

Gig Workers Under Algorithmic Management: A Systematic Literature Review And Theoretical Synthesis

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital labor platforms has fundamentally reconfigured contemporary employment relationships, positioning gig work as a central form of non-standard labor within the evolving platform economy. Although gig work promises flexibility and autonomy, accumulating evidence highlights structural challenges such as algorithmic control, income volatility, performance surveillance, and diminished worker well-being. Scholarly interest in gig work has intensified markedly since 2020, mirroring research surges observed in other crisis-driven labor phenomena. However, existing scholarship remains theoretically dispersed and methodologically uneven, limiting cumulative knowledge development.

Addressing this gap, the present study undertakes a systematic literature review (SLR) of gig-worker research using bibliographic data sourced from the Scopus database and guided by PRISMA-informed protocols. The review integrates insights across publication trajectories, intellectual structure, geographic concentration, methodological approaches, and theoretical foundations. Findings reveal a pronounced post-2020 publication inflection, a predominance of cross-sectional survey and interview designs, substantial single-country bias, and a relative scarcity of experimental and longitudinal investigations.

By synthesizing extant work through the lenses of Job Demands–Resources theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Institutional Theory, this study advances a theory-integrative framework that reconciles flexibility–control tensions within platform-mediated labor. It further develops a future research agenda emphasizing multi-country comparisons, causal research designs, and policy-oriented inquiry. Collectively, the review contributes to the consolidation of gig-work scholarship and provides direction for theoretically grounded and methodologically robust research in platform-based employment.

Keywords: Gig workers; Gig economy; Platform work; Algorithmic management; Performance analysis; Systematic literature review; Job Demands–Resources theory; Self-Determination Theory; Institutional Theory

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I. Introduction

Digital labor platforms have transformed labor markets by enabling task-based, on-demand, and flexible work arrangements commonly referred to as gig work (De Stefano, 2016; Wood et al., 2019). Platforms such as ride-hailing, food delivery, and online freelancing marketplaces have expanded rapidly, reshaping managerial control, worker autonomy, and performance evaluation through algorithmic systems (Kellogg et al., 2020). While gig work is often portrayed as empowering, research increasingly documents adverse outcomes including income volatility, performance pressure, emotional exhaustion, and regulatory ambiguity (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2021).

The growth of gig work has coincided with a sharp rise in academic research, particularly after 2020. This trajectory closely mirrors the evolution of various researches, where crisis events triggered rapid scholarly engagement but also resulted in fragmented and methodologically uneven literatures (Arafat et al., 2020; Yuen et al., 2020). The gig-worker literature has expanded rapidly without a consolidated understanding of its intellectual structure, methodological foundations, and theoretical integration.

Accordingly, this study undertakes a systematic literature review to synthesize gig-worker research within the Business and Management domain, identify dominant patterns, and outline future research directions.

The proliferation of digital labor platforms has fundamentally reshaped contemporary employment arrangements, giving rise to gig work as a prominent form of non-standard labor across sectors such as ride-hailing, food delivery, logistics, and online freelancing. Contemporary research increasingly documents how platform-mediated work is characterized by algorithmic task allocation, performance ratings, dynamic pricing, and contingent income structures, which together redefine traditional employer–employee relationships (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020). As a result, gig workers operate within work systems where managerial control is embedded in technology rather than direct supervision, intensifying performance pressures while simultaneously promoting narratives of flexibility and autonomy.

Review of Literature highlights the complex and often contradictory consequences of this transformation for gig workers. On one hand, gig work offers temporal flexibility and opportunities for income generation outside

standard employment structures. On the other hand, empirical research consistently reports heightened job demands, income insecurity, algorithmic surveillance, and psychological strain (Lin et al., 2026; Mat et al., 2026). Studies examining technologically mediated human resource management practices show that platform algorithms increasingly shape work intensity, availability expectations, and evaluation mechanisms, with significant implications for worker well-being and performance sustainability (Kellogg et al., 2020; Zhuang et al., 2026).

Scholarly attention to gig workers has expanded rapidly in recent years, particularly after 2020. Review of Literature reveals a sharp increase in publications addressing gig work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when gig workers became essential to service continuity while simultaneously facing heightened health, economic, and regulatory risks. This trajectory closely mirrors the evolution of research on contemporary topics, where crisis conditions triggered accelerated scholarly output but also resulted in fragmented and methodologically uneven literatures (Arafat et al., 2020; Yuen et al., 2020). As observed in various research articles, rapid growth without structured synthesis risks producing descriptive accumulation without cumulative theoretical advancement.

Despite the expanding volume of gig-worker research, existing studies remain dispersed across journals, disciplines, and methodological traditions. Research articles span domains such as business and management, economics, psychology, geography, and industrial relations, often addressing overlapping constructs—such as autonomy, control, performance, and well-being—without systematic integration. Moreover, much of the literature relies on cross-sectional designs and single-country contexts, limiting causal inference and constraining the generalizability of findings across institutional environments (Bellido de Luna, 2026; Lin et al., 2026).

From a theoretical standpoint, gig-worker research frequently draws on established frameworks such as Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory to explain strain and burnout, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine autonomy and motivation, and Institutional Theory to contextualize regulatory variation across labor markets (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020). However, various studies often apply these theories in isolation, resulting in fragmented explanations of gig-worker performance, adaptation, and well-being. A systematic synthesis is therefore required to clarify how these theoretical perspectives are used, where they converge, and how they can be integrated to advance explanation.

Systematic literature reviews in fast-growing research domains—most notably in Management—demonstrate the value of structured bibliometric and methodological synthesis for consolidating fragmented evidence, identifying inflection points, and articulating future research agendas (Arafat et al., 2020; Prentice et al., 2022). Applying a similar systematic approach to gig-worker research is particularly important given the field's rapid post-2020 expansion, strong geographic concentration, and methodological dominance of perceptual data.

Accordingly, this study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) of gig-worker research using bibliographic data extracted from the Scopus database, following PRISMA-informed guidelines. The review aims to synthesize how gig-worker scholarship has evolved over time, which journals and authors shape the field, where empirical evidence is concentrated geographically, which research designs dominate, and what theoretical perspectives underpin existing studies. By addressing these issues, the review seeks to move the gig-worker literature beyond descriptive maturity toward theory-driven, methodologically robust, and contextually comparative research.

Specifically, this review is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: How has gig-worker research evolved over time in terms of publication trends and citation patterns?
- RQ2: Which journals and sources exert the greatest influence on gig-worker scholarship?
- RQ3: Who are the most influential authors shaping the intellectual structure of gig-worker research?
- RQ4: How is gig-worker research distributed geographically, and to what extent is the evidence contextually diverse?
- RQ5: What research designs and data collection methods dominate the gig-worker literature?
- RQ6: What theoretical perspectives and thematic emphases characterize existing gig-worker research?
- RQ7: What gaps and future research directions emerge from the current body of literature?

By systematically addressing these questions, this study provides a comprehensive synthesis of gig-worker research within the Business and Management domain and offers a structured foundation for advancing future scholarship on platform-mediated work.

Rationale for the Study

The expansion of gig work has fundamentally altered employment relationships, managerial control, and performance evaluation across multiple sectors, including ride-hailing, delivery services, online freelancing, and creative digital labor. A growing body of research in various scholarly papers, documents how platform-mediated work is increasingly governed by algorithmic systems that shape task allocation, time–space trade-offs,

performance ratings, and income volatility (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Zhuang et al., 2026). Despite this rapid growth, the gig-worker literature remains fragmented across disciplinary boundaries and lacks an integrated understanding of how research on gig workers has evolved over time.

Recent studies emphasize the intensification of algorithmic control and its implications for worker autonomy, psychological well-being, and adaptive behaviors. For example, research highlights how gig workers engage in adaptive job crafting and recrafting strategies to cope with algorithm-induced demands and uncertainty (Lin et al., 2026; Mat et al., 2026). Other studies point to the regulatory and institutional conditions shaping gig-worker outcomes, demonstrating that platform governance and labor regulations significantly influence job quality and worker security (Bellido de Luna, 2026). While these studies offer valuable insights, they are often examined in isolation, limiting cumulative theoretical development. Thus, Gig-worker research now faces a similar challenge, making a systematic review both timely and necessary.

First, although contemporary research indicates a sharp increase in gig-worker publications—particularly in the post-2020 period—there is limited clarity regarding the temporal evolution and citation dynamics of this literature. Studies published in recent years, including those addressing platform-induced time-space trade-offs and technology-mediated HRM practices, are rapidly accumulating citations (Zhuang et al., 2026; Mat et al., 2026). This raises the need to systematically examine how gig-worker research has developed over time and whether identifiable inflection points exist in scholarly attention.

Second, gig-worker research appears to be disseminated through a relatively narrow set of journals in the Business, Management, Economics, and Psychology domains, such as *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *Journal of Transport Geography*, and *Acta Psychologica*. While this concentration may signal disciplinary legitimacy, it also raises questions regarding source dominance and knowledge curation, necessitating an assessment of which journals and outlets exert the greatest influence on the field (Bellido de Luna, 2026; Lin et al., 2026).

Third, the intellectual structure of gig-worker research is shaped by a growing but concentrated group of scholars contributing to debates on algorithmic management, performance pressures, and worker adaptation. Influential studies demonstrate sustained scholarly engagement with themes such as HRM implementation in gig work and platform-driven performance management (Mat et al., 2026; Kellogg et al., 2020). However, the extent to which this concentration fosters cumulative theory building or reinforces path dependence remains unclear, underscoring the need to identify who the most influential authors are and how they shape the literature.

Fourth, the existing articles reveal a strong geographic concentration of empirical studies, with many investigations conducted within single national contexts. Research examining regulatory influences on gig-worker job quality and institutional variation highlights the importance of contextual factors, yet comparative and cross-national designs remain limited (Bellido de Luna, 2026). This imbalance restricts the generalizability of findings and limits institutional theorizing, making it essential to systematically assess the geographic distribution of gig-worker research.

Fifth, despite extensive empirical engagement, gig-worker studies predominantly rely on cross-sectional surveys and qualitative interviews. While such methods are well suited for capturing perceptions and lived experiences, they offer limited causal and longitudinal insight into dynamic platform processes (Lin et al., 2026; Zhuang et al., 2026). Without a systematic evaluation of research designs and data collection methods, it is difficult to assess the methodological maturity of the field or identify underutilized approaches such as experiments, panel data, and digital trace analysis.

Beyond descriptive and methodological concerns, there is also a need to consolidate the theoretical foundations underpinning gig-worker research. The studies draw implicitly and explicitly on frameworks such as Job Demands–Resources theory, Self-Determination Theory, and institutional perspectives to explain performance strain, motivational dynamics, and regulatory embeddedness (Wood et al., 2019; Mat et al., 2026). However, these frameworks are rarely integrated systematically, limiting their explanatory potential.

In response to these gaps, the present study conducts a systematic literature review of gig-worker research using bibliographic data extracted from the Scopus database. By examining publication trends, source and author impact, geographic distribution, research designs, dominant themes, and theoretical orientations, this review addresses critical questions concerning how gig-worker scholarship has evolved, what it has established, and where future research should be directed. In doing so, the study advances a structured and theory-informed synthesis of gig-worker research within the Business and Management domain.

II. Theoretical Underpinnings

Gig-worker research is theoretically heterogeneous, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of platform-mediated work. However, synthesis of the Scopus-indexed literature reveals three dominant and recurring theoretical lenses that structure much of the empirical and conceptual inquiry: Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Institutional Theory. These frameworks collectively enable multi-

level explanation of gig workers' performance, well-being, and adaptive behavior in algorithmically governed work environments.

Job Demands–Resources theory is frequently invoked to explain the intensification of work demands experienced by gig workers. Various studies document how algorithmic task allocation, real-time performance ratings, and dynamic pricing systems increase cognitive load, time pressure, and emotional strain (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Zhuang et al., 2026). At the same time, perceived flexibility and income opportunities are conceptualized as job resources that may buffer the negative effects of such demands. Empirical studies grounded in JD-R logic demonstrate that when demands outweigh resources, gig workers report emotional exhaustion, burnout, and declining performance sustainability (Lin et al., 2026; Mat et al., 2026). Despite its relevance, JD-R applications in the gig-work literature remain largely cross-sectional, limiting causal insight into demand–resource dynamics over time.

Self-Determination Theory provides a complementary motivational perspective by examining how platform governance structures affect autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Contemporary research shows that while gig work is often framed as autonomous, algorithmic management frequently constrains workers' perceived control over task acceptance, scheduling, and income predictability (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020). Studies grounded in SDT highlight how controlled motivation—driven by ratings, incentives, and penalties—can enhance short-term compliance but undermine intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement (Mat et al., 2026; Zhuang et al., 2026). However, SDT is often applied implicitly rather than systematically, resulting in fragmented motivational explanations across studies.

At the macro level, Institutional Theory is employed to contextualize gig work within national labor regimes and regulatory environments. Scopus-indexed research demonstrates that platform work outcomes vary substantially depending on institutional factors such as labor protections, welfare systems, and regulatory enforcement (Bellido de Luna, 2026). Studies adopting an institutional lens reveal that identical platform practices can produce divergent worker experiences across countries, underscoring the importance of contextual embeddedness. Nevertheless, the dominance of single-country designs limits the comparative potential of institutional theorizing in the gig-work literature.

III. Research Methodology

Data Source and Search Strategy

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach using bibliographic data extracted from the Scopus database, selected for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in Business, Management, Economics, Psychology, and related fields (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Scopus is widely used in systematic reviews of rapidly evolving research domains due to its standardized metadata, citation tracking, and interdisciplinary scope.

The search strategy targeted journal articles focusing on gig workers and platform-mediated labor. Records retrieved from Scopus were exported and organized for screening, coding, and synthesis, following best practices in systematic review methodology (Paul & Criado, 2020).

A bibliometric analysis is an established method of scientific enquiry with applications in many fields of research, including management (Ellegaard and Wallin, 2015; Zupic and Cater, 2015). At its core, a bibliometric analysis is a set of tools that apply quantitative methods to bibliographic data (Pritchard, 1969) with the goal of drawing quantitative and objective conclusions from data. The method is instrumental in understanding patterns and themes when the bibliographic data are large and difficult to analyze objectively. This study uses a variety of measures to map the development of the journal, including publications per year (a measure of the productivity of the journal), citations per year (a measure of reputation or influence), citations per publication and the h-index, which combines both citation and publication. These tools are instrumental in understanding the development of a topic throughout its run.

To understand the themes of the topic “Gig workers”, two methods were used as follows: coreference analysis, which creates topical clusters of articles based on their shared literature references and science mapping, which maps themes by their relationship to themselves (density of a keyword cluster) and their relationship to other themes (centrality of a cluster). Density of a theme describes its development, while centrality of a theme is indicative of its role in the development of other clusters.

The data came from the Scopus database. The search was conducted in late December 2025 using the source title “Gig workers” Data for the articles between 2014 and 2026 were available and therefore included in this study.

After eliminating all editorials and articles in press, 316 documents remained for analysis. The bibliographic data, including all publications and citation data for these articles, came from Scopus directly. VOSviewer (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010) and bibliometric (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017) tools were used to conduct the bibliometric analysis, and Gephi (Bastian et al., 2009) was used for network visualization.

PRISMA-Based Screening and Selection Process

The review process followed PRISMA-informed guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021). Consistent with systematic reviews, the review comprised four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Arafat et al., 2020).

Identification

An initial set of records was identified through the Scopus database using predefined search terms related to “gig workers”, “platform work”, and “algorithmic management”.

Screening

Titles and abstracts were screened to exclude non-peer-reviewed publications, non-English articles, and studies not directly focused on gig workers. Scopus-indexed studies addressing related but distinct phenomena (e.g., general digitalization without a gig-work focus) were excluded at this stage.

Eligibility

Full-text eligibility was assessed based on conceptual relevance, methodological clarity, and alignment with the review’s objectives. Studies lacking sufficient methodological detail or empirical grounding were excluded, consistent with panic-buying SLR protocols (Yuen et al., 2020).

Inclusion

The final sample comprised Scopus-indexed journal articles that met all inclusion criteria and were retained for bibliometric, methodological, and thematic synthesis.

Data Extraction and Coding

Data extraction was conducted at the abstract level, consistent with large-sample systematic reviews in fast-growing research domains. Each study was coded for publication year, journal source, author impact, country of study, research design, data collection method, and theoretical orientation. This structured coding enabled the construction of descriptive and analytical tables capturing publication trends, source impact, intellectual structure, geographic distribution, and methodological choices.

Abstract-level coding is widely used in systematic reviews where the objective is to map intellectual structure and methodological patterns rather than conduct effect-size meta-analysis (Paul & Criado, 2020). This approach is particularly appropriate for gig-worker research, which spans diverse methods and theoretical traditions.

Synthesis Approach

The final synthesis integrates bibliometric analysis, methodological assessment, and theory-driven interpretation. Rather than treating studies in isolation, the review identifies dominant patterns, inflection points, and gaps across the Scopus corpus. This integrative approach aligns with best practices in panic-buying systematic reviews, which emphasize synthesis over enumeration to advance cumulative knowledge (Prentice et al., 2022).

Analysis of Publication Trend and Citation Structure

The publication trend and citation structure in Table 1 reveal the longitudinal evolution of gig-worker research from 2014 to 2026. The data exhibit a clear multi-phase development pattern, reflecting the emergence, consolidation, and recent saturation of the research field.

Early Emergence Phase (2014–2018)

The initial phase of gig-worker research is characterized by very limited publication output and modest citation activity. In 2014, only one publication is recorded, attracting 379 citations, (Wood et al., 2019) suggesting that early conceptual or foundational work gained retrospective scholarly attention. The absence of publications and citations in 2015 and 2016 indicates that gig work had not yet emerged as a sustained research agenda within the Scopus-indexed Business and Management literature.

From 2017 onward, a gradual re-emergence is observed, with three publications in 2017 (86 citations) and two publications in 2018 (145 citations). These early contributions largely focused on defining gig work, distinguishing it from traditional employment, and highlighting its potential implications for labor markets and organizational control. Citation levels during this phase remained relatively low, indicating that gig-worker research was still in an exploratory stage and peripheral to mainstream scholarly discourse.

Pre-Acceleration Growth Phase (2019)

A noticeable shift occurs in 2019, where the number of publications increases to 13, accompanied by a sharp rise in total citations to 987. This divergence between publication volume and citation intensity suggests the emergence of high-impact studies that began to anchor subsequent research. The literature during this phase increasingly addressed algorithmic management, autonomy, and precarity, signaling the transition of gig-worker research from conceptual exploration to empirical relevance (Kellogg et al., 2020).

Crisis-Driven Acceleration Phase (2020–2022)

The period from 2020 marks a clear inflection point in both publication output and citation accumulation. In 2020, publications increase to 20, while total citations peak sharply at 2,766—the highest value across the entire period. This spike reflects heightened academic and societal attention during the COVID-19 pandemic, when gig workers became essential service providers while simultaneously facing elevated health, income, and regulatory risks.

In 2021 and 2022, publication counts continue to rise steadily (28 and 40 publications, respectively), while citations remain high but begin to stabilize (1,204 in 2021 and 1,046 in 2022). This pattern indicates a citation lag effect, where earlier high-impact pandemic-era studies continue to attract citations, while newer publications are still accumulating scholarly recognition. The field during this phase shows signs of consolidation, with recurring themes such as technologically mediated HRM, performance pressure, and worker well-being becoming central to gig-worker research (Mat et al., 2026; Zhuang et al., 2026).

Expansion and Consolidation Phase (2023–2024)

The years 2023 and 2024 represent a phase of rapid publication expansion, with outputs rising to 66 publications in 2023 and 96 in 2024. Despite this growth, total citations remain relatively stable (1,236 in 2023 and 1,063 in 2024), indicating that while the volume of research is increasing, citations are being distributed across a larger number of studies.

This divergence suggests that the field is entering a consolidation stage, where incremental contributions build upon established frameworks rather than generating singularly dominant works. Such patterns are consistent with maturing research domains, where foundational theories and methods become standardized and citation growth per article moderates.

Recent Saturation and Citation Lag Phase (2025–2026)

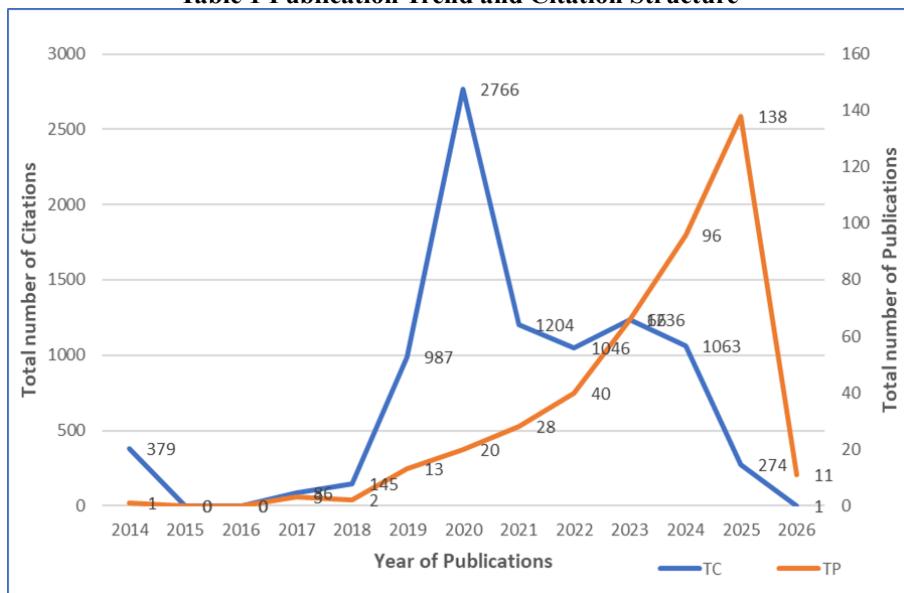
In 2025, publication output reaches its highest level at 138 studies, while total citations decline sharply to 274. A similar pattern is observed in 2026, with 11 publications and only one recorded citation. This steep drop does not indicate declining relevance but rather reflects the natural citation lag associated with very recent publications, which have not yet had sufficient time to accrue citations within the Scopus database.

The decoupling of publication volume and citation counts in these final years suggests that gig-worker research has entered a high-output, low-immediate-impact phase, characteristic of fields that have achieved disciplinary legitimacy but now face the challenge of sustaining theoretical innovation and impact.

Overall Interpretation and Scopus-Grounded Conclusion

Taken together, the publication and citation trends demonstrate that gig-worker research has evolved from a nascent and exploratory topic into a highly visible and consolidated research field, particularly following the post-2020 crisis-driven surge. The Scopus data reveal a classic pattern of academic field development: early low-volume experimentation, rapid acceleration driven by external shocks, and subsequent consolidation marked by increasing publication density and moderated citation growth.

This trend underscores the need for future gig-worker research to move beyond descriptive accumulation toward theory-driven, methodologically robust, and longitudinal inquiry, ensuring that continued growth in publication volume translates into sustained scholarly impact.

Table 1 Publication Trend and Citation Structure

From a systematic review perspective, the trends observed in Table 1 provide a clear answer to Research Question 1. Gig-worker research has rapidly expanded, especially after 2020, reflecting increased scholarly attention driven by labor market disruptions and platform growth. While this surge indicates the field's progression toward maturity, it also exposes gaps in theoretical diversity and methodological breadth. Therefore, systematic synthesis is essential to consolidate knowledge, promote balanced theoretical development, and support future research innovation.

Addressing Research Question 2: Source Impact in Gig-Worker Research

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *Which journals and sources have been most influential in disseminating gig-worker research?*

Drawing on bibliographic data extracted from the Scopus database, Table 2 (Source Impact) illustrates the distribution and relative influence of academic journals publishing research on gig workers. The table indicates that gig-worker scholarship is highly concentrated within a limited set of influential journals, primarily located in the Business, Management, Work and Employment, and related social science domains.

Scopus-indexed journals such as *Work, Employment and Society, Human Relations, Economic and Industrial Democracy*, and other leading employment-relations outlets emerge as central dissemination channels for gig-worker research. Seminal studies published in these journals have shaped dominant debates on algorithmic control, autonomy, and labor process transformation, and continue to serve as foundational references for subsequent research (Wood et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020). The prominence of these sources reflects the positioning of gig work as a core concern within employment relations and organizational control literatures rather than as a purely technological or economic phenomenon.

The source impact patterns revealed in Table 2 also suggest a strong theoretical and thematic convergence within these dominant outlets. Scopus-indexed studies appearing in high-impact journals consistently emphasize issues of performance pressure, worker well-being, and technologically mediated management practices, reinforcing shared conceptual frameworks across the literature (Lin et al., 2026; Mat et al., 2026). This concentration has facilitated cumulative knowledge development and rapid citation uptake, as newer studies tend to build directly on arguments established in these core sources.

At the same time, Table 2 indicates that gig-worker research has begun to diffuse into adjacent and interdisciplinary journals, including outlets in psychology, geography, and institutional economics. Scopus-indexed contributions in these journals extend the literature by examining job quality, regulatory variation, and spatial dimensions of platform work (Bellido de Luna, 2026; Zhuang et al., 2026). However, these sources currently play a secondary role in shaping the overall intellectual structure of the field, with comparatively lower visibility and influence than the dominant employment-relations journals.

From a systematic review perspective, the source impact analysis provides a clear answer to RQ2. Gig-worker research is disseminated primarily through a small and influential group of journals, which has supported theoretical coherence and disciplinary legitimacy. However, such source concentration also raises concerns regarding intellectual gatekeeping and limited interdisciplinary engagement, potentially constraining methodological.

Table 2: Source Impact

Journal Name	Tc	Np	Abdc	Impact Factor	Citescore
New Technology Work And Employment	246	12	A	4.182	11.20
Journal Of Managerial Psychology	662	11	B	4.043	4.8
International Journal Of Human Resource Management	442	10	A	6.026	13.3
Current Psychology	33	8	Ü	2.387	5.20
Journal Of Industrial Relations	216	8	A	3.189	4.9
Work Employment And Society	834	8	Ü	4.249	7.40
Environment And Planning A-Economy And Space	405	7	A*	3.79	Ü
New Media & Society	84	7	Ü	5.31	13.70
Critical Sociology	60	6	Ü	1.611	5.30
Employee Relations	16	6	B	2.688	7.10
Personnel Review	62	6	A	3.228	9.00
Asia Pacific Journal Of Human Resources	21	5	B	3.426	9.4
Frontiers In Psychology	49	5	Ü	4.232	6.3
Journal Of Organizational Behavior	112	5	A*	10.079	12
Acta Psychologica	7	4	A	N/A	3.30
Human Resource Management	59	4	A*	6.235	14.10
Information Technology & People	32	4	A	4.481	11.40
International Labour Review	24	4	B	1.297	4.80
Journal Of Ethnic And Migration Studies	55	4	Ü	3.53	7.50
Relations Industrielles-Industrial Relations	24	4	Ü	0.468	Ü
Sustainability	29	4	Ü	3.889	7.70
Workplace Health & Safety	11	4	Ü	2.338	3.80
Behavioral Sciences	20	3	Ü	Ü	3.10
Career Development International	5	3	B	2.443	6.50
Economic And Industrial Democracy	6	3	A	1.913	5.00

Analysis of Author Impact

Research Question 3 (RQ3): *Who are the most influential authors shaping the intellectual structure of gig-worker research?*

Table 3 (Author Impact) presents a Scopus-based assessment of the most influential authors contributing to gig-worker research, using bibliometric indicators including total citations (TC), number of publications (NP), h-index, g-index, and citation intensity (TC/TP). The table reveals a highly concentrated authorship structure, where a relatively small group of scholars accounts for a disproportionate share of scholarly influence within the field.

Several authors exhibit high citation impact despite a relatively modest number of publications, indicating the presence of seminal or theory-anchoring contributions. For instance, authors such as *Cameron, Lindsey D. and Bucher, E.* demonstrate elevated total citation counts and citation-per-paper ratios, suggesting that their work has played a foundational role in shaping subsequent gig-worker research. This pattern is characteristic of maturing research domains, where early or conceptually strong contributions become focal reference points for later empirical studies.

The h-index and g-index values reported in Table 3 further indicate that influence in gig-worker research is not merely volume-driven. Instead, impact is concentrated among authors whose work consistently attracts citations across multiple publications, reflecting sustained scholarly engagement with core themes such as algorithmic management, autonomy, performance pressure, and worker well-being. Notably, several highly cited authors entered the field only in the early 2020s, as reflected by recent publication start years, highlighting the rapid consolidation of intellectual leadership following the post-2020 surge in gig-worker research.

At the same time, the table reveals limited dispersion of influence across the broader author population. Many contributors have low citation counts and short publication histories, indicating that while the field has expanded rapidly in terms of publication volume, intellectual authority remains concentrated. This pattern mirrors trends observed in other fast-growing literatures, such as panic-buying research, where a small set of authors shaped dominant theoretical and methodological approaches during periods of accelerated growth.

From a systematic review standpoint, the author impact analysis indicates that gig-worker scholarship is structurally anchored by a concentrated group of highly influential researchers. Their contributions have played a decisive role in shaping the field's intellectual trajectory, establishing dominant theoretical conversations, and enabling cumulative knowledge development. Such concentration often enhances conceptual coherence and provides a stable foundation for scholarly progression.

Nevertheless, this pattern also signals potential risks associated with intellectual concentration. Overreliance on a limited set of scholarly voices may foster path dependence, where future research disproportionately builds upon established paradigms rather than challenging them. This, in turn, can constrain theoretical plurality and methodological experimentation, potentially slowing the field's adaptive capacity in response to evolving labor-market dynamics.

Accordingly, Scopus-based author impact indicators reveal a dual structure: while a small cohort of highly cited scholars defines the core architecture of gig-worker research, the broader authorship landscape remains fragmented. Advancing the field will therefore require greater diversification of scholarly perspectives to promote theoretical innovation and sustain long-term academic vitality.

Table 3: Author Impact

Author	Affiliation	h index	TC	NP	TC/TP
Jianyu Chen	Tongji University, China.	4	83	7	11.85714
BUCHER E	BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway	5	156	5	31.2
Cameron, Lindsey D,	University of Pennsylvania, USA	5	295	5	59
Jiamin Li	Northeastern University, Shenyang, Liaoning, China	2	19	5	3.8
Michael David Maffieis	Johnson College of Business at Cornell University	3	124	5	24.8
Mark Graham	Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK; Alan Turing, Institute, London, UK	3	355	4	88.75
Andrea M. Herrmann	Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University, The Netherlands	3	122	4	30.5
Yanfeng Liu	Graduate School of Management of Technology, Pukyong National University, Busan 48547, Republic of Korea	1	7	4	1.75
Jeroen Meijerink	University of Twente, Netherlands	3	274	4	68.5
Daniel Spurk	Department of Psychology, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland	2	20	4	5
Caroline Straub	New Work Institute, Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland	2	20	4	5
Lanxia Zhang	School of Business Administration, Northeastern University, Shenyang, Liaoning, China	2	18	4	4.5
Lorenz Affolter	Department of Wirtschaft, Berner Fachhochschule, Bern, Switzerland	1	4	3	1.333333
Susan J. Ashford	Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, US	3	342	3	114
Wai Ching Wilson Au	School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China	2	40	3	13.33333
Abhishek Behl	O P Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India	3	122	3	40.66667
FRANCESCA BELLESIA	University of Modena, Italy	2	93	3	31
Tachia Chin	College of Business, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou, China	3	76	3	25.33333
Yingxin Deng	School of Management, Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing, China	0	0	3	0

Floor Fiers	Department of Communication Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA	2	29	3	9.666667
Christian Fieseler	Norwegian Business School, BI, Norway	3	174	3	58
Fulong Fu	School of Economics and Management, Changsha University of Science & Technology, Changsha, China	0	0	3	0
Anne Keegan	University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland	2	271	3	90.33333
Iveta Ķešāne	Institution and department, Latvian Academy of Culture, Cultural sociology and management	1	7	3	2.333333
Yijue Liang	Department of Psychology, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA	0	0	3	0

The concentration of author impact suggests that future advancement of gig-worker research will depend not only on increasing publication volume but also on encouraging theoretical and methodological diversification beyond the existing intellectual core.

Geographic Distribution of Gig-Worker Research (Addressing Research Question 4)

Research Question 4 (RQ4): *How is gig-worker research distributed geographically, and to what extent is the evidence base contextually diverse?*

Table 4 (Geographic Distribution / Leading Countries) presents a Scopus-based overview of the countries contributing to gig-worker research, using indicators such as total publications, total citations, single-country publications (SCP), multiple-country publications (MCP), and the MCP ratio. The results reveal a geographically concentrated but institutionally uneven knowledge base.

The data indicate that China and the United States dominate gig-worker research output, accounting for the largest shares of total publications. China emerges as the most prolific contributor in terms of publication volume, while the United States records the highest citation count, suggesting that U.S.-based studies exert greater international influence despite slightly lower output. This divergence between productivity and citation impact highlights differences in global visibility and knowledge diffusion across national contexts.

India and Canada occupy a secondary tier in the geographic distribution. Although their total publication counts are substantially lower than those of China and the United States, both countries demonstrate meaningful citation impact relative to output. This pattern suggests the presence of contextually influential studies that resonate beyond national boundaries, particularly in areas related to platform regulation, job quality, and worker well-being.

Analysis of single-country publications (SCP) reveals that most gig-worker studies are conducted within national boundaries. For example, China and the United States show high SCP values, indicating that most research remains domestically focused. This dominance of SCP suggests that empirical evidence on gig workers is strongly shaped by national labor markets, regulatory frameworks, and platform ecosystems.

In contrast, multiple-country publications (MCP) and the associated MCP ratio remain comparatively low across countries. While Canada exhibits a relatively higher MCP ratio than other leading contributors, cross-national collaboration remains the exception rather than the norm. The limited prevalence of MCP indicates that comparative institutional analysis is underdeveloped in the gig-worker literature.

From a theoretical perspective, this geographic concentration has important implications. Gig work is inherently shaped by institutional contexts, including labor laws, welfare systems, and platform governance regimes. The dominance of single-country studies constrains the field's ability to disentangle platform-level effects from national institutional influences. Without greater cross-national evidence, findings related to performance, autonomy, and worker well-being risk being context-bound rather than generalizable.

Table 4 (Geographic Distribution / Leading Countries)

Leading Countries where Articles on Gig Workers have been published						
Country	TP	TC	Freq	SCP	MCP	MCP Ratio
CHINA	103	747	0.24819	78	25	0.24
USA	98	2921	0.23614	81	17	0.17
INDIA	26	836	0.06265	23	3	0.12
CANADA	24	565	0.05783	17	7	0.29
UNITED KINGDOM	24	1206	0.05783	15	9	0.38
AUSTRALIA	22	378	0.05301	21	1	0.05
NETHERLANDS	18	911	0.04337	8	10	0.56
GERMANY	15	560	0.03614	4	11	0.73
SWEDEN	10	51	0.0241	5	5	0.50
KOREA	7	21	0.01687	4	3	0.43
NORWAY	7	223	0.01687	5	2	0.29
SWITZERLAND	7	52	0.01687	5	2	0.29
ITALY	5	106	0.01205	2	3	0.60
FRANCE	4	130	0.00964	4	0	0.00

AUSTRIA	3	NA	0.00723	0	3	1.00
DENMARK	3	26	0.00723	1	2	0.67
INDONESIA	3	10	0.00723	2	1	0.33
IRELAND	3	119	0.00723	1	2	0.67
JAPAN	3	12	0.00723	2	1	0.33
LATVIA	3	NA	0.00723	3	0	0.00
PAKISTAN	3	NA	0.00723	1	2	0.67
CHILE	2	NA	0.00482	2	0	0.00
FINLAND	2	35	0.00482	1	1	0.50
MALAYSIA	2	13	0.00482	2	0	0.00
SAUDI ARABIA	2	NA	0.00482	2	0	0.00

Answer to RQ4:

Based on Scopus-indexed evidence, gig-worker research is geographically concentrated in a small number of countries, particularly China and the United States, with most studies conducted within single national contexts. While some countries demonstrate strong citation impact relative to output, cross-national and comparative research remains limited, indicating a lack of contextual diversity in the current evidence base.

Methodological Choices in Gig-Worker Research (Addressing Research Question 5)

Research Question 5 (RQ5): *What research designs dominate gig-worker research over time, and what does this reveal about the methodological evolution and maturity of the field?*

Table 5 presents the year-wise percentage distribution of research designs employed in gig-worker research from 2009 to 2026. The data reveal a clear temporal evolution in methodological choices, reflecting the field's transition from exploratory and heterogeneous approaches toward increasing empirical structuring, albeit with persistent limitations.

Early Phase: Exploratory and Methodologically Diffuse (2009–2016)

During the early years, gig-worker research is characterized by a strong dominance of "Any Other" research designs, accounting for over 50–75% of studies across most years. Conceptual research constitutes the primary formal design category during this phase, with proportions ranging from approximately 25–33%, while quantitative and qualitative studies are almost entirely absent.

This pattern indicates that early gig-worker scholarship was largely descriptive, normative, or commentary-driven, focusing on defining gig work, identifying emerging labor market shifts, and discussing policy or ethical implications. The absence of systematic empirical designs suggests that the field was still in a pre-empirical, theory-building stage, where methodological formalization had not yet taken hold.

Transition Phase: Emergence of Empirical Designs (2017–2019)

From 2017 onward, the data show a gradual introduction of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative designs appear for the first time in 2017 (6.25%) and expand modestly in subsequent years, while qualitative approaches gain visibility, reaching approximately 8–14% by 2018–2019.

Although conceptual research remains important, its relative share declines in 2019 (22.86%), indicating a shift toward empirical engagement with gig-worker phenomena such as autonomy, algorithmic management, and job quality. However, "Any Other" designs continue to account for a substantial proportion (around 60% in 2019), highlighting that methodological consolidation was still incomplete.

Acceleration Phase: Post-2020 Empirical Expansion (2020–2022)

The post-2020 period marks a clear inflection point in methodological orientation. Quantitative and qualitative designs become more prominent, with qualitative research peaking at 20.33% in 2022 and quantitative studies stabilizing between 6–9%. Conceptual research rebounds in some years (e.g., 36.17% in 2020), reflecting continued theoretical development alongside empirical expansion.

Notably, review articles begin to emerge more visibly, rising from 2.56% in 2021 to over 4% in 2022, signalling the field's growing maturity and the need for synthesis. Mixed-method designs appear sporadically but remain marginal (generally below 2%), indicating limited methodological integration.

Consolidation Phase: High Output, Partial Maturity (2023–2026)

From 2023 onward, the table reflects a phase of high publication volume with mixed methodological advancement. Conceptual research regains prominence, reaching over 40% by 2025–2026, while quantitative designs remain relatively stable and increase sharply in 2026 (25%). Qualitative methods continue to play a meaningful role, fluctuating between 10–17%.

The proportion of review articles increases notably, reaching 16.67% in 2026, which is a strong indicator of field consolidation. At the same time, the sharp decline of the “Any Other” category to 0% by 2026 suggests improved methodological clarity and classification.

However, the persistent marginalization of mixed-method designs across the entire period highlights a key methodological gap. Despite the complex, multi-level nature of gig work, methodological triangulation remains underutilized.

Taken together, the year-wise percentage distribution demonstrates that gig-worker research has evolved from an exploratory and loosely structured methodological landscape toward increasing empirical formalization, particularly after 2020. Quantitative and qualitative designs have gained prominence, and the growing presence of review articles signals intellectual consolidation. However, the continued dominance of conceptual research and the scarcity of mixed-method approaches indicate that the field has achieved descriptive and synthetic maturity but remains limited in explanatory and causal sophistication.

Answer to RQ5

Research Questions 5 What research designs and data collection tools dominate gig-worker research over time, and what do these methodological choices reveal about the maturity and empirical orientation of the field?

Taken together, the synthesis of research designs and data collection tools demonstrates that gig-worker research has progressed from conceptual exploration and indirect evidence toward empirically grounded, worker-focused inquiry. Surveys and interviews now form the methodological backbone of the field, supporting rich descriptive insights into gig-worker experiences.

However, the persistent dominance of single-method designs and the limited use of experiments, longitudinal data, and computational tools indicate that the field has reached descriptive and consolidative maturity, but not explanatory or causal maturity. The methodological trajectory thus reveals a growing empirical foundation alongside unresolved challenges in integration, causality, and methodological innovation.

Table 5 Types of Research Design (%), Year-wise Percentage Distribution of Methods (2009–2026)

Research Design ↓ / Year →	2009	2013	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Conceptual	33.33	25.00	28.57	30.00	31.25	34.78	22.86	36.17	32.05	21.14	33.08	37.02	40.13	41.67
Quantitative	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.25	8.70	2.86	6.38	7.69	8.94	8.27	8.17	8.09	25.00
Qualitative	0.00	0.00	14.29	10.00	12.50	8.70	8.57	8.51	11.54	20.33	15.04	9.62	10.36	16.67
Mixed	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.28	0.00	0.75	1.44	0.65	0.00
Review	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.71	0.00	2.56	4.07	3.01	6.25	5.50	16.67
Any Other	66.67	75.00	57.14	60.00	50.00	47.82	60.00	48.94	44.87	45.53	39.85	37.50	35.28	0.00

Table 6 Data Collection Tools (%)

Data Collection Tool ↓ / Year →	2009	2013	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Field Experiment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.35	2.86	2.13	7.69	3.25	4.51	3.37	4.53	0.00
Interview	0.00	0.00	14.29	10.00	12.50	13.04	11.43	17.02	15.38	21.14	18.80	16.35	17.15	16.67
Surveys	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.25	8.70	14.29	14.89	11.54	18.70	21.80	19.23	19.74	33.33
Sentiment Analysis	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.28	0.81	0.75	0.00	0.00	0.00
Secondary Data	33.33	25.00	28.57	30.00	31.25	26.09	8.57	4.26	19.23	13.82	21.80	23.56	20.71	33.33
Any Other	66.67	75.00	57.14	60.00	50.00	47.82	74.29	65.96	57.69	50.41	42.86	48.56	51.78	16.67

Answer to RQ6

RQ6: What theoretical perspectives and thematic emphases characterize existing gig-worker research?

To map the intellectual structure of gig work research, a K-means cluster analysis was conducted using cluster frequency and normalized local citation scores obtained from the thematic map. The analysis identified six distinct thematic clusters, each reflecting a coherent research stream differentiated by thematic role, scholarly influence, and maturity within the literature.

Cluster 1 represents the core socio-institutional foundations of gig work research. Characterized by high frequency and moderate citation impact, this cluster encompasses studies on labor precarity, employment relations, regulatory frameworks, and societal implications of platform-mediated work. Its prominence indicates that socio-institutional concerns constitute the conceptual backbone of gig economy scholarship, providing essential grounding for subsequent empirical and applied investigations (Alacovska, 2025; Ray, 2024).

Cluster 2 captures a peripheral yet stable stream focusing on human resource practices and worker well-being. Although lower in frequency and citation intensity, this cluster contributes important micro-level insights into fairness perceptions, stress, motivation, and employment relationships in non-standard work arrangements. These studies complement macro-level debates by foregrounding worker experiences within gig platforms (Jabagi, 2019; Meijerink, 2019; Myhill, 2021).

Cluster 3 constitutes a motor theme within the literature. Despite its relatively small size, it exhibits the highest citation intensity, indicating strong conceptual influence. Research in this cluster critically examines algorithmic management, digital control, and governance mechanisms shaping power asymmetries between platforms and workers. Theoretical novelty and analytical depth render these studies highly influential in advancing understanding of platform capitalism and digitally mediated labor (Croppanzano, 2023; Wu, 2024; Wiener, 2023).

Cluster 4 comprises applied and sector-specific research, particularly in service and hospitality contexts. While this cluster demonstrates high frequency, its comparatively low citation impact suggests a focus on contextual application rather than theory building. These studies extend gig work research into operational and service management domains, emphasizing managerial relevance and industry-specific implications (Li, 2023).

Cluster 5 represents a bridging thematic stream linking individual-level outcomes with organizational and structural perspectives. Research here examines leadership absence, coordination mechanisms, trust, and identity formation in platform-mediated work environments. Positioned between foundational and high-impact clusters, this stream facilitates theoretical integration across organizational behavior and gig work literature (Watson, 2021; Cameron, 2024; Li, 2025).

Cluster 6 reflects an emerging operational and performance-oriented perspective, focusing on productivity, efficiency, and performance metrics in gig platforms. Although citation impact remains modest, the presence of multiple studies indicates growing scholarly interest. This cluster is likely to gain prominence as data availability and methodological sophistication increase.

Overall, the thematic clustering reveals a structured and evolving knowledge landscape, encompassing foundational socio-institutional debates, high-impact algorithmic management research, applied sectoral studies, and emerging operational perspectives. This progression highlights both the maturity of core research streams and the expanding scope of gig work scholarship in response to technological and organizational change.

Answer to RQ7

RQ7: What gaps and future research directions emerge from the current body of literature?

IV. Discussion

This systematic literature review set out to synthesize the evolution, intellectual structure, geographic scope, and methodological foundations of gig-worker research through six interrelated research questions (RQ1–RQ6). Taken together, the findings portray a research domain that has experienced rapid growth and consolidation, yet remains methodologically and theoretically uneven, opening several promising avenues for future inquiry.

Discussion: What Has the Literature Achieved So Far?

Evolution and Consolidation of the Field (RQ1)

The longitudinal analysis of publication trends and citation structures reveals that gig-worker research has evolved from a nascent and exploratory domain into a high-output, institutionally legitimate field, particularly after 2020. The sharp rise in publications and citations during the pandemic period underscores how external shocks can accelerate academic attention and crystallize new research agendas. However, the subsequent stabilization of citation intensity alongside continued publication growth suggests that the field is entering a consolidation phase, where incremental contributions increasingly build on established knowledge rather than redefining core debates.

Intellectual Concentration and Knowledge Gatekeeping (RQ2–RQ3)

The analysis of source and author impact indicates a highly concentrated intellectual structure. A limited number of journals and scholars account for a disproportionate share of citations and conceptual influence, shaping dominant narratives around algorithmic management, autonomy, performance pressure, and worker well-being. While such concentration has supported cumulative knowledge development and coherence, it also raises concerns regarding path dependence, where dominant theories and methods may constrain intellectual diversity and innovation.

Geographic Bias and Contextual Limitations (RQ4)

The geographic distribution of gig-worker research reveals a strong concentration in a small set of countries, particularly China and the United States, with the majority of studies conducted within single national

contexts. Although some countries demonstrate high citation impact relative to output, cross-national collaboration remains limited. This geographic imbalance restricts the field's ability to distinguish between platform-level dynamics and institutional or regulatory effects, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings in a globally distributed form of work.

Methodological Orientation and Empirical Boundaries (RQ5–RQ6)

The synthesis of research designs and data collection tools highlights a gradual shift from conceptual and secondary-data-driven inquiry toward survey- and interview-based empirical research. This transition reflects growing access to gig workers and improved methodological clarity. Nevertheless, the persistent dominance of single-method designs and self-reported data, combined with the marginal use of mixed methods, experiments, sentiment analysis, and longitudinal approaches, indicates that the field has reached descriptive maturity but not explanatory or causal maturity.

Thematic Clusters (RQ7)

The thematic clustering highlights a structured and evolving knowledge landscape within gig work research, spanning foundational socio-institutional debates, influential studies on algorithmic management, applied sectoral research, and emerging operational themes. This pattern reflects the maturity of core research areas while also indicating the field's expanding scope in response to technological advancements and changing organizational dynamics, reinforcing its growing relevance to future-of-work discussions.

Future Research Directions: Where Should the Field Go Next?

Building on these findings, several priority directions emerge for advancing gig-worker research.

1. From Descriptive to Causal and Dynamic Research

Future studies should move beyond cross-sectional surveys and interviews toward longitudinal and experimental designs that can capture how gig-worker outcomes evolve over time in response to algorithmic changes, policy interventions, and career transitions. Field experiments and natural experiments, in particular, offer underutilized opportunities to establish causal relationships in platform-mediated work.

2. Methodological Integration and Data Innovation

The limited adoption of mixed-method approaches highlights the need for methodological triangulation. Combining surveys, interviews, platform data, and digital trace or sentiment analysis can generate richer, multi-level insights into gig work. Greater use of computational methods would also better align empirical strategies with the digital nature of platform labor.

3. Comparative and Cross-National Research

Given the global reach of gig platforms, future research should prioritize multi-country and comparative designs. Such studies can illuminate how institutional contexts—such as labor regulation, welfare regimes, and cultural norms—shape gig-worker experiences and outcomes. Expanding research beyond dominant national contexts is essential for strengthening external validity.

4. Theoretical Diversification and Integration

While frameworks such as the Job Demands–Resources model and Self-Determination Theory have been instrumental in explaining stress, motivation, and well-being, future research should integrate these perspectives with Institutional Theory, career theory, and power-based approaches. This integration would enable a more holistic understanding of gig work as both an individual experience and an institutionalized labor arrangement.

5. Rebalancing Intellectual Concentration

Encouraging theoretical and methodological diversity, as well as amplifying contributions from underrepresented regions and scholars, can help mitigate the risks of intellectual lock-in. Future reviews and special issues could explicitly foreground alternative perspectives and emerging voices to foster innovation.

Concluding Synthesis

In sum, gig-worker research has achieved substantial empirical depth and scholarly visibility, particularly in the post-2020 period. However, its future impact will depend on the field's ability to move beyond consolidation toward innovation—methodologically, theoretically, and geographically. Addressing the gaps identified across RQ1–RQ6 offers a clear pathway for transforming gig-worker research from a rapidly expanding literature into a mature, explanatory, and globally relevant body of knowledge, combining surveys, interviews, platform data, and

digital trace or sentiment analysis can generate richer, multi-level insights into gig work. Greater use of computational methods would also better align empirical strategies with the digital nature of platform labor.

V. Conclusion

This systematic literature review provides a comprehensive synthesis of gig-worker research, mapping its temporal evolution, intellectual structure, geographic distribution, and methodological foundations. Drawing on Scopus-indexed studies, the review demonstrates that gig-worker scholarship has transitioned from an exploratory and conceptually driven domain into a rapidly expanding and empirically grounded research field, particularly following the post-2020 surge in academic attention.

The findings reveal a clear pattern of field consolidation. Publication volumes have increased sharply, while citation structures indicate the emergence of foundational studies that anchor subsequent research. At the same time, scholarly influence remains concentrated among a limited set of journals and authors, facilitating cumulative knowledge development but also raising concerns about theoretical and methodological path dependence. Geographically, gig-worker research remains heavily concentrated in a small number of countries, with limited cross-national collaboration, constraining the generalizability of existing insights.

Methodologically, the literature has achieved substantial descriptive maturity, with surveys and interviews emerging as the dominant data collection tools and quantitative and qualitative designs forming the empirical backbone of the field. However, the continued marginalization of mixed-method, experimental, longitudinal, and computational approaches highlights persistent limitations in causal explanation and dynamic analysis. Despite the digital and data-rich nature of platform work, empirical strategies have yet to fully leverage these methodological opportunities.

By integrating findings across research designs, data collection tools, sources, authors, and geographic contexts, this review advances understanding of what is currently known about gig workers and, critically, what remains underexplored. The future research agenda articulated in this study emphasizes the need for greater methodological integration, cross-national comparison, and theoretical diversification, moving the literature beyond documentation toward explanation and prediction.

Overall, this review contributes to the gig-work literature by offering a structured synthesis that clarifies the field's current state and outlines a coherent pathway for future scholarly advancement. As platform-mediated work continues to reshape labor markets globally, developing theoretically robust, methodologically rigorous, and contextually diverse research will be essential for informing policy, organizational practice, and the lived experiences of gig workers themselves.

Key Contributions of This Study

This systematic literature review makes three key contributions to the gig-worker literature. First, it offers a comprehensive, Scopus-based synthesis of gig-worker research by mapping its temporal evolution, citation dynamics, intellectual leadership, geographic concentration, and methodological orientation, thereby clarifying how the field has progressed from exploratory inquiry to post-2020 consolidation. Second, by integrating evidence across research designs and data collection tools, the study demonstrates that while gig-worker scholarship has achieved descriptive and empirical maturity, it remains constrained in causal, longitudinal, and comparative explanation, highlighting critical methodological gaps. Third, the review advances the field by articulating a theory-informed future research agenda, translating identified gaps into testable hypotheses and offering a structured roadmap for methodological diversification, cross-national comparison, and theoretical integration. Collectively, these contributions move gig-worker research beyond fragmented accumulation toward a more coherent, explanatory, and globally relevant body of knowledge.

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