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## **Understanding the Bidding Process in Crowdsourcing Platforms among Freelancers**

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### **Abstract**

Freelancers play a vital role in crowdsourcing platforms, offering a diverse talent pool and winning projects through bidding. This study qualitatively explores the bidding processes among Malaysian freelancers and their motivation to bid. It recommends implementing governance mechanisms, optimizing bid strategies, enhancing freelancers' education, and promoting ethical bidding practices. Future research should consider larger sample sizes, multiple data collection methods, and platform data analysis for quantitative insights. Platforms should also invest in educational resources to equip freelancers with in-depth knowledge about the bidding process, project evaluation, and proposal writing.

**Keywords:** Bidding Process, Crowdsourcing Platform, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Crowdsourcing platforms have emerged as dynamic marketplaces where businesses and individuals can efficiently outsource tasks and projects to a global workforce. Central to this ecosystem is the bidding process, a critical mechanism that facilitates matching projects with suitable freelancers. According to a recent study by Grand View Research, the global crowdsourcing market size was valued at USD 10.5 billion in 2022 and is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17.1% from 2023 to 2030 (Global View Research, 2022). Additionally, crowdsourcing has penetrated various industries, with IT and software development being early adopters. However, healthcare, finance, and retail sectors are also increasingly leveraging crowdsourcing. Platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and Freelancer boast millions of registered freelancers, indicating a vast talent pool for crowdsourcing projects. The number of projects posted on crowdsourcing platforms has seen exponential growth in recent years, reflecting the increasing demand for outsourced tasks and services. While the growth of crowdsourcing has been substantial, a comprehensive understanding of the bidding behaviors and strategies employed by freelancers remains relatively scarce.

Bidding in crowdsourcing platforms among freelancers is a crucial process that involves multiple steps and considerations. Crowdsourcing platforms act as intermediaries connecting task requesters with workers in a virtual environment facilitated by information

technology and service strategies (Zhang et al., 2022). These platforms host open contests where individuals bid for tasks, with service fees typically being charged as a percentage of the prizes. In the bidding context, freelancers search for suitable tasks. At the same time, employers seek qualified freelancers, highlighting the importance of a smooth bidding process. In the bidding process, the evaluation of bids is essential. Crowdsourcing contest mechanisms often use multi-attribute reverse auctions to assess bids comprehensively. The sustainability of crowdsourcing platforms is influenced by motivation, quality assessment of bids, demand-supply matching, and reputation systems (Ayaburi et al., 2019). Effectively managing crowdsourcing platforms is crucial for maintaining a community of contributors and facilitating interactions between crowdsourcers and contributors. Therefore, this research seeks to understand the process of bidding on crowdsourcing platforms among freelancers and to explore the motivation of freelancers to bid on the crowdsourcing platform.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This section discussed the literature regarding freelancers' bidding on crowdsourcing platforms. It included a review of the bidding process, freelancers' motivations, and an understanding of the mechanics of the crowdsourcing platforms.

### 2.1 Bidding process in crowdsourcing

The research gap on the freelancer bidding process is a critical area that requires attention. While there is existing literature on bidding processes in various industries, such as construction and engineering, there is a lack of specific focus on freelancers. Freelancers operate in a unique environment where they often compete for projects independently, making their bidding process distinct from traditional contractors or companies (Alkhateeb et al., 2020). Studies on bidding competitiveness and success rates among contractors in construction projects have shed light on the factors influencing bidding decisions and outcomes. However, these findings may not directly translate to the freelance context due to the different nature of work and competition. Understanding the behavioral differences of freelancers towards bidding decisions, both internal and external, is crucial to developing insights tailored to this specific group (Bageis et al., 2019). Moreover, the bid decision-making process for freelancers may differ significantly from that of larger companies due to project complexity, historical data utilization, and cost considerations (Faraji et al., 2022) since most freelancers work solo.

Crowdsourcing platforms play a significant role in connecting freelancers with tasks posted by enterprises or individuals, allowing for a competitive bidding process where freelancers submit their proposals for consideration (Wang et al., 2022). The success of crowdsourcing contests relies on various factors such as motivating task seekers and contributors, assessing bid quality accurately, ensuring a smooth bidding process, efficiently matching demand with supply, and establishing credible reputation systems (Ayaburi et al., 2019). These elements are crucial for sustaining the crowdsourcing business model. In the context of bidding in crowdsourcing, platforms often operate in different modes, including the bidding mode, employment mode, and contrast mode, which influence how freelancers interact with tasks and submit their bids (Shi et al., 2021). Understanding optimal bid strategies is essential, as crowdsourcing contests can be modeled as multi-attribute reverse auctions, where contestants' bids are evaluated across multiple criteria (Xu & Zhang, 2018). This approach helps in evaluating bids comprehensively and selecting the most suitable solution.

To maintain integrity and maximize gains, truthful bidding and quality control mechanisms are crucial in crowdsourcing platforms. Mechanisms such as financial incentives for truthful reporting and reputation evaluation play a significant role in managing crowdsourcing processes effectively (Mohammadi & Golpayegani, 2021). Moreover, social reputation mechanisms can enhance the efficiency of crowdsourcing networks by selecting the most suitable task and data reporters (Ren et al., 2019). The bidding process is critical to crowdsourcing platforms, influencing project outcomes, freelancer earnings, and platform success. However, the current literature indicates that much research is needed to understand the bidding process, particularly in crowdsourcing platforms.

### 2.2 Freelancers' motivation in crowdsourcing

Understanding the motivations of freelancers participating in crowdsourcing platforms is crucial for platform designers and managers. Taylor & Joshi (2018) conducted an exploratory analysis of the motivations and career outcomes of technology workers engaging in compensation-based crowdsourcing platforms. They highlighted the significance of career anchors and motivations in influencing participation in crowdsourcing activities. Furthermore, Vega & Alvarez (2020) explored freelancers' experiences with gig economy platforms, shedding light on the advantages these platforms offer in finding clients, gaining experience, and reducing job precarity. The gig economy, which freelancing platforms are a part of, has transformed how individuals work and seek employment opportunities.

Freelancers' motivation in crowdsourcing platforms is a critical aspect that significantly influences their engagement and performance within these online environments. The success of crowdsourcing platforms heavily relies on the participants' motivation, as highlighted by Morschheuser et al. (2017). To enhance motivation, platforms often incorporate gamification elements borrowed from games to create a more engaging and rewarding experience for freelancers. This gamified approach aims to tap into intrinsic motivations, crucial in creative and innovative tasks commonly found on crowdsourcing platforms (Pinto & Santos, 2018). However, motivating individuals to participate in crowdsourcing platforms remains a primary challenge, as noted by Anand and Hota (2020). The study by Barnes et al. (2015) suggested that crowdsourcing's effectiveness stems from individuals' self-selection and motivation, indicating that individuals who engage in crowdsourcing activities are inherently driven to participate. Moreover, Lee et al. (2022) highlighted the role of achievement goals in influencing contributor participation in crowdsourcing, emphasizing the importance of designing motivating environments within these platforms to enhance contributor performance.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play a significant role in engaging freelancers on crowdsourcing platforms. Kassi et al. (2021) reported substantial growth rates in freelancer revenues on platforms like Upwork, indicating the attractiveness of these platforms for

freelancers seeking work opportunities. Naderi et al. (2014) also developed a scale to measure extrinsic motivation for crowdsourcing micro-task platforms, underlining the importance of understanding and catering to different motivational factors to sustain freelancer engagement. Sutherland et al. (2019) identified critical gig literacies emerging around online freelancing, highlighting the need for freelancers to possess specific skills and knowledge to navigate these platforms successfully. Furthermore, Gunarathna (2023) emphasized the importance of enhancing perceived usefulness, user-friendliness, and security on online freelancing platforms to cater to a diverse audience and improve the overall user experience.

### 2.3 Freelancers in crowdsourcing platform

Crowdsourcing platforms have transformed how tasks are completed by connecting individuals or enterprises needing services with a pool of contributors or freelancers who can offer their expertise. Platforms serve as intermediaries facilitating the interaction between those seeking and providing services (Pereira et al., 2022). The essence of crowdsourcing lies in bridging the gap between the demand for specific skills or knowledge and the availability of individuals possessing those skills. By leveraging crowdsourcing platforms, businesses can tap into a global talent pool, enabling them to access specialized skills on demand (Othman, 2023). Freelancers play a crucial role in crowdsourcing platforms, offering various services from non-digital tasks to digitally enabled tasks.

These platforms benefit freelancers by providing them with opportunities to secure projects and offer job providers a cost-effective way to access a diverse talent pool. The flexibility and efficiency offered by crowdsourcing platforms make them indispensable tools for freelancers and businesses. One of the key factors influencing the success of crowdsourcing platforms is the ability to attract and retain high-quality contributors (Wang et al., 2022). Task rewards have been identified as a double-edged sword, impacting the quantity and quality of contributors on these platforms. While rewards can incentivize freelancers to participate in tasks, excessive focus on monetary incentives may lead to a decrease in the overall quality of work produced (Wang et al., 2022). Thus, balancing task rewards to ensure optimal contributor engagement and output quality is crucial for the sustainable operation of crowdsourcing platforms. Through freelancing, individuals increasingly turn to platforms like Freelancer and Fiverr to offer their services directly to clients (Dolata, 2024).

Unlike traditional employment models, freelancers on crowdsourcing platforms can choose the projects they work on and the clients they engage with (Chatterjee et al., 2015). This flexibility allows freelancers to take on tasks that align with their expertise and interests, contributing to higher job satisfaction and motivation. Moreover, the direct engagement between freelancers and clients fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to enhanced productivity and quality of work (Pereira et al., 2022). Crowdsourcing platforms have also democratized access to work opportunities, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds and locations to participate in the global labor market. The emergence of online labor markets has facilitated the seamless exchange of services, enabling clients to source talent irrespective of geographical boundaries. Crowdsourcing platforms have played a pivotal role in creating a level playing field for freelancers worldwide, empowering them to showcase their skills and compete for projects on a global scale (Pongratz, 2018).

Furthermore, the rise of crowdsourcing platforms has led to innovative task-completion models, such as gamification and blockchain integration (Pereira et al., 2022; Kodjiku et al., 2022). Gamifying tasks on crowdsourcing platforms can enhance freelancer engagement and motivation, improving task performance and overall satisfaction (Pereira et al., 2022). By leveraging such technologies, crowdsourcing platforms can optimize the freelancer experience and streamline task completion processes.

## 3.0 Methodology

This research was conducted qualitatively by using thematic analysis and analysed using NVIVO version 14. The data was collected through virtual focus group discussion (V-FGD) with five freelancers selected through snowball sampling, as the 5-10 participants for a focus group discussion are considered adequate (Khalid et al., 2019). The V-FGD was conducted on weekends, considering the availability of the freelancers and the geographical limitations of each participant who was scattered geographically. In the context of V-FGD, snowball sampling can be advantageous for increasing sample diversity (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). It allows for mobilizing participants through existing networks, such as social media or community organizations, which can be particularly useful in reaching individuals in different geographic areas (Reisner et al., 2017). The freelancers selected were actively participating in any crowdsourcing platform and had at least three years of experience as freelancers to ensure the maturity of the response. Two main questions were asked parallel to the research objectives of this study, which are: (i) Can you share the process of your bidding decision to bid on a particular job in the crowdsourcing platform? and (ii) What motivates you to bid on the crowdsourcing platform?

However, the discussion presented should be carefully extrapolated. Future research should opt for further validation through different methods, either qualitative or quantitative. To reiterate, this research has only been conducted on a limited number of freelancers through V-FGD among Malaysian freelancers. Further focus group discussions with freelancers from different nations may yield different bidding processes due to different cultural backgrounds. Though the V-FGD greatly enabled the discussion, disregarding the geographical limitations, certain limitations on the method should be properly addressed. The method can significantly reduce interactions due to the absence of a shared physical setting, which can impede the natural flow of conversation and hinder effective idea exchange.

## 4.0 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Respondent's profile

Table 1 shows the respondents' background and profile derived from the V-FGD. The data reveals that most freelancers (80%) are male, and a significant proportion (80%) work part-time. This suggests a potential trend of freelancing as a supplementary income source

for male individuals. Most freelancers (60%) hold a bachelor's degree, indicating a relatively high educational attainment among the sample. However, the area of expertise is diverse, from occupational safety, construction and fabrication, video editing, social media advertisement, and warehouse general worker with (20%) in each area. This suggests a varied skill set among the freelancers. LinkedIn is the most popular crowdsourcing platform among the respondents (60%), followed by Glassdoor and Troopers.

Table 1. Respondent's background and profile

Variables	Descriptions	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	4	80
	Female	1	20
	Total	5	100
Freelancing mode	Full time	1	20
	Part time	4	80
	Total	5	100
Education level	SPM/ Certification	1	20
	Diploma	1	20
	Bachelor degree	3	60
	Total	5	100
Area of expertise in crowdsourcing	Occupational safety and health	1	20
	Construction and fabrication	1	20
	Video editing	1	20
	Social media advertisement	1	20
	Warehouse general worker	1	20
	Total	5	100
The main crowdsourcing platform used	LinkedIn	3	60
	Glassdoor	1	20
	Troopers	1	20
	Total	5	100

#### 4.2 Thematic analysis

Through the V-FGD, the freelancers were questioned about their understanding of the crowdsourcing platform's bidding process and their motivation to bid on the crowdsourcing platform. The tree diagram based on the NVivo analysis illustrated the freelancers' process (Refer to Fig. 1) and their motivation (Refer to Fig. 2). Further discussion is as follows.

##### 4.2.1 RO1: To understand the bidding process among freelancers in crowdsourcing platform

Fig. 1 presents a typology of freelancers' bidding processes on crowdsourcing platforms, derived from the thematic analysis of the V-FGD. Three primary patterns emerged.

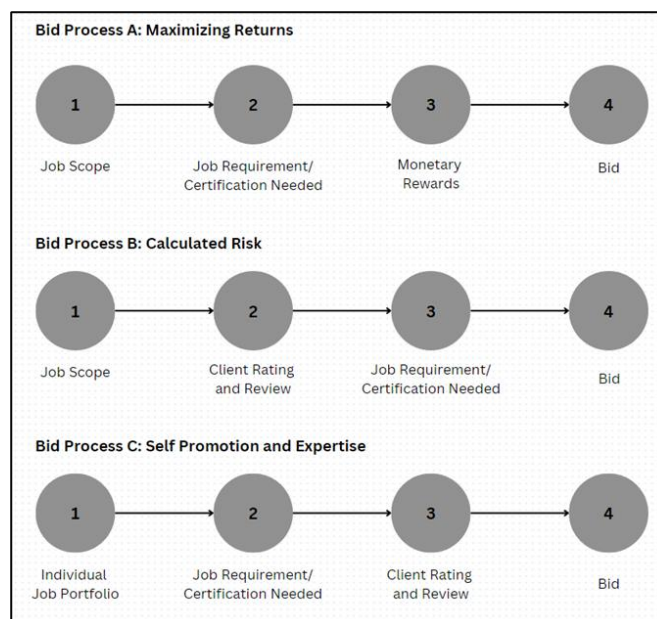


Fig. 1: Tree Diagram of The Bidding Process  
(Source: Authors)

Process A is characterized by a linear progression from job scope to bid, with financial compensation as the primary motivator. Process B introduces a more strategic approach, incorporating client reputation into the decision-making framework. Freelancers in this category prioritize risk assessment by evaluating client reviews and ratings before determining job requirements and qualifications. Finally, Process C reflects a freelancer-centric perspective, where individuals showcase their expertise through a personal job portfolio before engaging with specific project details. This model suggests a strong emphasis on self-promotion and a value proposition.

Debatably, this study categorized each process as: Process A: Maximizing Returns, Process B: Calculated Risk, and Process C: Self-Promotion and Expertise. Process A reflects a primarily transactional approach to bidding. Freelancers in this category prioritize financial gain and focus on the immediate project scope. Economic factors such as hourly rates, project budget, and competition often influence their decision-making. This approach is common among freelancers new to the platform or those seeking quick, high-volume work. Risk aversion is typically low as the focus is on maximizing short-term earnings. The nature of jobs often aligns with routine, low-complexity tasks that require minimal specialized skills.

Process B represents a more strategic bidding approach. Freelancers in this category consider client reputation a significant factor in their decision-making. They are more risk-averse and prioritize long-term relationships with clients. This behavior suggests focusing on job quality and client satisfaction over immediate financial gains. The nature of jobs often involves higher levels of complexity or specialized skills, requiring a deeper understanding of the client's needs and expectations. By carefully evaluating client feedback, freelancers aim to increase their chances of project success and repeat business.

Lastly, Process C highlights a freelancer-centric approach to bidding. These individuals emphasize their skills and experience, positioning themselves as experts in their field. By showcasing their portfolio, they aim to differentiate themselves from competitors and attract high-value projects. This strategy often involves a higher degree of risk, requiring a significant upfront investment in building a strong professional profile. However, it can lead to long-term rewards for project quality, client satisfaction, and earning potential. The nature of jobs typically aligns with high-value, complex projects that require specialized expertise and a strong professional reputation.

Based on previous research, individuals exhibit different bidding behaviours (Karmeliuk et al., 2022). This suggests that the bidding strategies may vary according to the individual experience and upbringing. This difference in the processes may be associated with the theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior suggests that an individual's behavior is determined by their intentions, which are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Liébana-Cabanillas et al., 2017).

Looking at the three bid processes, although they differ, they share somewhat linear stages of the bidding process. The variables synthesized from the transcription are job scope, job requirement/certification needed, monetary rewards, client rating, individual job portfolio, and bid. This corroborates past research that found that client reputation and financial stability are crucial factors in bidding decisions (Mahamid, 2022). Research by Duan et. al (2019) discovered that monetary rewards have been found to influence decision-making processes. The influence of job requirements on bidding decisions was also mentioned by past research (Fawale & Dada, 2017; Bageis et al., 2019). However, much of the past research was drawn on organizations' bidding decisions compared to individual ones.

#### 4.2.1 RO2: To explore the motivation of freelancers to bid on crowdsourcing platform

Fig. 2 presents a hierarchical structure of factors that motivate freelancers to participate in crowdsourcing platforms, categorized into two primary themes: Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation.

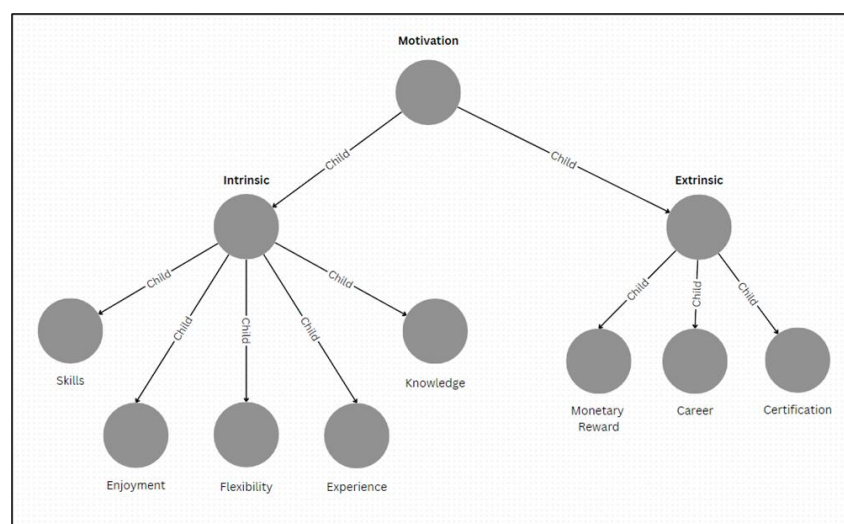


Fig. 2: Tree diagram of motivation of freelancers to bid  
(Source: Authors)

The findings connoted with many past studies on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors. To highlight, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are fundamental concepts in psychology and organizational behavior. Deci and Ryan (1985) emphasize the importance of understanding intrinsic motivation within a broader theory of motivation that encompasses various motivational types. They highlight the significance of intrinsic motivation, which involves engaging in activities for their inherent. Intrinsic motivation is the internal drive that

guides an individual's decision-making process (Selimović et al., 2024). Decision makers' characteristics, such as intrinsic motivation, risk perception, and propensity, significantly impact bid/no-bid decisions (Chen et al., 2015). Furthermore, participatory behavior influences intrinsic motivation, where participation in decision-making invokes intrinsic motivation in individuals (Zulfqar, 2022). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is characterized by the drive to engage in activities in exchange for external rewards or benefits. It plays a significant role in various contexts, such as work environments and educational settings. Monetary rewards, career opportunities, and recognition are common extrinsic motivators influencing individuals' behaviors and decisions (Nguyen et al., 2023; Nkemdilim, 2021; Rauf et al., 2023). These external incentives, including monetary compensation, job prospects, and formal acknowledgments like promotions and certificates, are instrumental in shaping individuals' performance and choices.

The discussion further confirms the sub-themes analysed from the V-FGD. Five sub-themes of intrinsic motivation were derived: skills, enjoyment, flexibility, experience, and knowledge. Notably, the key intrinsic motivators motivate the opportunity to complete a project. The flexibility offered by freelancing allows individuals to balance work with personal life, increasing job satisfaction. Moreover, building a strong portfolio through diverse projects is essential for career growth and personal fulfillment. To highlight, the freelancers' statements on the intrinsic motivation from the V-FGD are shown below:

Skills: "I would love to be upskilled from the job".

Enjoyment: "I enjoyed doing the freelance job".

Flexibility: "I prefer to be in this field because it gives me more flexibility".

Experience: "I am focusing on gaining experience on how to ace the job to get good ratings".

And Knowledge: "Sometimes the clients provide you with a specific standard, you can indirectly gain more knowledge on the job".

Enjoyment or interest, contrasting it with extrinsic motivation, where external rewards or outcomes drive actions. Hence, the motivation of freelancers to bid can also be extrapolated in the crowdsourcing platforms.

This intrinsic motivation analyzed from the V-FGD conforms to the past research findings. For instance, the gig economy in Malaysia mirrors a larger trend where freelancers, including women, are attracted to freelance work due to factors like flexibility, autonomy, and the ability to select projects aligned with their interests (Singh, 2024). Additionally, the contribution of freelancers to economic growth is substantial, with their specific skills often complementing those of the regular full-time workforce rather than competing with it (Žunac et al., 2021). The involvement of freelancers in startups can drive continuous value proposition innovation by offering diverse knowledge and expertise that may not be readily available otherwise (Gupta et al., 2020). Such findings reflect the intrinsic motivation pursued by the freelancers.

Next, three sub-themes were spanned from the extrinsic motivation: monetary reward, career, and certification. Financial compensation is the most apparent extrinsic motivator for freelancers on crowdsourcing platforms. However, the potential for career advancement through networking and acquiring certifications also plays a significant role. The promise of future opportunities and professional recognition can be powerful incentives. Additionally, the competitive nature of freelancing often drives individuals to seek out projects that offer higher rewards or prestigious clients, further emphasizing the importance of extrinsic factors. To reiterate, the freelancers' statements on the extrinsic motivation from the V-FGD are shown below:

Monetary Reward: "I choose to bid on the job with decent pay".

Career: "I joined because of any future potential career".

And Certification: "Some companies provide certification of job completion."

These sub-themes are parallel to the past findings. For example, Malaysian freelancers striving to improve their ratings and reputation on online platforms encounter challenges and opportunities that can significantly influence their success. Research has shown that freelancers' reactions to evaluation setbacks vary based on their performance levels and the platform's significance to their income (Bellesia et al., 2022). Platforms like Upwork offer visibility features that limit freelancers' self-branding efforts, posing difficulties in effectively managing their image. Furthermore, networking behaviors have been found to positively impact freelancers' need for relatedness fulfillment and employability-enhancing competencies, which affect career success and future opportunities (Jacobs et al., 2019).

## 5.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

To conclude, this research has provided insight into understanding the bidding process in crowdsourcing platforms among freelancers. Differing processes and patterns occur among individuals, which the individual's background may influence. Recommendations for improving the bidding process in crowdsourcing platforms among freelancers include implementing governance mechanisms to ensure fairness and transparency. Transparent bidding metrics may allow freelancers to analyze their strengths and weaknesses better. Organizations hosting crowdsourcing platforms should focus on building governance capabilities and structures to effectively manage the bidding process and overall platform operations. Additionally, optimizing bid strategies based on multi-attribute auctions can help task requesters and freelancers in crowdsourcing jobs and contests to make informed decisions and enhance the efficiency of the bidding process. Enhancing freelancer education can accelerate their effectiveness, as the platforms should invest in educational resources to equip freelancers with in-depth knowledge about the bidding process, project evaluation, and proposal writing. Finally, platforms can promote ethical bidding practices through guidelines and community enforcement. To date, the crowdsourcing market is promising and is attracting more freelancers across the globe. The platform must promote fairer competition by implementing measures to reduce the impact of bid sniping and other unethical bidding practices, fostering a level playing field for all freelancers. Future study

should consider a bigger sample size to emphasize the need for greater generalizability of findings, employing stratified sampling to compare across different freelancer segments, using multiple data collection methods to strengthen the validity of the results, explore the potential of analyzing platform data to gain quantitative insights into bidding behaviors and acknowledging the potential for biases in self-reported data and discussing the strategies to mitigate them.

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### **Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study**

This research contributes to the existing literature on crowdsourcing platforms by providing an understanding of the bidding process by freelancers. The findings highlight individuals' diverse strategies, influenced by their backgrounds and motivations. While intrinsic rewards may drive some freelancers, others prioritize extrinsic gains. Additionally, this research provides valuable insights for freelancers seeking ways to improve their chances of winning projects and building successful careers. The findings suggest that effective bidding strategies, such as thorough project analysis, competitive pricing, and compelling proposals, are crucial for navigating the competitive landscape of crowdsourcing platforms.



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