MOTIV8: Alternative Rewarding in Creative Crowdsourcing

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ABSTRACT

Crowdsourcing offers a new dimension and great flexibility to enterprises as tasks can be outsourced easily via the Internet. A large number of those tasks are microtasks, which are typically rewarded with extrinsic motivators (i.e. money). However, there is also a growing market for the outsourcing of more complex, which are typically creative tasks. Nowadays, these tasks are rewarded in the same way as microtasks, namely extrinsically. Paradoxically, it is important for creative and complex task outsourcing that a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards is used. In this paper we present, qualitative findings, challenges and implications for an iterative rewarding system with alternative motivators in creative crowdsourcing. These findings are supported by a conducted user study with three experts in the field of online crowdsourcing and a concept of an app that offers alternative rewards in creative crowdsourcing: MOTIV8.

KEYWORDS

Creative crowdsourcing; rewards; intrinsic motivation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have launched a new wave of sourcing, where businesses use online platforms to access resources and freelancers on demand [1]. Online crowdsourcing and freelancing platforms allow businesses and individuals to connect with millions of freelancers. Between 2016 and 2017, there has been a 26% increase in the number of projects sourced via these platforms, with popular categories of work being software development, design and creative, and writing [2, 3]. Early adopters of online freelancing platforms were mostly startups and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). More recently, however, large enterprises have started experimenting with platform adoption as part of their sourcing strategy [2].

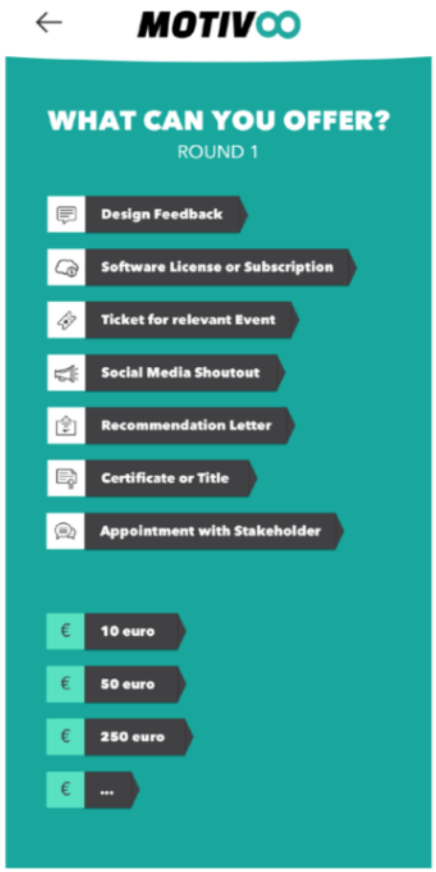

Figure 1: Requester's view: screenshot of the alternative rewards integrated in the MOTIV8 app

The dominant part of crowdsourcing platforms support microtask work [5], which offers a potential paradigm for engaging a large number of users for low time and monetary costs [4]. Microtasks focus on low managerial overhead of the matching process, and are best suited for relatively simple, repetitive tasks that require little training and coordination [2]. In fact, this type of crowdsourcing only enables tasks that are so simple and modular that the path towards its goal can be completely pre-defined [5]. Generally, workers on these platforms are motivated extrinsically - mostly by small monetary rewards. Examples of microwork platforms are Amazon Mechanical Turk, CloudFactory, and FigureEight.

Yet, crowdsourcing platforms for tasks with more complexity do exist. Online freelancing platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer and PeoplePerHour focus on more specialized and knowledge-intensive projects in categories such as development, design and writing [2]. Freelancing platforms place emphasis on the quality of the matches and the coordination and evaluation of the work. Some of the platforms also provide premium enterprise services to assist in sourcing, worker classification compliance and contracting. Freelancing platforms focus more on specializations, evaluation and experiments. Moreover, these platforms allow businesses to access others with widely different skills, cultural backgrounds and work history which potentially opens a direction with a lot of new knowledge and innovation [2, 6]. And, online outsourcing and outsourcing in general offers companies numerical flexibility, functional flexibility and financial flexibility [7, 8]. For such complex tasks, the way work is organized is around contests: many crowd workers submit their work and the best submission is chosen by the requester to be the winner, receiving a predefined monetary reward.

Prior work shows that a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is important in creative crowdsourcing [9]. Yet at this point there is only a single emphasis on extrinsic rewards, e.g. money. This creates a quite static environment for crowd workers to work in, and forms a financial barrier for project requesters. Earlier studies have offered "implications for the design of mobile workforce services, including future services that do not necessarily rely on monetary compensation" [10]. These implications point out the value in open-ended and innovation- oriented task support in existing platforms. In such an platforms, it would be possible to provide scaffolding for career growth, something currently lacking from most mainstream crowdsourcing platforms [11]. Finally, traditional online contest crowdsourcing is structured more towards one-way traffic. Many workers submit their work, which is often reviewed by the project requester only a single time, which is immediately the final decision. Here, no mid-term feedback is given and no chances are offered for workers to improve their work - there is barely iteration in this process. **However, the design challenge is to raise awareness and educate requesters in offering intrinsic motivators but also to support requesters in following through those motivators (e.g. providing meaningful feedback).**

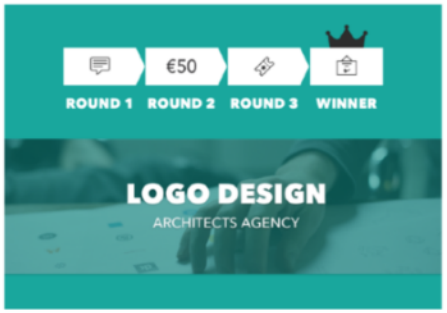

Figure 2: Worker's view: in this case the alternative rewards (in addition to a €50 monetary reward) include "design feedback" and "ticket for relevant event". This mix of rewards would be an example of a custom rewarding system for e.g. a "logo design" project.

Phase 1 sample questions: *How often do you post/request tasks on crowdsourcing platforms? What was the last task you posted/requested on a crowdsourcing platform? How often do you give feedback to your workers?*

Phase 2 sample questions: *To what extend do you believe that such a system can improve the quality of output of your crowdsourcing task? What would be the big challenge for implementing such an app into current crowdsourcing platforms?*

Phase 3 sample questions: *To what extend are you willing to offer and facilitate workers in these alternative rewards? What do you think of the in-app supported extra rewards? Would you change/add some?*

In this paper we would like to present a concept of an app that offers the infrastructure for designing and managing crowdsourcing rewarding systems with support for alternative rewards. We call this app MOTIV8 (pronounce: motivate) since it is intended to motivate crowd workers for alternative rewards rather than only money. For our user study purposes, this app was tweaked to address graphic design as a primary area.

2 METHOD

MOTIV8 lets project requesters synchronize their active projects from different crowdsourcing platforms (for example 99Designs, DesignCrowd and Crowdspring) and design a custom rewarding system for any project. In the app, the project manager or requester simply selects a specific project and starts designing a custom rewarding system. This custom rewarding system consists of an adjustable amount of iterations and adjustable rewards. For instance, a project requester can design a rewarding system with three rounds (iterations) and a different reward at the end of each round. Multiple alternative rewards are integrated and supported in the MOTIV8 app (Figure 1). We identified these alternative rewards by asking students from the faculty of Industrial Design at the Eindhoven University of Technology what they would consider as a valid reward for an online service. After the rewarding system has been designed by the project owner, it would be uploaded (resynchronized) to the platform on which the project is originally created and hosted. From that moment, an overview graph of the designed rewarding system is visible for crowd workers on the specific platform (Figure 2).
The rest of the process does not change much; crowd workers can apply and submit work for the specific project in the same way as they would currently do. However, submissions are now due in multiple iterations. After each iteration, the project requester will review the submissions and determine which workers receive the round reward and go to the next round.

To support requesters in following through their promised rewards, we have also designed a submission management function (Figure 3). Here, requesters can overview and manage their to-do and done submissions.

For our user study we contacted three experienced crowdsourcing project requesters. Our participants have either been active as a crowdsourcing platform owner, as a project requester or both. One of them is co-founder of a creative crowdsourcing platform. Another one has been requesting over 65 crowdsourcing projects online as a representative of a company, located in the UK. The last one of them has been hosting projects for a Dutch company as an intern, later on as an employee, and also has experience as a crowd worker in the field of packaging and distribution design. Participants were all aged between 25 and 33 one male and two female. Two of them are living in the Netherlands and one of them is living in the United Kingdom. One of them is professionally full time active with crowdsourcing while the other two are professionally part-time active in the field for Dutch or European companies. Our interview study consisted of three phases (example questions on the left column): 1) A face-to-face interview with questions about the participant's general experience with crowdsourcing, addressing the participant's history as a crowdsourcing project requester; 2) an interactive demonstration of the MOTIV8 app;

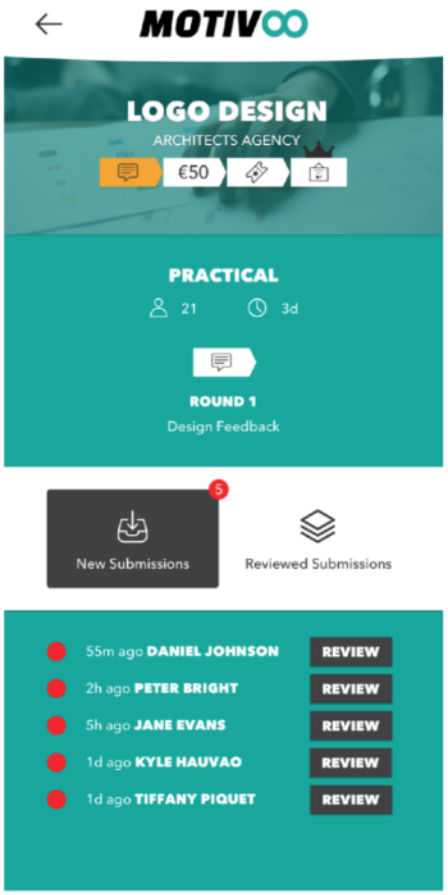

Figure 3: Requester's view: we designed MOTIV8 to support requesters to follow through their promised alternative rewards. In this screenshot the requester is reminded to provide "design feedback" to the five workers that have submitted their logos.

3) a face-to-face interview with questions about the participant's opinion and impression on the app, and major challenges or bottlenecks for implementing such a system into crowdsourcing. During the interview, participants were encouraged to ask questions. Each interview lasted around 60 minutes and was voice-recorded. We analyzed the qualitative data using thematic analysis [35].

3 RESULTS

Given the limited space for this paper we will only highlight few of our results. **Flexible costs through custom rewards: c**osts seem to become more flexible for requesters since they have the option to customize rewards. Two participants mentioned the potential to increase business performance because of this flexibility. Moreover, two participants were positive about getting tasks done online without necessarily offering money in reverse. **Risk management:** for both, requesters and workers, considering the costs and return of a certain alternative reward seems to play a huge role in decision-making. Two participants mentioned their concern for risk management: what does each alternative rewarding option cost and what does it return (both in terms of money, time and effort)? For requesters, relevant information seems to be what time it is expect to take to assign a certain reward and how many submissions (extra) are expected to be received with the choice for a certain reward. A big identified challenge here is how to inform and support both parties in decision-making and risk management. **Workload:** An important mutual thought appeared to be a perceived increase workload to review, rate and reward each submission in a concept like MOTIV8. The iterative concept and the alternative rewards make requesters' efforts even greater and more frequent. All participants mentioned this bottleneck and some proposed to split up, give away or outsource these efforts - for example internally in the company. Ultimately, as one of the participants mentioned, 'time is money': a requester might be able to review and roughly rate submissions, but assigning rewards like a recommendation letter are time consuming and can be better executed by fellow employees, interns or others. The second identified major challenge is optimizing or outsourcing the heavy workload for rewarding workers.

4 CONCLUSION

Research shows that a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators is necessary for creative crowdsourcing to flourish. Current creative crowdsourcing platforms focus on extrinsic motivators and have to a large extent overlooked the offer and support of intrinsic motivators. With this paper we showcase MOTIV8, a concept of an app that is primarily focused on requesters of creative crowdsourcing. MOTIV8 wishes to raise awareness among requesters of potential intrinsic motivators that they can offer and support them in following them through.

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