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Seriously?: Estimates of Gig Work Dependence Vary with Question Wording

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Seriously?: Estimates of Gig Work Dependence Vary with Question Wording

Abstract

In this presentation, Brawley Newlin examines whether "gig" workers respond differently to questions about their dependence on gig income based on question wording and/or based on objective dependence measures (e.g., number of dependent children, hours worked in the gig). Results show that about half of the variability in responses is due to question wording, and half is due to more objective dependence factors.

Keywords

gig workers, gig income, question wording, object dependence factors

Disciplines

Business | Management Sciences and Quantitative Methods

Comments

Symposium conducted at the the 33rd annual meeting of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, National Harbor, MD.

Seriously?: Estimates of gig work dependence vary with question wording

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#SIOP19, National Harbor, MD

What is the gig economy?

Short-term work

“contract work”

“very short (e.g., minutes)”

“short-term labor needs”

“independent contractor workers”

Done on apps or online

“technology-based platform work”

“using digital work platforms”

“websites or mobile apps”

“online intermediary”

“...use tech”

AKA

the on-demand economy, gig economy, platform economy, sharing economy, “share the scraps” economy

crowdwork, microwork

self-employment, independent contracting, freelancing, moonlighting, temp work, virtual work

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR



VS

EMPLOYEE





I DO WHAT
I WANT



Who counts as an independent contractor?

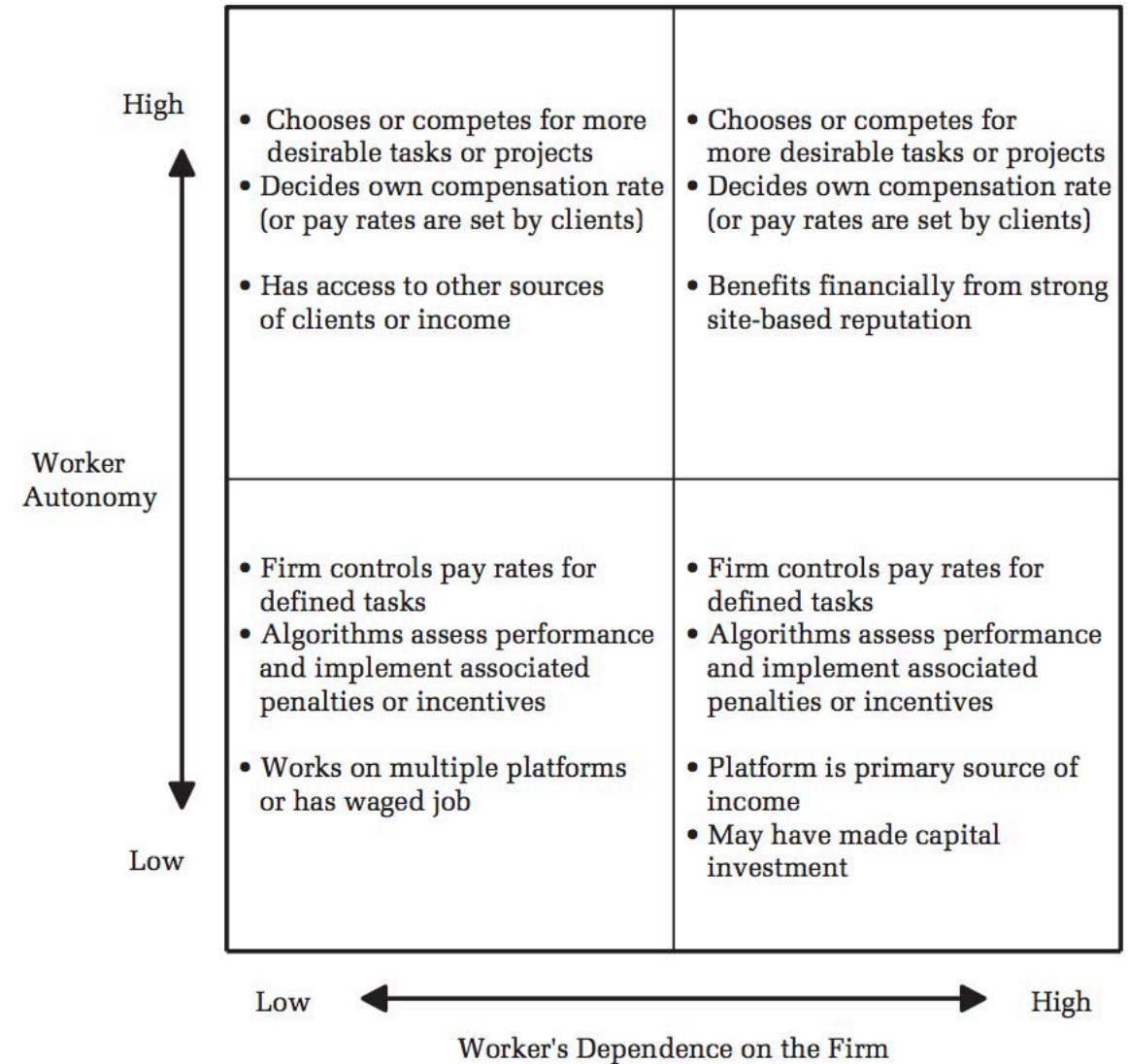
Per FLSA: Depends on...

- The extent to which the services rendered are an integral part of the principal's business.
- The permanency of the relationship.
- The amount of the alleged contractor's investment in facilities and equipment.
- The nature and degree of control by the principal.
- The alleged contractor's opportunities for profit and loss.
- The amount of initiative, judgment, or foresight in open market competition with others required for the success of the claimed independent contractor.
- The degree of independent business organization and operation.
- One key consideration here: “In the application of the FLSA an employee, as distinguished from a person who is engaged in a business of his or her own, is one who, **as a matter of economic reality, follows the usual path of an employee and is dependent on the business which he or she serves.** The employer-employee relationship under the FLSA is tested by ‘economic reality’ rather than ‘technical concepts.’”



- Dependence is one of two key features of gig work (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017)
- And, primary concern = pay (Intuit, 2016)

FIGURE 1
Classifying the Worker's Relationship With the Platform Firm



But: estimates of dependence vary... a lot

Item	Source	Original Estimate
I use MTurk to make money.	Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling (2011); Litman, Robinson, & Rosenzweig (2015)	$M = 3.4$ ($SD = 1.9$) on a 7-point scale; $M = 6.3$ ($SD = 0.8$) on a 7-point scale
I consider myself a serious Turker (for example, I rely on the site for critical income, work regular hours, multiple days a week).	Brawley (2017)	$M = 4.9$ ($SD = 1.8$) on a 7-point scale
My MTurk income is essential or important.	Pew Research Center (2016)	56% endorsed
I complete tasks on MTurk for "primary" income purposes (e.g., gas, bills, groceries, credit cards).	Ipeirotis (2010)	13% endorsed
Money from MTurk is necessary to make basic ends meet.	Ross et al. (2010)	9% endorsed "sometimes" necessary, 3-5% endorsed "always"
MTurk is my primary source of income (that is, my main job).	ILO's Survey of Crowdworkers	Not publicly reported

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Method effects vs “real” dependence

Research question:

- how much is a method effect (cf. Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012) here,
- and how much is “real” dependence?

MTurk: an ideal place to study gig workers, and item wording!

Method – Study 1

Six items previously used to examine financial dependence – specifically on MTurk – were identified in published literature

Incumbent MTurker SMEs ($n = 252$, cleaned $n = 240$) were recruited systematically over one week (cf. Casey, Chandler, Levine, Proctor, & Strolovitch, 2017) and paid \$1 to

- Rank the items according to the percentage of Workers they thought were likely to endorse each item
- Provide explanations for rankings

Method – Study 1

Mean rankings, nonparametric Bonferroni-adjusted t -tests, and qualitative analyses used to finalize five experimental survey items

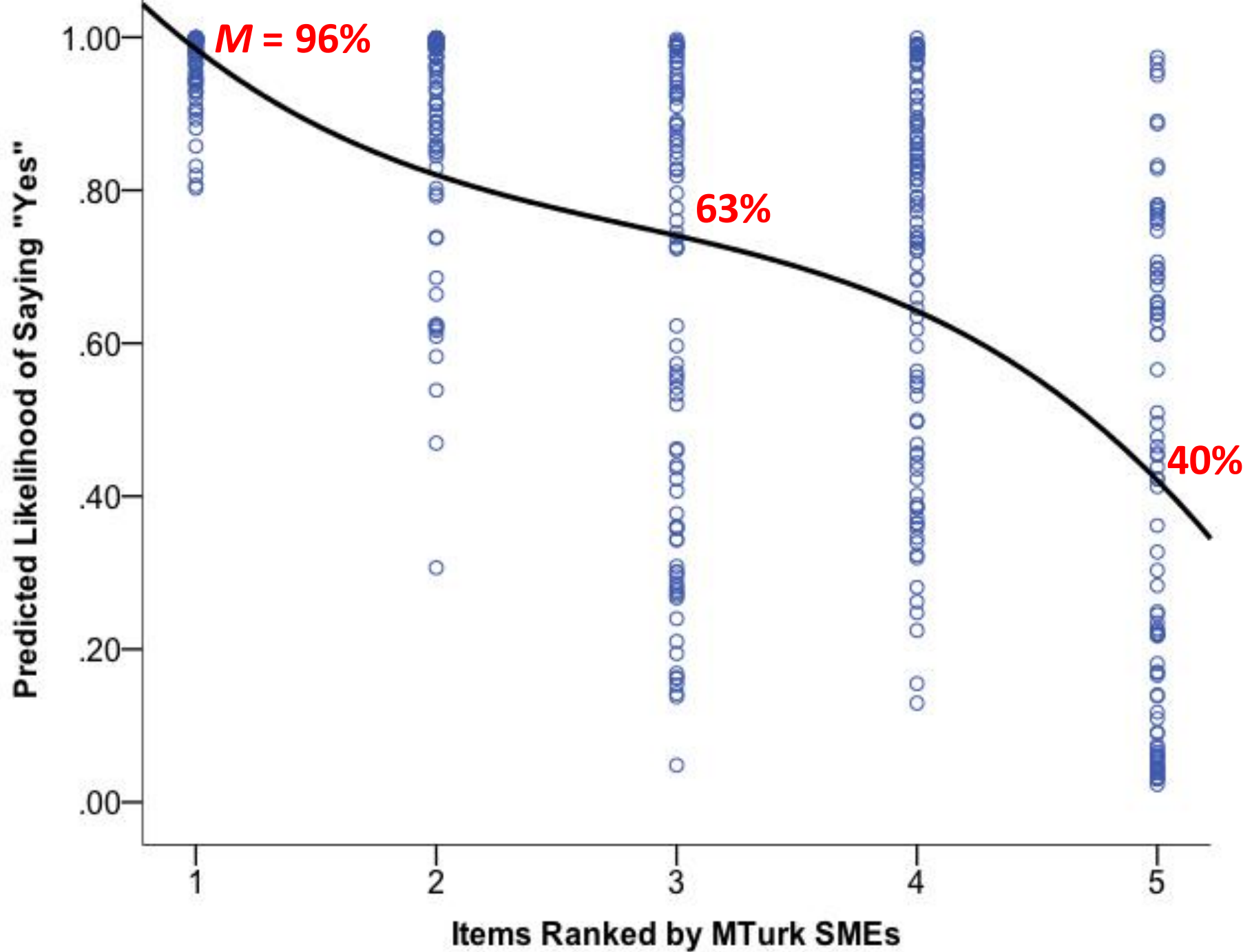
Final Rank	Item	Original Source
1	I use MTurk to make money.	Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling (2011); Litman, Robinson, & Rosenzweig (2015)
2	My MTurk income is essential or important.	Pew Research Center (2016)
3 (tie)	I complete tasks on MTurk for "primary" income purposes to make ends meet (e.g., gas, bills, groceries, credit cards to pay bills).	Speirotis (2010)
3 (tie)	Money from MTurk is necessary to make basic ends meet. combined with above item	Ross et al. (2010)
4	I consider myself a serious Turker (for example, I rely on the site for critical income , work regular hours, multiple days a week).	Brawley (2017)
5	MTurk is my primary source of income (that is, my main job).	ILO's Survey of Crowdworkers

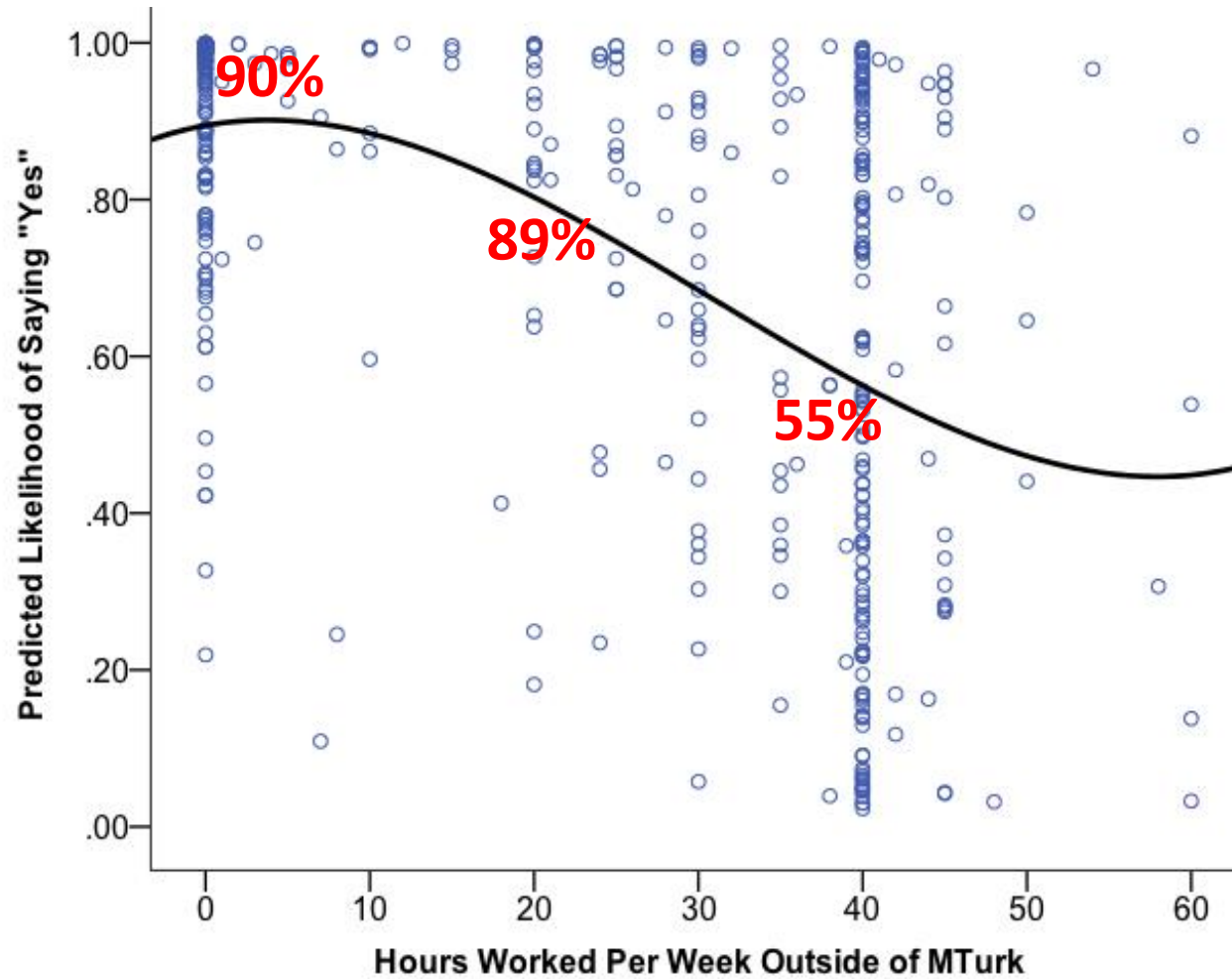
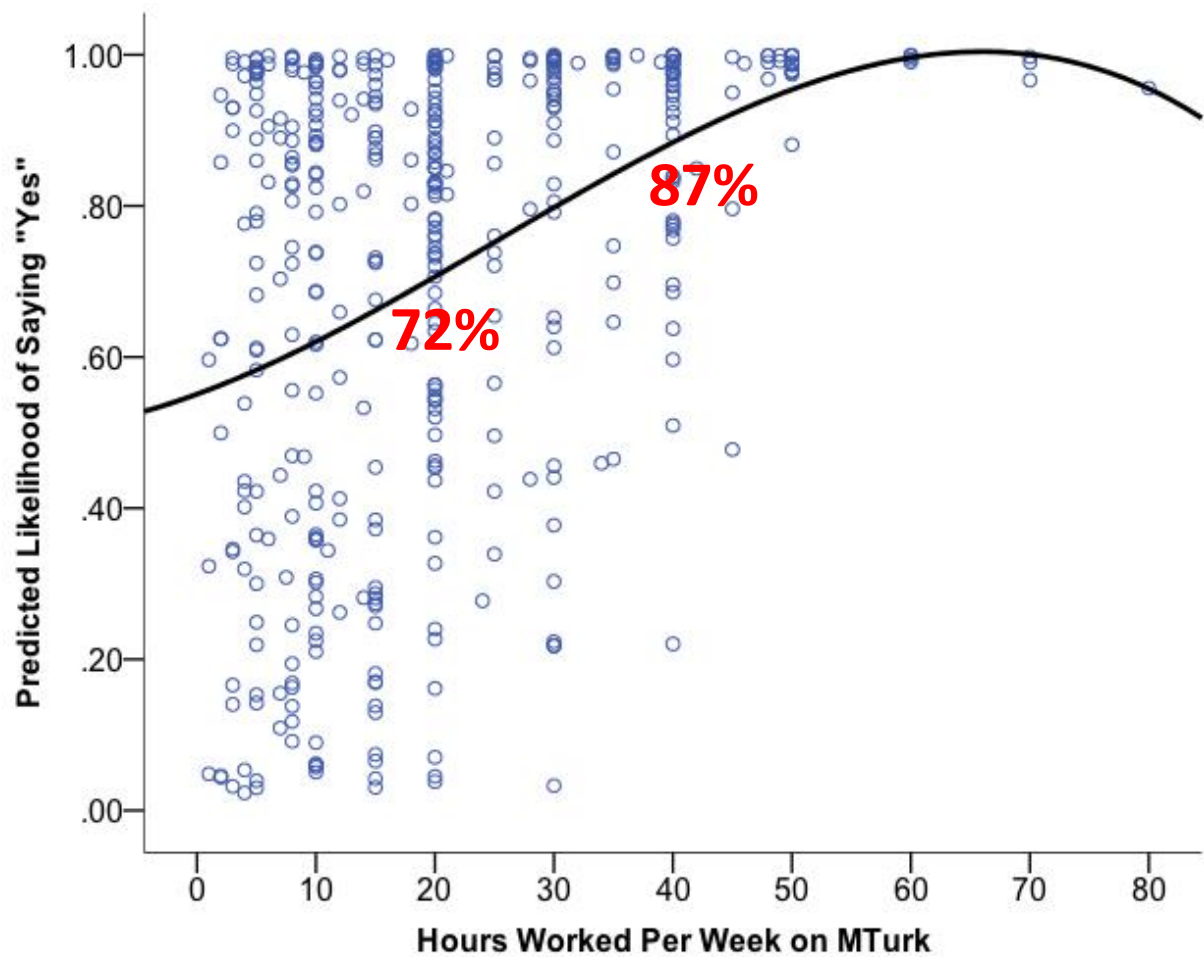
Method – Study 2

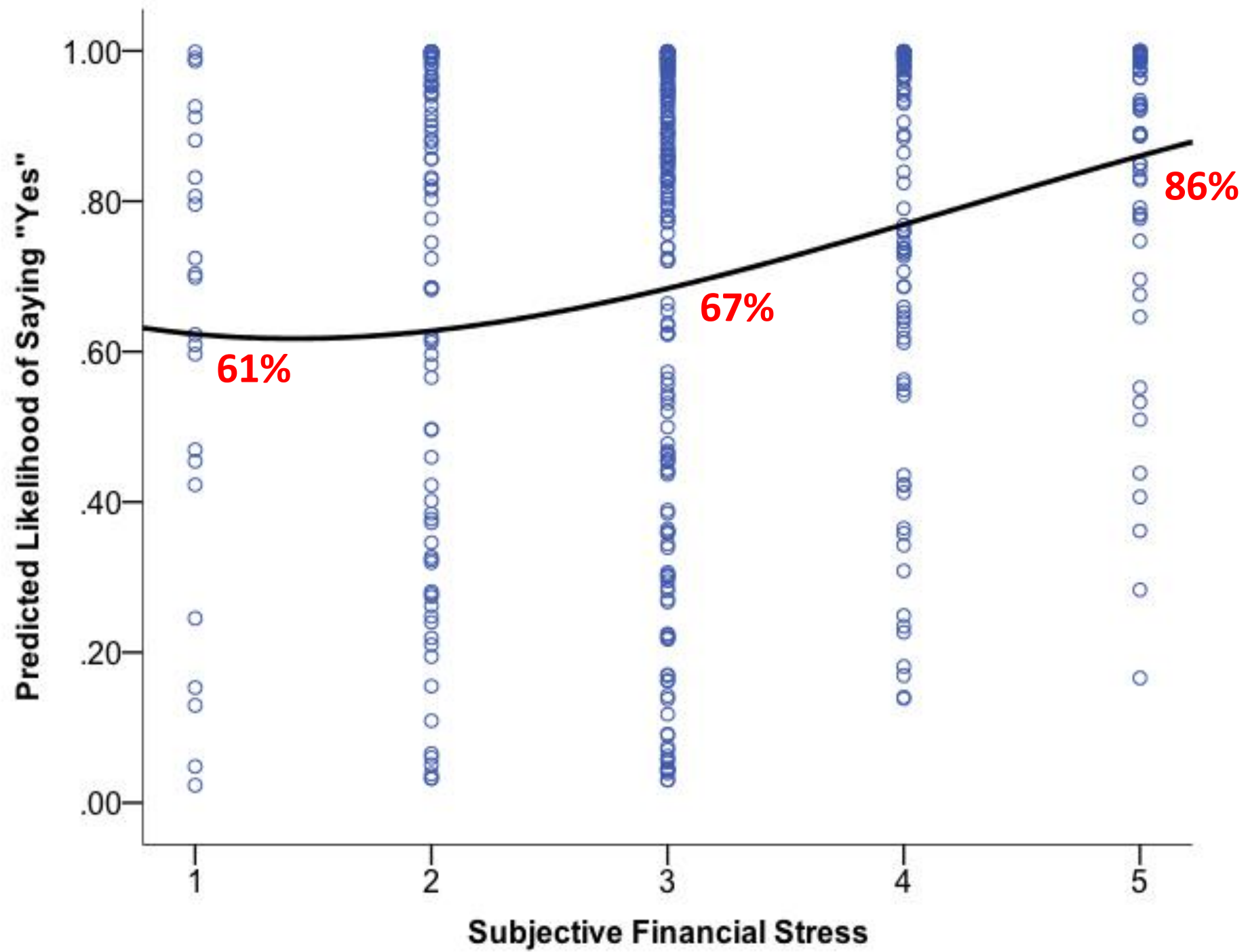
MTurk Workers ($n = 504$, cleaned $n = 447$) were recruited systematically over one week (cf. Casey et al., 2017) and paid \$0.50 to

- Respond to “objective” indicators of financial dependence on gig work (e.g., # of dependents, # of hours worked on/off MTurk)
- Respond to one of the five experimental items, randomly assigned

Predictor	B (SE)	R ² _L (Δ R ² _L)	Rescaled relative weight
Step 1: Experimental item ranking		.13 (.13)	
Constant	2.04*** (.89)		
Items ranked by MTurker SMEs	-1.08*** (.13)		.45
Step 2: Demographics		.15 (.02)	
Age	.00 (.01)		.01
Gender (male = 1)	.39 (.29)		.01
Ethnicity	-.09 (.08)		.00
Education	.18 (.11)		.00
Marital status	.09 (.20)		.01
# of children	.15 (.15)		.01
Step 3: Working on MTurk		.23 (.08)	
Tenure on MTurk (in months)	.01 (.01)		.01
Hours per week on MTurk	.05*** (.01)		.16
Step 4: Working outside of MTurk		.30 (.08)	
# of outside jobs	.17 (.24)		.03
Hours per week at outside job	-.06*** (.01)		.21
Step 5: Financial stress		.34 (.03)	
Subjective financial stress	.54*** (.16)		.07
Objective financial stress	.05 (.15)		.03







Discussion

For understanding dependence

- Item wording is half the battle
- Still, open Qs: Do we go with a “moderate” item? Weight items?
- Hours worked as a “better” measure?

For understanding the gig economy

As researchers using MTurk: be aware of your participants' financial dependence on YOU