

Five small surveys on Mechanical Turk

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On 28-29 June 2017 I ran five small surveys on Mechanical Turk (US workers).

The most important results are:

- Most Turkers have a job other than Turking
- Most Turkers are **employees** in their other jobs, not self employed
- There are **more self employed** among Turkers who always or usually rely on Turking income to meet basic needs than in the overall Turker population
- Most Turkers Turk **at home**
- The three most important activities or services a Turker union or nonprofit could provide are:
 - work with requesters (clients) to increase task pay on MTurk
 - communicate with Amazon to improve MTurk for workers
 - communicate on behalf of members with non-paying or badly behaved requesters (clients)
- Most respondents said they would pay a monthly membership fee of around USD 5. The average monthly fee from all respondents was just above USD 5.

The survey titles, reward, and number of respondents are listed below.

Survey title	Reward, USD	Respondents
Annoying things	0.50	20
Where do you Turk?	0.50	40
Reliance and insurance	1.00	40
Turking communities	0.50	40
Turker nonprofit services	1.00	40

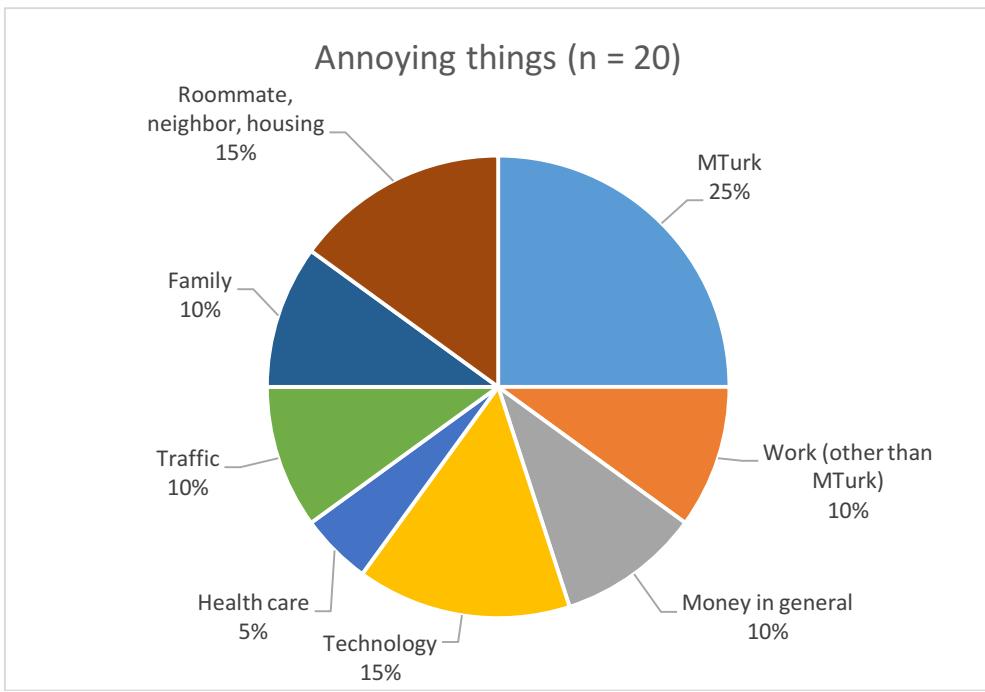
All surveys were limited to workers in the US or Germany with approval rates of at least 95% who had completed at least 1000 HITs (tasks). None of the surveys took more than a few minutes.

Summaries of the surveys

“Annoying things” survey

This survey asked respondents about the most annoying that had happened to them in the last week (or so). Of the 20 respondents, five (25%) replied with a story about something that had happened on Mechanical Turk.

The other stories are summarized in the chart below.



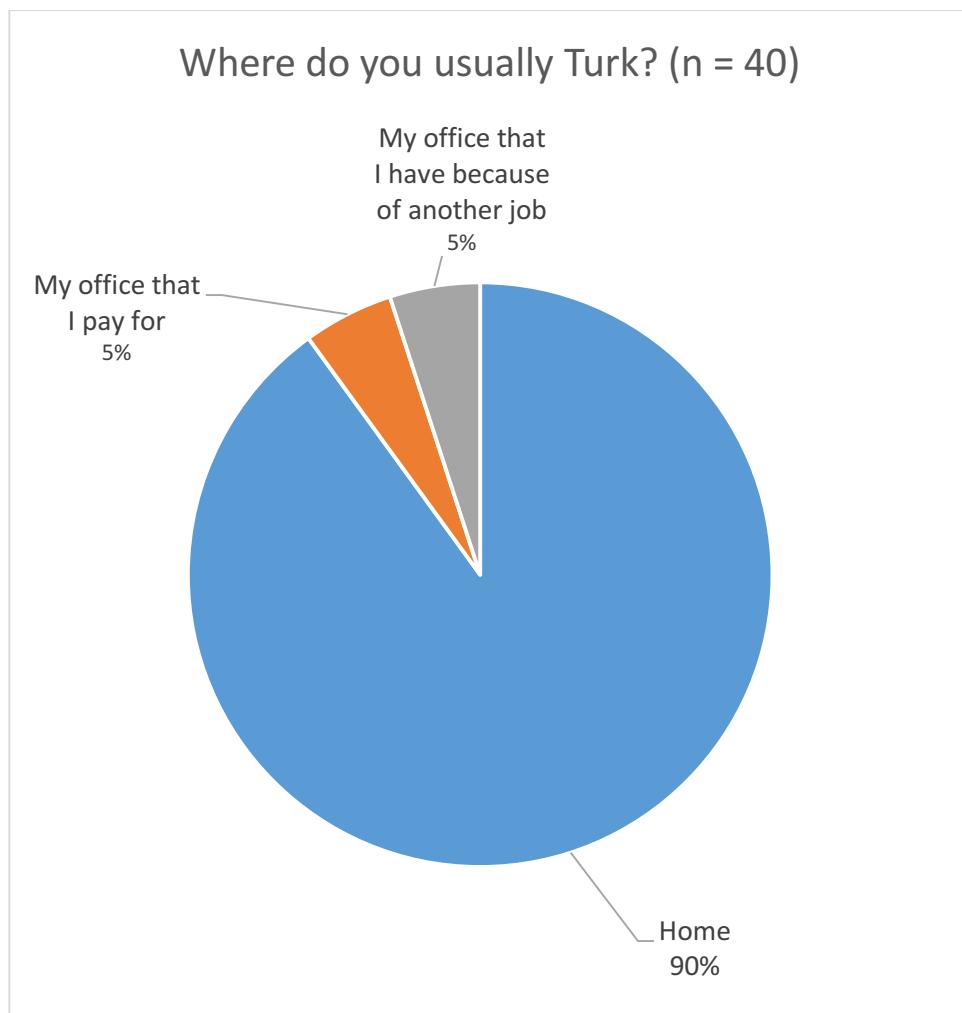
The stories about MTurk were:

- “I received a random rejection from a requester who said that they had posted the wrong data and made a mistake. I suffered for their mistake with losing time for the work I did along with receiving a rejection which lowers my approval rating. I have no recourse against this so it is even more frustrating.”
- “I was rejected for an Mturk survey because of insufficient time spent on it -- as if time spent on a task is the best or only way of measuring the adequacy of task performance! It was annoying because I feel quite confident I performed the task successfully. Others were rejected as well, making me think that the requester was just deciding to reject workers with no more sophisticated measurement than a stopwatch.”
- “In the last week the most annoying thing that happened to me was my Hit Scraper on MTurk freezing up. Every time it would freeze up, I would miss HITs, which would mean I was missing money and others were getting that instead of myself. It made me angry because I couldn't find the cause.”
- “The most annoying thing is when trying to find decent paying hits on mturk they are gone in less than a second or two. This makes it quite hard to stay interested in trying to make some extra money. Today would be a good example, I have tried to grab about 10 hits and have only managed to get two, and these have been fairly low paying. It seems that amazon has allowed too many workers onto the platform as it is now quite hard to actually make money, versus a couple of years ago when one could easily grab decent work just about anytime of the day. Another big part of this problem is that so many people are now using scripts which allow them to grab hits in a moments notice, the amount of this type of activity has made the platform far less enjoyable than it was in the past.”

“Where do you Turk?”

This survey asked two questions: “Where do you usually Turk?” and “Where else do you occasionally Turk?”

The answer to the first question was overwhelmingly “at home” (see below).



In answer to the second question, respondents mentioned school, cafés, someone else's office, library, the home of a significant other, and even camping — and also “at home.”

“Reliance and insurance” survey

This survey asked respondents:

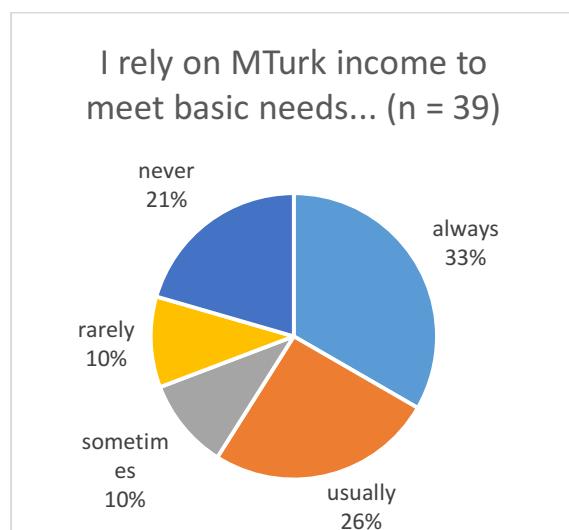
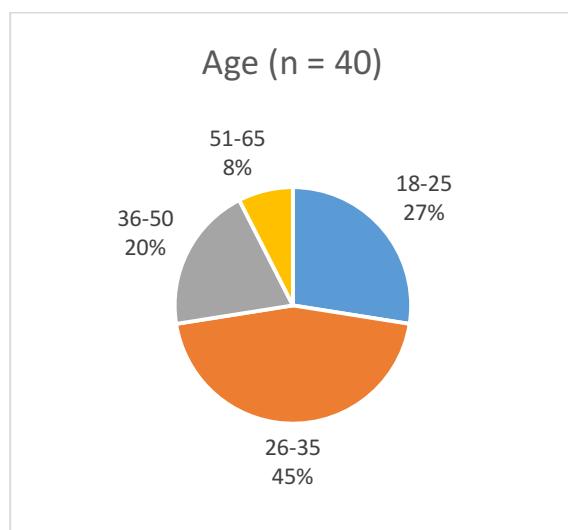
- their age (within ranges)
- how often they rely on Turk income to meet basic needs
- if they have jobs other than Turk
 - if yes, what those jobs are
 - if yes, whether they are self employed or an employee in those jobs
- whether they have bought any of the following in the last year or so
 - health insurance (as a self employed person)
 - insurance for a laptop or phone
 - in-person tax preparation services
 - legal advice about work (as a self employed person)
 - office or coworking space
 - child care
 - other work-related services of professional memberships

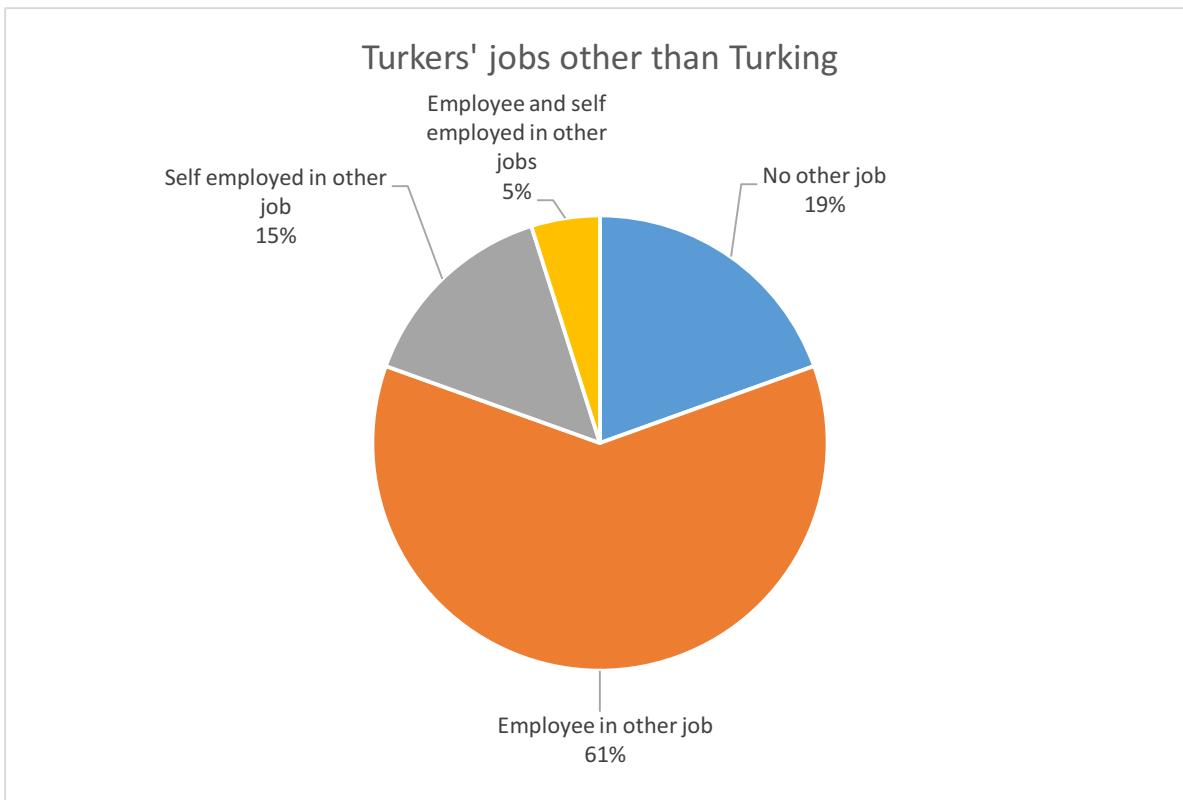
Respondents reported purchasing the following services in the past year (or so):

Services	Number of respondents	Percentage
Child care	6	15%
Device insurance	7	17.5%
Health insurance as self employed	11	27.5%
Legal advice about work as self employed	1	2.5%

Data on office/coworking space was lost because of a technical error. Based on the answers to the “Where do you Turk?” survey and the fact that **most Turkers have another job in which they are an employee, not self employed** (see below), I expect this number is small, between 2% and 10%.

Answers to the other questions in this survey are shown in the charts below.





Other jobs held by Turkers

Lab assistant	Sign language interpreter
YouTube creator	Goodwill donation attendant
Senior point of sale technician (IT)	Educator
Restaurant manager	Pharmacy technician
Tech support	Accountant
Security specialist	Computer technician
Attorney	Systems administrator
Microbiologist	Technical analyst (IT support)
Cashier	Office assistant
E-commerce	Musician
Manufacturing	Sales representative
Copy-writing, editing	Automotive mechanic
Retail associate	

“Turking communities” survey

This survey asked respondents which Turker communities they participated in.

The most often used forums and websites by the respondents are Turkopticon, MTurk Crowd, and MTurk-related subreddits (e.g., /r/mturk, /r/HITsWorthTurkingFor).

Forum/site	Several times a day	Weekly to daily	Less than weekly
Turker Nation	3	4	31
MTurk Crowd	6	8	25
MTurk Forum	2	9	27
Turkopticon	20	6	12
Crowd-Workers.com	0	3	35
Turker Facebook groups	5	3	29
Other MTurk-focused forums (reddit, TurkerHub, etc.)	10	5	17
Other apps	1	4	21

“Turker nonprofit services” survey

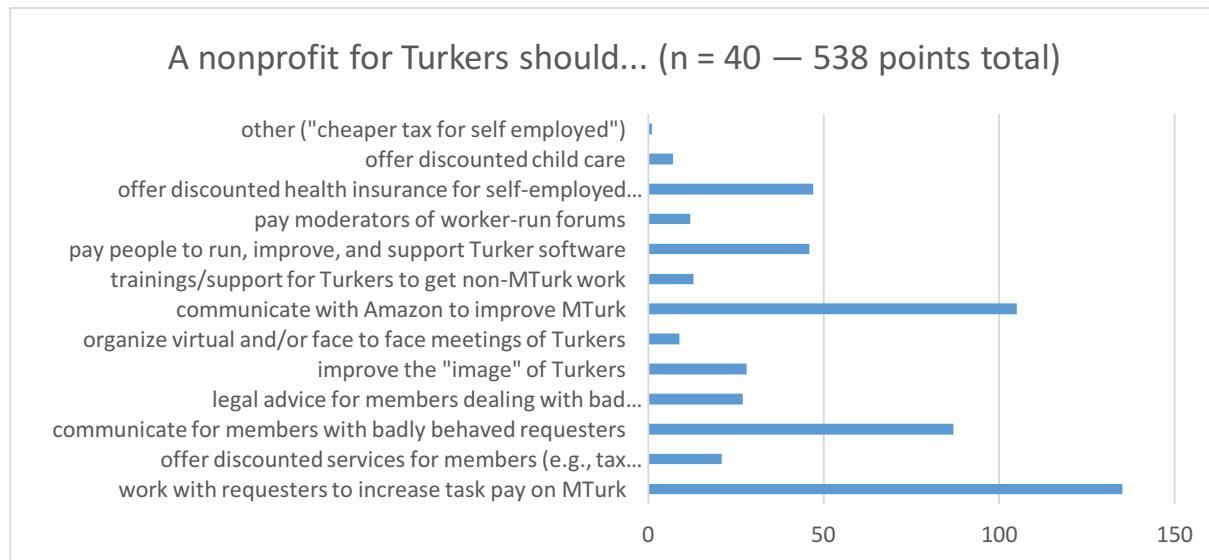
This survey asked respondents to prioritize the following hypothetical services that a “nonprofit for Turkers” could offer:

- work with requesters to increase task pay on MTurk
- offer discounted services such as tax preparation for members
- communicate with nonpaying requesters (or other “badly behaving” requesters) on behalf of members
- offer free legal advice for members dealing with nonpaying requesters or other requester problems (or client problems in other self-employed work)
- improve the “image” of Turkers among requesters and the public
- organize virtual and/or face to face meetings of Turkers
- communicate with Amazon to make improvements to MTurk for workers
- organize trainings and support for Turkers to get more work outside of MTurk based on their individual skills
- pay people to run, maintain, improve, and provide tech support for MTurk-specific software like HIT Scraper and Turkopticon
- pay moderators of worker-run forums like Turker Nation, MTurk Crowd, /r/mturk, and Turker Hub
- offer discounted health insurance for self-employed workers
- offer discounted child care
- other

Each respondent was given 14 “points” total to allocate to the different options. Respondents could allocate a maximum of 4 points per option.

Respondents were also asked how much they would pay per month for these services if they were done well.

The results are shown below.



By far the three most important services or activities were, in order of decreasing importance:

- work with requesters (clients) to increase task pay on MTurk
- communicate with Amazon to improve MTurk for workers
- communicate on behalf of members with non-paying or badly behaved requesters (clients)

The next two most important were:

- offer discounted health insurance for self employed workers
- pay people to run, maintain, improve, and give tech support for MTurk-specific software like Turkopticon and HIT Scraper

The next three most important were:

- improve the “image” of workers
- legal advice for members dealing with badly behaving requesters (or clients in self employed work outside of MTurk)
- offer discounted services for members (e.g., tax preparation)

Perceived as less important were:

- trainings/support for Turkers to get non-MTurk work
- pay moderators of worker-run forums
- organize virtual and/or face to face meetings of Turkers
- offer discounted child care

How much per month would you pay for these benefits?

