Journal of Business Ethics (2024) 193:1–16
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05604-9

ORIGINAL PAPER

The Ethical, Societal, and Global Implications of Crowdsourcing Research

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Received: 20 June 2023 / Accepted: 16 December 2023 / Published online: 24 January 2024

Abstract
Online crowdsourcing platforms have rapidly become a popular source of data collection. Despite the various advantages these platforms offer, there are substantial concerns regarding not only data validity issues, but also the ethical, societal, and global ramifications arising from the prevalent use of online crowdsourcing platforms. This paper seeks to expand the dialogue by examining both the "internal" aspects of crowdsourcing research practices, such as data quality issues, reporting transparency, and fair compensation, and the "external" aspects, in terms of how the widespread use of crowdsourcing data collection shapes the nature of scientific communities and our society in general. Online participants in research studies are informal workers who provide labor in exchange for remuneration. The paper thus highlights the need for researchers to consider the markedly different political, economic, and socio-cultural characteristics of the Global North and the Global South when undertaking crowdsourcing research involving an international sample; such consideration is crucial for both increasing research validity and mitigating societal inequities. We encourage researchers to scrutinize the value systems underlying this popular data collection research method and its associated ethical, societal, and global ramifications, as well as provide a set of recommendations regarding the use of crowdsourcing platforms.

Keywords Crowdsourcing research · Online labor · Ethics of methods · Data validity · Transparency · Global South

Introduction

Online crowdsourcing platforms, such as Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and Prolific, have rapidly become a popular source for data collection over the last decade. Crowdsourcing platforms offer certain advantages – quick, convenient, and cost-effective data collection, and the possibility to tap into diverse populations – as compared to conventional data collection methods (e.g., in-person lab experiment). Nevertheless, scholars have voiced substantial concerns about the validity of data collected via such platforms, ranging from self-selection bias, participants' non-naivete, to inattentiveness and self-misrepresentation (Aguinis et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2017; Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). Furthermore, the ethical, societal, and global ramifications arising from the prevalent use of online crowdsourcing platforms are little understood and demand closer scrutiny. Research participants in online crowdsourcing platforms are part of the global precarious casual online workforce operating as freelancers who face unstable and unprotected work and income opportunities and are not shielded by labor legislation and social safeguards (Berg & de Stefano, 2018; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016; Huws et al., 2018). We emphasize that researchers utilizing crowdsourcing platforms should follow ethical and fair labor practices and consider the political, sociocultural, and global implications of the widespread use of crowdsourced data.

This paper seeks to foster a pluralistic dialogue on online crowdsourcing data collection and encourage researchers to practice reflexivity – scrutinizing the value systems underlying this popular data collection research method and its associated ethical, societal, and global ramifications. By "pluralistic", we refer to our intention to open critical dialogue around crowdsourcing data rather than defend a specific policy; we believe the issue to be a complex one requiring a nuanced position. Written by a diverse team of researchers consisting of empirical scholars who use crowdsourcing

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platform regularly, scholars from a critical research tradition, and scholars from the Global South with expertise in online labor markets (OLMs), this paper examines crowdsourcing research in the wider social, cultural, and global context, highlighting ethical concerns and bringing to the fore multiple perspectives and their nuances.

Specifically, we seek to expand the dialogue on crowdsourcing research by examining not only the "internal" aspects of crowdsourcing research practices, such as data quality issues, reporting transparency, and fair compensation, but also the "external" aspects, in terms of how the widespread use of crowdsourcing data collection shapes the nature of scientific communities and our society in general. The "point" essay evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of crowdsourcing data collection. The "counterpoint" essay provides an in-depth examination of the ethically problematic nature of normalized crowdsourcing data collection and the potential negative impacts on the scientific communities and the broader society. The "Global South perspective" essay highlights the need for researchers to consider the markedly different political, economic, and sociocultural characteristics of the Global North and the Global South when undertaking crowdsourcing research involving an international sample; such consideration is crucial for both increasing research validity and mitigating societal inequities. We end with a set of suggestions that are relevant to authors, reviewers, and editors.

Point: A Critical Review of Crowdsourcing Research

Research using crowdsourced data from online platforms such as MTurk, CrowdFlower, and Prolific has increased over tenfold in the last decade (Aguinis, Villamor, and Ramani, 2021) and frequently appeared in academic journals spanning various business disciplines and topics such as organizational behavior, leadership, marketing, ethics and morality (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017; Hunt & Scheetz, 2019; Keith et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2019). This essay explores the advantages and disadvantages of using crowdsourced data and provides some recommendations on best practices to ensure data quality and mitigate potential concerns of crowdsourced data.

Advantages of Using Crowdsourcing Platforms

The collection of data using crowdsourcing platforms has a number of advantages, such as speed of data collection (Follmer et al., 2017), access to a more diverse population than traditional university student samples (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2017), and access to data for researchers with limited access to organizations. Thus, crowdsourced participants form a viable source of data, especially when conditions for data quality and ethical treatment of participants are met (Aguinis et al., 2021).

Data obtained from crowdsourcing platforms are shown to be valid and of similar, if not higher, quality as compared to data collected via conventional methods, especially when researchers follow some of the best practices. For example, studies addressing validity concerns have shown crowdsourced studies to be equally valid (Horton et al., 2011), and that concerns for inattention of participants are not relevant when selecting workers with high reputation (e.g., a more than 95% approval rating on MTurk; Peer et al., 2014). Some studies have even revealed that crowdsourced participants from MTurk are more attentive than participants in convenience samples such as undergraduate students (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). Addressing concerns related to criterion validity, researchers successfully replicated a range of well-known lab experiments in psychology using crowdsourced data (Crump et al., 2013; Horton et al., 2011; Palan & Schitter, 2018), and a study of 90 samples showed that psychometric properties and criterion validities are similar between carefully sourced panel data from crowdsourcing platforms and conventionally sourced data (Walter et al., 2019).

Crowdsourcing research platforms are also beneficial in that they help facilitate access to more diverse populations, underrepresented or hard-to-reach populations, and large sized samples. Compared to student samples and samples collected via snowball techniques, crowdsourced panel data is more representative of the larger population (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Kees et al., 2017). Although the samples may still not be fully representative of a country's national population, they are a good counterbalance to traditional samples from WEIRD populations (where study participants from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic societies are overrepresented; Cheung et al., 2017). Moreover, depending on the diversity of the panel population, crowdsourced data may also allow access to traditionally underrepresented populations, such as unemployed people and people with lower socio-economic status, as well as other minorities (Buhrmester et al., 2011). Finally, crowdsourcing allows for easier collection of larger samples, addressing concerns about statistical power in experimental research (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Kees et al., 2017).

Crowdsourcing research platforms provide additional benefits to both participants and researchers. Proponents of crowdsourcing have argued that crowdsourcing platforms allow for more openness and transparency (Abrahamson et al., 2013), and allow those from disadvantaged backgrounds to access the labor market directly (Barnes et al., 2015). This view fits with the perspective of crowdsourcing as a future way of working, allowing participants more flexibility and autonomy to earn additional income, especially in cases where health concerns, remote living locations,

or care tasks hinder regular employment. Those benefits, however, are contingent upon the crowdsourcing platforms' satisfying the requisite ethical labor requirements and the extent to which these platforms have policies and subject pool management procedures in place to protect the participants (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer et al., 2017). For example, Prolific has a set of payment rules, return options, and rejection guidelines to provide more clarity about the rights, obligations, and compensation of participants (Palan & Schitter, 2018): it has established a minimum fixed payment rate per unit of time, which is updated based on the time an average participant spends on the study and communicated to participants before they agree to participate in a study; it bans requesters from screening participants beyond the initial selection criteria, has made rejection criteria at the end of the study stricter, and allows participants to object to rejection by the requester; in addition, it offers participants several options for terminating a study without negatively affecting their reputation score. However, protective measures such as these do vary across different platforms, and there is no universal standard for ethical treatment of crowdsourcing participants. Researchers working with crowdsourcing data therefore should pay careful attention to the conditions and regulations for the platform to ensure ethical treatment of their participants. Finally, from the researchers' perspective, crowdsourcing platforms in some ways democratize research, as they provide access to data for researchers who have limited access to experimental laboratory facilities or have limited organizational contacts (Aguinis et al., 2020), albeit still excluding researchers at institutions without funding.

In summary, studies using crowdsourcing platforms can be valuable in a number of ways; they can complement studies using other means of data collection by adding to the external validity of phenomena established in field research, by confirming causal relationships through experimental setups (Aguinis et al., 2021), or by undertaking longitudinal designs based on the identification numbers that circumvent the need for saving identifying data (Follmer et al., 2017). Researchers should prioritize conscientious design of their research and choose panels that ensure ethical treatment of the participants, to prevent some of the boundary conditions discussed below.

Boundary Conditions of Using Crowdsourcing Data

Despite the widespread use of crowdsourced data and its associated benefits discussed in the previous section, crowdsourcing research has several disadvantages (e.g., self-selection bias, data quality issues) that could negatively influence the validity of research findings, as well as ethical concerns regarding treatment of participants (Aguinis et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2021). These disadvantages and ethical concerns form the boundary conditions to the usability of crowdsourced data.

The first disadvantage of crowdsourcing research is sample bias. Even though crowdsourcing platforms facilitate researchers' access to more diverse populations, underrepresented, underprivileged, or hard-to-reach populations, especially as compared to student samples, snowball or other traditional techniques (Kees et al., 2017), participants on these platforms are often not representative of the larger population under study because of self-selection bias. This sample bias exists at the platform level because participants self-select into using a crowdsourcing platform, leading to observable differences in sample compositions not representative of the general population. Compared to the general population, participants on crowdsourcing platforms are younger, more educated, less likely to have been married, have lower incomes, are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, and are more likely to be white and work in tech-related fields (Levay et al., 2016). In addition, participants on crowdsourcing platforms tend to exhibit unique personality and psychographic characteristics, such as being more liberal, less religious, and demonstrating higher social anxiety relative to the general population (Levay et al., 2016; McCredie & Morey, 2019). These idiosyncrasies of platform participants are likely to affect the generalizability of research findings.

The self-selection bias is present not only at the platform level, but also at the study level, since participants can freely choose which studies to participate in. Research shows that self-selection bias at the study level is influenced by various factors associated with the study, such as the rewards provided (Wessling et al., 2017), the day of the week or the hour of the day in which a study is posted, and the topic of the study (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). Self-selection bias can pose a serious threat to the external validity of research findings and, in some cases, to the internal validity of the findings as well. For instance, in a between-subject experimental study, if the attrition rate varies systematically across conditions (e.g., if the participants are more likely to quit a study in one condition than the other), then the assumption of random assignment would fail, seriously confounding the research results (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016).

Furthermore, data obtained from crowdsourcing platforms may be of poorer quality due to participants behaving differently on the online platforms vis-à-vis in conventional data collection settings (e.g., a physical behavioral lab) or in real life outside the digital platform context. First, participant non-naiveté is a serious issue that occurs because there are thousands of tasks every day on a given crowdsourcing platform and, as a result, some workers tend to accumulate significant experience with social science studies. There are super-workers who complete a disproportionate number of studies on a platform and become very familiar

with experimental settings, tasks, and research materials (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Chandler et al., 2014). Workers can also become non-naïve via the exchange of information on worker forums; such information sharing has been shown to be quite prevalent on crowdsourcing research platforms and could mean that workers are often aware of the manipulations used or of a study's purpose (Chandler et al., 2014; Wessling et al., 2017). Participant non-naivete can substantially distort effect size, posing a threat to the internal validity and construct validity of research studies (Aguinis et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2017).

Second, data quality concerns may arise due to participant inattentiveness or self-misrepresentation on crowdsourcing platforms. Unlike in a physical behavioral lab, participants on crowdsourcing platforms are virtually unsupervised and are likely to be motivated to complete studies as quickly as possible to maximize payout. There is evidence that MTurkers complete studies while also engaged in other tasks (e.g., chatting online, listening to music, and watching TV; Chandler et al., 2014). Participant inattentiveness may threaten the internal validity, construct validity, and statistical conclusion validity of research studies (Aguinis et al., 2021). However, on the other hand, crowdsourcing participants have an incentive to perform tasks well and maintain a high reputation because, if their submissions are rejected by the researchers, not only will they be denied payment, but also their reputation will suffer, which reduces access to future studies. Overall, empirical studies comparing participant attentiveness on crowdsourcing platforms versus physical laboratory settings show mixed results (Hauser et al., 2020).

In addition to inattentiveness, participants may also misrepresent themselves (e.g., in terms of demographics, personality, and other characteristics) to meet a study's eligibility criteria. In a study examining MTurker misrepresentation, Wessling et al. (2017) found that about 24% to 83% of those passing the screener questions are imposters, and that deceit occurs amongst 49–89% of those who are "eligible" to misrepresent. MacInnis et al. (2020) found that, even after utilizing best practices to ensure data quality, about 2.2–28% of MTurkers misrepresent their qualifications. Misrepresentation may compromise the internal and external validity of a study, particularly when eligible and ineligible participants may answer in systematically different ways.

Finally, crowdsourcing data collection raises concerns for ethical treatment of participants and procedural fairness and transparency. On crowdsourcing platforms, a researcher is basically hiring workers to complete a task within a prescribed period of time in exchange for payment. This creates a power imbalance and shifts the relationship between researchers and participants to that of employers and independent contractors. On many platforms, due to the absence of policies and guidelines protecting workers, researchers can unilaterally decide on the pay rate for their studies and are not subject to minimum wage regulations, if any, and researchers can unilaterally refuse payment or block any worker from participating in their studies if they believe that the worker is providing substandard work (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Gleibs, 2017). Many such practices are ethically deplorable and violate fair labor practices. This power imbalance is even more disconcerting given that participants on these crowdsourcing platforms tend to have lower incomes (Williamson, 2016) and lower levels of social and psychological wellbeing (Ophir et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2019) than the general population. There are criticisms that some crowdsourcing platforms are digital sweatshops or unregulated online labor marketplaces with very low wages and where workers are denied basic workplace rights (Gleibs, 2017), and that researchers are participating in a market that leaves the people they study in precarity and poverty (Williamson, 2016). Ethical concerns related to fair pay, procedural fairness and transparency (e.g., providing reasonable time estimates for the required work, maintaining a responsive line of communication, and prompt payment) should be addressed in a satisfactory way.

Recommendations

Recent work has proposed several recommendations that researchers may adopt to deal with the concerns previously highlighted around using data from crowdsourcing platforms. First, to ensure that the data are representative of the population from which they intend to sample, researchers might adopt several tactics to improve data quality when collecting data from crowdsourcing platforms. For example, they might use platforms with more diverse participant pools such as CrowdFlower and Prolific (Peer et al., 2017), set quotas for participants from certain demographic groups, and utilize several platforms in the same study (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Second, to improve the quality of data obtained from crowdsourcing platforms, researchers may adopt various strategies. In addition to limiting non-naïve participants (Robinson et al., 2019), researchers should exclude non-attentive participants through the introduction of attention checks (see Newman et al., 2021 for details on different types of attention checks) and undertake post hoc statistical techniques to identify inattentive participants. Third, researchers may adopt several strategies to address concerns about participant misrepresentation. For example, researchers might consider using a two-step approach consisting of a short paid prescreen and then an ongoing panel with a number of screening variables (see Wessling et al., 2017 for more details on this approach), use data integrity tools to block multiple responses from the same participants, and use targeted questions to verify the expertise of participants (Newman et al., 2021). In addition, researchers might consider using explicit instructions and warnings to reduce

the level of dishonest reporting; such techniques have been shown to reduce the likelihood of misrepresentation by participants (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Hunt & Scheetz, 2019).

Finally, researchers should take a more systematic approach to properly address the ethical concerns of crowdsourcing research. It is critical to adequately compensate the participants for their time and efforts. Researchers should pay minimum wages (if applicable) or living wages in the countries from which they source participants and provide clear details on compensation rules in the consent form including codes of conduct, monitoring procedures, and penalties for fraudulent or untruthful reporting (Aguinis et al., 2021). It is also important to approve or deny compensation for completed responses promptly (e.g., within 24 to 48 h) and clearly specify reasons for rejecting compensation. In addition, researchers should provide a reasonably accurate time estimate of the required task and maintain a responsive line of communication to ensure that participants' inquiries and complaints are properly addressed. It is worth mentioning that some platforms (e.g., Prolific) have minimal hourly compensation and recommended hourly compensation; such platform guidelines regarding compensation go a long way in promoting ethical and fair compensation to participants. Another key category of ethical concerns relates to reporting transparency (Gleibs, 2017). Researchers should provide sufficient information about data collection, including qualifications used to restrict access to HIT (e.g., age, country of residence, etc.), detailed sample characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, employment status, education qualifications), details on the use of attention checks or screening techniques, average length of task completion (and average pay per hour). Greater transparency is needed to facilitate the assessment of both data quality and the ethical aspects of data collection, thus holding researchers accountable for ensuring data quality and addressing ethical concerns.

Counterpoint: Crowdsourcing Platforms and the Ethics of Methods

The use of crowdsourcing platforms for online data collection has recently generated much debate, both in terms of the validity of data gathered from such platforms and the research ethics of using platforms for data collection (Aguinis et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2021). One goal of the current dialogue is to examine the broader societal ramifications of this widespread adoption and to question the meanings and impact of crowdsourcing research practices on the scientific communities and the society more broadly.

While the "point" essay above deftly balances the positive and negative aspects of online platforms to provide guidelines for more ethical uses, our "counterpoint" essay questions whether such a balancing act can be sufficient to justify the generalized use of online platforms for data collection. We acknowledge that the benefits and harms of online platforms are complex and that new work technologies should be neither categorically condemned nor defended. To do so would miss an opportunity to examine the conditions under which these may be used in more ethical ways, as the "point" essay argues above. Our concern is that, while measures to mitigate harms are crucial, the ethically problematic aspects of online platforms may run deep enough to render such measures nugatory, geared toward reducing harms but not sufficiently engaging with the ethical dilemmas posed by platforms.

Our approach draws from a recent editorial essay by Islam and Greenwood (2023), in which the ethics of methods is considered both "prescriptively," i.e., whether it involves ethical actions by agents involved, and "evaluatively," i.e., whether it promotes the right kind of world (see also Islam & Greenwood, 2021; Williams, 1985). Prescriptive aspects of research ethics tend to focus on researcher practices and focus "internally" on aspects of research design, such as validity, informed consent, or analytical transparency, although they can go beyond research design to take into account, for instance, participant compensation practices. Evaluative ethics, however, requires researchers to ask more systemic questions about the kind of scientific community that is produced or normalized through research practices, as well as the role of research practices in society more broadly. While researchers must operate in the *world that we have*, ethical research should attempt to envision and promote a *world that should be*, and researchers should justify their practices at least in part by the extent to which the practices make such a world possible. This is especially so in the field of business ethics, where our methods should demonstrate sophisticated ethical reflection.

To begin with, we concur with Landers and Behrend (2015) that data sampling strategies are not "universally 'good' or 'bad'". As with most ethical questions, the devil is in the details. Methodological judgments should be situated within specific research contexts, according to fit between research questions and methodological strategies. The benefits and harms of research practices on participants and society in general are likely to vary across geographical and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, maintaining contextual judgment should not lead us to minimize the systemic and structural problems associated with the platform economy (Srnicek, 2017; Visser & Arnold, 2022). The research community should think carefully before tying the destiny of empirical social scientific research with the social experiments that are online platforms.

We say "tying the destiny" because the use of online crowdsourcing platforms is a rapidly emerging and very convenient data solution (Aguinis et al., 2021) in a time when publishing is increasingly the criterion for a successful

academic career and when intensifying demands for publication are fueling ethically questionable practices (Linder & Farahbakhsh, 2020). In that epistemic-institutional configuration, the increasing legitimation of online crowdsourcing has led to its rapid adoption (Aguinis et al., 2021), perhaps at the expense of other empirical methods. As in many digital domains, each moment of online crowdsourcing data collection is a moment that could have been spent otherwise, risking the crowding out of other (perhaps slower) methods. The digital imperative could make online crowdsourcing research seem increasingly inevitable and the chance of turning back increasingly unlikely.

We share many of the concerns raised above in the "point" essay, but we are less sanguine about their resolution through best practices because even the adoption of best practices can lead to unethical outcomes in the context of structural injustices. To see why this is so, we begin with some of the specific points raised above, then move to progressively more general concerns with the role of online crowdsourcing platforms in social sciences and business research.

Research Practice Ethics: Identification, Representation, Treatment of Crowdsourcing Samples

As noted above, several concerns have been expressed about online crowdsourcing in terms of sampling and representativeness, with direct bearing on the validity of claims inferences. Although these are methodological concerns and not framed in terms of "ethics", they have ethical bearing in so far as unwarranted claims can create harmful distortions on scientific communities and their readers. However, these methodological issues have more wide-ranging ethical harms that include but go beyond methodological questions of validity.

For instance, the participation of "super-workers" (Chandler et al., 2014), that is, professional online workers engaging in hundreds or thousands of academic studies for pay, has drawn concern over practice effects that can distort response patterns. This raises a validity concern that is empirically testable, to ascertain whether or not super-workers in fact respond differently as compared to naïve participants. However, in our view, the deeper concern is whether such practices distort what it means to study a population when members have developed institutionally specialized roles as "study participants," which become consolidated as forms of employment. The existence of professional participants fundamentally shifts the roles of researchers and participants in the research process, independent of the statistical pattern of responses derived from these participants.

Another common sampling concern is the possibility of participant misrepresentation, where it is difficult to correctly ascertain the demographic or other characteristics of online populations (Wessling et al., 2017), or where dishonest reporting potentially distorts results (Brink et al., 2019). To address this data validity issue, some researchers include verification processes to more effectively identify participants, such as verifying IP addresses (Keith et al., 2019). However, this may distract from the core problem that social scientists are trying to study the personal and social lives of people with whom they have virtually no contact, lacking even the minimal face-to-face introductory and debriefing moments that characterize traditional experiments. Attempting to control this lack of knowledge through computerized verification process addresses only the symptom of this deeper problem, while the control needed to do so deepens forms of surveillance and control (Zuboff, 2019) that undermine the trust relationship that should characterize scholarly inquiry.

A commonly cited advantage of online platforms is that it provides access to populations that are underrepresented in traditional research (Buhrmester et al., 2018), solving the problem of a social science of "college sophomores" (Sears, 1986). The issue of population representativeness is important, and indeed, some have found crowdsourced data to be an important alternative to student samples for theory testing (Kees et al., 2017). Access to distant populations may be possible with such technology and is justified when crowdsourcing is done with specific population parameters that a study aims to sample. Otherwise, however, the kind of abstract generalization in which any human with an internet connection can participate is unlikely to provide a sound basis for generalization. Such an approach to generalization imagines it as a stripping away of context via abstraction (see Zyphur & Pierides, 2017) rather than a specific recognition of generalizable processes while taking context seriously.

Relatedly, the "point" essay above notes that crowdsourcing provides "access to traditionally underrepresented populations, such as unemployed people and people with lower socio-economic status, as well as other minorities." The global nature of online gig work does, whatever else, offer an aspect of diversity. Nevertheless, to the extent that outsourced gig jobs are a source of precarity (Berg et al., 2018) as well as a way of minimum-wage arbitrage to find cheap labor, the diversity argument seems misplaced. By contrast, some scholars consider platforms like MTurk to be engaged in a digitalized form of labor colonization (Casilli, 2017), which may be diverse but in all the wrong ways. Diversity that results from exploiting structural inequalities and underprivileged labor pools from the Global South is not an ethical form of research inclusion.

Such exploitations are exacerbated by the fact that crowdsourced research protocols may involve exclusionary triage practices such as refusing participants who do

not meet a 95% approval rating (Keith et al, 2019). Such practices, promoted as increasing sample quality, increase the leverage of platforms to control their workers and create a state of duress under which consent seems more formal than substantive. Moreover, basic ethical practices such as post-study debriefings or trigger warnings may be inadequate to deal with psychological effects at a distance, sometimes leading to traumatized participants with little recourse to support (Bridgeland et al., 2022).

Cultivating a dual concern with data validity and economic justice for participants means recognizing that what may in some cases appear as epistemic virtues (e.g., sample heterogeneity, identity verification, performance assurance) may reflect economic injustices (e.g., worker precarity, surveillance, geopolitical exploitation). It has been noted above that online platforms and/or researchers on these platforms sometimes do not respect local labor regulations such as minimum wages (if applicable), and may provide inadequate compensation or even resort to payment blocking with little recourse for participants (Buhrmester et al, 2018). What such coercive power asymmetry does to the ethical principle of uncoerced informed consent should be seen as compromising standards of research ethics.

Recognizing potential harms, the "point" essay suggests paying minimum wages or living wages in the countries of origin (not, notably, the country of the researchers, which given recent publication trends, tend to inhabit the Global North). Even paying living wages of sourcing countries, however, may exploit geopolitical asymmetries to acquire low-wage labor, while creating downward pressure on home country gig workers. Again, what seems like an ethical practice of "voluntary" minimum wage or living wage compliance reproduces structurally unethical relations by expediently taking advantage of the historically unequal economic relations between geopolitical regions.

What is perplexing about such situations is how they juxtapose employment logics with those of voluntary, consensual study participation. This juxtaposition is intrinsic to paid platforms, and it is difficult to see any non-exploitative way around it. The "point" arguments seem to acknowledge this quandary by noting that while under-payment should be avoided, participants "should not be overcompensated" because this may lead to overly economic motivations rather than the voluntaristic spirit of scientific participation. But online piece work *is* economic activity, one that many people depend on for their livelihood. This ethical dilemma over payment reveals the core problem of trying to treat participation as an employment relationship and a volunteer activity at the same time.

Ethical Researcher-Participant Relations

The tension between scholarly and employment discourses suggests a deeper set of ethical worries around the systemic social and economic relations of online platforms and their potential for jeopardizing ethical research practices. Transforming research-participant relationships into employment or contracting relationships, and precarious ones at that (Gleibs, 2017), calls into question the foundations of our responsibilities to those we study. Particularly because employment relations are considered as relations of subordination (see Rosioru & Kiss, 2013) – hence the need for special legal protections – these fundamentally change the researcher-participant relationship. Specifically, they push this relationship into one defined by power, where the participant is an agent of the researchers' interests. However, engaging in the platform-based exchange without acknowledging its employment-like status risks abusing voluntarism to avoid taking the responsibilities of an employer, while failing to acknowledge how this conflict of interest problematizes the researcher-participant relationship.

This dilemma is one most academics will find familiar, and one that characterizes many academic activities in which the line between voluntary versus paid participation is blurry at best, and can result in abuses. These abuses are (at the best of times) avoided by the collegial and communitarian norms of academia, where professional trust is a condition of these norms. Already tenuous, such norms are specifically undermined by research-at-a-distance that is normalized by online platforms. The collegiality of academic relations, which we extend to the goodwill voluntary participation of research subjects, depends on mutual trust, learning, and academic generosity that are difficult to replicate on an online crowdsourcing platform. Without these, participants are reduced to free or cheap laborers. Such relations may be particularly exacerbated among vulnerable populations, as platform workers have both lower economic (Williamson, 2016) and socio-psychological well-being (Stone et al., 2019).

The upshot of this critique is that against such a background, it seems ethically problematic either to expect voluntary participation or to treat participation as employment. The former option leverages academic goodwill for researcher benefits, and the latter gives economic compensation while sidelining the collegial spirit of research. In short, this impasse is created by trying to graft a specific form of social relation onto a modality that cannot easily support it, at a physical distance that cannot generate the relational infrastructure needed for good faith inquiry. As noted above, this issue is not unique to online crowdsourcing platforms, but it is exacerbated and amplified in this context.

Macro Concerns: Social Science and Social Good

The previous arguments point persistently at our concern that seemingly innocuous methodological micro-practices can subtly reinforce structural injustices. By structural injustices, we refer to the persistence of social processes that systematically disadvantage groups through domination or deprivation and simultaneously provide opportunities or benefits to others (Young, 2003). Online platforms provide low-cost microtasks for a global workforce in ways that map onto existing geopolitical and economic asymmetries (Casilli, 2017), while reinforcing these asymmetries by instituting a highly controlled form of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) in which workers have few recourses to justice. Thus, there is reason to believe that they form part of a system of digitalized, global exploitation that taints research activities that benefit from such services.

It may be argued, as suggested by some scholars (Newman et al., 2021), that all platforms are not alike, and that each should be considered in its own context. We agree. The most well-known platform, MTurk, is associated with a company that has been frequently criticized for worker-related injustices in academic (Pittman & Sheehan, 2016) and popular press (e.g., Financial Times, 2016) sources. However, there may be alternative platform systems that closely attend to worker care, well-being, and economic justice; if so, we're all ears. For instance, in the realm of humanitarian work, open source tools such as KoboToolbox specifically emphasize data openness and ease of collection in difficult field environments. However, even in such situations, the specifical structural aspect of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017) is such that our primary concern is less with specific firm behaviors than with the ethics of participating in this system as such, in our role as researchers. Thus, because the very infrastructure of global networking that seems to make data collection possible is deeply complicit with social problems, it raises the question of whether participation can entirely avoid complicity with an unjust structural arrangement.

A similar counterargument can be proposed that our concerns are not unique to online crowd platforms but are characteristic of "big science" in general; many areas of study are only possible because of large-scale infrastructure that may be associated with structural asymmetries (Gastrow & Oppelt, 2018). The use of large-scale datasets requires costs of collection or access that give advantages to well-funded scholars. The ability to gain field and sample access may require forms of social capital that are not available to researchers from less prestigious institutions or who lack connections with powerful organizations. Such asymmetries run throughout empirical disciplines, and perhaps online platforms may help in addressing such asymmetries by providing low-cost alternatives to data collection. On the other hand, the convention of paying online workers rather than, for instance, offering credits to participating students, may have the opposite effect of rendering research more expensive. We do not contest the possibility of benefits, however, and believe that studies should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis for whether the scientific benefits of drawing on such systems outweigh their specific and general ethical costs. We can do good empirical social science and business research without piggybacking on global mega-infrastructures and the structural injustices they bring. To engage with those infrastructures purely for expediency or ease of data collection seems lazy at best and negligent at worst. Will the incremental value-added of conducting such research justify the Faustian bargain of embedding our research into such systems? This question suggests that an ethical calculus between the immediate effects of such data practices and their ultimate structural effects is appropriate.

A Global South Perspective

Research studies relying on data collection via online platforms sometimes include an international sample comprising Global North and Global South[1] online workers as participants (e.g., Keith et al., 2017; Shank, 2016). Across the globe, participants in online crowdsourcing research are casual workers operating as freelancers who are subject to

[1] In the late twentieth century, the terminology 'Global North' and 'Global South' replaced previous descriptors of the global order such as East-West, developed-developing nations, First-Third World, core-periphery, and modern-traditional societies. Global North and Global South do not refer to a geographic region in any conventional sense, but rather to the relative power, privilege, wealth, and development of countries in distinct parts of the world. The Global North encompasses the rich, powerful, and developed regions of the world such as North America, Europe, and Australia. It includes countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, nations of the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. The Global North countries have mature economies and stable polities and are technologically advanced with low population growth rates and high quality of life metrics. The Global North has roughly 25% of the world's population, but earns 80% of the world's wealth and tends to dominate the Global South both politically and economically. The Global South encompasses the poor, less powerful, and less developed countries of the world in areas such as South America, Africa, and Asia, including formerly colonized countries. Many of these countries are still marked by the social, cultural, and economic repercussions of colonialism, even after achieving national independence. The Global South remains home to the majority of the world's population, but that population is relatively young and resource-poor, living in economically dependent nations which have unstable democracies and are marked by large inequalities in living standards and access to resources as well as low per capita income and excessive unemployment (Braff and Nelson, 2021; Dados and Connell, 2012; World Population Review, 2023a and b). Both the Global North and Global South encompass internal variations (Braff and Nelson, 2021).

the platforms' profit-driven unilateral, and often arbitrary, decisions with no redress options (Berg & de Stefano, 2018; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2023; Huws et al., 2018). These workers have to build up and protect reputational and relational capital, the foundational pillars of work in online labor markets (OLMs), to ensure continuous work and income (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2023; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Huws et al., 2018). Indeed, while facing unstable and unprotected work and income opportunities, these workers have to arrange for their own infrastructure and skill development, and they are usually not covered by labor legislation and social safeguards (Berg & de Stefano, 2018; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016; Huws et al., 2018; Wood et al., 2019). This predicament is found to be more pronounced in the case of Global South online labor (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Leung et al., 2021). Not only are most OLMs financed by capital from the Global North but the most demand for platform labor also originates from the Global North, while the most online work is undertaken by Global South workers (Haidar & Keune, 2021). The informal nature of OLM employment exacerbates the already skewed traditional informality of Global South labor markets, which stand in dramatic contrast to Global North labor markets (Haidar & Keune, 2021). Observations about the precarity of online platform workers, some of whom constitute research samples for academics, are worth highlighting so that academics sourcing online participants for their research studies can make informed choices.

Can and should the Global North and Global South as two historically divergent contexts with markedly different political, economic, and sociocultural trajectories (further differentiated across the countries they subsume) – and their online workforces – be treated identically in research studies, as is often the case? Through the Global South perspective elaborated in this section, we argue that considering these contexts and their online workforces (who serve as the population from which research samples are drawn) as identical and glossing over their distinctive features raises questions about the ethics, rigor, meaningfulness, and impact of such studies.

On the one hand, there are various contextual attributes that Global North and Global South online workers bring to the sample which hold implications for the robustness and generalizability of the study being undertaken. On the other hand, there are issues of equality in matters of perceived and actual competence, remuneration, and relational interactions across Global North and Global South online workers, which may have a bearing on the study being conducted. Yet, the Global South perspective cannot be limited exclusively to insights into online workers, their contextual attributes and experiences and the implications of including them as participants in online data collection. Global South researchers' experiences vis-à-vis online platforms—and what these mean for being able to design, conduct, and complete studies and show research output—are likely to vary from those of their Global North counterparts. Below, we structure the Global South perspective into two subsections, capturing the points of view of researchers and of participants.

The Researcher Perspective

Numerous features of online platforms hold implications for researchers' engagement with them as sites for data collection. Equally, these features hold implications for the rigor, meaningfulness, and impact of the studies being executed on online platforms. Online platform work is informal, nonstandard, and precarious (Berg & de Stefano, 2018; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2023; Huws et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2021). Hence, on the one hand, relying on online platforms does not facilitate the study of formal sectors and formal workers, which fall in the purview of standard employment; on the other hand, we cannot overlook the fact that the informal sector differs in Global North and Global South countries because of the country context (D'Cruz et al., 2022a, 2022b; Haidar & Keune, 2021). Specifically, in Global South countries, online platform workers are not representative of informal workers who form the bulk of the country's workforce and work in a spectrum of industrial and economic sectors. Online platform workers have some class advantage over other informal workers in terms of education, proficiency with English, computing literacy and access, access to electricity, access to the internet, and so on, and usually live in medium to large towns and cities (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Leung et al., 2021). They do not represent workers with no/little literacy/education, workers who have no access to electricity, workers who have no knowledge of and access to computing and the internet, workers who lack facility with English, etc., all of whom usually form the urban poor/periphery or belong to semi-rural/semi-urban and rural areas, and all of whom comprise the majority of the informal workforce in these countries (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016: Leung et al., 2021). In fact, if a researcher wishes to study informal sectors that do not require or do not use the internet, then the digital route serves no purpose (as an indication of the scale involved here, we refer to India as an example, where there were 8 million online and offline platform workers[2] in 2020–2021

[2] Online platform workers, also known as 'crowdworkers', operate via online platforms that digitally connect workers, clients, organizations, and businesses across borders spread over large geographic distances (e.g., Amazon Mechanical Turk, Upwork, Innocentive). Offline platform workers engage in 'work on-demand via apps', undertaking place-based and geographically-limited work facilitated by platforms through their applications but requiring direct interface between workers, customers, clients, organizations, and businesses (e.g., Uber, Swiggy, Urban Company) (de Stefano, 2015).

[StrideOne, 2022] against a total 415.6 million informal workforce [State of Working India, 2021]). Obviously, the focus of the research is important. How does the inclusion of informal online platform workers impact the robustness and utility of the study?

Online data collection drawing on the global workforce available on online platforms relies on English as the language of communication. Yet though online platform workers from the Global South may be proficient in English, cultural interpretations of words and tasks or culture-linked ambiguity or confusion about words and tasks could influence understanding and performance, with an impact on the validity, meaningfulness, and applicability of findings. Mawdsley et al., (2018, 2021) have brought this out effectively in their offline study of Nigerians, Indians, Arabs, and Ghanaians responding to the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ), a standard tool used internationally to measure workplace bullying. Relying on the cognitive interviewing method, they showed how their participants, while comprehending most NAQ items as English words, nonetheless brought in culturally-linked interpretations which altered meanings and impacted responses. Cultural interpretations of the English language, evidenced in offline research, are equally unavoidable in online research. What could possibly be different, contingent both on the study's online or offline setting and on its data collection design strategy and execution, are the opportunities for researchers and participants to interact and clarify the interpretations. Offline settings, where researchers and participants are likely to be physically present simultaneously during data collection, (potentially) allow for clarification. Online settings, such as platforms where researchers and participants often work asynchronously and indirectly (e.g., through emails or file uploads of task requirements/task completion), do not (necessarily) present opportunities for clarification.

Sampling design is a point of relevance. How does it fit in with the objective of the research? And if randomness and representativeness are called for, then does it include all countries and continents across the globe? And if so, then are the features of the sample taken into account during the data analysis process – these would include, for instance, the ease of access to the internet and thereby to platforms, the facility of literacy and language, and sociocultural factors that impinge on responses.

Research funding patterns and disciplinary orientations are important considerations. Whereas not all scholars enjoy the (same) opportunity to garner large grants that facilitate participant payment, this is particularly the case for most Global South researchers, whose resources are usually far more limited. In such instances where participants are not paid at all or not paid at par with the compensation being offered by Global North researchers, Global South researchers relying on online platforms for data collection may not be able to attract global participants into their samples, impacting the international representativeness of their samples and the robustness and generalizability of their findings. This contrasts with Global North researchers who, due to their better resources and hence better capacity to pay research participants, can get online global samples with better international representativeness more easily and thus increase the robustness and generalizability of their findings. Further, the adverse impact of unequal opportunities and funding for Global South researchers may reinforce the disadvantaged position of scholars from such contexts, perpetuating the power asymmetries in academia, where the subaltern's position remains unchanged (Jammulamadaka, 2020). Indeed, it is timely for academia to acknowledge and address the context of asymmetries in knowledge production where research in the Global South is undertaken in conditions of scarce resources. Limited funding for primary data collection and the prohibitive costs of secondary data sources weigh down the research endeavors of Global South scholars such that they "are limited not because we are not interested but because we do not have the means to do it" (Jammulamadaka, 2020, p. 390).

Moreover, across the world, the provision of participant compensation for research is associated with particular disciplines (psychology remains foremost among these) and/or particular research designs (experiments and surveys), in addition to being essentially a Global North practice in that it originated in the Global North, with Global North researchers undertaking research in their own settings as well as in Global South settings (Hammett & Sporton, 2012; Lombe et al., 2013). Various questions with ethical underpinnings arise. First, regarding the rationale of the practice of paying research participants: is it a token of appreciation and a symbol of gratitude? Or is it an instrumental approach that reflects an operant conditioning strategy of providing a reward (stimulus) to trigger and increase participation in research (response)? What implications does it hold for issues of power, equality, responsibility, generosity, expectations, and reciprocity in the researcher-participant relationship and for the nature of responses provided and data generated? Among Global South researchers who do not or are not able to give compensation, it is not uncommon for them to provide informational assistance to their participants if this is required or requested (for instance, pointing out unions or NGOs to informal, precarious, and vulnerable workers; e.g., D'Cruz et al., 2021). Second, on the lines of the geopolitics of knowledge production: is it necessary, in order to ward off the risks of being treated as inferior and inadequate, for Global South researchers to uncritically import Global North research conventions which may not be culturally relevant and/or practically feasible in their countries (D'Cruz et al., 2022a, 2022b; Jammulamadaka, 2020; Lombe et al., 2013)?

The Participant Perspective

Including Global South online workers as participants in research studies raises several complex contentious issues around decent work, neocolonialism, and racism (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2023). It raises ethical issues around social responsibility, social sustainability, and inclusion, which hold implications for worker rights, dignity, and well-being.

On the one hand, interestingly, Global South workers, particularly those on professional online platforms such as Upwork, report feeling empowered by their earnings, which allowed them a decent quality of life, facilitated long-term savings, and contributed to career development, thereby promoting upward mobility, while also providing them a coveted Global North-centric connection (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016, 2023; Haidar & Keune, 2021). This is not surprising given the high rates of unemployment, limited options in local job markets, and largely informal workforce, along with accompanying underpayment, that characterize the Global South countries, even for the educated and skilled population. Indeed, online work is often the main/sole source of household income for many online workers, with levels of income from the platform sometimes higher than what can be gained from local labor markets (Anwar & Graham, 2021; D'Cruz, 2017; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016, 2023; Haidar & Keune, 2021). Pertinently, it is usually online workers enjoying structural power emerging from better socioeconomic positions via education and class benefits who gain more via platforms, as they have better technological access and facilities and can build up better reputations (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Leung et al., 2021).

On the other hand, paradoxically, Global South online workers face a 'decent work deficit' (D'Cruz, 2017: 190) on all seven of Kantor et al.'s (2006) dimensions, including labor market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security, and representation security, with the workers also bearing infrastructure costs (D'Cruz, 2017). While some online workers see themselves as entrepreneurs, in reality, they add to the ranks of the informal workforce, thereby remaining beyond the ambit of most legal protections and related statutory benefits in their countries (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016, 2023; Leung et al., 2021; Wood et al, 2019). While some professional online platforms may offer workers protections through authenticity checks, minimum wages (if applicable) or recommended hourly compensation, and grievance procedures, thereby countering the disenfranchisement commonly associated with such workplaces, these fall short of ensuring decent work and adequate empowerment (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016). In fact, global competition is central to platform functioning (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Wood et al, 2019), making bidding, reputation, and skill enhancement crucial to getting jobs. Online workers spend large amounts of uncompensated time to search and apply for jobs. This is in addition to undertaking as many jobs as they can successfully bid for, in order to build their reputation and hence create appropriate conditions that could support their quest to gain more work. Yet, the onus of skill improvement, to be able to avail of more opportunities on the platform, is also on the workers. Finding the right courses/programs for skill acquisition and then investing time and money in the learning/training process takes online workers away from engaging in more paid work and depletes their financial resources (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016, 2023; Fairwork, 2022; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Leung et al., 2021; Wood et al, 2019). Nonetheless, online workers consider these demands inevitable, if they want to survive in the highly competitive, yet unequal, international environment, where they are easily replaceable (Wood et al, 2019).

Buhrmester et al (2011)'s work on online platform workers as participants in academic research brings out some of the aforementioned issues quite starkly. They highlight that MTurkers are ready to complete tasks which display high statistical reliabilities for almost no compensation, making data collection quick and inexpensive for researchers. While it is questionable whether researchers should take advantage of MTurkers' willingness and dependability, the basis of Buhrmester et al. (2011)'s suggestion that their finding indicates that 'workers are not driven primarily by financial incentives' (p. 4) can be challenged, because reputation considerations can underlie workers' behavior. Reputation considerations are directly linked to earning capacity, thus the need to build and protect reputation is indicative of worker vulnerability. Buhrmester et al. (2011) offer no insights into the profiles of such workers; yet, these profile data are crucial to reveal workers' socioeconomic backgrounds, possibly shining light on the motivations underlying their readiness and the quality of their responses.

Further, online platforms themselves, being virtual, are invisible and borderless and operate outside legislation and beyond potential democratic oversight (Berg & de Stefano, 2018; Huws et al., 2018; Urry, 1991; Wood et al, 2019). Operating as intermediaries which facilitate outsourced work as a service contribution between independent clients and self-employed independent contractors, platforms are able to bypass local labor regulations (Wood et al, 2019). Guided by capitalist underpinnings of profit maximization, platforms add to the global commodified precarious workforce (D'Cruz, 2017; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2023; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Huws et al., 2018; Wood et al, 2019), exacerbating the vulnerability of the Global South workforce, which is predominantly informal, non-standard, and precarious (D'Cruz et al., 2022a, 2022b; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Williams, 2017).

Yet, there is little evidence of workers' associational power on online platforms (Anwar & Graham, 2021;

Fairwork, 2022; Haidar & Keune, 2021). Global South online workers' position on collectivization is mixed, with some opposing it and others favoring it (Anwar & Graham, 2021; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016). The former group either maintains that the merit-based nature of the platform negates the need for unions or invokes national sociocultural influences against collective action (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016). The latter group is unclear how a union for remote work would look like, given the global nature of platform and the competition among workers, and how effective it would be (Anwar & Graham, 2021; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016). Some workers considered platform restrictions on worker interactions to be attempts to pre-empt mobilization (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018a). It may be noted that unions for remote work rarely exist globally (Anwar & Graham, 2021).

Notwithstanding Global South online platform workers' positive evaluations of their work experiences, the decent work deficits they face are aggravated by neocolonialism and racism. Global North clients seek quality performance and output from skilled and competent Global South workers at lower payment rates (Beerepoot & Lambregts, 2015; Berg et al., 2018).[3] In other words, labor arbitrage leads Global North clients to seek to maximize their gains by engaging Global South workers instead of Global North workers who demand higher returns (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016; Haidar & Keune, 2021; Leung et al., 2021). Researchers who adopt similar differential payment scales across Global North and Global South workers as compensation for research participation would appear to endorse such neocolonial and racist tendencies when they source samples from online sites. Besides, apart from dealing with instances of cheating and fraud where payments are denied despite task completion (Anwar & Graham, 2021; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018a, b), Global South online workers sometimes face emotional mistreatment and abuse from Global North clients and fellow workers (Beerepoot & Lambregts, 2015; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018a, b). Global North clients sometimes raise issues about Global South workers' integrity and competence, linked to stereotypical perceptions that Global South workers are neither trustworthy nor skilled or competent at par with their Global North counterparts (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018a, b). Even so, Global North clients 'use' Global South workers to their advantage by paying them less. Researchers on crowdsourcing platforms who engage in similar acts of emotional mistreatment and abuse vis-à-vis Global South workers would appear to evidence such neocolonial and racist attitudes when sourcing samples from online platforms. Global North fellow workers' negative behaviors, which might play out in project teams, during the bidding process and via general interaction fora, are believed to arise from the insecurity linked to the competitiveness of surviving on the platform and often triggered by these workers' sense of threat by their Global South counterparts' skill and competence (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018a, b). The lower payment rates of Global South workers, perceived as undercutting Global North workers, may also trigger the latter's hostility (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018a, b). As another manifestation of offshoring, then, online platforms sustain neocolonialism (Holtgrewe, 2014) and racism, evidencing the hegemony of the Global North (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2016; Leung et al., 2021), which contradicts the claim that cyberspace democratizes global society (Ettlinger, 2016).

In summary, the complexities associated with the Global South perspective, as described in this essay, underscore why research inquiries engaging online platforms as sites of data collection should take into account context, including details about the virtual setting as well as the participants'/samples' geographical location and their political, economic, and sociocultural features. Regardless of whether a research inquiry is positivist or post-positivist in its ontology and epistemology, capturing context speaks to the ethical issues and is crucial for the rigor, meaningfulness, and impact of research.

Conclusion

In this paper, we consider crowdsourcing research in the wider social, cultural, and global context and encourage scholars to not only pay attention to the data quality aspects of crowdsourcing research, but also be mindful of the ethics of methods and the role of research practices in shaping scientific communities and the society in general. We do not attempt to definitively resolve the question of whether crowdsourced data collection is ethical, but instead aim to promote continued thoughtful discussion on this issue. However, a key message from this paper is that such discussion should go beyond specific cost–benefit accounts of a particular study, to consider the broader structural and global implications of participating in a data economy that often fails in its duty of care towards digital participants. As researchers, we cannot remain negligent of the broader social effects of the data collection technologies we use. By using these crowdsourcing platforms for our data collection, we have a responsibility to shape their effects.

[3] For example, Berg et al. (2018) found that across various platforms, including MTurk, Prolific, and Clickworker, the average hourly wage for online workers in North America (US$4.70 per hour) and Europe and Central Asia (US$3.00 per hour; Central Asia includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) is higher than that for online workers in other regions of the world, where the average hourly wage varied between US$1.33 (Africa) and US$2.22 (Asia and the Pacific; Asia includes Bangladesh, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Vietnam).

When conducted conscientiously and ethically, crowdsourcing research serves multiple purposes for researchers and participants, respectively. First, we highlight concerns related to the data quality and ethical aspects of data collection using crowdsourcing platforms, such as self-selection bias, participants' inattentiveness and self-misrepresentation, and researchers' ethical and fair treatment of participants (e.g., fair pay, procedural fairness and transparency). To address these concerns about data quality, at a minimum we advise researchers to incorporate several best practices, such as using more diversified platforms (e.g., CrowdFlower and Prolific), setting demographic quotas, and verifying participant qualifications through targeted questions or prescreens. When using these crowdsourcing platforms, researchers need to incorporate attention checks, limit nonnaive participants, and use post hoc statistical techniques to strengthen data reliability and integrity.

At a deeper level, to use crowdsourcing platforms ethically, researchers should consider the larger societal issues of subordination and exploitation, and incorporate principles of trust, equality, caring, and transparency into researcher-participant relationships. This is particularly important considering the resource-dependency nature of this relationship. Thus, we call on researchers to recognize the political and economic implications of their research practices and engage in ethical labor practices, including but not limited to fair compensation that is consistent with workplace dignity and a livable wage, and ensure procedural fairness and transparency in dispute resolution.

Third, revisiting the issues related to the ethics of methods (Islam & Greenwood, 2023), we raise the question of whether the scientific benefits of using a crowdsourcing data platform outweigh the associated ethical costs and potential negative externalities of such data collection methods. Instead of using these platforms purely for expediency or convenience, we believe conducting good empirical social science and business studies is possible without relying heavily on crowdsourcing platforms and the structural injustices they bring. We encourage researchers to utilize multiple methods of data collection to address their research questions. Multiple-method papers allow researchers to leverage the complementarities of different methods (e.g., in-depth interviews, lab experiments, field experiment and surveys, and secondary data) and demonstrate the robustness of their findings and external validity. Also importantly, multiple-method papers reduce the reliance on data collection from crowdsourcing platforms. That said, data collected from these platforms can help complement existing datasets in a set of studies.

Finally, we echo Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas' (2018) assertion that crowdsourcing platforms are sites of precarious work. As such, researchers should ensure that their behaviors towards *all* workers (i.e., participants on these platforms) are respectful and inclusive, particularly towards those from the Global South, given that decent work deficits are more pronounced in this part of the world. Along with the ontology and epistemology of the research inquiry, considering the research context (e.g., virtual setting, the geographical location of participants, and the area's political, economic, and sociocultural features) will help foster ethical conduct, rigor, and meaningfulness of research across the globe.

Acknowledgement We thank Tracy Wilcox for her co-ordination role during the initial phase of this article.

Funding No funding was received for this paper.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This paper does not involve human participants.

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