

Consumer Behaviour in the Gig Economy: Implications For Traditional Labour Market

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DOI: [10.22178/pos.113-3](https://doi.org/10.22178/pos.113-3)

JEL Classification: K39

Received 30.10.2024

Accepted 28.01.2025

Published online 31.01.2025

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Abstract. The gig economy is fast evolving, typified or characterised by short-term, flexible and task-based digital platforms. This paper investigates how consumer behaviour in the gig economy affects traditional labour markets, focusing on structural shifts in employment and changes in labour market dynamics. It gives an overview of the gig economy, which has experienced rapid growth in transitioning towards flexible, short-term employment arrangements through platforms enabled by digital technologies. The study also highlights the different types of gig platforms, such as ridesharing, freelance marketplaces, and on-demand services, by elaborating on their specific feature and business models. The study reinforces that consumer buying behaviour in the gig economy predicts convenience, cost-effectiveness, and speed of service delivery. The study also indicates that the gig economy has significant implications on the labour market dynamics since new forms of employment challenge regular job security, benefits, and worker rights. These findings support that while the gig economy provides greater flexibility to workers, it also creates more significant issues related to income instability and removing traditional labour protection. The challenges associated with the gig economy are also investigated, including regulatory obstacles, poor or insufficient worker protection, and the long-term viability of gig platforms in light of rising competition. The study concludes that although the gig economy provides new opportunities for consumers and workers, it also involves many challenges that must be thoroughly deliberated and mitigated by policymakers and industry representatives.

Keywords: Labour; Gig; Workers; Consumer; Economy.

INTRODUCTION

The global labour market has undergone much transformation and alteration in recent years [1]. Today's skilled workforce and employment opportunities are not limited and constrained by the workers' physical location or business organisation's physical location. Digital technology has accelerated this with its broad reach, helping to connect job seekers with corporate organisations globally [2]. More specifically, the rise in popularity of digital technology and easy access to the internet has given rise to new types of economic activity collectively known as the "gig" economy. In regions around the globe that have historically suffered from high unemployment and poor salaries, this digitally mediated type of labour creates jobs [2].

According to the author [3], the gig economy is characterised by workers open to flexible work schedules based on service demand, workers

who self-provide jobs, tasks completed online, and often a triangle-shaped relationship between employees, end users, and digital intermediaries. Technological progress and the proliferation of digital platforms have primarily driven this shift towards more flexible and dynamic work, connecting service providers directly with consumers [1]. These platforms facilitated the ease with which people could seek per-task work and empowered consumers through their vast array of convenient and cost-effective services.

At the core of any gig economy lies the consumer. Consumer behaviour has been one of the essential drivers of its growth. The factors that attract consumers to the gig economy are based on convenience, affordability, and efficiency [4]. Whether getting a ride via some peer-to-peer ridesharing app, ordering food for delivery, or engaging a freelance professional to complete a particular project, consumers expect the flexibility and efficiency most traditional service providers struggle

gle to match. This shift in consumer expectations and behaviour has profound implications for the labour market in terms of shifting the nature of jobs in demand and how they are performed and compensated [5].

As millions of people join the gig economy, whether as a primary or supplementary income or their traditional job, the difference between full-time work and freelancing continues to be more insignificant; it also has fundamental implications for job security, workers' rights, and the conventional relationship between employer and employee [1]. In most cases, gig workers are considered independent contractors and often lack standard perks or benefits extended to employees, including health insurance and retirement plans.

Within its flexible and mostly short-term nature lies the potential of the gig economy to breed a disaggregated workforce with low long-term economic security and reductions in social cohesion. This article assesses the relationship between consumer behaviour within the gig economy and its effect or implications on the traditional labour market. The study also analyses the driving force for the behaviour of consumers within the gig economy and how these behaviours reshape employment patterns and impact the broader economy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Gig Economy. The Gig economy refers to a labour market characterised by part-time, flexible jobs – mostly digital-platform-based – where workers resort to independent contractors rather than full-time employees [6]. It is the new wave of the international division of labour, wherein businesses, as consumers, log on to online platforms to connect with contractors or workers to execute any task [4]. This model has created a robust market, particularly in sectors like delivery, day labour, and odd jobs, which, in turn, efficiently enables SMEs to outsource tasks like manual labour, transportation, and human intelligence services [7].

This is because most platforms have very minimum entry requirements, efficiently sourcing many workers to ensure the continuous supply of on-demand labourers [8]. The gig economy offers gigantic benefits to workers and businesses through an information technology- and internet-driven infrastructure that matches demand

and supply of services at very high speeds. Still, these benefits seem to favour those with specialised skills, deep expertise, or in-demand experiences since such workers are more likely to succeed within a competitive environment [9].

The basic model involves gig workers formally agreeing with on-demand companies to provide services for the clients of that company, and in return, the platform acts as an intermediary through which clients request service and where workers get paid [10]. As organisations and businesses continue to use gig economy platforms, policymakers and economists must recognise the effect of this ever-growing trend in the labour market. On the one hand, the gig economy offers a flexible and cost-effective way to secure labour; on the other, it has implications and effects related to worker rights, job security, and the viability of long-term work arrangements [7].

Theoretical Background. The evolving nature of technology is constantly changing conventional employment structures in the modern business environment and replacing them with the 'gig' economy, entailing the use of temporary or freelance labour in several industry sectors. The gig economy involves platforms linking independent contractors, consultants, and workers in IT, content creation, and food services [1]. Technology – the internet, more specifically – has increased the reach of the gig economy by facilitating the ease with which workers could find a job worldwide, hence not necessarily dependent on any region.

On the other hand, there are chances and challenges in the gig economy. The advantages are low frills to entry, flexible working hours, freedom for various zones of projects, and flexibility of working from any place. The disadvantages are: no pension, social or health insurance coupled, no assurance of job safety/security, and no guarantee on income levels. The gig workforce forms a dominant part of the labour market [11]. For instance, there were 4.8 million self-employed individuals in the UK, while in the U.S., there were 15 million gig workers in recent years – 15.1 per cent and 10.1 per cent of the workforce, respectively [12].

In India, 15 million freelancers of repute in various fields are gaining prominence and leaving their mark in the business environment [1]. Moreover, according to researchers, the gig economy is bigger because many full-time workers are also involved in gig work regularly [13]. Government data shows that upwards of 30 per

cent of families make income through self-employment or gig work. Also, Upwork and Freelancers Union indicated that in 2017, 57.3 million Americans contributed an estimated \$1.4 trillion annually through freelancing to make up 36 per cent of the workforce [11].

Gig Platforms. According to the author [14], the gig economy represents an opportunity to create surplus value for consumers in a more efficient allocation of labour services. Authors [15] define these platforms as "multisided markets," with participants on both the demand and supply sides. According to authors [4], this can involve locally-based platform-mediated work in tasks requiring human contact, such as driving or caring, and remotely based tasks requiring no human contact, like transcription or graphic design operations. Over the past years, gig platforms have rapidly grown and diversified to include various jobs. This study highlights some of the various gig platforms currently being used presently.

Upwork. Upwork is a California-based American freelancing platform enabling remote working globally. Through an easy-to-use interface, it allows and standardises a working environment among its users. Upwork significantly reduces traditional forms of the geographically defined boundary to hiring, that is, for African employees or workers wishing to become a part of the online work market [16]. Labour is managed through algorithmic control, where the platform offers features such as voluntary skills tests and a feedback mechanism, all for a 10% service fee on contracts [17].

According to authors [2], Upwork is the most important platform for African gig workers since it is easily accessible. Upwork is powered by a techno-system that amalgamates algorithmic governance and surveillance to manage labour processes, a concept also evident in other gig economy platforms like Uber.

Uber. Founded in 2009 and based in San Francisco, Uber has been pioneering the much-needed transformation in the traditional taxi industry with its taxi service through a mobile app-based solution that integrates geolocation, online payment, and workforce management capabilities – this business model is setting new standards for other similar platforms [18]. With operations in about 68 countries, the company has an estimated valuation of roughly \$62.5 billion. By 2014, it had crossed sales of more than \$1 billion. On av-

erage, Uber drivers earn between \$11 and \$12 per hour after deducting daily expenses [19].

Freelancer. Freelancer is an online marketplace where employers can post projects, and freelancers bid to complete the projects. Therefore, anyone can quote for any job; however, in this marketplace, payment will only be given when a freelancer wins a project or becomes one of the top contributors [20]. Graders provide constructive feedback on submissions, while the site charges a 10% commission, which members can reduce by purchasing a paid plan. Free accounts are limited because they can bid on only eight monthly projects, and direct deposit withdrawal is unavailable.

Fiverr. Fiverr.com is a freelance digital marketplace where freelancers offer services in the form of "gigs" starting at \$5. It brings freelancers and clients together all around the globe, providing an interface through which users can buy or sell services from home. According to the author [21], Fiverr's success can be attributed to its ability to fill the gap in demand for low-cost, high-quality services targeted at small – to medium-sized businesses. Fiverr has processed over 25 million transactions with over a million service providers since 2010 and ranked 412 in global traffic with 39.76 million daily unique visitors as of 2018 [22].

Understanding Consumer Behaviour in the Gig Economy. Assessing consumer behaviour under the gig economy will define how growth in on-demand services and flexible work arrangements influences consumer purchasing decisions, service expectations, and brand loyalty [23]. Consumers within the gig economy are likely to value ease, speed, and relatively low cost; hence, consumers gravitate toward platforms that provide instant access to services tailored towards immediate needs. The behavioural shift – a trend toward personalisation flexibility, away from traditional and often rigid service models – has profound implications for businesses and workers within the gig economy [3].

Consumer Motivation for Engaging with the Gig Economy. One of the major factors influencing consumer interaction with the gig economy is convenience in an ever-increasingly fast world, which appreciates services delivered quicker and easily accessible through user-friendly digital platforms. The gig economy provides consumers with instant solutions for everything, from ordering food to booking a taxi or even seeking a free-

lance professional in some domain of expertise [17]; this is a convenience level that befits the modern consumer lifestyle, in which time is an essential asset, and the capability of getting goods and services with minimum hassle has become vital. Cost-effectiveness is another important driver for consumer involvement in the gig economy [24].

Many gig-based services can offer competitive pricing compared to traditional businesses due to their lower overhead costs and flexible pricing models. For example, while ridesharing services underpin conventional taxis, freelance platforms allow consumers to find skilled workers at any price point [24]. These financial advantages will enable the gig economy services to be a deal for value-conscious consumers without losing quality.

Consumer Preferences and Expectations. In the gig economy, immediacy and quality of service are two significant focus areas among consumer preferences. Consumers have grown used to attaining services speedily and efficiently on on-demand platforms, so they want their ride, meal delivery, or freelance work today [1]. This expectation for speed exists because of the real-time nature of gig services – often, individual users need something or want it right now – and this demand for rapid delivery coupled with a high focus on the quality of the service delivered.

Not only do consumers want quick responses, but they also expect accuracy in service, reliability, and professionalism. They would want the service provider to at least match up to their standards, which can consist of anything - be it the accuracy of an order or even how courteous the service is provided [1]. This dual focus on speed and quality is essential for companies in the gig economy, where the fulfilment of expectations is enormous toward driving and retaining consumer satisfaction and loyalty and setting one company apart from others within a crowded market [25].

Influence of Technology on Consumer Behaviour. Consumer behaviour has changed drastically with the arrival of mobile applications and digital platforms within this new gig economy era. These technologies act as the primary interface governing the relationships between consumers and service providers, making connecting to and engaging with gig services easier [26]. Mobile apps make finding and booking services much more convenient; hence, users can comfortably

connect with providers to complete transactions. The likes of convenience – having a slew of services at one's fingertips – reshaped expectations with real-time tracking and instant communication features.

With apps allowing users to request services, house payments, and even give feedback, users expect more convenience and efficiency than ever. This speed of delivery and ease of access have become so core to consumer preference that the gig economy has increased exponentially. Social media and e-commerce platforms play a significant role in driving consumer demand by sharing products and user reviews [27]. These elevate the power of consumers by enabling them to research products, brands, and manufacturers before purchase, thereby enabling more informed customer decisions [28].

Implication of the Gig Economy on the Traditional Labour Market. The gig economy has massively influenced the traditional labour market by changing the nature of work and employment dynamics. With flexible, short-term freelance work opportunities, several people opt for gig-based roles rather than regular full-time employment [26]; this has contributed to lower employment security and stability for many within the traditional labour market since gig work rarely offers a variety of benefits or protections afforded by conventional employment businesses, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave. The study evaluates various implications of the Gig economy on the traditional labour market, such as shifts in employment patterns, effects on wage dynamics, impacts on labour unions and workers' rights and effects on job security.

Employment Patterns. The gig economy continues to reinvent the traditional notions of full-time employment by breaking the extended 9-to-5 model, as more workers opt for flexible schedules that place a premium on their personal preference [29]. Short-term, temporary, and task-based gigs increasingly replace fixed and permanent contracts, providing greater flexibility for workers and businesses. Since these gigs are often accessible to all skill levels, the labour market is broadening to include low-skilled workers [29]. While flexibility has a dual effect, it produces benefits and possible adverse effects on all parties concerned.

Gig work provides flexibility but often comes at a cost, such as losing job security and many stand-

ard benefits typically associated with regular employment, like health insurance, paid time off, and retirement. Gig workers thus place themselves in one precarious situation after another, for they do not have as much stability as a full-time employee would [30]. Usually, this instability comes in the form of financial problems stemming from income through gig work being very unpredictable and unreliable. Crucially, the lack of benefits provided by the employer places more burdens on gig workers, who are forced to manage their insurance, taxes, and savings outside of the support typically provided in conventional job settings.

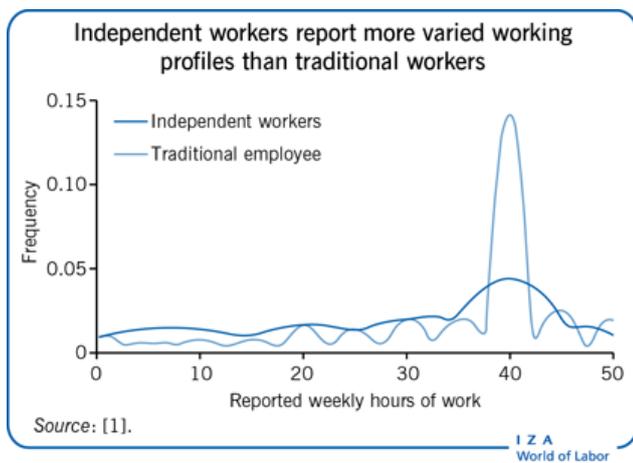


Figure 1 – weekly working hours of Independent (Gig) Workers and Traditional Workers [29]

Wage Dynamics. The gig economy is well known for its short time and "on-demand" features and fluctuating income of gig workers. Employers pay gig workers per task or project rather than provide fixed or basic salaries, as opposed to conventional workers [31]. This financial insecurity can make it hard for a gig worker to cover living expenses, which could affect his living standard. In 2020, 62% of U.S. gig economy respondents reported that their emergency savings wouldn't last six months, with 24% indicating that they had less than one month of savings [32].

In return for the high level of flexibility and independence in gig work, workers are expected to face unstable incomes. With insufficient savings, it would be hard to cope with unexpected events like layoffs during an economic downturn, which may make a big dent in their lives. Furthermore, the gig economy brings a dynamic dimension to wage structures. Dynamic pricing and compensation strategies might be expected in gig work. Though the income for workers would fluctuate,

this strategy could let a business fund its labour cost according to customer demand [32]. Furthermore, businesses benefit from the opportunity to raise or lower the available labour supply in the face of market changes that will increase their profits. Moreover, gig jobs seem to include a lot of repetition, which is relatively cheap for any business to use compared with a full-time worker; therefore, it helps reduce labour costs.

Implication of Labour Union and Workers right. The gig economy has further complicated the ability of labour unions to bargain regarding workers' rights and protection effectively. Much of this reason goes towards the fact that gig workers have different employment arrangements and work commitments. When the nature of gig work is diverse and dispersed, it becomes very hard to elect representatives who can represent all gig workers effectively [33]. Remote gig workers, in particular, usually have lower negotiating power, reducing their control of working conditions and making exploiting their labour quite likely.

In this regard, gig workers face a weak bargaining position wherein there are few avenues of redress related to late payment, non-payment, or very long working hours. Available remedies, like legal action or private arbitration, are expensive and thus out of reach for many [1]. In this respect, it becomes challenging for gig workers to protect their rights as new forms of collective representation that meet the unique needs and challenges of this flexible and diverse workforce within the gig economy are required.

Implication of Job Security. According to authors [34], job security is the guarantee given by an employer to the worker or employee that their services will be retained for a more extended period, even if one does not specify particular reasons for their retention. It involves some attitude whereby an individual employee has trust that he will still be employed regardless of financial ups and downs [32]. As research by authors [35] indicates, employees' perception of job security positively relates to commitment towards implementing the organisation's goals. Therefore, management should establish a high-performance workforce by creating an environment prioritising job security. If the employees are confident about their job security, they can communicate effectively and strategically to work for the organisation's success, thus preventing arbitrary terminations.

The gig economy offers flexibility and autonomy but also significant challenges for workers regarding job stability, benefits, and protection. Full-time employment is contrasted with gig work, characterised by short-term contracts or freelance arrangements. As such, it can result in uncertain streams of income flow. Workers in the gig economy face various instability and uncertainty from fluctuating demand, whereby available work hours might be very inconsistent. This instability makes long-term financial planning challenging and enhances stress and insecurity, particularly for those who rely on gig work. Furthermore, a combination of unstable work, no added benefits, and poor legal protection has the potential to result in uncertainty within the gig economy. Indeed, with its continuous growth, concerns have been raised on how regulatory frameworks could help combat these challenges, providing a safer and fairer environment for people working in the gig economy.

Challenges of the Gig Economy. The United Nations Development Programme underlined that gig workers face many challenges [36]. On the plus side, gig workers have flexibility, but it generally has some significant disadvantages or challenges, like physical and psychological negative impacts. In most cases, gigs are done at home or in cafés, so the lines between work and life become blurred. Another problem with gig workers is that many do not know what projects they will work on in the future [2].

Occupational vulnerability of Gig workers. Digital technologies have introduced many new types of economic activities worldwide. According to authors [7], while this flexibility is of great use to gig workers, they are more vulnerable to fluctuations in client demand. Moreover, they have to bear the difficulties arising from economic and social pressures of supplying their tools and equipment, limited possibilities for training and career development, low wages, lack of job or revenue security, and wage discrimination, especially as regards women.

Gig workers face other health hazards associated with the psychological strain from tedious work, in addition to having no form of health and social insurance coverage in countries lacking publicly funded healthcare systems. For instance, studies on gig work in the United States show how the lack of full access to universal health coverage and social benefits exacerbates the harmful effects of unstable work [4].

Precarity. Authors [4] described precarity as the short-term, contingent nature of gig work, where there is often no health coverage, collective bargaining, or opportunity for promotion. A global debate has been raging regarding the misclassification of gig workers as contractors, not employees. The misclassification of workers in the gig economy denies workers stability and all the benefits of being classified as an employee. Furthermore, clients can end contracts anytime, making it even riskier for workers. From the management perspective, gig employment's unpredictability contravenes classic organisational theory, postulating that competitive advantage through a stable workforce and solid company culture is a key variable in that process [37].

Platform-based Vulnerabilities. Platform vulnerabilities primarily lie in the gig economy's peculiar structure, worker misclassification problems, and asymmetric and pervasive surveillance. On the one hand, the gig economy allows workers to determine their employers, the type of jobs, and working hours [4]. On the other hand, research has shown that these freedoms have already been considerably curtailed through control mechanisms of digital work platforms, particularly by algorithms [31]. Algorithmic management, technical supervision, and rating systems characterise these platforms. They destroy workers' autonomy, high work intensity, unsocial working hours, and constant monitoring [31].

A particularly insidious aspect of platform-based work is surveillance, where businesses are said to use apps to monitor when workers log in and track their locations and reportedly even eavesdrop on their interactions with customers. Such surveillance and evaluation practices have been shown to bear significant psychosocial effects on workers-related to health [38].

CONCLUSIONS

The rise of the gig economy reflects a profound cultural change in how work is imagined, performed, and valued in contemporary society. As consumer demand grows for more immediacy, personalisation, and quality service, the gig economy has become an equally powerful mechanism transforming industries and upsetting traditional business models. This flexibility of gig platforms resonates with modern consumers' preferences and hence explains the massive demand for on-demand services. It's not another trend in consumer behaviour but a change in the

fundamentals of how services are delivered and consumed, creating a new paradigm that will prioritise convenience and customisation.

The gig economy, powered by online platforms, has dramatically changed traditional employment. Full-time jobs seemed to have been replaced by flexible, short-term work arrangements. This flexibility benefits workers and businesses by offering many individuals a better balance in their work and personal lives and more opportunities for added income. On the negative side, it indicates serious concerns about job security and a lack of employer-sponsored benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leaves.

In conclusion, although the gig economy can change customer behaviour in the labour market, it also provides numerous opportunities and a variety of challenges. It is, therefore, imperative to distinguish between the gig economy's flexibility and the stability every worker would require to be more efficient. Thus, future work should address these challenges to make both the gig economy and the existing traditional labour structures coexist, ensuring that each segment benefits workers and consumers; this will require thoughtful regulation and creative solutions to build a future for all that is sustainable and equitable.

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