

Conflicting Logics: Organization-based Gig Work

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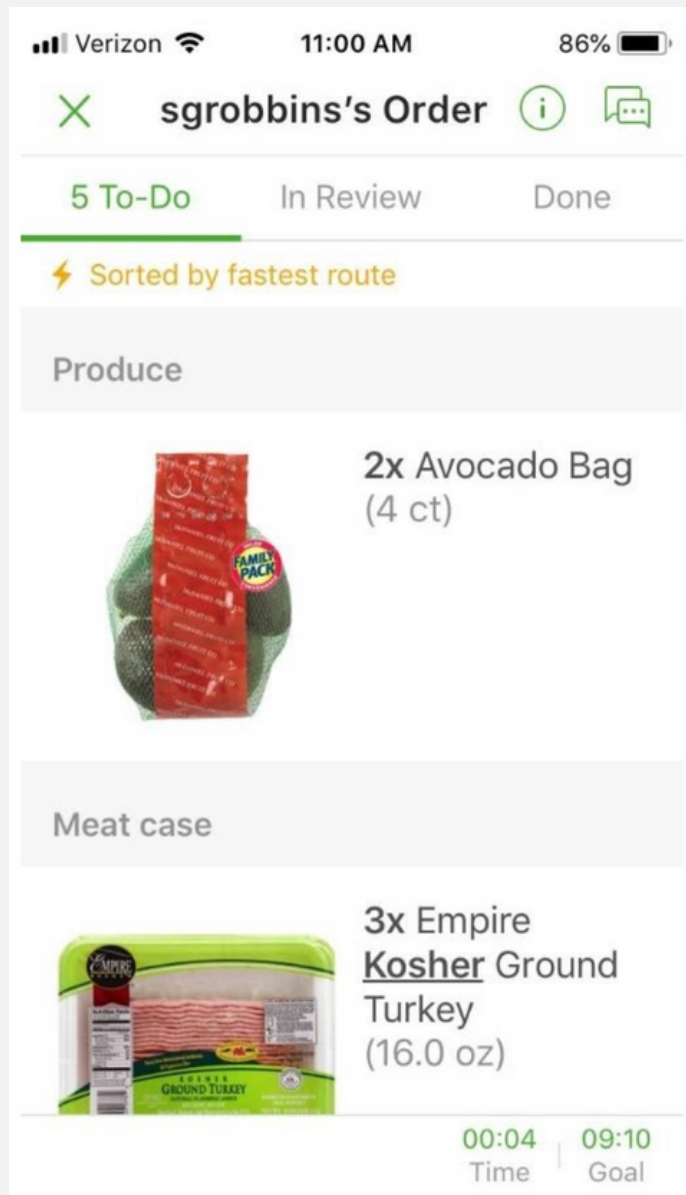


Image from Chelsea Wahl's field work depicting a usual order and time limit on the Instacart app.

Introduction

Gig work allows for an individual to work as an independent contractor through online platforms and enter into informal agreements with certain on-demand companies. This allows for the flexibility of deciding one's own hours and only reporting to themselves and a digital platform. These apps deteriorate the relationship between the gig workers and organizations with in-store managers and human resources. Despite this, these independent contractors are thrown into organizational settings without personal guidance.

Project Goals

This project draws on ethnographic data to investigate how gig workers learn to navigate these settings and how they shape experiences in the gig economy. Specifically, this project focused on the grocery delivery app, Instacart, and its relationship with supermarket chains to understand how workers navigate the logic of app-based algorithmic control within the context of existing organizational settings: the grocery stores in which they shop

Context

- The gig economy has been rapidly expanding in the last few years
- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, participation in gig work grew exponentially
- The pandemic increased the reliance on gig workers and home-delivery platforms.
- Coronavirus redefined the traditional 9-5 working world and pushed many to seek additional, or primary, income on their own schedule

Methods

- Passive recruitment through social media posts and Facebook groups.
- Data collection through media platforms and Instacart chat groups.
- In-depth, one-on-one interviews with grocery employees and Instacart workers.
- Previously collected field data.
- Three focus groups consisting of discussion between researchers and gig-workers.

Preliminary Findings

- Grocery stores spend ample time and resources assisting gig-workers through their organizational settings.
- Gig workers often find themselves lacking management from the algorithm when dealing with human error or occurrences.
- Due to its digital and impersonal nature, gig-based work platforms do not have strong service logic and standards like the grocery stores they function in