Multidimensional Impacts on Workers in the Gig Economy: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract
Driven by digital technology, the gig economy is reshaping labour markets in developing Asian cities, where location-based workers—such as drivers, couriers, and domestic helpers—form a major share and play a key role in social and economic development of the region. However, this flexible work model also brings many challenges, such as unstable income, unsafe working conditions, and limited access to social protection, which increase workers' vulnerabilities. These issues raise questions about whether gig workers can participate in and remain in this labour market sustainably. This study uses a systematic review with the PRISMA method, combined with qualitative content analysis, to explore the factors affecting Asian gig workers. The results show that workers are affected by three main groups of factors: (1) platform technology and algorithms, (2) policies and legal frameworks, and (3) workers' efforts to adapt and resist. These factors interact in complex ways, shaping both the risks and opportunities. Based on these findings, this study suggests policy measures to improve social protection, limit platform power, and promote a fairer and more sustainable gig economy. The goal is to reduce workers' vulnerability while supporting the contributions of location-based gig workers, ensuring that their work is safer and more sustainable in the rapidly changing digital labour market.

Keywords: Gig economy, location-based work, labor vulnerability, systematic literature review

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies and online platforms has fueled the global rise of the gig economy, a labor market characterized by short-term, flexible, and independent work arrangements. Unlike traditional employment based on long-term contracts and fixed labor costs, gig work thrives on temporary, project-based engagements that often lack job security, social protection, and clear employer–employee relationships (Oyer, 2020)

Asia has emerged as a major hub for gig labour, with the expansion of digital platforms accelerating its growth beyond the global average. Approximately 84% of talent managers in the region report hiring gig workers compared to 65% worldwide (Cheng & Tian, 2023). In China, over 200 million people–approximately 25% of the workforce - are engaged in flexible or gig work (World Economic Forum, 2025). In Indonesia, there are an estimated 41.6 million gig or

independent workers, accounting for roughly half of the informal workforce. These figures underscore the significance and scale of the gig economy in Asia (Kantar, 2024).

Among gig workers, those providing direct services through digital platforms, such as transportation, delivery, and domestic work, often referred to as location-based workers, experience profound and multidimensional impacts on their jobs and daily lives. While it offers flexibility, autonomy, and resilience during economic downturns, workers often face unstable income, lack of employment benefits, and deepening inequality (Alauddin et al., 2025; Basavaraj et al., 2023; Ganapathyraman, 2025). Constant surveillance through digital platforms can reduce workers to mere data points, undermining their mental health and work–life balance (Gupta & Gupta, 2023; Kaushik, 2024; Shaikh et al., 2024; Wheatley, 2024). Platforms also lower entry barriers and allocate tasks efficiently but exert strong algorithmic control, driving competition and wage pressure while undervaluing the spatial labour that sustains urban life (Anderson 2017). Overall, the gig economy generates new opportunities for flexible participation but also creates significant risks to workers' security and well-being, requiring balanced strategies to ensure fairer and more sustainable outcomes.

Against this backdrop, this study conducts a systematic literature review using the PRISMA method, combined with qualitative content analysis, to explore how platform technology, regulatory frameworks, and workers' adaptive strategies collectively shape the risks and opportunities of gig work in Asia's emerging economies.

Methodology

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, focusing on peer-reviewed studies related to workers in the gig economy. To examine research trends concerning the issues faced by workers in the gig economy, the analytical process follows five stages, as adapted by Nguyen Quoc et al. from studies by Binder and Belz (2015) and Muñoz and Cohen (2018): (1) keyword strategy, (2) database analysis, (3) screening, (4) bibliometric analysis, and (5) content analysis (Nguyen Quoc et al., 2021).

Keyword strategy

With the two primary keywords, "gig economy" and "worker", the authors employed related synonyms to minimise the risk of omitting relevant data. The Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" were used to optimise the search results. Accordingly, the keywords included "platform economy", "digital labor", "on-demand economy", "sharing economy", and "access economy"[1].

Database analysis

This study employs the Scopus database, a leading scientific citation platform developed by Elsevier in 2004. With broad coverage, rigorous selection, and continuous updates, Scopus ensures high academic quality across diverse sources, such as journal articles, books, and conference proceedings (Singh et al., 2021). As of February 2025, it indexes over 100 million

records with contributions from approximately 20.5 million authors, making it a reliable and appropriate source for conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) (Baas et al., 2020).

We included any type of original publication (books, journal articles, conference proceedings, etc.) and all types of studies (observational, interventional, methodological, and theoretical). The exclusion criteria were: (1) not written in English; (2) not focusing on location-based workers; (3) not relevant to Asia; and (4) full text not accessible.

Screening

This study followed the PRISMA model (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), a reporting guideline that has been published and is widely applied in systematic review research (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA framework is broadly used to ensure transparency and reliability in the synthesis process, thereby providing a rigorous assessment of the methodology and the appropriateness of the included data. In this study, to enhance scientific rigor and suitability, the authors applied the PRISMA Flow Diagram during the selection process, as illustrated in Figure 1.
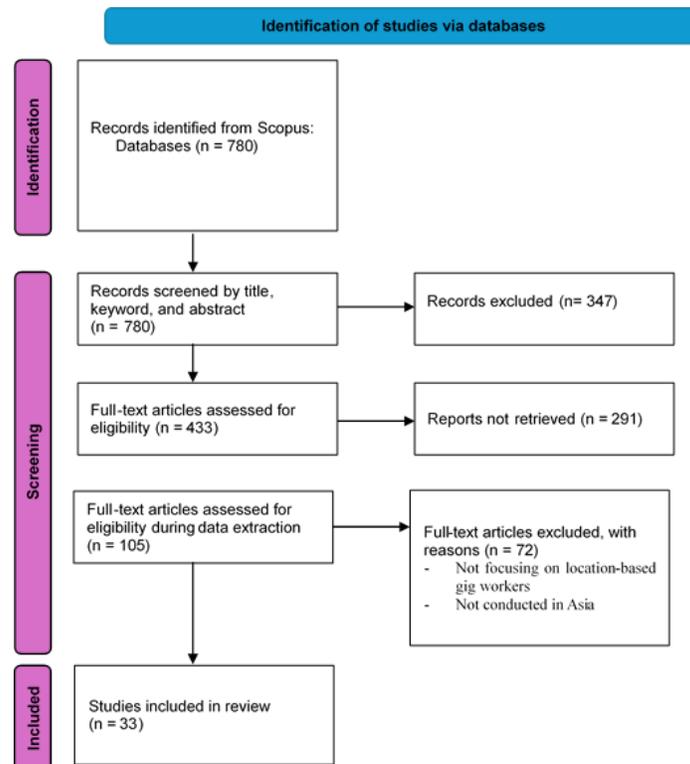

Fig. 1. Flowchart of the studies included in this systematic review.

Figure 1 illustrates the study selection process following the PRISMA guidelines. The initial search in Scopus yielded 780 records that were screened. After removing duplicates, 433 records were screened by title, keywords, and abstracts, of which 347 were excluded as irrelevant. A

total of 142 full-text articles were retrieved; however, 37 could not be accessed. Thus, 105 articles were assessed for their eligibility. During this stage, 72 articles were excluded for reasons such as not focusing on location-based gig workers, lacking empirical data, or not addressing the three key factors under investigation. Ultimately, 33 studies met the criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. Two authors independently screened and assessed the included studies. Any disagreements regarding inclusion were discussed until a consensus was reached. This process ensured transparency and minimised subjective bias in the study selection.

Theoretical framework

This study draws on labour process theory (LPT) to interpret the dynamics of gig work in Asia. Originally developed by Braverman (1974), LPT emphasises how technology and managerial strategies are used to control workers, often reducing their autonomy. In the platform economy, algorithms, rating systems, and digital surveillance function as new forms of managerial control (Kellogg et al., 2020; Rosenblat 2016). These mechanisms explain how platform technology and algorithms shape the working conditions and risks for gig workers.

Simultaneously, LPT recognises the constant tension between control and worker agency. Gig workers are not passive recipients of platform power; they actively develop strategies to adapt, negotiate, and resist, both individually and collectively (Wood et al., 2019). Moreover, the broader institutional and policy environment mediates this labour process, either reinforcing platform dominance or providing protection that enables workers to secure fairer conditions. Thus, LPT provides a useful lens for understanding the interplay of technology, regulation, and worker resistance that emerged from this systematic review.

Results

Bibliometric analysis

The trend of the selected articles closely mirrors the overall trajectory of the publications on the gig economy. Both sets of studies show a sharp increase after 2020, peaking in 2024, before slightly declining in 2025. This parallel pattern indicates that the filtering and selection processes were consistent with the broader research dynamics of the field. Although the number of selected articles represents only a small fraction of the total, their temporal alignment with the general trend demonstrates that this review successfully captured the most relevant contributions in the growing body of literature.
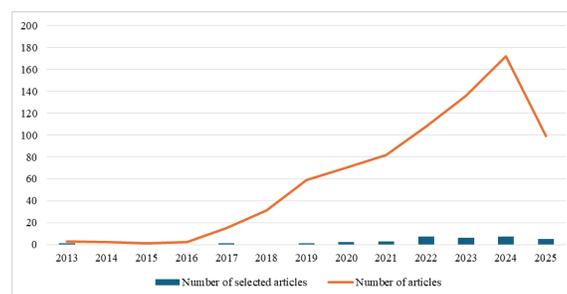
Fig. 2. Number of articles on the gig economy and number of selected studies included in the review. Source: Synthesised by the authors based on data from Scopus (retrieved at 17:50, August 15, 2025).

Qualitative analysis

Our thematic analysis identified three main dimensions that capture the multidimensional impact of the gig economy on workers: (i) platform technology and algorithms, (ii) policies and legal frameworks, and (iii) workers' adaptation and resistance (Table 1). These dimensions were derived from a set of subthemes aggregated into broader themes, reflecting both the structural constraints of digital labour and workers' agency in navigating them.

Dimension	Theme	Subtheme	Example of extracted data from original study for each dimension
Platform technology & algorithms	Algorithmic management	Ratings Incentives	Ratings/reviews are core to performance control, linked to rewards, penalties, or deactivation (Christiaens, 2025; Dong et al., 2025). Even small rating drops reduce income and drive burnout(Christiaens, 2025). Negative feedback and opaque systems create stress, anxiety, and reinforce bias or unfair pay(Dong et al., 2025; Graham et al., 2025). Time-bonus and cumulative bonus schemes push risky driving (Hsu et al., 2024). Incentives are dynamic/personalized; piecework plus bonuses encourages unsafe speed and overwork (Graham et al., 2025; Hsu et al., 2024) Reward difficulty—not reward amount—extends working hours; dependence and volatile demand raise pressure (Lin et al., 2023). Tipping policies (e.g., DoorDash) alter fairness and reduce net earnings (Chong et al., 2024). Better promotions improve retention, while bonus cuts lead to "survival strategies" (Le Van et al., 2022; Mustika & Savirani, 2021) Algorithmic order allocation itself acts as indirect incentives/rewards(Wu et al., 2022).
		Task allocation Opacity	Platforms allocate tasks automatically, workers must accept or reject rides blindly (Christiaens, 2025; Schor et al., 2020). Acceptance/cancellation rates are tracked; low rates risk deactivation(Schor et al., 2020). Order distribution is uneven; algorithm gives priority to certain workers (Christiaens, 2025).Workers express distrust of surge pricing, suspecting artificial manipulation (Karanović et al., 2021). Algorithms operate as a "black box"; workers face uncertainty over surge pricing and job assignment (Christiaens, 2025; Schor et al., 2020). Platforms use informational asymmetries to maintain control(Schor et al., 2020). Gamification and nudges push workers to work longer, but the rules are unclear (Christiaens, 2025; Schor et al., 2020).
		Algorithmic workload pressure	Platforms use real-time electronic monitoring to track riders' movements, reducing autonomy and increasing stress(Dong et al., 2025). Constant monitoring creates "anxious freedom," where riders feel nominally free but heavily pressured (Dong et al., 2025). Toters in Lebanon applies automated controls (order assignment, routing, account blocking) that drivers perceive as surveillance and policing (Atwood, 2024). Monitoring systems link data collection to punishment, fostering fear and pracy concerns (Dong et al., 2025). Algorithms compress delivery times and enforce strict deadlines, forcing riders to rush (Dong et al., 2025). Heavy workloads and repetitive tasks designed by algorithms cause physical and mental exhaustion (Dong et al., 2025). Syrian Toters drivers feel "trapped," as automation demands long hours with low pay, undermining promised flexibility(Atwood, 2024). Continuous optimization of tasks sustains high intensity labor and reduces job satisfaction (Dong et al., 2025; Schor et al., 2020).
Policies & legal frameworks	Labor protection gaps	a. Misclassification b. Labor rights	Most platform workers are classified as "self-employed" or "delivery partners," which excludes them from basic labor protections such as minimum wage, working-time limits, and occupational safety. This classification allows platforms to avoid legal responsibilities and shift economic risks onto workers (Graham et al., 2025; Parwez, 2022; Parwez & Ranjan, 2021; Pyo et al., 2023). Attempts to reclassify gig workers as "employees" have emerged, but platforms often lobby against such reforms to maintain the current model, resulting in ongoing legal disputes (Doorn, 2020; Graham et al., 2025) Platforms classify gig workers as independent contractors, excluding them from basic labor protections such as minimum wage, working hours, and paid leave(Chen et al., 2022; Muralidhar et al., 2022) Legal ambiguity allows platforms to shift risks to workers while avoiding obligations under employment law (Chan, 2025; Huang, 2023; Novianto et al., 2023) Platform exit cases (e.g., Foodora in Canada) show workers lose jobs instantly without severance or labor rights safeguards (Lee, 2023). Drivers' dependence on apps (e.g., Ola, Uber) reinforces precarity—workers accept poor conditions due to lack of alternative employment (Muralidhar et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2022). Short-term contracts and irregular schedules make workers easily replaceable, with unstable income and limited collective bargaining power. As a result, they face unsafe conditions and difficulty sustaining livelihoods (Christie & Ward, 2023; Ķešāne & Spurina, 2024; Maury, 2024; Parwez, 2022).
		Social security	In Indonesia, Go-Jek drivers are treated as informal workers and must pay full BPJS contributions; many do not enroll due to low income and lack of awareness (Yuniastuti et al., 2019) Even with BPJS cooperation, costs remain the driver's responsibility, leaving them without effective protection (Yuniastuti et al., 2019)

Table 1. Summary of the three dimensions of the multidimensional impacts on workers and the themes identified in this study.

Studies have shown that platform technology and algorithms control workers through ratings, incentives, and opaque task allocation. Even small rating drops reduce income or risk deactivation (Christiaens, 2025; Dong et al., 2025), while dynamic bonuses push for longer hours and risky driving (Graham et al., 2025; Hsu et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2023). Algorithms act as a "black box", with uneven distribution and suspected surge manipulation eroding trust (Karanović et al., 2021; Schor et al., 2020). Real-time monitoring compresses delivery times, creating an "anxious freedom" (Atwood, 2024; Dong et al., 2025).

Policies and legal frameworks show significant gaps. Most gig workers are classified as independent contractors, excluding them from minimum wage and safety protections (Graham et al., 2025; Parwez, 2022; Pyo et al., 2023). Platforms shift insurance costs to drivers, causing low enrolment (Novianto et al., 2023; Yuniastuti et al., 2019), while collective bargaining remains weak and mobilisation faces retaliation (Lee, 2023; Wu et al., 2022).

Despite these constraints, workers adapt. Collective organising appears in paguyuban groups or Foodpanda strikes (Chan, 2025; Ekdale & Aidoo, 2024; Mustika & Savirani, 2021), while individuals use multi-homing and build algorithmic literacy through online communities (Atwood, 2024; Graham et al., 2025; Schor et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2025; Newlands, 2024; Yu et al., 2022).

Overall, platforms expand flexible work but deepen surveillance and exclusion of workers. Workers' resilience is evident; however, without institutional reforms in labour law and social protection, these strategies remain fragile.

Discussion

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports and extends the labour process theory (LPT) in the context of the gig economy. LPT argues that technology reinforces managerial control, as evident in how platforms use algorithms, customer ratings, and GPS surveillance to allocate, monitor, and discipline workers. These mechanisms erode autonomy despite promises of "flexibility."

Workers must invest greater effort to maintain access to work, while employers withdraw from commitments such as job security, career advancement, fair wages and benefits (Omidi et al., 2023). However, LPT also highlights the tension between control and agency. Practices such as multi-homing, solidarity in informal groups, and sharing tactics to counter algorithms show that workers are not passive but actively negotiate and resist platform power. This study reaffirms LPT's relevance of LPT in the digital era by demonstrating how traditional labour control is reconfigured through technology. Simultaneously, it underscores that struggles for autonomy and improved conditions remain central to gig labour relations and modern employment.

First, platform technology and algorithms are powerful tools for labour control. Rating systems, incentive schemes, and opaque task allocation mechanisms ensure constant worker compliance, whereas real-time surveillance compresses delivery times and heightens stress (Christiaens, 2025; Dong et al., 2025; Hsu et al., 2024). These practices exemplify what Kellogg et al. (2020) call "digital Taylorism", where nominal flexibility conceals the deepening asymmetry of power. While such systems increase efficiency, they also generate significant social costs, including burnout, distrust, and erosion of autonomy.

Second, policies and legal frameworks shape the extent of platform control. Across Asia, most gig workers are classified as independent contractors, leaving them outside the scope of minimum wage, occupational safety, and collective bargaining rights (Lee, 2023; Wu et al., 2022). Social protection schemes, where they exist, are largely financed by workers themselves, as in the case of Go-Jek drivers in Indonesia (Yuniastuti et al. 2019). This reflects Kalleberg's (2012) notion of a "legal void" in non-standard work: while platforms withdraw from employer obligations, national welfare systems remain too weak to compensate. Compared with European contexts, such as Spain's Ley Rider, the Asian setting underscores the urgent need for regulatory innovation around algorithmic transparency, shared welfare responsibility, and recognition of collective rights (Vieira & Mendonça, 2025).

Third, workers' adaptation and resistance demonstrate that they are not passive recipients of platform power. Collective mobilisations, such as the Foodpanda strikes in Hong Kong or paguyuban associations in Indonesia, illustrate solidarity under constrained conditions (Chan, 2025; Mustika & Savirani, 2021). At the individual level, multi-homing and algorithmic literacy represent everyday strategies for mitigating dependency and reclaiming partial control (Newlands, 2024; Yu et al., 2022). However, these practices remain fragile, easily undermined by fragmentation, retaliation, and weak institutional protections. This resonates with Scott's (1985) concept of "everyday resistance", highlighting workers' creativity and their structural limits.

Taken together, the findings reveal a contradictory reality: platforms expand access to flexible employment but embed workers in systems of surveillance, legal exclusion and economic dependency. Workers respond with resilience; however, these strategies cannot substitute structural protections. Building on LPT, this study argues that the struggle over control and autonomy remains central to platform labour relations in Asia's Global South. To move toward a more sustainable future of work, reforms are needed to close legal gaps, extend social protection, and rebalance the power between platforms and workers.

Limitation

This study has some limitations. First, the review relied mainly on English-language publications indexed in Scopus, which may have excluded valuable local research and grey literature. Second, the analysis narrows attention to three main dimensions—platform technology and algorithms, policies and legal frameworks, and workers' adaptation and resistance—potentially overlooking other relevant aspects, such as health outcomes or gender dynamics. Third, the heterogeneity of national contexts in Asia, with diverse legal systems, cultural factors, and economic structures, limits the comparability of findings across countries in Asia. Finally, the rapidly changing nature

of digital platforms means that some findings may quickly become outdated as new technologies, regulations, or worker strategies emerge.

Implications

This review highlights several urgent implications for policy. Governments should address worker misclassification, as most platforms classify workers as independent contractors, excluding them from minimum wage, occupational safety, and paid leave (Chen et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2022; Pyo et al., 2023). Social security schemes also need substantial reform, since current arrangements often shift the full cost of contributions onto workers, leading to low enrolment and ineffective protection for workers. Cost-sharing models, where platforms, workers, and the state jointly contribute, as suggested in Indonesia, offer a more sustainable approach (Yuniastuti et al., 2019; Novianto et al., 2023). Collective bargaining rights require stronger legal recognition because current exclusions leave workers reliant on fragile informal groups, and strikes organised via messaging apps are frequently met with retaliation (Wu et al., 2022; Chan, 2025). Finally, policymakers should regulate algorithmic transparency and fairness, ensuring that opaque systems of task allocation, ratings, and incentives do not undermine trust, autonomy, or income stability (Christiaens 2025; Schor et al. 2020).

Future studies should examine how ratings, incentives, and tipping systems shape income volatility, burnout, and risky behaviour among workers over time (Dong et al., 2025; Hsu et al., 2024). Comparative research is also needed on task allocation and opacity, particularly on how uneven order distribution and suspected manipulation of surge pricing affect workers' trust and decision-making across different platforms (Christiaens, 2025; Karanović et al., 2021; Schor et al., 2020). Another promising avenue concerns the effects of algorithmic workload pressure, where continuous optimisation and real-time monitoring contribute to psychological strain and health risks, including the condition of "anxious freedom" (Dong et al., 2025; Atwood, 2024). In terms of institutional arrangements, scholars should further investigate the consequences of legal ambiguity and misclassification, focusing on how workers experience precarity when treated as contractors and the vulnerabilities created by sudden platform exits (Lee, 2023; Graham et al., 2025). Attention should also be paid to social security and collective bargaining, evaluating the sustainability of hybrid insurance models, and the effectiveness of informal associations—such as paguyuban communities in Indonesia or WhatsApp groups—in enhancing worker resilience (Yuniastuti et al., 2019; Mustika & Savirani, 2021; Chan, 2025). Finally, more research is required on workers' adaptation and resistance, especially multi-homing and algorithmic literacy as strategies of everyday resistance, and on how institutional protections can transform these fragile practices into more durable forms of empowerment (Newlands, 2024; Yu et al., 2022; Schor et al., 2020).

Conclusion

In summary, this study reviewed the multidimensional impact of the gig economy on location-based workers in Asia, emphasising three key dimensions: platform technology and algorithms, policies and legal frameworks, and workers' adaptive strategies. Applying labour process theory, this review highlights how digital platforms reinforce labour control while workers remain active agents of resistance. Ultimately, building a fairer and more sustainable gig

economy requires institutional reforms—particularly stronger social protection, collective bargaining rights, and algorithmic transparency— so that technological innovation progresses in parallel with workers' welfare and long-term security..

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[1] (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("gig economy" OR "platform economy" OR "digital labor" OR "digital labour" OR "on-demand economy" OR "sharing economy" OR "access economy") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("worker*")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , "all"))