

Call for Conference Papers

Work and Employment in the Platform Economy

Rutgers-Renmin Center for Global Work and Employment
School of Labor and Human Resources, Renmin University of China
School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University
Beijing, China, July 14-16, 2017

Conference Organizers

Mingwei Liu, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University
Adrienne Eaton, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University
Qingjun Wu, School of Labor and Human Resources, Renmin University of China

Featured Keynote Speakers & Presenters

Wilma B. Liebman, Former Chairman of the U.S. National Labor Relations Board
Arne L. Kalleberg, Professor, University of North Carolina
Arun Sundararajan (to be confirmed), Professor, Stern Business School of New York University
Bernd Waas, Chair Professor, Goethe University Frankfurt Faculty of Law
Uma Rani Umara, Senior Economist, International Labor Organization
Ursula Huws, Professor, Hertfordshire Business School
Jack Qiu, Professor, Chinese University of Hong Kong
Susan Lund (to be confirmed), Partner, McKinsey & Company and McKinsey Global Institute

Recent advances in digital technology, particularly the massive growth in the volume of digitized information available and the vastly improved performance of data processing and modelling software, have driven a rapidly rising model of business—online platforms that connect thousands of suppliers and customers to form so-called two-sided markets (Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Zhu & Iansiti, 2012). While this new business model has been given different terms such as the platform economy, the sharing economy, the gig economy, the on-demand economy and crowdsourcing, common features in various definitions include the irrelevance of geographical location, the key role played by platforms, the importance of network effects and the use of big data (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016). Some of the best-known examples of online platforms include eBay, Uber, Airbnb, and Amazon Mechanical Turk. It is widely believed that the platform economy represents a radical shift in how business is organized, and poses challenges to many existing theories and practices of labor, employment, the firm, and the nature of economic enterprise (Davis, 2016).

In particular, the views on the impact of the platform economy on work and employment are mixed. Some are excited about the freedom, autonomy, and new income and entrepreneurial opportunities brought by platform employment, while others worry about the negative impacts of crowd work on wages, labor rights, and access to social protections (Degryse, 2016; Huws, 2013; Sundararajan, 2016). Although there has been a body of literature on various aspects of this topic, further rigorous scholarship is needed as this form of workplace evolves and as more information becomes available about the phenomenon and its effects. Therefore the conference organizers invite contributions that examine key questions include:

- What are the new types of jobs and new professional identifies in the platform economy? How do they differ from traditional ones?
- How might various forms of platform work and employment be conceptualized? What are the dimensions underlying different typologies and classification systems? And how could these conceptualizations contribute to theories of labor and management?
- How will employment relationships change in the platform economy? What are the challenges for existing labor laws, regulations, and public policies? How should policy makers respond?

Call for Conference Papers

- How is work designed in virtual organizations associated with the platform economy, and how are data, digital metrics and algorithms integrated into work processes? How do firms manage virtual labor and what are the new forms of managerial control?
- Why do individuals work in the platform economy? How do they transit from traditional employment to freelancers or independent contractors? Are they better or worse off in terms of income, working conditions, work autonomy, work stress, access to social protection, and work-life balance?
- What are the challenges of the platform economy for worker representation? How do labor unions respond to these challenges? How might virtual labor be best organized?
- How should we study work and employment in the platform economy? What are the methodological opportunities and challenges?

The above list of questions is not intended to be exhaustive. The conference organizers encourage authors to contribute papers that address issues consistent with the themes outlined in this call for papers. Papers can be from different theoretical perspectives, as can be the use of different empirical methodologies (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, case-oriented or mixed). Works presented must be original studies that contribute to the advancement of existing knowledge and debates on the topic.

Conference:

Those interested in submitting papers for the conference are asked to submit an abstract of 250-500 words to platformeconomy@gmail.com by May 28, 2017. The organizers aim to advise the authors if their abstracts have been accepted by May 31, 2017. Invited authors will present their papers at a conference to be held at Renmin University of China, Beijing, China, on July 14-15, 2017, with a possibility of participating in a journal special issue on this topic. All conference presenters are also invited to attend the Platform Employment Forum on July 16, 2017, featuring presentations from and interactions with China-based leading platform companies such as Alibaba, Didi, and WUBA. For inquiries please contact Mingwei Liu (mingwei@smlr.rutgers.edu).

References

Davis, G. F. 2016. *The vanishing American corporation: Navigating the hazards of a new economy*. Ann Arbor, MI: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Degryse, C. 2016. Digitalization of the economy and its impact on labor markets, Working paper 2016.02, Brussels, ETUI.

Huws, U. 2013. Working online, living offline: labor in the Internet age, *Work organization, labor and globalization*, 7 (1), 1-11.

Rochet, J.-C., & Tirole, J. 2003. Platform competition in two-sided markets. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 1(4), 990-1029.

Sundararajan, A. 2016. *The Platform economy: The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press.

Valenduc, G & Vendramin, P. 2016. Work in the digital economy: sorting the old from the new. Working paper 2016.03, Brussels, ETUI.

Zhu, F., & Iansiti, M. 2012. Entry into platform-based markets. *Strategic Management Journal*, 33(1), 88-106.