

---

# TOGETHER BUT ALONE:

## Atomization and Peer Support among Gig Workers

Zheng Yao, Silas Weden, Lea Emerlyn,  
Haiyi Zhu, and Robert E. Kraut.

**This study leveraged interviews with 20 gig workers (rideshare drivers, delivery workers, and handymen) and content analysis of nearly 1,500 online posts to understand how gig workers exchange informational and emotional support in online social media groups.**

### Highlight findings:

- Workers view peer support groups as information hubs, and they particularly value concrete, experiential knowledge.
- However, the fear of competition prevents workers from sharing information and providing emotional support.
- Public social media groups (e.g., Reddit and Facebook groups) are not good places for organizing collective actions for workers.





# Atomized workers

**Workers are rarely in the same physical space**

**Interaction with the platform exclusively on the app**

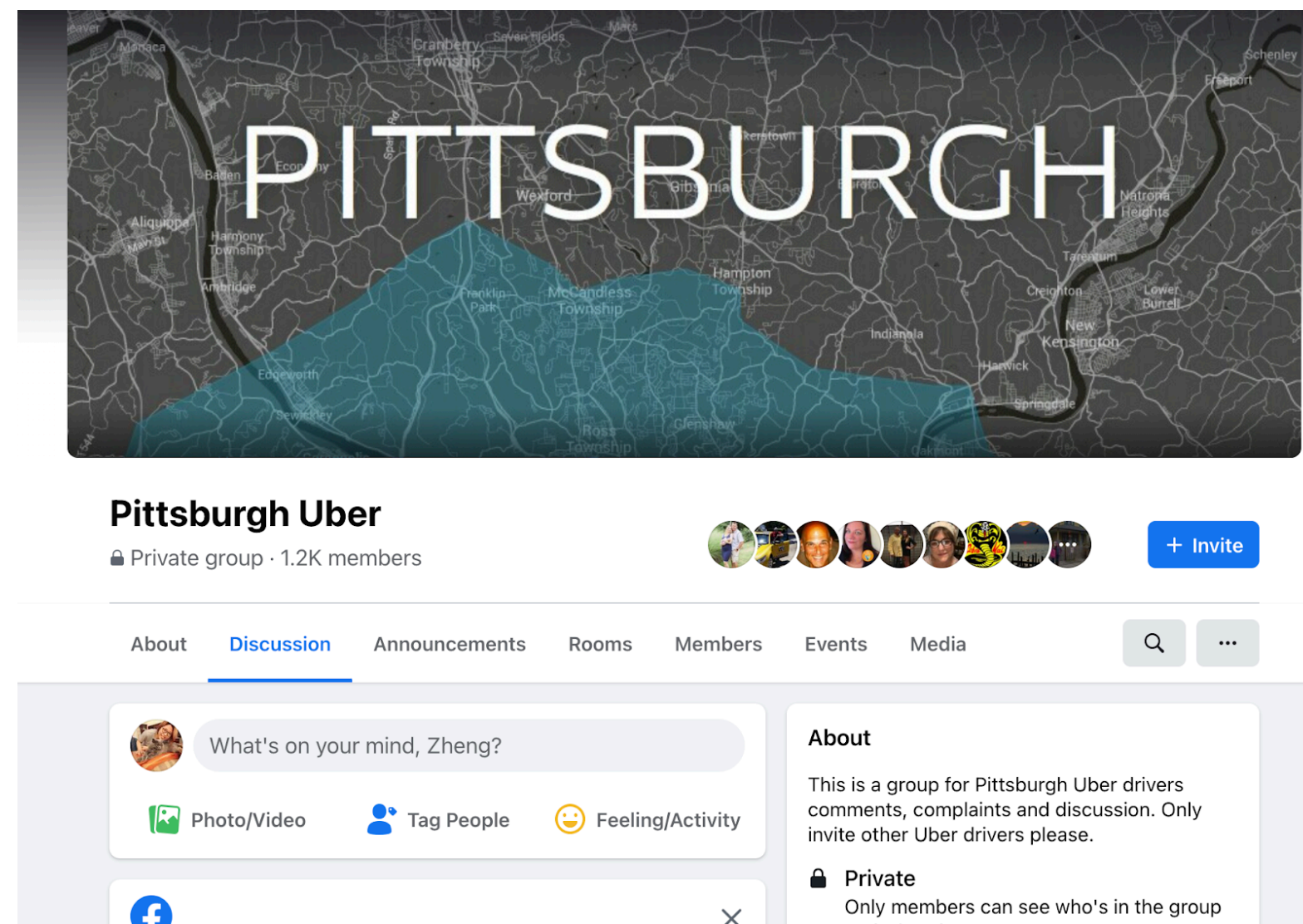
**The platform provides few opportunities of in-app communication between workers**

**Webster (2016)**

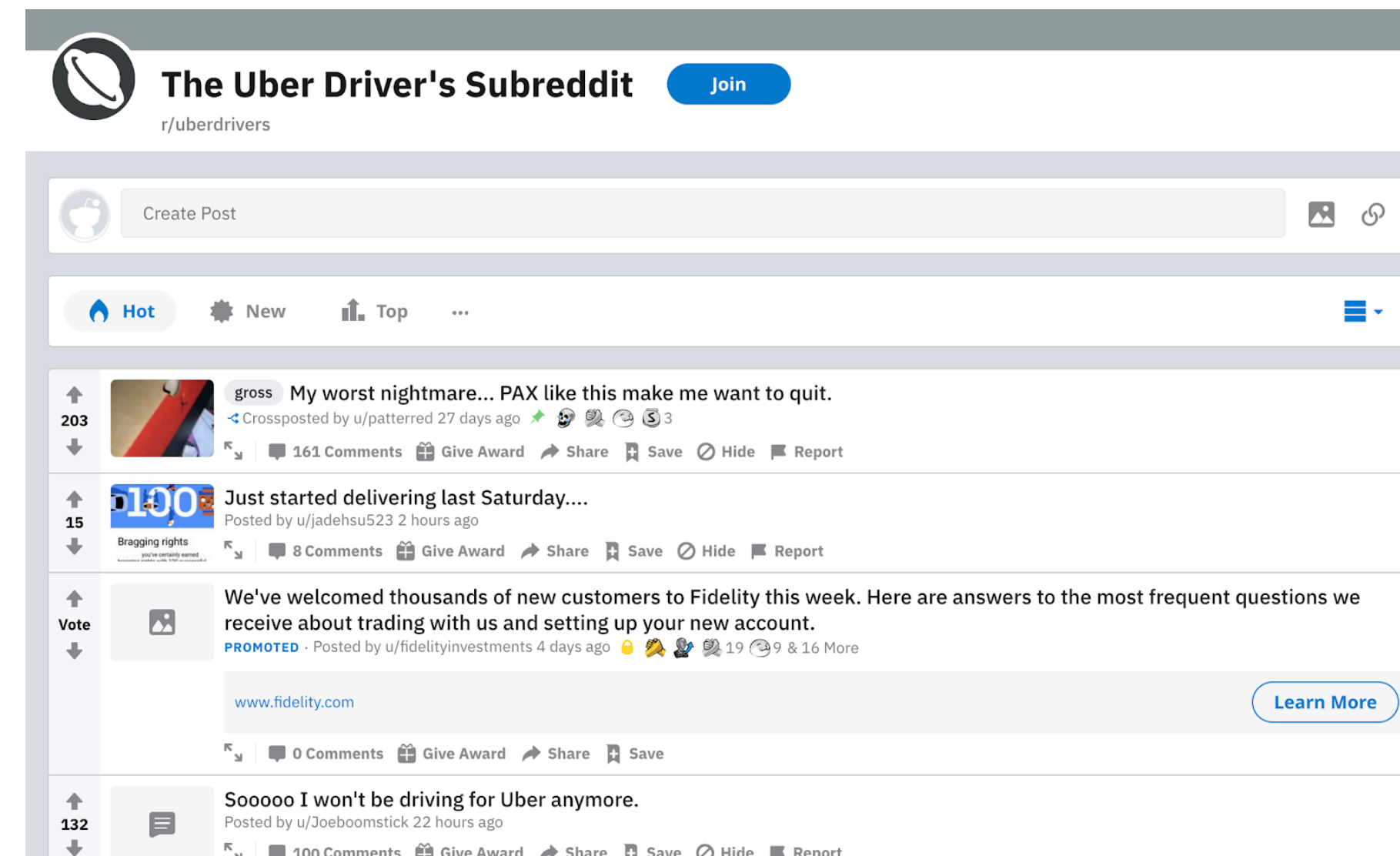


# Peer support group could be a solution

## FB group for Pittsburgh Uber drivers



## r/uberdrivers

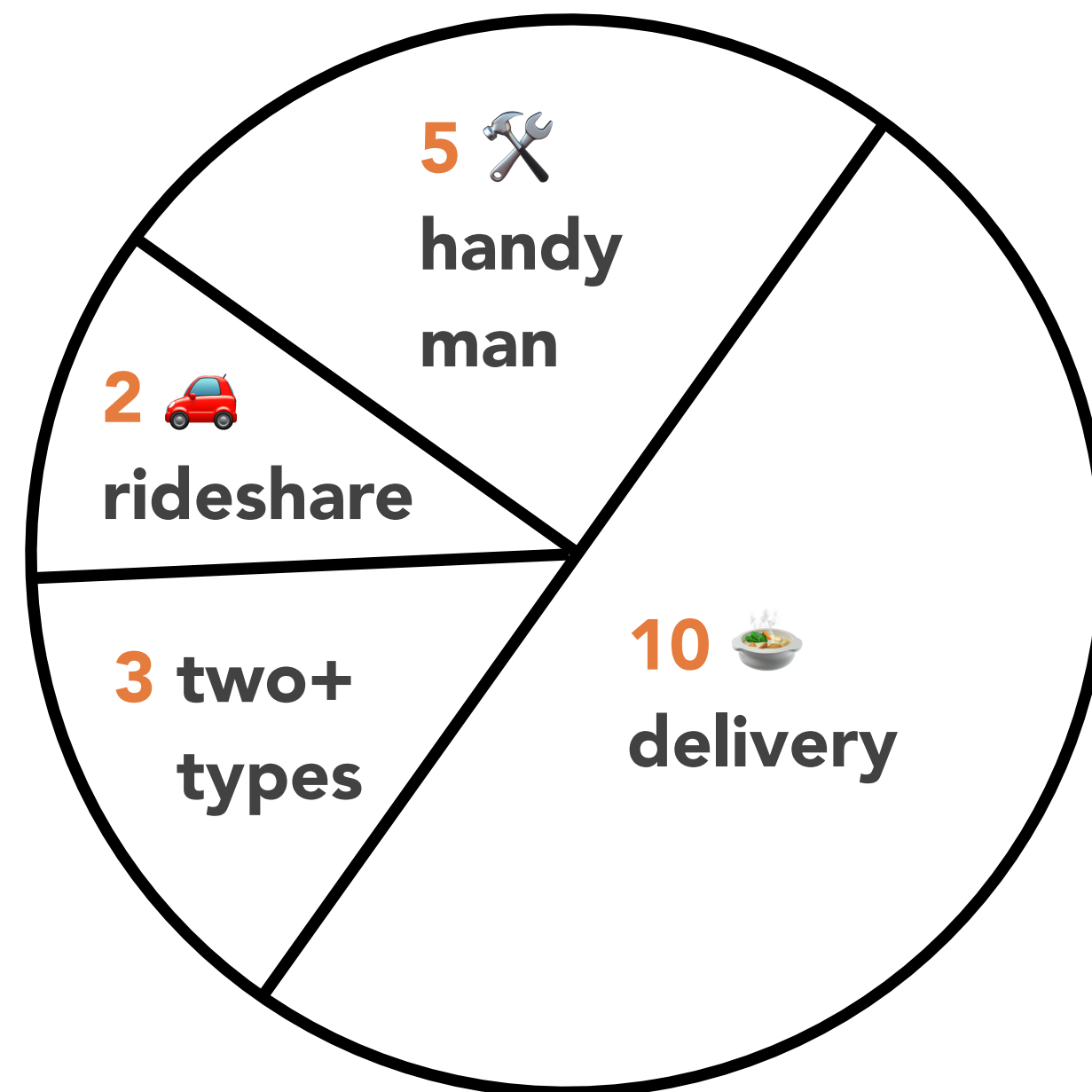


# Research question

How do gig workers exchange peer support in online spaces?

# Methods: Interview

Sampling: **20** physical gig workers



Execution timeline

- **Feb 2020**, 3 pilots before COVID-19
- **Apr 2020**, 4 pilots during COVID-19
- **July 2020**, data collection: used COVID-19 as a probe to understand the support exchange process

# Methods: Content analysis



**8 relevant Facebook groups**

1,494 posts



**r/uberdrivers**  
**r/InstacartShoppers**

162 posts

170 comments from strike  
related posts

# Workers view peer support groups as information hubs

	Informational Support				
Code	Seek experience	Seek solution	Share external info	Share experience	
Count (%)	349 (21.1%)	433 (26.1%)	197 (11.9%)	346 (20.9%)	
	Emotional Support			Tangible support and commercial	
Code	Humor	Rant	Offer emotional support	Offer tangible support	Commercial
Count (%)	142 (8.6%)	329 (19.9%)	61 (3.7%)	7 (0.4%)	54 (3.3%)



## 2 common types of information seeking

### Seek solution

“ Does anyone know if it is possible to drive for Uber or Lyft in the state of New York with Seattle Washington plates just wondering

### Seek experience

“ Is anyone having issues with Instant Pay Cashing out?

# Concrete experiential knowledge is valuable



Sometimes the picture of an item won't match the description of the item. [According to the post], usually what people do is they just try to follow what the picture is, and then just double check with a screenshot. I entered the app to that customer today, and I was like, 'do you want ... this fruit bar that it says or do you want ... this cereal, that's ... what the picture is'. They clarified that it was ... the cereal in the picture. So I was like, 'Okay, great'.

—P12, Delivery

## Fear of competition prevents workers from sharing information in peer support groups



When you ask a question, Reddit people are more honest and forthcoming because it won't directly affect them. So, if you say, 'what's a good area?' or 'What's the best thing to do for this particular gig?' Or like, for Instacart, 'how to be a good shopper?' They're going to honestly tell you the truth. **You know, Facebook is basically, especially with the Instacart Facebook groups, they don't want another person to compete with them.**

—P13, Delivery

## Fear of competition also drives workers away from providing emotional support



I joined a group to see if there was any reasonable information. I'm not a fan of being friendly with other drivers. As far as I'm concerned, we're all self employed. There's nothing we can do to compete but, you know, we're both sitting on the same corner waiting for an order. **You're gonna take things from my own pocket. Why would I be friends with other drivers? I'm not interested in being friendly.**

—P20, Rideshare & delivery



**“Strike would never work when the platforms  
can keep recruiting new workers”**

“

Dude, get money while you can. Instacart is hiring 300000 more shoppers and has seen more groceries ordered over the last 72 hours than in its history. This strike will only hurt you.

**—r/InstacartShopper, #19**

---

# TOGETHER BUT ALONE:

## Atomization and Peer Support among Gig Workers

Zheng Yao, Silas Weden, Lea Emerlyn,  
Haiyi Zhu, and Robert E. Kraut.

**This study leveraged interviews with 20 gig workers (rideshare drivers, delivery workers, and handymen) and content analysis of nearly 1,500 online posts to understand how gig workers exchange informational and emotional support in online social media groups.**

### Highlight findings:

- Workers view peer support groups as information hubs, and they particularly value concrete, experiential knowledge.
- However, the fear of competition prevents workers from sharing information and providing emotional support.
- Public social media groups (e.g., Reddit and Facebook groups) are not good places for organizing collective actions for workers.