Gig Work and the Digital Security Divide

Kendra Albert, Harvard Law School (@KendraSerra)
In collaboration with Elizabeth Anne Watkins, Columbia University (@watkins_welcome)
Delivery person, name unknown
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Cleaner, name unknown.
Handy instructional video
Current gig work models are exacerbating trends towards a digital security divide.
whether people can control their digital lives

• ...whether their computer or phone is running malware,
• ...whether their identity gets stolen because of a data breach,
• whether their account gets phished.
Traditional company model

Company

workers

Customers
1. Gig workers have fewer chances to get trained or connect to security expertise.
The adoption of security tools and practices is socially contingent.
Of people who get security training, most get it in their workplace.

(McGregor et al, forthcoming 2018)
Workers often identify security “guides,” whom they ask for advice.

(Watkins et al, FOCI 2017)
Gig work platforms don’t just externalize their security costs, but they actively make workers less secure.
2. Digital platforms require digital buy-in.
Document requirements

To become active on the platform, you need to:

- create an account at partners.uber.com
- submit your background check

Upload Your Documents

Take photos of each of the documents below and upload them in the Dashboard.

**Driver's license**
Drivers are required to have a valid driver's license (see sample [here](#)). A temporary license is acceptable, but be sure to upload your permanent copy when you receive it.

**Personal vehicle insurance**
Drivers are required to have personal vehicle insurance. Proof of insurance needs to be provided with either a photo of an insurance policy ([sample](#)) or vehicle registration ([sample](#)).

**Driver photo**
Lyft requires a photo of all drivers. Your driver photo is a passenger's first impression of you when they request a ride.
“Handy collects the latitude and longitude location... for 4 hours prior to the scheduled start of a Job and ending 2 hours following the scheduled end of a Job for the purpose of confirming that the Job is completed.”
Uber Left Hundreds of Drivers' Licenses and Social Security Numbers Exposed

Apparent mistake exposed drivers’ licenses, social security numbers, and work documents.

MOTHERBOARD

Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai
Oct 13 2015, 6:52pm
Those keys had allowed Preacher to gain access to Uber’s Amazon web servers, where it stored source code as well as 57 million customer and driver accounts, including driver’s license numbers for some 600,000 Uber drivers.”
Please pull over to verify your identity
Baseline mistrust.
Brittle systems.
If the two photos don’t match, the account is temporarily blocked while we look into the situation. Severe consequences.
Please pull over to verify your identity
Distrust makes some security problems worse.
“They said if you don’t [give us your credentials] we are going to deactivate your account right now...”
“And I’m thinking, ‘oh come on, I just made a bundle of money and haven’t cashed out’.”
These problems disproportionately impact workers who rely on gig platforms for money.
In 2016, 8% of Americans earned money from an online gig platform.

56% of those Americans rely on that money.

Money from gig work essential or important (56%)
Money from gig work nice to have (44%)

These gig workers, economically reliant on platforms, often do not have the power to say no.
“... all of the net employment growth in the U.S. economy from 2005 to 2015 appears to have occurred in alternative work arrangements.”

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How do the systems you design, test, and study allocate security risk?

Is it to those with the least power to say no?
Thanks to Data & Society and Pew Research Center for foundational work in this space.

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For further reading, check out the work of:
• Julia Ticona
• Alex Rosenblat
• Alexandra Mateescu
• Mary L. Gray
• Siddharth Suri
• Elissa M. Redmiles
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