

DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

‘CYBER’ CONNECTED? : EMPIRICALLY INVESTIGATING RELATEDNESS AS A MOTIVATIONAL NEED AMONG SKILLED GIG WORKERS

By

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Abstract

Skilled gig workers experience deficit of professional belonging with similar others in the absence of teams and organization frameworks. My dissertation identifies the dynamics of building relatedness online and the psychological mechanisms underlying the experience of professional belonging. To provide theoretical foundation to my research, I combine conceptual and methodological streams of literature from multiple domains including organizational behavior, cyberpsychology, and machine learning. I then apply two methods – textual analytics and online survey – for data collection and analysis.

A comprehensive literature review and two empirical studies comprise this dissertation. My literature review focuses on the emergence and structural attributes of the gig economy, self-determination theory of motivation and the dynamics of building relatedness in online spaces. My first empirical study utilizes large-scale data scraped from a social media platform, which I analyze using textual analytics. This study shows how skilled gig workers use words of mutual encouragement and support to build an online community where they showcase accomplishments and share useful knowledge. My second empirical study focuses on the psychological mechanisms underlying the creation of online relatedness. Using an online survey, I empirically test a conceptual model and a set of hypotheses at the individual level. This study demonstrates that participation in an online community of similar others provides gig workers general positive experiences, however, this does not translate into work-specific belonging arising from being part of a team or an organization.

Using findings from these studies, I argue that experiencing belonging online does not translate into belonging in a traditional organizational setting. Thus, my thesis lays the groundwork for scholars of SDT and the gig economy to examine alternate avenues of work-specific belonging for skilled gig workers.