

## Gig Economy Workers: A Systematic Literature Review

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**Abstract:** *The gig economy has significantly transformed work patterns and labor market dynamics. This study presents a systematic literature review to identify conceptual trends in research on gig economy workers. Employing descriptive analysis, 157 articles from the Scopus database (2017–2023) were analyzed using VOSviewer. The findings reveal three primary concepts: the gig economy, online platforms, and workers. Moreover, the analysis indicates that digital technology positively and negatively impacts gig economy workers, highlighting workers' need to comprehend the digital ecosystem. Policymakers have a pivotal role in ensuring adequate employment protection for these workers. However, this study is limited to data from Scopus and excludes publications from 2024. Future research should include a comparative analysis using the Web of Science (WoS) database and extend the period frame to provide a more comprehensive perspective.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital communication platforms has enabled the emergence of the gig economy, a modern economic system involving multiple forms of transient employment. This system has experienced rapid global dissemination (Banik and Padalkar, 2021). This has changed the labor market, management procedures, business models, and existing regulations. The gig economy is paid work independent contractors perform through online platforms. However, a broader definition includes online and offline intermediaries, employees and independent contractors, paid and unpaid work, and sharing assets other than gig performance (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020). This transformation has revolutionized how individuals work by leveraging digital platforms that enable them to connect with potential clients for short-term and contract-based employment (Lehdonvirta, 2018; Tironi & Alborno, 2022; Keller, 2023).

The gig economy has created new opportunities and challenged traditional concepts of work, employment relationships, and social protection. This emphasis on flexibility and autonomy requires new adaptations in employment and social protection policies and raises questions about fairness and economic stability for gig workers (Anwar and Graham, 2020). This occurrence has also drawn considerable interest from academics, decision-makers, and practitioners worldwide, who are increasingly interested in understanding the gig economy's impact on social, economic, and legal aspects. Previous research has documented the positive effects of the gig economy's growth on creating new jobs, especially in the context of entrepreneurship and more inclusive employment opportunities. According to Webster and Zhang (2020), the gig economy has created

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business opportunities for recent immigrants in Sweden, shaped by gender norms. This study reveals how gender narratives about women's unemployment and domestic work capacity are marketed and transformed through digital platforms. In addition, according to Mouazen and Hernandez-Lara (2023), the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the gig economy positively impact female entrepreneurship. Additionally, elements within the entrepreneurial ecosystem are considered to play a significant role, while entrepreneurial opportunities and needs contribute relatively equally. This study is based on data gathered from a sample of 300 women entrepreneurs in Lebanon through a questionnaire designed to measure the metrics and framework outlined in the suggested approach, which were analyzed using the partial least squares method.

Recent studies have emphasized the gig economy's contributions to job creation and entrepreneurial innovation, particularly benefiting marginalized groups within the employment sector. Asfahani et al. (2023) identified a positive correlation between effective human resource practices, job satisfaction, and career resilience. Furthermore, the study revealed that demographic factors, including age and gender, exert minimal moderating effects on these relationships. These findings offer valuable insights into the influence of HR practices on fostering workplace fulfillment and promoting sustainable career development among gig workers in Saudi Arabia. Studies related to the gig economy in the context of technological developments and the labor market are fundamental and can benefit the development of future employment policies. Therefore, researchers recognize this as an intriguing issue and aim to explore and analyze how the gig economy is addressed, along with the appropriate implementation of regulations and protections for gig workers. In studies related to the gig economy, the structured literature review method is frequently employed as it is considered effective in addressing fundamental research questions and producing relevant conclusions. Several studies have highlighted the global development and evolution of gig economy workers.

Although many previous studies have discussed gig economy workers, only a few have used the systematic literature review (SLR) approach with articles from the Scopus database. Furthermore, research that utilizes article review methods in conjunction with the VOSviewer application remains limited. This study provides a new contribution by applying the SLR approach to comprehensively and comparatively analyze research trends related to gig economy workers, drawing on 157 scholarly articles sourced from the Scopus database, the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method provides a structured and rigorous approach to analyzing research issues, leveraging insights from prior literature to enhance understanding.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The gig economy has rapidly evolved as a service provision that has transformed workforce management procedures, business models, and regulations. In particular, platform companies' interaction with their employees has raised significant public attention (Healy et al., 2017). The gig economy creates new opportunities and challenges traditional concepts of work, employment relationships, and social protection. This emphasis on flexibility and autonomy demands new adaptations in employment and social protection policies and raises questions about fairness and economic stability for gig workers (Anwar and Graham, 2020).

On the other hand, the creation and advancement of machine learning algorithms, which underlie artificial intelligence, has accelerated automation and changed the way workforce management is done. Algorithmic management, initially dominant in the context of the gig economy, is now starting to influence the structure and dynamics of conventional work environments, resulting in broader impacts on the work landscape (Jarrahi et al., 2021). Gig workers are under the firm control of algorithmic management, which, while seemingly offering flexibility and autonomy, actually tends to reduce workers' well-being. Algorithms regulate their

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tasks and work directly, affecting the organization's social and power structures (Wood et al., 2019).

This often places workers in disadvantaged conditions, with low wages, irregular working hours, and social isolation. While there is potential for worker collectivism, increasingly centralized corporate control hampers such organizing efforts (Muldoon and Raekstad, 2023; Mendonça and Kougiannou, 2023). In Indonesia, millions of workers involved in the gig economy have faced a variety of benefits and challenges. The report found positive aspects, such as gross wages and efforts to reduce work risks and harassment. However, issues such as net income below the minimum wage, long working hours, lack of social security, and restricted appeal mechanisms still require attention (Putri et al., 2023).

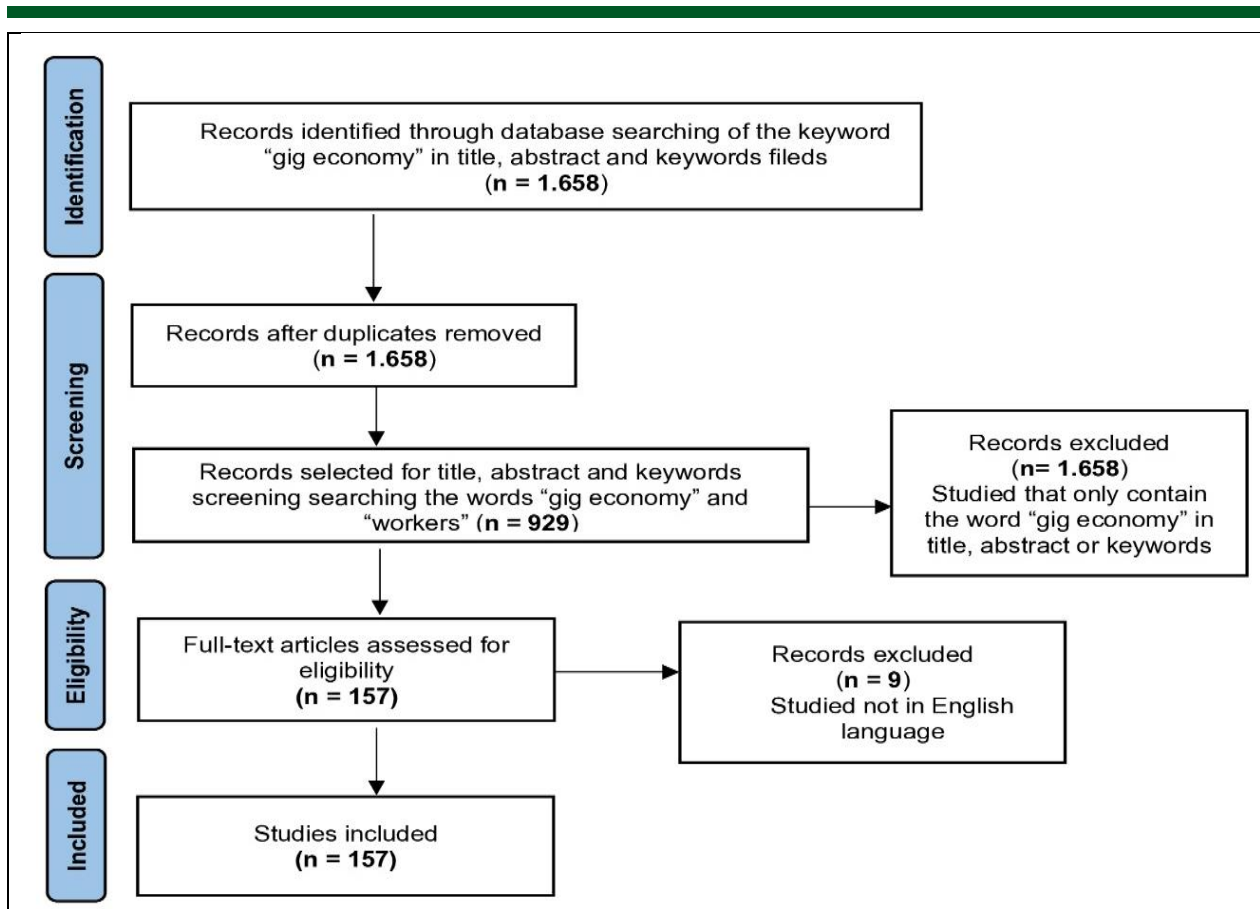
Exploring the effect of the gig economy on workers' well-being, social security access, and financial stability is crucial in this context. Additionally, a comprehensive analysis of how technology influences the structure and dynamics of the contemporary labor market is necessary to understand the challenges and opportunities that gig workers and policymakers face. A thorough study of the gig worker economy is required, given the explanations provided. The various issues in this sector must be thoroughly and comprehensively examined, and practical solutions must be developed to address them. Although the gig economy offers flexibility and a supplementary revenue stream, companies and policymakers still have significant work to do to ensure adequate social protection and financial security for gig workers. Projections indicate that the gig economy is expected to experience continued growth in the years ahead, driven by technological innovation and changes in market preferences that influence the expansion of this sector.

## **METHOD**

This systematic literature review aims to systematically explore and synthesize research on gig economy workers using the Scopus database. Scopus was chosen as the primary data source due to its extensive and influential collection of international research articles, ensuring that the reviewed literature has significant academic rigor and relevance.

This study explores several salient factors related to understanding gig economy workers' concepts, impacts, and trends. The researcher aims to synthesize prior studies and reviews conducted by other researchers to identify common themes and insights into how the role of gig workers is evolving in the modern economy. This analysis is further depicted in the PRISMA flow diagram as follows:

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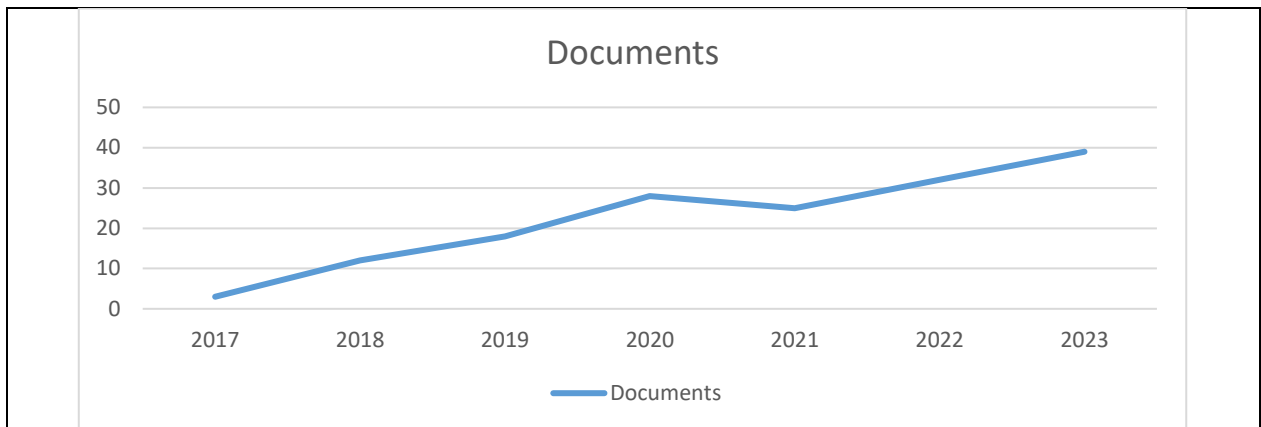


**Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Information Search in SCOPUS**

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

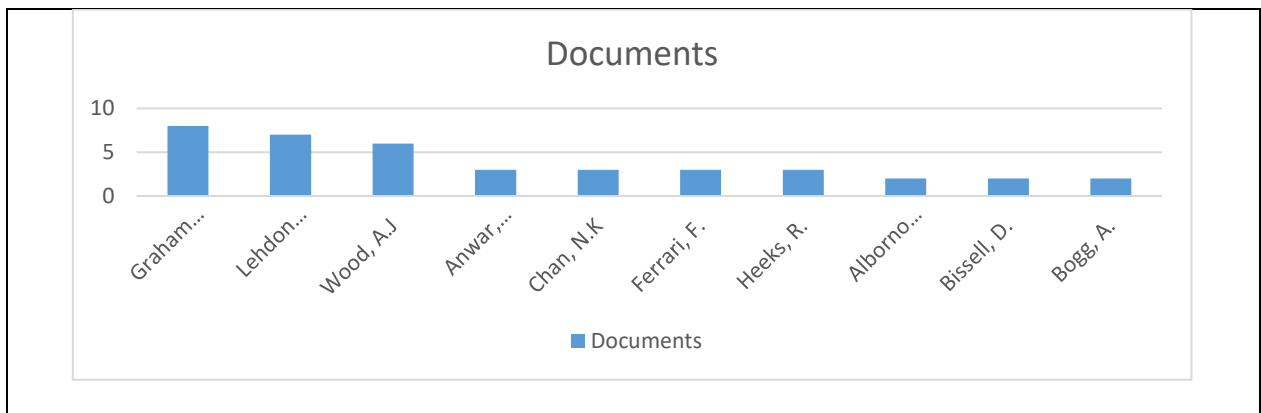
### Leading Publications and Authors

Studies on gig economy workers have become increasingly prominent and have demonstrated consistent growth in publication numbers over the years. Figure 2 illustrates that from 2017 to 2020, there was a consistent upward trend in the number of publications. However, a slight decline was observed in 2021 compared to the previous year. In contrast, the number of articles published rebounded and increased again from 2022 to 2023. Meanwhile, the year with the most articles published was 2023 (40 articles). Conversely, the year with the lowest number of articles published was 2017 (3 articles).



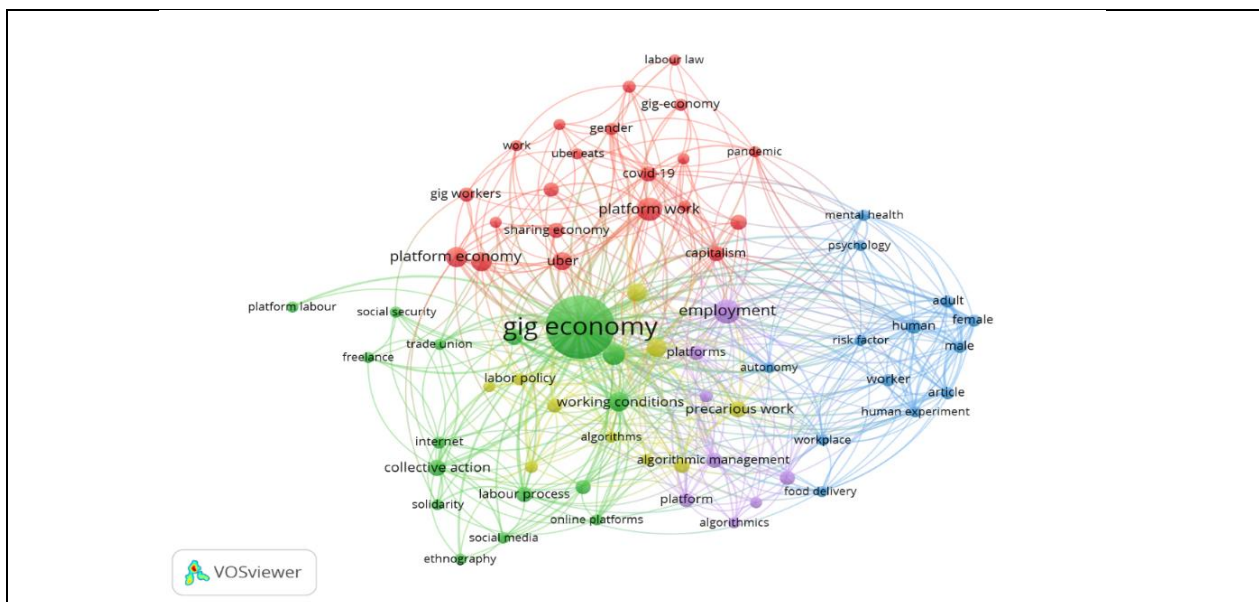
**Figure 2: Count of Publications from 2017-2023**

Figure 3 presents the 10 most prolific authors in publications on gig economy workers from 2017 to 2023. Graham ranks first with the most contributions, totaling eight articles. Meanwhile, in second place is Lehdonvirta, who has published 7 articles; third place is occupied by Wood, who has published 6 articles. Furthermore, 4 authors, Anwar, Chan, Ferrari, and Heeks, have published the same 3 articles. Finally, 3 authors, Albornoz, Bissell, and Bogg, published 2 articles.



**Figure 3: Top 10 Published Writers Associated to Gig Economy Workers from 2017-2023**  
**Connections and Classification of Themes in the Study of Gig Economy Workers**

The subsequent description outlines the follow-up procedure applied to the selected articles and academic publications following the completion of the preliminary screening and verification process. The review results are processed using the VOSviewer application to categorize concepts by group. The results can be seen in the following image.



**Figure 4: Related Discussion Topic Groups Gig Economy Worker**

Figure 4 illustrates various conceptual groupings visualized through cluster density, featuring 348 links with a total connection intensity 484. The differences in cluster hues represent distinct discussion groups, making it easier for researchers to map and analyze data. Each color corresponds to a unique cluster, signifying the grouping of related concepts. The figure also categorizes themes for review, showing how correlated groups are organized based on the topics discussed. This form of mapping, as shown in Figure 4, can be particularly valuable for new researchers starting their studies. By identifying a topic of interest within a specific field, they can locate relevant articles using this research as a guide.

Additionally, Table 1 provides a detailed overview of ideas or topics categorized through clusters associated with the research of gig economy workers. The corresponding information is presented in the table below.

| Group     | Draft   | Total    |
|-----------|---|----------|
| Cluster 1 | Australia, COVID-19, digital platforms, economics, entrepreneur, future of work, gender, gig workers, gig economy, informal economy, labour law, pandemic, platform economy, platform work, remote work, sharing economy, South Africa, uber, uber eats, work | 21 items |
| Cluster 2 | Collective action, digital labour, ethnography, freelance, gig economy, gig work, internet, labour, labour process, online platforms, platform labour, social media, social security, solidarity, trade union, working conditions                             | 16 items |
| Cluster 3 | Adult, article, autonomy, female, food delivery, human, human experiment, male, mental health, psychology, risk factor, worker, workplace   | 13 items |
| Cluster 4 | Algorithm, algorithms, embeddedness, gamification, labour market, labour policy, labour geography, platform capitalism, precarious work, resistance   | 10 items |
| Cluster 5 | Algorithmic management, algorithmics, employment, job   | 8 items  |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | satisfaction, platform, platforms, precarity, workers |  |
|--|---|--|

**Table 1: Topics Categorized by Cluster**

Table 1 indicates that Cluster 1 primarily explores how the gig economy can increase work flexibility and create new income opportunities in the digital era. The most dominant keyword in Cluster 1 is the gig economy, which indicates that the subject of the internet is mentioned most frequently in Cluster 1. In the case of Cluster 1, which explores the gig economy, the article by Davletgildeev and Klimovskaya (2019) reveals that many countries, including Russia, have experienced rapid growth in the gig economy. This growth is marked by a significant annual increase in workers engaging through digital platforms. Similarly, Lu et al. (2023) highlight that this expansion has also driven the emergence of flexible workforce platforms, which allow businesses to handle short-term labor more efficiently.

One notable advantage of working through these platforms is the minimal entry requirements, particularly the absence of a strict obligation to register as an individual entrepreneur. This flexibility allows anyone interested in providing services to join the platform. However, as Lyutov & Voitkovska (2021) noted, certain shortcomings persist, particularly in the legislative frameworks and law enforcement practices related to remote work within online platform-based employment. Consequently, as this sector grows, there is a pressing need to establish clear legal statuses for platform workers within the employment system and ensure their access to social protection. As emphasized by Hickson (2024), this includes providing workers with access to unemployment benefits and social assistance.

Furthermore, Cluster 2, which is dominated by the keywords digital/online platforms, highlights essential dynamics within the gig economy. Research by McDonald et al. (2021) indicates that platform control over various aspects, such as pricing, services, product quality, and relationship management, influences worker engagement levels. This adds a new dimension to understanding how digital platforms operate and affect workers' experiences. In line with this context, the experiences of self-employed individuals and freelancers, who often operate under platform control, further complicate the understanding of work dynamics within digital platforms (Octavia, 2022; Bertram, 2023). Additionally, research by Waldkirch et al. (2021) has enriched the understanding of how digital platforms shape their work experiences by focusing on the political economy of creative freelancers.

Consistent with this study's findings, platforms' algorithms and Human Resource Management (HRM) practices significantly impact how workers interact with them and evaluate their legitimacy and effectiveness. Freelancers and self-employed workers are not only engaged in their work but are also influenced by broader arrangements related to pricing and supervision implemented by digital platforms. These factors affect their comfort levels, satisfaction, and even their decisions to continue working with specific platforms. Thus, the results of this research enhance comprehension of the obstacles encountered by independent workers in the freelance economy, particularly concerning engagement, supervision, and platform-imposed controls. They also provide critical insights into clarifying the relationship between platform power and control, directly influencing the quality and types of work offered to creative freelancers.

Cluster 3 relates to the worker topic explained by Athreya (2020). Digital technology, which is often considered neutral, actually allows for new forms of worker exploitation, primarily through algorithmic manipulation. Workers relying on digital platforms for employment remain highly susceptible to coercion and control due to unequal access to information, insufficient labor protections, and exploitative business practices. The study also illustrates how digital platforms have transformed traditional labor relations, highlighting forms of control and barriers to worker

autonomy. The report argues for a new conceptualization of forced labor in the digital age. It responds to new violations in the worldwide economy, encompassing alternative business models and labor organizing.

In addition, another article by Wu et al. (2022) shows that platform work does have significant risks and pressures. However, workers can utilize internal resources and social support, especially from family and online groups, to maintain high mental well-being. The relationship between the significance of work, autonomy, perceived ability, and personal well-being also plays a vital role in this achievement. Cluster 4 is related to the topic of the labor market, which is explained by Curran and Jenks (2023), who emphasize how the gig economy has transformed service-focused industries, including digital education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching in the gig economy generated significant income; however, despite substantial changes in the global labor market after the gig economy. Studies on gig-based work's influence are still minimal. This study attempts to bridge this gap by examining how teachers in the gig economy market themselves using self-branding theory. An analysis of 100 teachers found that they used four different self-branding discourses depending on their country of origin, qualifications, and language background.

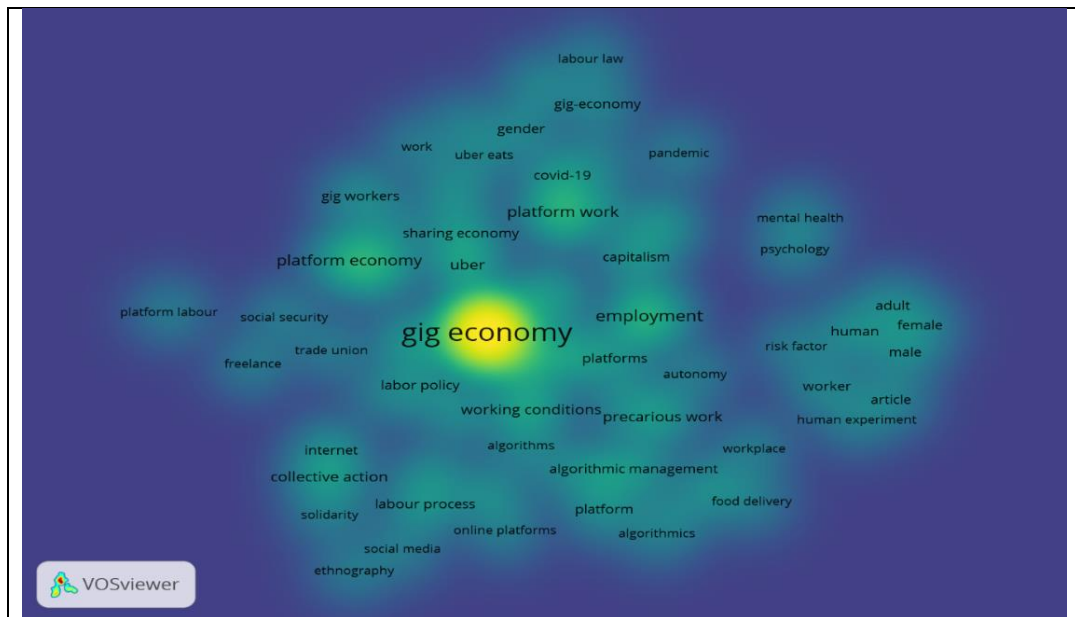
This discourse reflects a global trend highlighting intense worker competition, which can lead to declining income and job security. Lastly, in Cluster 5, focusing on algorithmics, McDaid et al. (2023) demonstrate that algorithms in the labor market function as powerful disciplinary tools. Workers engage in various practices to self-regulate, whether by enduring, challenging, or abandoning the working conditions dictated by algorithms. The distance between management and workers has influenced these practices, underscoring the need for careful consideration in employing algorithms for remote control. Failure to address these dynamics may exacerbate tensions or dissatisfaction among workers.

Additionally, another study discussed by Wood et al. (2019) highlights the essential role of algorithmic management in the functioning of online labor platforms. While algorithmic management offers workers flexibility, high levels of autonomy, diverse tasks, and significant work complexity, these control mechanisms also present several challenges. These include low wages, social isolation, irregular working hours, overwork, sleep deprivation, and burnout, all of which can negatively impact workers' well-being. Further research by Wiener et al. (2023) highlights the importance of micro-level legitimacy evaluations in mediating the effects of algorithmic control. Online labor platforms can mitigate adverse outcomes such as overwork and burnout by designing algorithmic control mechanisms that respect workers' autonomy, fairness, and privacy. Moreover, this approach can enhance worker satisfaction and loyalty to the platform, promoting a more enduring and balanced workplace.

### **Dominant Themes in Gig Economy Workers Studied**

Drawing from the data analysis, several prominent themes or concepts strongly correlate with the study of gig economy workers. Classifying these key themes is intended to streamline and sharpen the research focus, ultimately aiding in presenting a relevant conclusion. Additionally, categorizing and classifying dominant themes helps the author more effectively map topics related to the issues under discussion. This study on gig economy workers requires verifying or sorting data to suit the topic. This step is vital to ensure the discussion is not too general and focuses on relevant issues. The results can be seen in the following figure.

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**Figure 5: Key Themes in Research on Gig Economy Workers**

Figure 5 highlights key concepts that dominate discussions in the study of gig economy workers. The word clusters displayed in the figure reveal recurring themes or concepts that have been frequently explored in previous research. To process the data and identify these dominant ideas, the researchers utilized the Vosviewer analysis tool. Some of the essential concepts and topics discussed by previous researchers are the gig economy, platform economy, sharing economy, labor conditions, internet, employment, autonomy, precarious work, algorithmic management, labor market, human, gig work, and platform work. In Figure 5, the color thickness indicates the status of each subject group. Topics shown in bright and bold colors indicate topics discussed in the study. These dominant theoretical groups are closely related, making it easier for researchers to conclude research focused on gig economy workers. Unraveling these dominant themes is essential to provide insight into concepts often overlooked in previous research.

As a result, the processed data is illustrated in Figure 5. Many issues are being studied based on the main topics shown in Figure 5. The first theme, namely the gig economy, is the focus of the study. The presence of technology and the internet profoundly affects the gig economy, both positively and negatively. The complexity of this problem makes it an interesting and important research topic to be the main focus of historical research. Another essential topic shown in bold in Figure 5 is employment. Employment is closely linked to the analysis of gig economy workers. The gig economy opens up opportunities for people with difficulty finding traditional jobs due to non-standard working hours, specialized skills, and geographic limitations. However, working in the gig economy also presents numerous obstacles, as many researchers have observed.

Horváth et al. (2021) have highlighted the effect of digitalization on workforce and labor markets, including the emergence of new jobs and the loss of others due to technological advancements. These changes present new challenges for legal frameworks, mainly regarding financial transactions that do not align with traditional legal structures. The study also argues that "employment relationships" should be expanded to encompass all work requiring financial independence. Conversely, Wright et al. (2019) research emphasizes the need to modify the fragmented legal framework to protect workers from emerging vulnerabilities, such as exploiting their increasingly fragile personal and biographical data in the digital era. These perspectives collectively indicate that digital transformation alters the nature of work and necessitates updates

to legal regulations to protect workers. Such adjustments ensure that technology drives innovation and efficiency, not creating inequities or exacerbating worker vulnerabilities in the digital age. Owing to the limitations faced by the researcher, several significant themes in this study could not be examined in detail. Nonetheless, each dominant theme in Figure 5 is interconnected and serves as a valuable reference for analyzing gig economy workers.

### Co-Authorship Analysis

This study includes network mapping based on author names. Author participation in related research is essential because it reflects the intensity of contributions and relationships between authors in the field. Author network mapping can help identify potential references between authors for future collaborations and show how often an author collaborates with other researchers. Graham has the most publications, namely 8 works, as seen in Figure 6. Furthermore, when examining the author collaborations, it was found that, of the 337 authors with at least three works, only 7 people are Graham, Lehdonvirta, Wood, Ferrari, Heeks, and Anwar. Finally, 3 authors with 3 joint works are Wood, Graham, and Lehdonvirta. This shows that the author's collaboration with gig economy workers is still tiny.

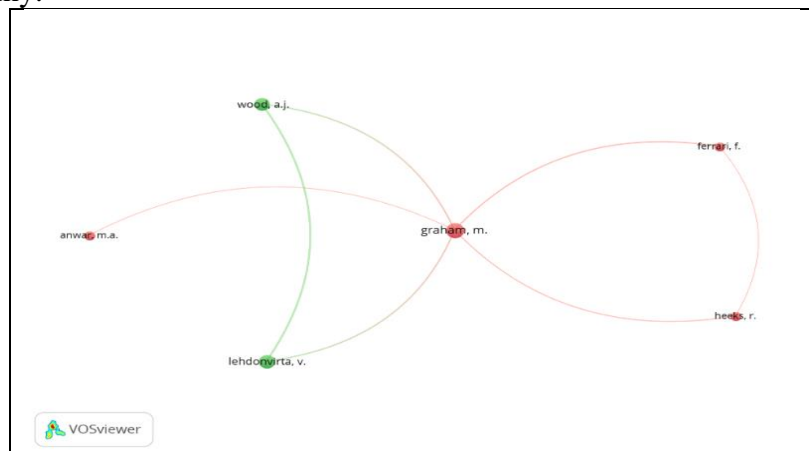


Figure 6: Co-Authoring Analysis

### CONCLUSION

The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has caused changes and dynamics in work patterns in the digital era. Research on the workforce in the gig economy is essential and should be widely disseminated. This research highlights several significant findings related to gig economy workers. Key aspects concerning these workers include: The first aspect is the gig economy. Digital technology has profoundly influenced work patterns. Its availability and ease of access have opened up new opportunities for the community. Digital platforms play a central role in driving the gig economy, creating jobs, and enabling innovation and creativity in today's digital world. The second aspect is workers. Freedom to work does not mean being free from limitations and support. Employee values and rights must be preserved in virtual or digital spaces. Therefore, employees need to know and understand their rights and obligations as their foundation in carrying out gig work fairly and effectively. Finally, another important aspect is the platform's online presence. There are currently indications that control over specific platforms or businesses can influence the working environment in the gig economy. This negative effect can reduce the quality of life of employees. Therefore, a deep understanding of the workforce and appropriate security policies are needed to defend against this challenge.

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