous scholarships have discussed digital labour platform (DLP) workers using social media and ICTs to build online worker collectives, share knowledge and mutual aid, make sense of algorithms, fostering solidarity, mobilizing collective action, and documenting everyday acts of resistance (Grohmann et al 2023). While DLPs have exacerbated socio-economic insecurity as well as "algorithmic insecurity," (Wood 2021), they have concurrently created conditions encouraging workers to engage with, experiment and appropriate technology in innovative ways to meet workplace needs and beyond, positioning them aptly as "design actors" (Chandra 2017).

The post-pandemic surge of individuals engaging as influencers in the apparel, beauty, and fitness industries to supplement their income has led to the coining of terms like "gigfluencer" (Drenik 2021). In Thailand, Mieruch and McFarlane (2023) identify a "hero" narrative that glorifies delivery riders' independent status, misrepresenting their worker identity and alongside a

"worker" narrative that critiques their working conditions on that same platform. However, there is limited research on how workers in DLPs transition into influencers, effectively managing a double gig. Specifically, since much of the existing discussion on DLP workers' use of social media focuses on resistance and survival, it often overlooks how and why some workers transform into "content creators", becoming "influencers" by sharing their daily routines and workplace experiences. Additionally, the implications of the shaping and commodification of their "worker" identities by these social media platforms and DLPs remain unexamined.

Through in-depth interviews and digital ethnography of the social media accounts of six ridesourcing DLP workers in India who have transitioned into influencers while managing their ridesourcing work, we aim to address these questions. Our findings indicate that the emergence of gigfluencers, arises from workers' aspirations to negotiate the invisibility of gig work, take

ownership of their narratives, and supplement their low income. By streaming their work life into "content" they raise awareness of their working conditions and foster a sense of community and solidarity, while generating additional income and maximizing the value of their work, without switching gigs. We also identify the emergence of worker organizers transitioning into gigfluencers, even within traditional trade unions. Furthermore, ridesourcing platforms co-opt these gigfluencers as ambassadors to attract more unemployed youth to the sector. As a result, gigfluencers inhabit a contested terrain where resistance discourse meets platform narratives, both mediated by the lived experiences of workers in ridesourcing DLPs.

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