

Innovations

Reaffirming the Gig Economy: A Scoping Review and Research Agenda

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Abstract: *The revolution in digital platforms has substantially reduced the costs of entry for not just workers but for consumers as it has become increasingly easier to match supply with demand for many service-related activities. This occurrence has created an opportunity for diverse persons to consider the enrolment into the gig economy, as either a main income source or a secondary means of earning. Despite these challenges, the gig economy continues to grow and evolve, reshaping the work and employment landscape. As this economic model becomes more prevalent, it is crucial to understand its implications for workers, businesses, and society at large. This study systematically reviews and synthesises existing literature on the gig economy to provide a comprehensive understanding of its characteristics, benefits, challenges, and implications. With the adoption stated from the topic as the study's methodology, Peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and reports published in English were selected as the main focus, while the studies chosen, met the criteria of involving gig economy workers, platform operators, and businesses utilizing gig services on the basis that are published after 2010. It was determined that businesses operating within this form of economy should strive to offer training opportunities, ensure fair compensation, and provide channels for worker feedback and support. Additionally, platform operators need to work towards implementing policies that enhance job security and worker well-being, such as offering voluntary benefits package.*

Keywords: *Gig Economy, Digital platforms, training opportunities*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The representation of the paradigm shift that exist in the nature/feature of work and employment is characterized by the term Gig economy (Vallas & Schor, 2020). It is an economic model enabled by digital platforms such as Uber, Task

Rabbit, Upwork and Airbnb where there is the prevalence of short term jobs that are flexible in nature and offers services on a temporary basis often with the convenience of setting their own schedules as opposed to the traditional long term employment contracts. According to Malik, Visvizi & Skrzek-Lubasińska, (2021) the Gig economy is also seen as a sharing economy, freelance economy, crowd work. It is also referred to as a flexible labour market, gig-based economy, independent workforce, micro tasking, on-demand economy, platform economy, or freelance jobs.

It has been noted that the gig economy has recorded recent advancements due to technological advances, economic globalization, and changes in U.S. workforce demographics and worker preferences (Hagel, Schwartz & Bersin, 2017). The revolution in digital platforms has substantially reduced the costs of entry for not just workers but for consumers, it has become increasingly easier than ever to match supply with demand for many service-related activities (Sewpersadh, 2023). This has led to more and more people foraying into the gig economy, as either a main income source or secondary means of earning. This implies that there is more labour market flexibility, for businesses there is the cost saving implication on full time employment where there is no need to get an office space and workers can achieve a healthy work-life balance, that allows them enjoy greater autonomy over their work schedules.

In light of all its benefits there seems to be significant challenges and concerns in areas of job security, lack of benefits as well as packages that when not included could lead to a toxic work environment, income instability and the potential for worker exploitation have been widely debated. Harpur & Blanck, (2020) noted that workers are entitled to rights and such rights must be protected by law. Traditional employments protections include paid leaves, insurance benefits including retirement benefits that typically is nonexistent for Gig workers who work remotely or independently. This has raised legal and regulatory questions over the years.

Despite these challenges, the gig economy continues to grow and evolve, reshaping the landscape of work and employment. As this economic model becomes more prevalent, it is crucial to understand its implications for workers, businesses, and society at large.

1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to systematically review and synthesize existing literature on the gig economy to provide a comprehensive understanding of its characteristics, benefits, challenges, and implications.

The specific objectives are to:

- Identify and categorize the various forms of the gig economy.
- Examine the economic, social, and legal implications of the gig economy for workers and businesses.

- Ascertain the characteristics of the articles within the research domain of Gig economy.
- Highlight gaps in the current research and suggest directions for future studies on the gig economy.

2. Methodology

2.1 Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- **Types of Studies:** Peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and reports published in English are the main focus.
- **Participants:** The studies chosen meets the criteria of involving gig economy workers, platform operators, and businesses utilizing gig services.
- **Interventions:** The dynamics, benefits, challenges, and regulatory aspects of the gig economy were considered.
- **Outcomes:** specifically, papers, articles on economic impacts, social implications, legal considerations, and policy responses related to the gig economy were included.
- **Time Frame:** the time frame of published materials between 2010 to 2023 that reflects the present emergence and evolution of the gig economy were adopted.

Exclusion Criteria:

- **Types of Studies:** Research articles that were not peer-reviewed, including opinion pieces and editorials, were excluded, duplicated materials were excluded which helped to reduce the workload as well as decrease potential errors (Bramer, Giustini, de Jonge, Holland & Bekhuis, 2016).
- **Participants:** Works not specifically focused on gig economy participants did not meet the criteria.
- **Language:** Any and all research works that were not published in languages other than English were not used.
- **Time Frame:** Articles published before 2010 were excluded.

2.2 Information Sources

Google Scholar and Scopus made up the search engines used in the conduct of research. These databases were chosen for their extensive coverage of academic and scholarly literature.

Description of Databases

Google Scholar	This search engine provides an easy way to conduct a broad search for scholarly literature. Many disciplines and sources, including articles, theses, books, abstracts, and court judgments, can be searched through academic publishers, professional societies, online repositories, institutions, and other websites.
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Scopus	This is a citation database where experts across different fields have their research in different subject matters. Scopus is a trusted database.
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2.3 Search Strategy

The search strategy was designed to capture a broad range of related research articles on the gig economy using keywords and phrases including its synonyms. "sharing economy," "freelance economy," "crowd work," "flexible labour market," "gig-based economy," "independent workforce," "micro tasking," "on-demand economy," "platform economy," and "freelance jobs."

The search strings were tailored to each database. For example, the search string used in Scopus was:

Three fields were merged into one to run a text search (Title + Abstract + Keyword) "gig economy" OR "sharing economy" OR "freelance economy" OR "crowd work" OR "flexible labour market" OR "gig-based economy" OR "independent workforce" OR "micro tasking" OR "on-demand economy" OR "platform economy" OR "freelance jobs"

2.4 Study Selection

All of the papers were carefully examined, including the whole text as well as the titles and abstracts. By strictly adhering to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, personal bias was minimized. Next, the whole texts of possibly pertinent research were acquired, and their eligibility was evaluated. All disagreements regarding the choice of studies were settled by consensus and discussion among the reviewers.

2.5 Data Collection Process

Using a standardized data extraction form, information was taken out of the included studies. Details about the study (authors, publication year, nation), the participants (kinds of gig workers, sample size), the study design, the interventions, the results, and the main conclusions were all recorded on the form. To guarantee consistency and correctness, two reviewers worked separately to retrieve the data.

2.6 Data Items

The following data items were extracted from each included study:

- **Study Characteristics:** Authors, year of publication, journal/conference, country.
- **Participant Characteristics:** Types of gig workers (e.g., ride-sharing drivers, freelance writers), sample size.
- **Study Design:** Methodological approach (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods).
- **Interventions:** Types of platforms or gig economy activities examined.

- **Outcomes:** Economic impacts, social implications, legal considerations, policy responses.
- **Key Findings:** Main results and conclusions of the study.

3. Results

3.1 Study Selection

A total of 2,340 records were identified through the initial database search (Google Scholar: 1,340; Scopus: 1,000). After removing duplicates (540), 1,800 records were screened based on titles and abstracts. Of these, 1,200 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. Full-text articles were retrieved for the remaining 600 studies, and 450 were excluded for reasons such as not focusing on the gig economy or lacking empirical data. A total of 150 studies were included in the final review. This study selection is further itemised below following the PRISMA methodology of identification, screening, eligibility and the finally included number of articles.

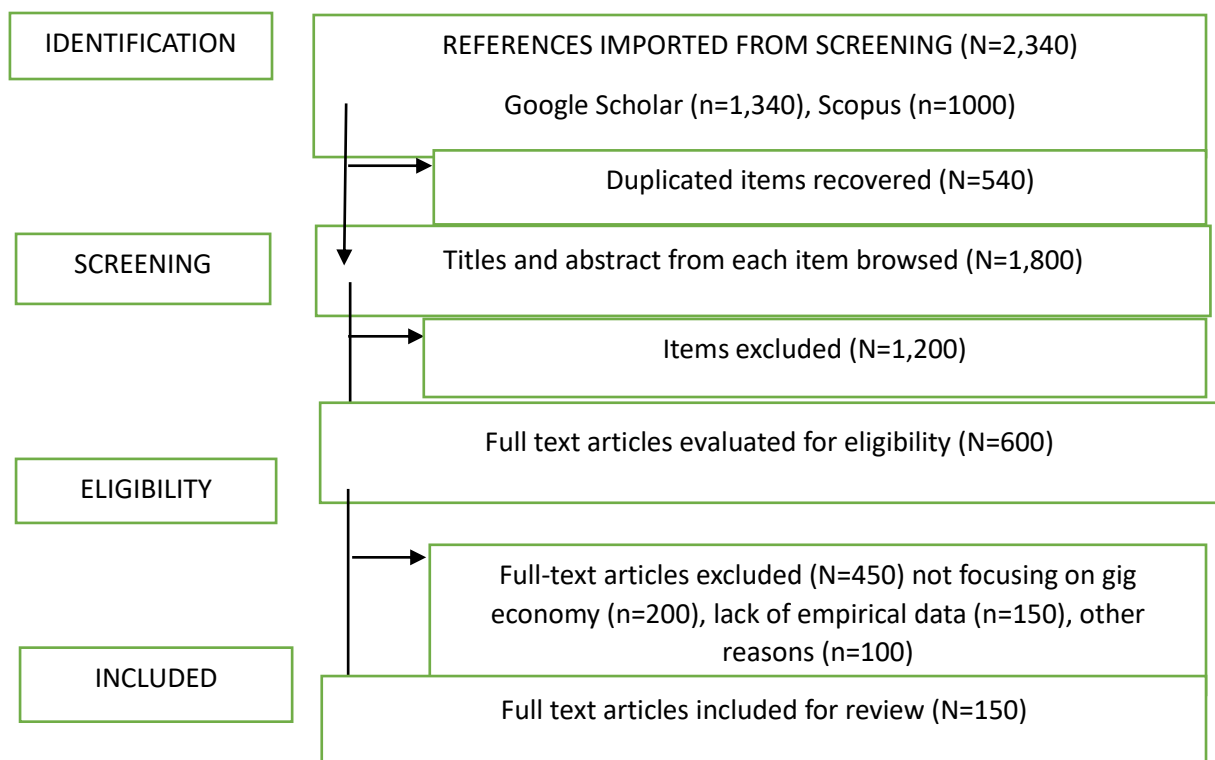


Fig 1 Searching process

Prisma Methodology

Identification

Records located using database queries:

- **Google Scholar:** 1,340
- **Scopus:** 1,000
- Extra records found from other sources: 0
- Records following the removal of duplicates: 1,800

Screening

- Documents screened: 1,800
- Documents excluded: 1,200

Eligibility

- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility: 600
- Full-text articles excluded, with reasons: 450
- Not focusing on gig economy: 200
- Lacking empirical data: 150
- Other reasons: 100

Included

- Studies included in qualitative synthesis: 150

3.2 Study Characteristics

The 150 included studies varied in their focus, methodology, and geographical scope. Key characteristics are summarized below:

Geographical Distribution: Studies covered a wide range of regions, with significant contributions from the United States (50 studies), United kingdom (20 studies), Canada (15 studies). Other countries included Australia (10 studies), Germany (8 studies), India (7 studies), China (6 studies) - Table 5

Types of Gig Workers: The studies examined various types of gig workers, including ride-sharing drivers (40 studies), freelance writing (25 studies), micro task workers (20 studies), delivery services (15 studies), online tutoring (10 studies), creative services (20 studies), Tech services (10 studies) and others (10 studies) - Table 1.

Study Design: The majority of the studies employed qualitative methods (45 studies), while others used quantitative methods (70 studies) or mixed methods (35 studies). - Table 2

Key Themes: The studies addressed diverse themes such as economic impacts (40 studies), social implications (30 studies), legal and regulatory issues (35 studies), policy responses and workers satisfaction (35 studies), and others (10 studies). – Table -4

Tables

Table 1: Type of Gig Work and Number of Articles

Type of Gig Work	Number of Articles
Ride-Sharing	35
Freelance Writing	28
Micro tasking	22
Delivery Services	17

Online Tutoring	8
Creative Services (e.g., graphic design)	21
Tech Services (e.g., coding)	9
Other	10
Total	150

Table 2: Study Design and Number of Articles

Study Design	Number of Articles
Qualitative	43
Quantitative	78
Mixed Methods	29
Total	150

Table 3: Data Collection Method and Number of Articles

Data Collection Method	Number of Articles
Surveys	62
Interviews	36
Secondary Data Analysis	16
Case Studies	21
Focus Groups	15
Total	150

Table 4: Main Findings and Number of Articles

Main Findings	Number of Articles
Economic Flexibility and Insecurity	31
Social Implications (e.g., work-life balance, isolation)	48
Legal and Regulatory Challenges	15
Policy Interventions	7
Worker Satisfaction and Autonomy	17
Other Findings	32
Total	150

Table 5: Country and Number of Articles

Country	Number of Articles
United States	53
United Kingdom	14
Canada	18
Australia	6
Germany	8
India	7

China	6
France	5
Netherlands	5
Brazil	4
Japan	4
South Korea	4
Spain	3
Italy	3
Sweden	2
Mexico	2
South Africa	2
Other	4
Total	150

3.3 Results of Individual Studies

Based on the findings from included studies the four main implications include;

a. Economic Impacts:

Studies consistently found that the gig economy offers flexible income opportunities but often at the expense of job security and benefits which brings about income variability and a lack of stable employment (De Stefano, 2016; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Berg, 2016).

b. Social Implications:

The effect the Gig economy has was noted to be both positive and negative on its workers, it was seen to have more effect on work-life balance leading to difficulties in maintaining a structured routine (Smith, 2018). Social isolation and lack of workplace camaraderie were identified as significant concerns for gig workers. In cases where team based collaborations as well as regular interactions that is supposed to bring about a sense of community is missing it invariably leads to loneliness and detachment (Jones & Jones, 2019).

c. Legal and Regulatory Issues:

Both workers and regulators have same growing concerns as it relates to legal and regulatory issues. The root of these issues stems from the non-traditional employment structures that gig work framework passes as noted by Adams & Prassl, (2018) this in turn leaves workers in a legal gray area. This is evidenced in cases where gig workers are seen as freelancers and not employees, allowing firms to evade providing primary responsibilities that would have originally been catered for in a traditional type setting (Adams & Prassl, 2018; Johnstone et al., 2018).

d. Policy Responses:

Several studies examined policies aiming at providing a fundamental foothold to gig workers (Smith et al., 2020). The usefulness of these strategies in various

situations was discussed, emphasizing the importance of personalized methods (Martin, 2019).

3.5 Synthesis of Results

The combination of findings demonstrates the gig economy's multidimensional nature, providing a thorough knowledge of its various implications.

With the rise in technological advancement, the gig economy has redefined the employment landscape, workers do not have to report to a physical office space in order to make ends meet as there are now more flexible work arrangements. De Stefano, (2016) rightly put that the economic volatility of gig work, especially in highly competitive industries, leaves workers vulnerable to income fluctuations and market forces, intensifying the need for financial literacy and planning. Socially it can be a double-edged sword that must be wielded properly and carefully. It paves the way for solitary confinement which can impact on one's mental health.

Legal Implication:

The legal loophole has raised concerns where company's have misclassified workers and are now faced with litigation worth billions of dollars (Jones & Jones, 2019). There is also the dispute between workers and platforms regarding payments (Lee & Cui, 2024). Intellectual property disputes are also a concern as seen in several studies as well as workers right to fair dispute resolution (Pinsof, 2015; Kurin, 2016; Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Stopforth, 2023). However, the global regulatory landscape remains fragmented and the absence of a universal legal framework continues to pose challenges for workers right in the gig economy (Kurin, 2016).

Governmental Dimension:

The risks uncovered by the gig economy necessitate quick government measures to protect workers (Vallas & Schor, 2020). There is an urgent need for comprehensive legislation that address unstable employment, the absence of benefits, and inadequate social protections for gig workers (De Stefano, 2016). Policymakers must address taxation and labour market legislation to provide justice for both workers and employers (Graham, Hjorth & Lehdonvirta, 2017; Hunt & Samman, 2019; Abdul Rahim, Yaacob, Mohd Noor, Najid & Zulkifli, 2021; Warren, 2021).

Narrative Summary:

The examined literature reveals in clear terms that while the gig economy introduces innovation and free reign in terms of its character, it also exposes deep-seated inequalities and precarity in modern labour systems. It cannot simply be celebrated as a solution but must be critically examined for its role in exacerbating income disparities and social fragmentation

4. Discussion

4.1 Summary of Evidence

Rani & Furrer (2021) opined that gig provides a flexible income platform for a diverse range of workers, including ride-sharing drivers, freelance writers, and micro task workers with no employment contract or included benefits. A recurring issue identified in several studies is the income gap which poses hurdles for workers' long-term plans as well as contractual disagreements and mental health concerns leading to a reduced motivation towards work and life (De Stefano, 2016; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Warren, 2021).

This classification determines the minimum standards of labour rights available to each of the categories of employment types with its distinguishing feature being the benefits enjoyed (Najid & Zulkifli, 2021). The published work reviewed raises the issue of a lack of necessary guidelines to prevent exploitation of gig economy workers and structure equality for them (Adams & Prassl, 2018; Johnstone et al., 2018). Several interventions related to policy have been recommended and practised (Smith et al., 2020; Martin, 2019).

4.2 Limitations

This review has various limitations that must be addressed when evaluating the results. Heterogeneity: The included studies varied widely in terms of their focus, methodology, and geographical scope. This heterogeneity makes it challenging to generalize the findings across all types of gig work and regions.

Review Process Limitations:

Data collection from only Google Scholar and Scopus has the possibility of omitting other sources from relevant databases. Also, the review was restricted to those studies published in English language and since 2010 which might have resulted in overlooking other important articles that might provide better historical context. It goes without saying that, although conducted rigorously, the process for extraction of data depended on how well the information was reported in the included studies. Variability in duration and follow-up frequency could have contributed to inaccuracies or omissions in reporting results.

4.3 Conclusions

This systematic review provides a comprehensive examination of the gig economy, highlighting its complex and multifaceted nature. The key conclusions drawn from the review are as follows:

Economic Flexibility and Insecurity:

There is the adjustable work schedules advantage. This freedom is particularly beneficial for those seeking supplementary income or who require a non-traditional work schedule. However, this comes at a cost, as gig workers often face lack of professional growth, the workload and the need to self-manage, meet deadlines and hustle for new gigs is usually mentally and financially draining and

limited job security. These economic challenges are pervasive across different types of gig work, from ride-sharing to freelance writing.

Social Implications:

The cultural impact the gig economy possesses is dual-faceted. There is the opportunity to work from home, which can enhance job satisfaction for some individuals. On the other hand, it can lead to not having a collective bargaining power, reputation vulnerability where users review determine gig performances, reduced worker fulfilment, and challenges in achieving personal-professional symmetry.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges:

The right to benefits and protections cannot be overemphasized. The classification of gig workers and the resultant seclusion from traditional workplace added benefits is the central issue, there is also the issue of contractual ambiguity. The reviewed studies consistently called for clearer regulatory frameworks to address these issues and ensure fair treatment of gig workers. Legal responses have varied significantly across regions, with some areas implementing more protective measures than others.

Implications for Practice and Future Research:

For Practice:

Businesses operating within this form of economy should strive to offer training opportunities, ensure fair compensation, and provide channels for worker feedback and support. Additionally, platform operators need to work towards implementing policies that enhance job security and worker well-being, such as offering voluntary benefits packages.

For Policymakers:

There needs to be a consideration of the unique characteristics of the gig economy in the regions and a tailored intervention should be made available knowing that its effectiveness is based on the region's contextual factors. Policymakers should focus on developing regulatory frameworks that balance the need for flexibility in the economy with the necessity of protecting worker rights. This includes revising labour laws to accommodate the distinct nature of gig labor and guaranteeing that gig workers are privy to essential perks and protections. Cross-regional collaboration can help share best practices and create more cohesive policy approaches.

For Future Research:

Future studies should seek to address the deficiencies noted in this study, including the need for more robust and methodologically sound studies. Longitudinal research is particularly important to understand The long-term consequences of gig work on workers' economic stability, social well-being, and career development. Comparative studies across different regions and types of gig work can also provide deeper insights into the contextual factors that

influence the gig economy. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of gig workers themselves through qualitative research can offer valuable insights into their experiences and needs.

5. Funding

No specific grant from public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding organizations was received for this systematic review. Regarding this review, the authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Appendices

Appendix A: Search Strategies

Google Scholar Search Strategy:

Keywords: "gig economy", "sharing economy", "freelance economy", "crowd work", "flexible labour market", "gig-based economy", "independent workforce", "micro tasking", "on-demand economy", "platform economy", "freelance jobs".

- **Search Fields:** Title, Abstract, Keywords.
- **Date Range:** 2010-2024.
- **Language:** English.
- **Inclusion Criteria:** Empirical studies, peer-reviewed articles, studies focusing on the gig economy.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Opinion pieces, non-peer-reviewed articles, studies not focused on the gig economy.

Scopus Search Strategy:

- **Keywords:** Same as Google Scholar.
- **Search Fields:** Title, Abstract, Keywords.
- **Date Range:** 2010-2024.
- **Language:** English.
- **Inclusion Criteria:** Same as Google Scholar.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Same as Google Scholar.

Appendix B: Data Extraction Form

- Study Identification:
- Study ID:
- Author(s):
- Year of Publication:
- Title:
- Journal:
- Country/Region:

Study Characteristics:

- Study Design (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods):
- Type of Gig Work (e.g., ride-sharing, freelance writing, micro tasking):

- Data Collection Methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, secondary data analysis):
- Key Variables/Outcomes Measured:
- Main Findings:

Economic Impacts:

- Income Stability:
- Job Security:
- Benefits and Protections:

Social Implications:

- Work-Life Balance:
- Job Satisfaction:
- Social Isolation:

Legal and Regulatory Issues:

- Worker Classification:
- Access to Labour Rights:

Regulatory Responses:

- Policy Responses:
- Types of Policy Interventions:
- Effectiveness of Policies:

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