

# The Work Motivation and System Dynamics in the Digital Gig Economy: A Multi-Theoretical Approach

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**Abstract:** This article aims to conduct a comprehensive review of the research on the digital gig economy. Using a PRISMA-based systematic review, the paper not only provides a bibliometric analysis but also takes a qualitative approach to synthesise the insights from both methods.

This paper used data mainly from the Scopus-indexed database during the time frame 2017 to 2025. The research intends to find out the factors changing work motivation and system dynamics in the digital gig economy through a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic synthesis. Thematic analysis of 69 Scopus-indexed articles revealed four main themes, *Work Structure*, *Worker Motivation*, *Organisational Practices*, and *Technological Systems*. Reference to these themes to develop a conceptual framework based on Functional Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, lay out the ways in which gig platforms influence motivation, autonomy and labour system dynamics.

The number of studies on the digital gig economy metaphorically depict a curve going uphill since research output in this area has been expanding. Study of changing patterns reveals regularly dealt with topics along with newly uncovered areas for research in the future. The positive aspects of gig work which have been emphasized in the research include such things as flexibility, autonomy, and being able to tap into new labour markets. On the other hand, issues such as job insecurity, algorithmic management, and limited regulation have also been highlighted as the downsides. The present paper fills these voids by summarizing the Scopus-indexed literature, finding key themes, and creating a conceptual framework.

**Key Words:** Motivation, Gig economy, Thematic, PRISMA, Digital Economy

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## Introduction

Digitalisation has radically transformed labour markets, resulting in the digital gig economy becoming one of the main forms of platform-based work. Gig work, facilitated by online platforms and mobile technologies, functions via short-term, task-based arrangements that significantly differ from traditional organizational employment models. This change has not only increased the variety of income-generating opportunities in different sectors but has also deeply altered the way work is organized, managed, and controlled in digitally mediated labour systems. (Healy, Nicholson, & Pekarek, 2017). The gig economy has seen noticed the remarkable growth as a result of recent economic shifts (Friedman, 2014; Piketty, 2014; Ravenelle, 2017). This digital intermediation has helped the gig economy flourish and gain popularity in today's digital era.

The gig economy is broadly characterised as a free-market system in which businesses utilise independent contractors or freelancers for short-term projects or service-based tasks, often facilitated by digital platforms (Alauddin et al., 2025). In past centuries, full-time employment has been seen as the

main and preferred form of work. However, the rising global workforce, along with digital disruption and economic uncertainty, has led to fewer opportunities for stable, long-term jobs (Manyika et al., 2016). As a result, an increasing number of people—often referred to as independent workers, freelancers, or gig workers—have decided to take platform-mediated work arrangements to gain additional income and professional engagement. Gig platforms are commonly utilized as a kind of "bridge employment" in emerging economies, thus providing supplemental income before one makes a transition to more stable job prospects (Healy et al., 2017).

The driving force behind the gig economy's growth mostly comes from online startups and small businesses. Gig workers are usually found by startups, medium-sized businesses, and large companies who need people for short-term and long-term projects. Recently one research reveals that the gig economy is fast spreading across the world. It was shown by Statista (2020) and Pofeldt (2019) that the number of gig professionals in the USA rose from 3.7 million in 2014 to 62.2 million in 2019. Platforms for gig work like Upwork, Guru, and

Fiverr facilitate businesses in hiring freelancers at the global level. Many freelancers and independent workers use online platforms to sell their services to offshore prospects.

Digital platforms enable freelancers/gig professionals to easily get work and do projects online. Digital platforms use performance ratings, remote monitoring, and algorithmic task distribution to reshape work. (Duggan et al., 2020). Gig employees are attracted to flexibility and autonomy but they also experience unpredictability in their work life. The rapid digital transformation of work has led to an increasing body of research on the digital gig economy, but the literature remains fragmented in terms of definitions, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings. The research has been divided into various aspects, including technological innovation. The existing work concentrates on different themes or localities, thus giving rise to the concept of the gig economy as a digital reality.

Digitalization has fundamentally changed labour markets, and the digital gig economy has emerged as a major form of platform-based employment. Thanks to online platforms and mobile technologies, gig work is carried out through short-term, task-based agreements that are very different from the usual organizational employment models. This change has not only opened up various income opportunities in different sectors but at the same time it has changed fundamentally the way work is structured, coordinated, and governed in digitally mediated labour systems. The pace of literature production on the digital gig economy has been very fast. However, the field is still quite fragmented. Many of the articles deal only with either platform governance and labour conditions or individual motivational outcomes while there is very little work on integration of theoretical perspectives linking motivation to system dynamics. Until now, major motivational theories, like Self-Determination Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Functional Theory, have been applied only separately and therefore our understanding of behaviour in the gig economy has been quite limited. (Shabu et al., 2025; Gagné & Deci, 2005)

Self-Determination Theory focuses mainly on intrinsic motivation which comes from autonomy, competence, and relatedness which are all equally important aspects of the platform-based work. Vroom's Expectancy Theory is about how a gig worker's effort is a result of his/her belief in the connections between his/her performance, rewards, and expected outcomes which the algorithms also play a big role in. Functional Theory gives us a perspective at the system-level which can be used to analyse how digital platforms arrange labour, carry out economic functions, and at the same time create structural constraints. Bringing all these theories together can open up new possibilities for us to

understand thoroughly the role individual motivation plays in the context of system dynamics driven by platforms.. (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Gagné & Deci, 2005)

The present study aims to examine work motivation and system dynamics in the digital gig economy through a bibliometric and thematic review of Scopus-indexed literature. By combining a PRISMA-based systematic review, bibliometric analysis, and qualitative thematic synthesis, this study identifies key research trends, thematic patterns, and theoretical gaps. The findings contribute by developing an integrated conceptual framework grounded in Functional Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, thereby offering directions for future research, policy development, and platform design in the evolving digital gig economy.

This research based on worldwide definitions, worldwide definition of the gig economy, worldwide definition, worldwide definition of the gig economy, antecedents, consequences, and strategic implications of the digital gig economy combines quantitative content analysis, qualitative theme synthesis, and systematic literature review (SLR). The review of literature bridges the gaps in the existing knowledge and offers a comprehensive framework that improves academic and policy understanding of digital economic transitions. This is done by integration of theoretical and empirical evidence through literature studies. The study, to achieve its goals, deeply probes into the literatures that were published from 2017 to 2025 and are Scopus indexed, as an answer to the research objectives stated below.

RO1: To examine the global research trends on the digital gig economy.

RO2: To examine the different technological factors that have the potency to bring a significant change in the gig economy.

RO3: To examine work motivation and system dynamics through Functional, Expectancy, and Self-Determination theories

The aim of this research is to find out the coming direction/opportunities of the gig economy in the digital era. The gig economy is free from geographical and cultural barriers, thus, it raises issues for workers and organisations.

This study identifies key developments in the gig economy and the skills required by worldwide prospects. The article shows a comprehensive literature review on the gig economy, highlighting key research in this area, and concludes with future research directions.

#### **Research Method:**

Research approach

This study adopts a systematic review design integrating a PRISMA-based approach, bibliometric analysis, and qualitative thematic synthesis to

examine work motivation and system dynamics in the digital gig economy. Data were collected from the **Scopus database**, covering peer-reviewed journal articles published between **2017 and 2025**. Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure relevance and quality. (Hasanah et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2003). The method is effective for analysing contextual variables, theme development and empirical discoveries in the digital world of gig economy (Rother, 2007; Dziopa & Ahern, 2011; Mubarrok et al., 2022). The data collected from the Scopus-indexed database for articles published between 2017 and 2025, as, prior to 2017, there was limited or no significant scholarly work specifically addressing the concept of the digital gig economy. The PRISMA framework was used for review (McKenzie et al., 2021) to ensure transparency and methodical flow in article selection, screening, and synthesis.

**Data Source**

Scopus was chosen as the primary source of literature because it indexes high-quality, peer-reviewed journals from various fields, including business, management, economics, econometrics, and finance. The key word used for SLR are “Gig”, ”Digital”, ”Gig economy” and original filtering utilised. The filtering technique focuses on papers on the digital era in the gig economy and assuring appropriate data for the research topic (Damarell et al., 2019). The article used thematic content analysis, (Valle, 2025) Prisma-based methodologies and processes. Data was extracted from 1024 publications and filtered to 69 papers that met the identified criteria for study. The details of data reduction are as follows (Figure 1).

This research study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) strategy that adheres to the PRISMA 2020 principles for scientific rigour, transparency, and replicability. Figure 1 shows a complete procedure for data reduction, comprising of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility evaluation, and final inclusion.

**1. Identification.**

The Scopus database was used for the initial search, as it indexes high-quality peer-reviewed literature from numerous disciplines. This includes digital gig economy. The following search keywords were used as "Gig"" Digital Economy"" Gig Economy".

This search resulted in 1024 records. Fig. 1 shows records from "databases (n = 1024)", which correspond to the same dataset with an internal duplication count to align with PRISMA structure. After removing 26 duplicate records, there were 998 unique items to screen.

**2. Screening.**

Titles and abstracts were screened by keywords for thematic relevance.

- Inclusion criteria at this stage are: Studies discuss the digital gig economy and present empirical or theoretical insight.
- Articles written in English, published in journals that are indexed by Scopus. After keyword-based filtering, 889 entries do not fulfil the criteria and are eliminated for full-text retrieval and assessment.

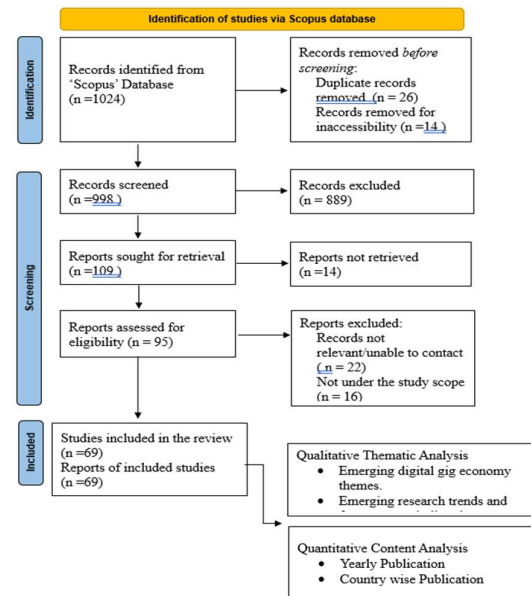
**3. Eligibility**

We screened the whole text of 109 papers for methodological completeness, theme congruence, and data accessibility. 14 articles were omitted owing to inaccessibility, such as paywalls or inability to contact the authors or links. After examining each abstract of 95 articles based upon their relevancy, the final synthesis includes 69 papers that met the eligibility requirements.

**4. Inclusion**

The final analysis comprised a total of 69 studies. The articles underwent theme synthesis to identify trends in antecedent causes, consequences. This review maps the landscape of digital gig economy research and examines the connections between drivers and outcomes.

The research approach adopted in this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The literature selected for the study encompasses both qualitative and quantitative thematic content analyses. To systematically source the literature, this study has embraced the PRISMA framework. (Sharma & Bhattarai, 2022; McKenzie et al., 2021). The following sections detail each of the main steps.



Source: (McKenzie et al., 2021)

Fig 1 PRISMA Screening Method

**5. Analysis technique**

SLR methodology offers multiple data analysis methodologies tailored to certain research aims and data kinds. Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Kim & So, 2022) are common approaches for

synthesising quantitative findings from multiple studies.

This research follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews method (Sarkis-Onofre et al., 2021) for data collection, screening, and synthesis. Transparent and reproducible processes improve the reliability and depth of reviews on digital gig economy. (Alauddin et al., 2025) used thematic content analysis to find and explain patterns in data, providing a greater knowledge of the experiences, viewpoints, and contextual factors influencing digital gig economy. Researchers use qualitative data to create initial codes for identifying recurring ideas or concepts. Researchers follow systematic approaches to gain a deeper understanding of gig economy in a new digital dynamics environment (Shirolkar & Patil, 2021)

### **Results and Discussion**

This study conducted a systematic review of the published literature on the digital gig economy, utilising the PRISMA 2020 framework. The review, guided by specific research topics, sought to discover, analyse, and synthesise current scholarly contributions on how digitalisation, technology, and platform design influence gig work arrangements and worker well-being. As (Manatos et al., 2017) point out, systematic reviews are useful for mapping existing knowledge, critically evaluating evidence, and identifying research needs. Although the PRISMA framework has typically been used to assess the effectiveness of interventions, it is also being extended to broader goals such as analysing technological, social, and economic shifts within digital ecosystems.

In the current study, content analysis was used to comprehensively evaluate a selected body of literature on the digital gig economy. After the screening and selection steps that were in line with the PRISMA 2020 framework, highly influential articles. Research attributes such as publication year, authorship, country/region of study, research design, and significant findings were documented for these articles. The 20 most-cited papers out of 69 articles indexed in Scopus and identified through the PRISMA screening process (2017–2025) were selectively chosen for qualitative and quantitative analyses in-depth. The study had its emphasis on high-impact, peer-validated, and widely recognised research contributions that were considered as the core intellectual foundations of the digital gig economy literature by making this choice. The qualitative assessments of publication trends were made possible by this. Quantitative content analysis included mapping of yearly publishing trends to gain a deeper understanding of the research evolution of the digital gig economy. Similarly, a country-wise specific publication analysis was conducted to identify geographical patterns and regional research contributions, revealing a concentration of studies in

affluent economies and a growing interest in developing contexts.

The rise of the digital gig economy has had a significant impact on the traditional gig employment market by the way it changes job relationships through algorithmic coordination and online platforms. In their study, Kassi and Lehdonvirta (2018) describe the gig economy as a labor system where work is mediated by digital platforms that connect clients and service providers on a project-based short-term, task-based or temporary basis. Wood et al., (2018; 2019) state that autonomy, flexibility, and short-term contractual security are some of the features of gig work that distinguish it from regular employment.

At the core of the digital gig economy design is deep technology integration—Waldkirch et al. (2021) refer to it as algorithmic management, where digitally systems control task distribution, monitoring, and evaluation—has changed the entire model to a greater extent.

The digital gig economy is a technologically mediated work arrangement that fundamentally shifts work coordination, mediation, and execution. As per the research of Kassi and Lehdonvirta (2018), digital platforms such as Upwork, Uber, and Fiverr facilitates short-term, task-based, or freelance connections between clients and professionals. Despite the fact that gig work is devoid of job security, benefits, and long-term stability, it provides autonomy, temporal flexibility, and global accessibility in contrast to the traditional employment/de Stefano, 2016/. Online freelancing as described by Graham, Hjorth, and Lehdonvirta (Graham et al., 2017) is a good substitute for the traditional employment route, as it allows the workers to avail their skills worldwide and thus have several sources of income.

One of the main issues addressed in the research of the digital gig economy is the use of algorithmic management which is done by the help of the different ways to assess and evaluate the disciplinary actions of the workers. Francesca Bellesia and Elisa Mattarelli (2024) propose an explanatory model for gig work and demonstrate how the enclosed technological processes in algorithmic systems not only define the primary structure of the gig work but also determine the way it functions. Correspondingly, algorithms are utilized as a kind of digital human resource management that takes over human supervision by replacing it with automated performance evaluation and providing feedback. This technology diminishes the number of human contacts and limits the workers' autonomy while at the same time it makes the process more objective and faster (Wood et al., 2019; Stefano, 2019).

The bibliometric analysis indicates a consistent and significant increase in scholarly publications on the digital gig economy over the last decade, with a marked surge after 2020. This trend demonstrates an

increasing scholarly focus on the issues of platform-mediated work, labour governance, and worker motivation in digitally driven employment systems. Keyword co-occurrence and citation patterns reveal dominant research clusters centred on work motivation, platform governance, autonomy, algorithmic management, and future work arrangements, thus showing the researchers' gradual shift from descriptive studies to theory-informed analyses.

Through a qualitative thematic review of 69 articles indexed by Scopus, the researchers came up with four core themes namely Work Structure, Worker Motivation, Organisational Practices, and Technological Systems. Work Structure theme communicates the role of digital platforms as tools that coordinate labour and work as facilitators of market efficiency which is in conformity with the Functional Theory. On the other hand, the literature through a number of examples reveals structural problems such as the army of the unemployed and unequal platform-worker power relationship probably thus indicating system dysfunctions in the platform-based labour market (Nimkar, 2025; Dawle et al., 2025).

Automated decision-making and real-time employee-client matching help AI to provide these digital platforms with scalability and operational efficiency (Li et al., 2024). On the other hand, the automation and its attendant algorithmic management have significantly diminished the gig workers' autonomy, and their transparency and fairness which are values that are also important to them have been affected. Stefano (2019) opines that AI makes workers more productive and the work more flexible but at the same time, it makes workers more dependent on data, increases their surveillance, and makes their jobs more precarious. Berg anine and Furrer Marianne (2018) observe that the datafication of labor, i.e., when human performance is measured through ratings and metrics, has led to a set of challenges for fair digital governance. One of the key problems that AI brings is that besides being a digitally efficient tool in the gig sector, it also appears to be a new source of social-economic inequalities (Liu & Yin, 2024). For gig platforms which are moving towards Industry 5.0 - the era where human-AI collaboration will be the main focus; knowing and understanding the ethical and psychological impacts of AI-mediated work will be very helpful in the realization of sustainable digital labor practices.

Table 1 presents the major key findings from global studies on the gig economy, highlighting the diverse technological factors that influence and reshape work through the transformation of the digital gig economy. Manual content analysis of these 20 papers yielded 13 key focus areas, each representing distinct authorial perspectives and thematic orientations such as algorithmic management,

digital transformation, worker well-being, human-tech interaction, HRM adaptation, and sustainability in digital work.

Region	Authors( year)	Key Findings	Theoretic al Link (Objective 2 & 3)
Slovakia(E urope)	(Stryzha k et al., 2025)	Shows that digital change in tourism boosts gig work options while increasing employment insecurity and dependence on platforms for self-employed workers.	<b>Function al Theory:</b> Platforms as labour coordinators; <b>Expectan cy Theory:</b> Uncertain effort-reward outcomes reduce motivation.
India	(Shabu et al., 2025)	Discuss about digital HR tools and analytics that improves the management of the gig workforce, but the lack of regulation undermines employment stability and inclusivity in gig professionals	<b>Function al Theory:</b> HR systems restructure work; <b>Expectan cy Theory:</b> Governance gaps weaken reward expectations

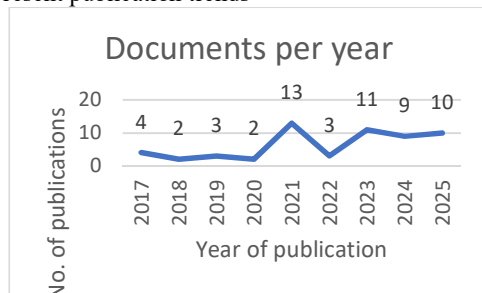
India	(Srihita et al., 2025)	The study shows that technology-driven gig working models enhances flexibility but negatively impact worker well-being due to long hours of work, deadline, digital surveillance, and the absence of infrastructure and social protection.	<b>SDT:</b> Autonomy increases motivation; <b>Functional Theory:</b> System-level stressors create dysfunctions	Russia	(Shevchuk, 2023)	Digital economies and platforms are regarded as control institutions, with algorithmic governance and data incorporation replacing traditional work culture	<b>Functional Theory:</b> Platforms as dominant governance systems.
Italy(Europe)	(Bellesia et al., 2024)	Demonstrates how algorithmic systems affect digital gig work by incorporating control into technology design, resulting in a contradiction between autonomy and	<b>SDT:</b> Autonomy vs. control tension; <b>Functional Theory:</b> Algorithmic governance reshapes system dynamics	Ireland(Europe)	(Umair et al., 2023)	According to the study, empirical evidence suggests that technostrategies, resulting from constant connectivity and task pressure, significantly impacts the contentment and health of gig workers.	<b>SDT:</b> Reduced competence and well-being weaken intrinsic motivation.
				Ukraine(Europe)	(Kraus et al., 2023)	Business models that use AI, robotics, and flexible digital	<b>Functional Theory:</b> Technological systems restructure

		labour arrangements connect Industry 5.0 with the gig economy.	digital labour markets.
Ireland(Europe)	(McDonnell et al., 2023)	Determines how AI-generated HR solutions manage gig professionals by automating recruitment process, performance tracking system, and reward management.	<b>Expectancy Theory:</b> Algorithmic evaluation shapes effort–performance–reward perceptions.
France(Europe)	(Bunjak et al., 2021)	Shows that digital overload and multiple work, gigs cause burnout, but can also stimulate or motivate advanced, adaptable innovation when managed properly.	<b>SDT:</b> Balance between overload and competence influences motivation.
		Defines "digital	<b>Expectancy</b>
USA	(Sutherland et al., 2020)	"gig skills" as the skills workers need to overcome algorithmic precarity and opaque digital systems while freelancing.	<b>Theory:</b> Skill development improves outcome expectations.
United Kingdom (UK)	(Wood et al., 2018)	Identifies growing digital collectives in which remote gig workers utilise internet tools to demand better terms.	<b>SDT:</b> Relatedness enhances collective motivation; <b>Functional Theory:</b> Emergent system adaptation.
United Kingdom (UK)	(Graham et al., 2017)	Research shows that global digital platforms perpetuate inequalities by increasing access to income while exacerbating dependency and low pay in developing	<b>Functional Theory:</b> System efficiency vs. inequality trade-offs.

		economies.	
United Kingdom (UK)	(Coyle, 2017)	demonstrates that digital gig work is both liberating and exploitative, providing freedom while promoting precarious employment under platform capitalism.	<b>SDT &amp; Functional Theory:</b> Autonomy coexists with structural insecurity.

**Table 1: Key focus areas and regional insights on digital gig economy research**

According to the research compiled in Table 1, technological mediation—through automation, digital platforms, and algorithms—is the primary factor changing contemporary work structures. These developments create new forms of precarity, technostress, and Keywords were used to filter abstracts and titles for thematic relevance. At this point studies that address the digital gig economy and offer theoretical or empirical insights meet the inclusion criteria. articles published in English-language journals that are indexed by Scopus. Present publication trends



**Figure 2 : Publication Trends on Digital Gig Economy Research (2017–2025)**

The publication trend in the discipline of the Digital Gig Economy, as shown in Figure 2, exhibits a clear pattern of growing academic maturity and global expansion over time. From 2017 to 2020, the number of publications remained very low, averaging between 2 and 4 documents per year, with contributions mostly from the United Kingdom and

European countries. This early phase implies that research was primarily concerned with developing core ideas and conceptual frameworks for digital gig economy and platform work.

A significant growth occurred in 2021, with a sudden increase to 13 publications, marking the highest point of scholarly output. The growth was actually correlated with the COVID-19 pandemic situation, which caused the digital transformation to be very fast and led to a serious dependence on online gig platforms. Consequently, the topics of remote work, digital freelancing, and algorithmic management have been increasingly drawing the attention of scholars.

Although there was a temporary decline in output in 2022 (with 3 articles), the figure has risen again in 2023 (with 11 publications) and has been stable in 2024 (with 9 publications) and 2025 (with 10 publications), thus, confirming that the topic continues to attract the attention of researchers.

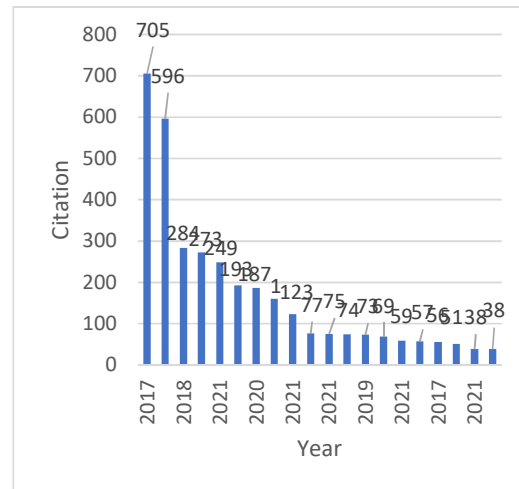
Regarding the regional aspect of the contribution, the United Kingdom and Europe were the major contributors of research over the years, while India, China, and Australia, were the regions that showed the greatest increases of research contributions in the later years. This trend indicates the worldwide spread of digital gig economy research that has gone far beyond the Western economies, where it has become a mature industry, to developing countries that are rapidly adopting digital labor as part of their economic systems.

Year	Cited	Country	Title
2017	75	United Kingdom (UK)	Digital labour and development: impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods.
2019	56	United Kingdom (UK)	Labour process theory and the gig economy
2020	284	United Kingdom (UK)	Workers of the Internet unite? Online freelancer organisation among remote gig economy workers in six Asian and African countries
2021	273	Norway	Algorithmic Surveillance in the Gig Economy: The Organization of Work through Lefebvrian Conceived Space
2022	249	United Kingdom	Between a rock and a hard place: Freedom, flexibility, precarity and vulnerability in the gig economy in Africa

		dom (UK)	
2021	013	Germany	Pacifying the algorithm – Anticipatory compliance in the face of algorithmic management in the gig economy
2020	018	USA	Work Precarity and Gig Literacies in Online Freelancing
2017	016	Spain	The ‘gig economy’: employee, self-employed or the need for a special employment regulation?
2021	013	Germany	Controlling space, controlling labour? Contested space in food delivery gig work
2021	017	France	Absorbed in technology but digitally overloaded: Interplay effects on gig workers’ burnout and creativity
2021	015	Austria	‘You can’t pick up a phone and talk to someone’: How algorithms function as biopower in the gig economy
2017	014	Canada	Sharing economies: Moving beyond binaries in a digital age
2019	013	Finland	Digital platforms and the changing nature of physical work: Insights from ride-hailing
2020	019	Norway	From crafting what you do to building resilience for career commitment in the gig economy
2021	019	Ireland	Technologically mediated human resource management in the gig economy
2019	017	Italy	Platforms as entrepreneurial incubators? How online labor markets shape work identity
2017	016	United Kingdom (UK)	Precarious and Productive Work in the Digital Economy
2022	011	United Kingdom (UK)	Reconsidering digital labour: Bringing tech workers into the debate

2021	038	Inida	Gamifying the gig: transitioning the dark side to bright side of online engagement
2021	038	India	The spread of gig economy: Trends and effects

**Table 2: Highly influential articles research publications from the country**



**Figure 3: Highly influential articles research publications**

For the analysis of citation and country, only the highly influential articles on the Digital Gig Economy were chosen for in-depth analysis from Table 2 and Figure 3. These publications were chosen based on their citation counts in the Scopus databases, ensuring the inclusion of high-impact and influential contributions to the field.

The United Kingdom (UK) is the most prominent research hub in the digital gig economy, with six articles among the highly influential articles. The publication with the most citations (705 in 2017) is likely to have established a foundational framework or theory about platform work, algorithmic management, or labour precarity. Subsequent UK studies (2018-2022) show a consistent scholarly interest, with a specific emphasis on digital labour legislation, technology-work interface, and worker autonomy.

Germany, Norway, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, and Italy all have a significant European presence, indicating regional academic leadership in comprehending the socioeconomic, technological, and institutional components of digital gig employment. Germany and Norway are the two countries which are the major contributors of research papers based on technological mediation, worker well-being, and policy implications. The research papers from these two countries have been cited frequently. Apart from Europe, the United

States, Canada, Australia, and India are the countries which have made major contributions to the research papers related to the digital gig economy.

United States of America (187 citations, 2020) is a lead example of the whole region, showing the interest of North America in digital platforms and labor freedom. Australia (2021) and Canada (2017) display their concern about the ethics of digital labor and environmental sustainability issues. The India's entries (both 2021) with the number of citations to be at 38 each depict the role of the developing economies, as a source of new ideas in the global gig economy discourse, that is, more of the focus is on women's participation, digital inclusion, and platform justice.

**Theoretical Implications of Work Motivation in the Gig Economy**

**Functional Theory:**

Workers' welfare refers to a wide range of facilities, services, and other amenities that are made available to workers which aim at improving their health, efficiency, economic status, and social level. The objective of labor welfare is to facilitate the overall personality development of workers so that they become good workforces. (Stinchcombe, 1985)

The main purpose of introducing welfare schemes is to equip the company with a workforce that is capable, healthy, faithful and satisfied.

**THE ELEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (2007–2012) :**

These plans aim primarily at joblessness and underutilization of labour, creating a larger number of regular wage employment opportunities and meeting the needs of workers who continue to be missing out from unorganised sector enterprises. Theory reveals, if workers are provided with adequate facilities and treated kindly it leads to improvisation of work efficiency. Welfare work is a means of securing, preserving and increasing the efficiency of labour, if employers taking care of employees then employees will become more efficient. Here there is a healthy collaboration between employers and employees, it helps the gig workers to improve their working conditions and efficiency of work which it leads to satisfaction.

Welfare is a motivation factor for gig worker to stay and reduce the risk of uncertainty, its better to act on the basis of functional theory of labor welfare, which helps the gig employees to take interest in skill development activity and perform better with higher employee productivity, this theory talks about efficiency of workers with high flexibility of work. According to this theory welfare facilities to be provided to have feel of job securit, safety at work with lots of employment benefit , this secured feeling and financial gain leads to satisfaction.

**Vrooms Expectancy:**

It implies that people are driven toward goals if they believe that their efforts will lead to a performance

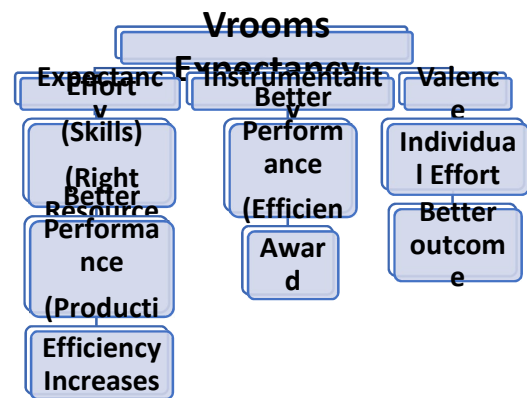
that will be rewarded. In the research, Vroom identified three factors-Expectancy, Instrumentality and Valence.

Motivation is a force that initiate the gig workers to manage the goals and behaviors in a better way. Motivation take some sort of action to continue the gig workers with different projects at a time and help to reach the end goal successfully. This theory proposed by work Victor Vrooms. Key concepts of Vrooms model are -Expectancy, instrumentality and valence. Vrooms theory provides a process of individual differences in the work motivation.

**Expectancy:** Talk about there is a relationship between gig workers effort and performance. Performance leads to various outcomes, which motivate the gig workers to continue their career as a gig worker. It says better efforts will result in better performance. It is influenced by factors like having appropriate skills for performing the job, availability of right resources.

**Instrumentality:** Gig workers performance will lead to rewards in terms of recognition, increases in pay scale. It is the faith that the individual will receive an award if employees performs well.

**Valence:** Rewards satisfy individual needs, valence is an individual emotion, which feels to be happy to continue with the same career. Valence is the importance associated by an individual with respect to the expected outcome. (Vroom, 1964).



**Figure 4 Vrooms expectancy and gig economy motivation model**

Source: (Vroom, 1964)

**Self-determination theory**

According to self-determination theory, people are motivated to develop and transform through three basic psychological needs which are innate and universal. Meeting one's needs for competence, connection, and autonomy enables a person to be self-determined.

Self-determination theory is an important concept that refers each person’s ability, this independence helps the gig workers have control over their choices and which motivate them to take action and learn the new skills to perform the task. The workers take action and more confident on their planned work and achieve their objectives. The theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate psychological needs. (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Nagre et al., 2025)

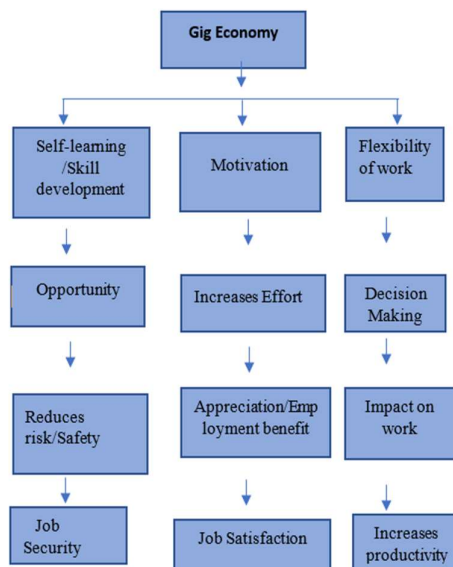
**Competence:** People need to gain mastery of task and learn different skills, which help the gig workers to get more opportunity which helps to reduce the risk and increases job security, always competent workers take right decision to achieve their goals.

**Relatedness:** People needs to experience a sense of belongingness of people, which motivate employees to work passionately and get the rewards from the employers in which it leads to job satisfaction.

**Autonomy:** Gig workers have independence to take a decision at their own level, that change impact on work, which leads to motivation and increases productivity. This theory helps the employees to be more active and responsible, which determines to get success.

Self-determination is a vital piece of psychological well-being; as you may expect, people like to feel control of their own lives.

decision was taken to ensure that the examination is based on the contributions of the most notable and theoretically significant disciplines. After the detailed inspection of titles, abstracts, and keywords, the recurring concepts were recognized and considered as the main themes and sub-themes by applying inductive content analysis method. The choice of manual coding rather than software-based technologies was because it provided researchers with more contextual understanding, interpretive flexibility, and allowed them to be critically engaged with the intricacies of each study. As a result of this, four major themes - Digital Transformation of Work, Worker Experience in Digital Context, Human Resource and Organisational Adaptation, and Technological Innovation and Future of Work - which, in a way, represent the evolving dynamics of the digital gig economy, were identified.



**Figure 5 Self Self-Determination and Gig Model**  
 Source: (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Coding and Analysis

The work relied on manual coding procedures to uncover and comprehend the patterns present in the selection of literature on the digital gig economy. Out of 57 only 20 most highly cited pieces of literature from the reviewed works were chosen for in-depth coding and thematic elaboration. This

Main Theme	Code	Description	Keywords / Indicators
<b>3 Organisational Practices</b>	<b>Digital HRM Practices</b>	Technology-mediated recruitment, performance tracking, and engagement.	HR analytics, e-HRM, performance algorithms
	<b>Gamification in Digital Work</b>	Use of game-like digital mechanisms to motivate gig workers.	Points, badges, leaderboards, engagement
	<b>Skill Development and Digital Learning</b>	Use of digital tools for worker training and upskilling.	Online training, digital literacy, learning platforms
<b>4. Technological Innovation and Future of Work</b>	<b>AI Integration in Gig Platforms</b>	Application of artificial intelligence in matching, pricing, and task automation.	Machine learning, predictive analytics
	<b>Industry 5.0 and Human-Tech Collaboration</b>	Coexistence of human creativity with digital automation.	Smart systems, collaborative robots, digital ecosystems
	<b>Sustainability in the Digital Gig Economy</b>	Environmental and ethical implications of digital work.	Green tech, digital sustainability, fair work principles

**Table 3: Generated themes and Subthemes  
Integration of Quantitative & Qualitative Findings — Theme Explanations**

**Theme 1 — Digital Transformation of Work**

Qualitative insight: Represents the transformation of traditional employment into digitally mediated, platform-based work arrangements. Digital platforms act as intermediaries connecting workers and clients, enabling flexible participation while weakening formal employment relationships, particularly affecting women gig workers in IT and e-commerce.

Quantitative relationship: This is the most common issue in top-cited publications, with 7-9 of the highly influential articles addressing platform/algorithmic governance. These papers, which cover 2017-2021, have the highest citation weights (e.g., 705; 596; 273; 193), demonstrating that platform/algorithmic arguments are the central, extremely influential lines in the area. Geographically, high-impact contributions came predominantly from the United Kingdom and Northern Europe (Norway, Germany), demonstrating regional leadership in theoretical and labour-process critiques.

**Theme 2 — Worker Motivation**

Qualitative insight: This theme emphasizes that motivation in the gig economy is a double-edged sword because on one hand flexibility and autonomy, on the other hand insecurity and instability coexist. Digital platforms offer workers the opportunity to manage their own time and be selective with tasks that motivate them. However, unstable earnings, absence of social safety nets, technostress, and overlapping work, life boundaries are factors that lower motivation over time. Besides, women workers face even greater role conflict due to constant digital availability.

Quantitative relationship: 6-8 of the most influential articles approximately study articles provide empirical or conceptual evidence of worker-level effects (technostress, burnout, well-being). Among other massively recognized studies from France, Ireland, Australia, and Spain, investigation into burnout, creative loss, and regulatory demands has been done. Citation counts in this cluster (for example, 160, 77, 59, and 74) illustrate that these worker-centered studies are not only abundant but also influential, especially in post-2020 literature when pandemic effects increased focus to welfare.

**Theme 3 — Organisational Practices**

Qualitative insight: The theme is about technology-focused organisational ways that substitute the human resource functions of a traditional nature. Digital HRM software, gamification, and algorithmic performance tracking are being used to keep, stimulate, and involve gig workers. Though these methods lead to higher effectiveness and easier expansion, they, on the other hand, lack

transparency and human touch, quite often. Hence, workers are looked upon as data-driven entities and not as members of the organisation.

This is a quantitative Relationship: Approximately 4-6 of the highly influential articles clearly address HR and organisational practices; these papers are fairly referenced (40-120 citations) and date from 2019 to 2023. The quantitative trend shows that this is an emerging applied subfield (with more recent publications and mentions) suggesting a move away from criticism and toward organizational responses and interventions.

**Theme 4 — Technological Innovation & Future of Work**

Qualitative insight: This theme is about AI integration, Industry 5.0 narratives, human-technology collaboration, and sustainability/ethical problems. The dialogue raised issues such as predictive matching, workload redistribution through automation, and proposals for a balance between efficiency and worker dignity. AI and algorithmic management came up in 35% of the articles that were reviewed. Psychologically, AI-driven technologies are facilitating gig work by delegating task allocation, using predictive analytics, and monitoring performance.

Quantitative relationship: It is a newly emerging area but quickly evolving one with 3-5 highly influential articles focusing on AI, Industry 5.0, and future horizons. Citation counts of these latest publications are low (single to double digits), but they are rising, reflecting a forward-looking research program that extends the core algorithmic critiques. AI increases gig platform efficiency while decreasing worker autonomy and decision-making authority (Wood et al. (2019) Kellogg et al. 2020). More algorithmic control raises questions about fairness data privacy and technostress (Vallas and Schor 2020 Van Doorn 2021).

**Final Developed Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework depicts the system dynamics that affect work motivation and outcomes in gig employment. Gig work is depicted as the main factor that determines income uncertainty, flexibility, and welfare-related aspects. Income uncertainty leads to the creation of motivation, which is the basis of worker interest and skill development that eventually leads to employee productivity. At the same time, flexibility is identified as the main factor of motivation that directly leads to productivity.

Organisationally, welfare provisions, job security, and employment benefits are seen to influence trust in safety and job satisfaction. Employee productivity is the mediating factor that links motivational and system-level factors to overall satisfaction. The framework combines motivational and structural components to illustrate how gig employment can provide flexibility and at the same time create insecurity.

Functional Theory (income needs and flexibility), Expectancy Theory (effort reward and productivity linkages), and Self-Determination Theory (interest, autonomy, and satisfaction). Therefore, the framework is a direct response to RO3 by explaining work motivation and system dynamics in the gig economy.

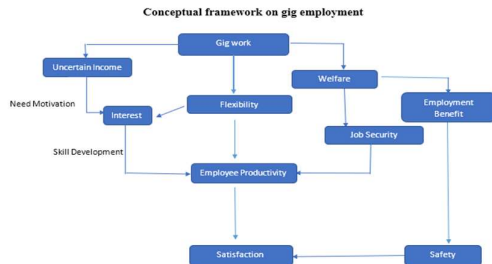


Figure 6 Conceptual Framework on Gig Employment  
Source: Author's Own

**Conclusion**

This PRISMA-based mixed-methods research combining the quantitative bibliometric analysis and qualitative thematic review comprehensively understands the digital gig economy between 2017 and 2025 fulfilling the study's aims. Firstly, in line with RO1 (global research trends on the digital gig economy), quantitative analysis of publication patterns revealed a rapid increase in gig economy research since 2020, with major contributions from the United Kingdom and Europe and emerging outputs from India and China, reflecting a growing global research focus (author et al., 2024). Secondly, with regards to RO2 (technological factors shaping the gig economy), the thematic synthesis of the most cited articles revealed that technological drivers such as artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and algorithmic management are the main factors influencing job structures, platform governance, and organizational adaptations in the gig context (Graham et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Thirdly, to support RO3 (work motivation and system dynamics through Functional, Expectancy, and Self-Determination theories), this study emphasizes that digital work systems affect worker motivation, autonomy, and engagement but at the same time, they are linked to increasing precarity, surveillance, and work-life imbalance which make motivational theories very relevant to understanding gig worker behavior. Hence, the combination of a quantitative and qualitative approach allows the study to strengthen its triangulation which means that it provides both empirical scope and interpretive depth for understanding the evolving research landscape.

**Future Research Direction**

This study shows a PRISMA-based mixed-methods approach to provide detailed information on the digital gig economy. Many areas related to it are still unexplored/minimum research has been done. Future research studies should focus on expanding the coverage of their bibliometric coverage by

utilising multiple databases. Further research should use more tools and techniques, such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and cloud computing, in its synthesis regarding the efficiency, inclusivity, and sustainability impacts on the gig economy.

Job stability, social security, employment benefits, and the empowerment of gig workers should also be compared across developed and emerging economies. Future research should also explore how AI systems can assist in fair assessment practices, as well as inspire and tailor work experiences.

**Declarations**

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**AI Usage:** AI tools were used solely for grammar and language refinement.

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