

We chose to look at Amazon Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing or microworking platform that allows employers (known as requesters) to order a large volume of small human intelligence tasks, that are completed by workers earning sometimes as little \$0.01 per task, and averaging significantly less than the US national minimum wage. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center survey, 25% of respondents used MTurk as a primary source of income. A 2011 paper published with the Association for Computational Linguistics found that 80% of tasks were performed by the most active 20%, who all spent at least 15 hours a week on the site.

Amazon Mechanical Turk is ubiquitous in machine learning, both in research and industry, as well as social, linguistic and psychological research. (Morgan has seen AMT suggested as a tool in every one of their Machine Learning textbooks.) Like many other platforms in the gig economy, Amazon Mechanical Turk provides an impersonal, technological buffer between employers and thousands of nameless workers, allowing those employers to pay dramatically substandard wages while enjoying little awareness of the pay and conditions of their workers. The technological company in the middle collects a 20% fee for providing the service.

Sources

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