UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING CROWD WORKERS’ PRACTICES

presented by

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Abstract:
Crowdsourcing has enabled technologists and researchers to implement novel and increasingly impressive functionalities and algorithms. But who are the workers in the crowd who enable this functionality? To answer this question, I will present a series of ethnographic and design studies that investigated how the crowd experiences the Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) labor market. In this work I draw from three studies. First, a virtual ethnography of the Turker Nation forum, which is run by and for Turkers (the moniker that the crowd workers on AMT have given themselves), where we outlined the experiences and concerns of the workers. Second, a traditional ethnographic study of Indian crowd workers, where we discovered and contrasted their work practices with that of the American crowd workers. A key contribution of this work was framing the multiple layers of invisibility within crowd work, as well as outlining how the AMT platform mediates user agency. Finally, I present a design study of a system that sought to minimize the unpaid, invisible work of Turkers and increase their agency by re-rendering the market to their advantage. Based on these results, I will offer design implications for crowdsourcing platforms.

Bio:
Benjamin Hanrahan is a Research Associate in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at Pennsylvania State University. Previously, he was a Research Scientist in the Work Practice Technologies group at Xerox Research Centre Europe in France. Dr. Hanrahan holds a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the Virginia Polytechnic and State University, where he was a member of the Center for Human Computer Interaction. Dr. Hanrahan’s research interests are in understanding how software systems can both inhibit and support the agency of users. Agentic actions are always situated with the personal, professional, or community context in which users are engaged. As such, he has investigated this topic in a number of different contexts and scopes, e.g.: in the context of the personal, particularly the management of one’s attention when using email; in the context of the work place, in outsourced telecommunication support centers, as well as online crowd sourced labor; and in the context of forming stronger local communities. The results of his research have been published in several top-tier conferences and journals, such as CHI, CSCW, the Journal of CSCW, IEEE Computer, and Interacting with Computers.

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