

RECALIBRATING LABOUR PROCESS THEORY FOR ALGORITHMIC HRM: A SEMI-SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF GIG WORK (2010–2025)

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Abstract

Gig work has reconfigured managerial authority through algorithmic infrastructures, raising fundamental questions for Human Resource Management (HRM) and Labour Process Theory (LPT). This study conducts a semi-systematic review and bibliometric mapping of 250 Scopus-indexed publications (2010–2025), retrieved with a targeted query and screened to transparent ex-ante criteria. Using VOSviewer for network analysis and interpretive synthesis, the review connects quantitative structures with substantive debates. The field has expanded rapidly since 2016, remains Euro-Atlantic centred with growing Chinese contributions, and is organised around recurring clusters of control, agency, institutions, and HRM transformation. Building on these patterns, we recalibrate LPT through a triad of Algorithmic Control, Adaptive Agency, and Institutional Co-Governance. Comparative evidence highlights China's state-platform arrangements as an alternative to adversarial litigation. The article contributes by: (1) providing an updated map of LPT-informed HRM research on platform work; (2) clarifying a framework and propositions for algorithmic HRM; and (3) offering practice and policy implications focused on transparency and hybrid governance.

Keywords: Gig economy; Algorithmic management; Labour Process Theory; Human resource management; Institutional co-governance

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of the gig economy has reconfigured how work is coordinated, supervised, and rewarded. Digital platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, and Meituan embed ranking, rating, dispatch, and incentive mechanisms into data infrastructures, relocating managerial authority from supervisors to code (Chang & Huang, 2023; Dassori & Donini, 2024; Gandini, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020). For human resource management (HRM), this shift raises first-order questions: decision rights are automated, performance is continuously monitored, and evaluative metrics are coupled to pay and opportunity at scale (Duggan et al., 2020a; Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2023). Labour Process Theory (LPT) remains a natural starting point—its core concern is how capital secures labour effort under indeterminacy through evolving regimes of control, resistance, and consent (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979; Thompson & Smith, 2009). Classical categories, grounded in the experience of industrial-era employment relations, provide a foundation that can be extended to account for algorithmic HRM in digitally mediated labour.

Despite important advances, three limitations persist. First, the literature is fragmented and case-centric: rich ethnographies of ride-hailing, food delivery, and online freelancing rarely cumulate into field-level explanations, leaving LPT applications uneven across sectors and geographies (Gandini, 2019; Rosenblat, 2016; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1994; Thompson & Smith, 2009; Veen et al., 2020; Woodcock, 2020). Second, worker responses are too often read through a resistance/compliance binary, whereas platform workers frequently enact adaptive and repair-oriented practices—multi-homing, gaming of acceptance and rating systems, peer coordination—that sustain earnings and keep opaque systems workable (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Burawoy, 1979; R. Edwards, 1979; Gandini, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020).

Existing scholarship focuses largely on policy and legal debates in Europe and North America, while regulatory approaches in other contexts remain insufficiently theorised. There, authorities have promoted wage transparency, limits on commission rates, and expanded coverage for riders through state-platform-union arrangements that differ from adversarial litigation models (Aloisi, 2015; Chen & Sun, 2023; De Stefano, 2015; De Stefano et al., 2016). Without addressing these issues, the field risks universalising claims and neglecting the political-economic diversity that structures platform work.

This study addresses the following questions: 1) How does algorithmic management reconfigure control within the labour process?, 2) In what forms do gig workers enact adaptive and repair-oriented agency beyond resistance-compliance dichotomies?, 3) How do institutional and regulatory regimes mediate these dynamics of control and agency?

We answer these questions through a semi-systematic review and bibliometric mapping of approximately 250 Scopus-indexed publications (2010–2025) retrieved via a targeted query on gig/platform/digital labour and labour process/algorithmic management (Omidi

et al., 2023). Bibliometric techniques trace the field's growth, geography, and intellectual structure; interpretive synthesis then reads clusters closely to generate higher-order theoretical insight (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

The paper's contribution is threefold. (1) We provide the most up-to-date mapping of LPT-informed HRM research on the gig economy to date, specifying temporal growth, outlet concentration, geographical diffusion, and cluster structure (Omidi et al., 2023). (2) We re-specify LPT for gig work around a triad—Algorithmic Control, Adaptive Agency, and Institutional Co-Governance—and formalise this through propositions that clarify how evaluative metrics are coupled with allocative power, how agency operates as structured adaptation and repair, and how institutions moderate outcomes (Gandini, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Rowlinson & Hassard, 1994; Thompson & Smith, 2009). (3) We integrate comparative insights from China to show how co-governance arrangements condition the balance between control and autonomy beyond Euro-American settings, thereby extending the external validity of LPT (L. Chen, 2020; De Stefano et al., 2016; Prassl, 2018; L. Zhang et al., 2023).

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. We first revisit LPT's lineage and its dialogue with critical HRM. We then detail our review design and bibliometric strategy, followed by descriptive and cluster-based findings. Building on these results, we develop the updated LPT framework and propositions, and close with implications for HRM and employment relations and a future research agenda.

■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Labour Process Theory and Critical HRM

Labour Process Theory (LPT) emerged as a foundational framework for analysing how managerial control and worker agency shape the employment relationship. Braverman's (1974) account of the deskilling tendencies of capitalist management positioned the labour process as an indeterminate exchange in which capital persistently seeks to extract surplus effort. Building on this, Edwards (1979) and Friedman (1977) identified distinct regimes of control—simple, technical, and bureaucratic—while Burawoy (1979) introduced the notion of “manufacturing consent,” showing how workplace games and routines routinise subordination. Together, these debates established the enduring analytical triad of control, resistance, and consent (Thompson & Smith, 2009).

Subsequent contributions underscored that LPT is not static. Rowlinson and Hassard (1994) cautioned that its explanatory reach diminishes when detached from the political-economic foundations of accumulation and ownership. (Hompson and Smith (2009) similarly observed that successive “waves” of LPT—from structural critiques to cultural and post-structuralist turns—risked fragmentation if they abandoned a unifying theoretical core. At the same time, these interventions expanded the field by incorporating identity, subjectivity, and organizational culture into accounts of labour control (Rick, 2007).

The dialogue between LPT and human resource management (HRM) scholarship further sharpened its critical edge. While mainstream HRM often frames managerial practices as neutral instruments for performance and commitment (Peter & John, 2003), LPT-inspired analyses emphasise their location within asymmetric power relations and contested employment dynamics (Edwards & Ramirez, 2016). From this perspective, HRM is not simply a functional toolkit but part of the terrain of the labour process, where managerial attempts to enhance productivity encounter diverse worker responses ranging from acquiescence to subtle resistance (Omidi et al., 2023).

Taken together, classical and critical contributions to LPT demonstrate that control is always provisional, resistance is continuous yet uneven, and workplace dynamics are inseparable from institutional and political-economic contexts. As digital technologies and novel organisational forms reconfigure work, however, scholars increasingly call for a reformulation of LPT to account for new infrastructures of control and emergent modalities of labour agency (Attaran et al., 2019; Gagan Deep, 2023; Gandini, 2019; Thompson & Smith, 2009).

2.2 Algorithmic Management and the Gig Economy

The expansion of digital platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, Meituan, and Didi has unsettled established frameworks of work and employment. These platforms operate through algorithmic infrastructures that allocate tasks, monitor performance, and enforce discipline via GPS tracking, customer ratings, and real-time feedback loops (Gandini, 2019; Rosenblat, 2016). This form of algorithmic management constitutes a hybrid regime that fuses technical, bureaucratic, and normative control while embedding them in digital architectures (Kellogg et al., 2020; Meijerink et al., 2021; Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2023).

Compared with earlier regimes, algorithmic management is distinctive in three respects. First, it is infrastructural and ambient: control is exercised through code rather than supervisors, rendering oversight constant yet impersonal (Cheng & Foley, 2019; Mareike & Lior, 2017; L. Zhang et al., 2023). Second, it is dynamic and adaptive: algorithms are recalibrated continuously, producing opaque and shifting criteria for evaluation (Lee et al., 2015). Third, it mobilises gamified incentives—surge pricing, badges, and bonuses—that harness competitive dynamics rather than hierarchical authority (Veen et al., 2020). These features embed asymmetries of information and power within the everyday routines of work.

From an LPT perspective, algorithmic management addresses the “labour problem”—securing effort under conditions of contractual indeterminacy—by transferring supervisory functions to data infrastructures and customer feedback mechanisms (Gandini, 2019). This generates what Woodcock (2020) described as “algorithmic despotism,” in which managerial prerogatives are refracted through claims of technological neutrality.

Workers, however, are not passive subjects of this regime. Research shows that gig workers develop varied forms of adaptive agency to navigate and repair these systems (Anwar & Graham, 2021). Common strategies include multi-homing across platforms, rejecting unfavourable tasks despite penalties, and forming communities to exchange information and coordinate action (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). These practices resonate with Burawoy's (1979) account of "making out" but extend it: agency here involves sustaining livable conditions through pragmatic adaptations and repair work (Kellogg et al., 2020). Such behaviours blur the boundary between compliance and resistance, highlighting the need for LPT to theorise agency as more than opposition.

A further dimension concerns employment status and protections. By classifying workers as independent contractors, many platforms evade labour regulations and shift risks onto workers (De Stefano et al., 2016; Prassl, 2018). This intensifies precarity while rating systems institutionalise bias and discrimination (Rosenblat et al., 2017). Constant surveillance and performance pressure also contribute to stress and burnout (Veen et al., 2020). Thus, the gig labour process combines flexibility with heightened managerial control, embedding new vulnerabilities within ostensibly autonomous arrangements (Duggan & Jooss, 2023; S. Li, 2023; Sharma et al., 2025).

In sum, algorithmic management illustrates both the continuing relevance and the limits of classical LPT. Control is enacted through digital infrastructures rather than direct supervision, agency is expressed through adaptive and repair practices rather than overt resistance, and the employment relationship is reconstituted at the intersection of autonomy and dependence.

2.3 Research Gaps and Analytical Framework

Although research on platform work has grown rapidly, three persistent gaps constrain the development of a cumulative LPT-informed account of algorithmic HRM. First, fragmentation limits theoretical integration. Studies of algorithmic management are scattered across sociology, information systems, labour law, and HRM, often generating case-specific insights without consolidating them into a coherent framework (Gandini, 2019; Thompson & Smith, 2009). While control mechanisms and adaptive practices are richly documented, fewer analyses link these micro-level dynamics to the structural transformation of capitalist employment relations (Rowlinson & Hassard, 1994).

Second, agency is too often reduced to resistance (Lata, 2025; Pilatti et al., 2024a). Much scholarship reproduces the classical resistance–consent binary, overlooking the adaptive strategies workers deploy to sustain participation in platform systems. Recent work demonstrates that gig workers frequently engage in practices such as multi-homing, selective task rejection, or system repair—behaviours that are neither fully resistant nor entirely compliant (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Kellogg et al., 2020; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). Without incorporating such practices, LPT risks mischaracterising the everyday ways workers shape algorithmic HRM.

Third, institutional diversity remains under-theorised. The literature continues to centre on Euro-American debates over employment status, unionisation, and litigation (Antonio, 2015; De Stefano et al., 2016; Prassl, 2018). Yet platform labour unfolds within diverse political–economic regimes. In China, for example, local governments have capped commission fees and promoted wage transparency, while state-led unions have negotiated protections—producing forms of state–platform co-governance distinct from adversarial Western models (Zhang, 2022; Chen, 2020). Embedding LPT in comparative institutional analysis is therefore essential.

Responding to these limitations requires recalibrating LPT along three axes: theorising algorithmic control as an infrastructural and adaptive mode of managerial power; recognising adaptive agency as a continuum of practices that exceed resistance–compliance dichotomies; and incorporating institutional co-governance as a central dimension connecting workplace processes to regulatory and political–economic regimes.

This study addresses these gaps through a semi-systematic review and bibliometric analysis of research on gig work, algorithmic management, and LPT between 2010 and 2025. By consolidating fragmented insights, foregrounding adaptive agency, and integrating comparative perspectives beyond the Euro-American core, it develops an updated framework for understanding HRM in the gig economy that retains LPT's political–economic foundations while extending its explanatory reach to digital labour.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Rationale

This study adopts a semi-systematic literature review combined with bibliometric mapping and interpretive synthesis (Kallio et al., 2016; Palumbo et al., 2023). Unlike fully systematic reviews that aim to exhaustively code every study within narrow boundaries, the semi-systematic design is suited to fragmented and rapidly evolving fields where the purpose is to consolidate conceptual insights and trace intellectual trajectories rather than to provide a purely quantitative aggregation (Snyder, 2019). Such a design enables both replicability and adaptability, allowing bibliometric visualisation to be paired with qualitative interpretation (Paul & Criado, 2020).

The rationale for this approach lies in the character of research on the gig economy and Labour Process Theory (LPT). The literature is expanding quickly, scattered across disciplines, and employs varied terminologies—"gig economy," "platform work," "digital labour"—that complicate attempts at exhaustive coding (De Stefano et al., 2016; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Bibliometric mapping makes it possible to detect structural patterns such as clusters of authors, co-cited works, and emerging keywords. Interpretive synthesis then interrogates these clusters, ensuring that quantitative patterns are connected to the underlying debates and theoretical developments (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015).

The specific objective is to examine how LPT has been mobilised in studies of gig and platform-mediated work between 2010 and 2025, with particular attention to the Chinese context where platformisation has expanded at scale. This design allows algorithmic management and new regimes of labour control to be situated within long-standing LPT debates on labour process, worker agency, and managerial strategies (Rowlinson & Hassard, 1994; Thompson & Smith, 2009). In doing so, it provides a systematic yet flexible means of consolidating dispersed literatures and generating higher-order theoretical insights across diverse institutional settings.

3.2 Data Source, Search Strategy, and Screening

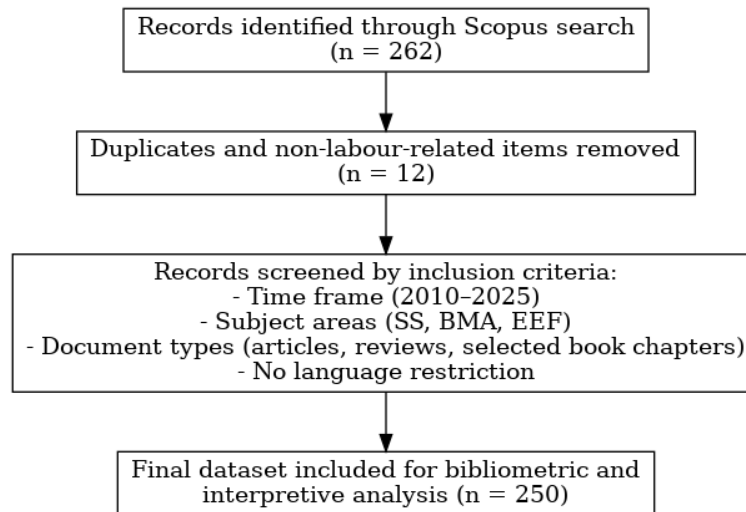


Figure 1 Flow of record identification and screening

The dataset was retrieved from Scopus, selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals in the social sciences, management, and economics. The search was conducted on 19 August 2025, with results inclusive up to that date. The query targeted titles, abstracts, and author keywords:

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(TITLE-ABS-KEY("gig economy" OR "platform work" OR "digital labour"))
AND
(TITLE-ABS-KEY("labour process theory" OR "labour process" OR "algorithmic management"))
AND PUBYEAR > 2009
  
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The time frame was set from 2010 onwards, reflecting the emergence of platform-mediated work and algorithmic management as salient topics in the early 2010s (Gandini, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Munoz et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2025). To ensure relevance to HRM, organisation studies, and employment relations, the search was restricted to Social Sciences, Business, Management & Accounting, and Economics, Econometrics & Finance. Eligible document types were journal articles and reviews; selected book chapters were included where they directly engaged with gig work and LPT. No language filter was applied. Non-English publications were screened on the basis of publisher-provided English abstracts and, when necessary, machine-assisted translation, thereby mitigating Anglophone bias and incorporating contributions from Russian, Chinese, and other literatures (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2023).

The initial retrieval yielded 262 records. Titles and abstracts were screened to remove duplicates and to exclude items unrelated to labour or employment contexts (e.g., “platforms” in computing domains). Records were retained if they addressed gig, platform, or digital labour, and engaged with labour process theory, algorithmic management, or HRM/ER perspectives. This process resulted in a final dataset of 250 records. While formal PRISMA protocols were not applied, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined ex ante and documented to ensure transparency and replicability (Moher et al., 2009).

The final dataset was exported in CSV format (including abstracts, author keywords, source title, year, and citations) for descriptive statistics and bibliometric mapping. RIS and BibTeX files were also exported for reference management and citation control.

3.3 Analytical Strategy

The analysis combined bibliometric mapping with interpretive thematic synthesis. Bibliometric mapping was conducted using VOSviewer v1.6.20 (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) to visualise networks of keywords, co-cited authors, and bibliographically coupled documents. Three types of maps were constructed. Keyword co-occurrence to capture the conceptual vocabulary of the field. A minimum threshold of five occurrences was applied, with binary counting as the primary option and full counting used as a robustness check. Co-citation networks to identify the intellectual foundations of gig economy and LPT-related scholarship. Bibliographic coupling to highlight clusters of more recent research fronts.

For clarity, only the largest connected components were visualised, though all records were retained in the dataset. An overlay technique was also employed to track the temporal evolution of topics across three intervals: 2010–2015, 2016–2020, and 2021–2025.

The second step involved interpretive thematic synthesis. Representative papers from each cluster were examined closely to identify conceptual linkages and tensions. These readings were then organised into higher-order themes: (i) algorithmic control and structured discretion; (ii) worker agency and adaptive strategies; and (iii) governance and regulation of platform work. This dual approach provided both breadth, through quantitative mapping, and depth, through qualitative interpretation, thereby enabling the refinement of LPT in the context of digital labour (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; García-Lillo et al., 2018; Kallio et al., 2016).

Several measures enhanced methodological robustness. All search parameters, filters, and VOSviewer settings are reported to ensure reproducibility. The inclusion of non-English studies—screened via translated abstracts—reduced Anglophone bias and broadened coverage. Finally, the integration of quantitative mapping with qualitative synthesis generated convergent insights, minimising the limitations of either method in isolation (Tranfield et al., 2003). The 250-record CSV, including metadata and abstracts, underpins all tables and figures presented in the findings.

■ 4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Descriptive Bibliometric Results

As shown in Figure 2, publications connecting the gig economy and Labour Process Theory (LPT) were scarce before 2015, typically limited to conceptual discussions or exploratory case analyses. A gradual increase is visible from 2016 onwards, with sharper growth after 2018. By 2024, annual output approached 80 items, before a decline in 2025 that reflects the cut-off point of the dataset rather than a substantive reversal. The overall trajectory indicates that the intersection of LPT and gig work has emerged as a distinct line of inquiry within employment and work studies, although the growth in output primarily reflects a broader surge of interest in platform labour rather than a full institutionalisation of algorithmic management as a research paradigm.

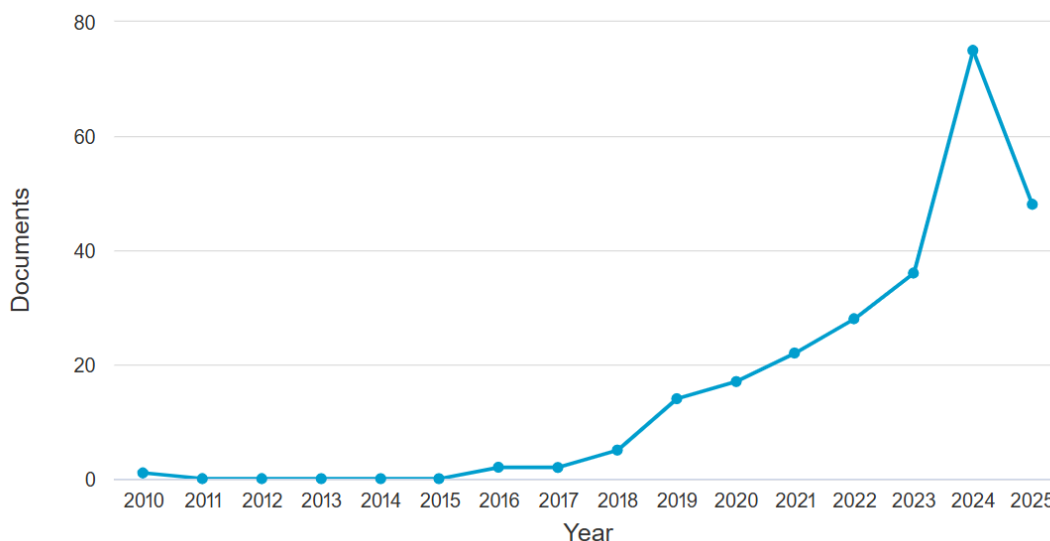


Figure 2 Line chart of annual publications

Figure 3 presents the disciplinary distribution of the dataset. The majority of publications fall within Social Sciences (36.8%), Business, Management (24.2%), and Economics, Econometrics & Finance (13.3%). Smaller shares are distributed across Computer Science (7.7%), Arts & Humanities (6.0%), and Psychology (3.9%), with other areas such as Environmental Science, Decision Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering contributing less than 2% each. This profile confirms that scholarship on gig work and LPT is predominantly anchored in the social sciences and employment-related fields, with limited diffusion into technical or medical disciplines.

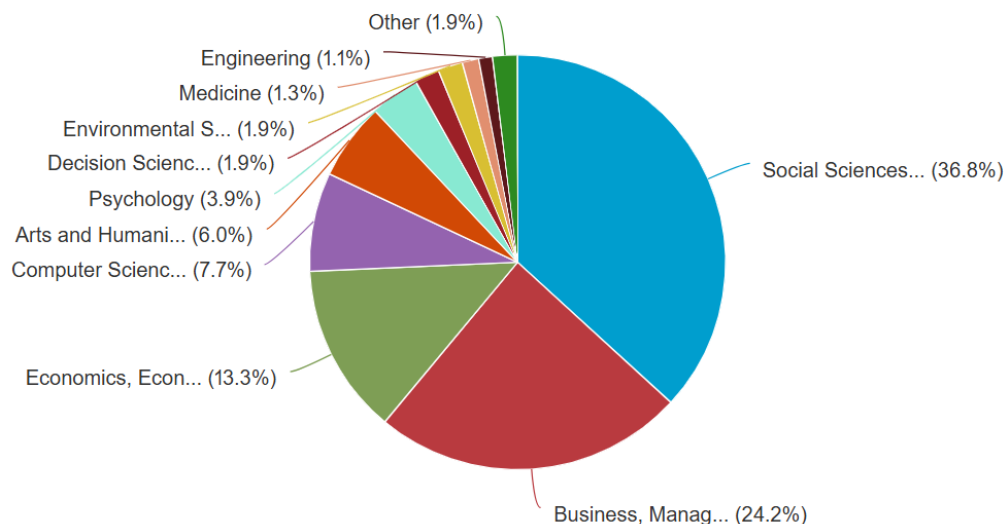


Figure 3 Bar chart of journal outlets

The country distribution (Figure 4.3) underscores the predominance of European and North American research. The United Kingdom (45 publications) and United States (36) lead in output, followed by Germany (23) and Australia (18). Contributions from China (16), Ireland (15), and Spain (15) signal growing diversification, with emerging input from Canada, Italy, and India. Particularly notable is the recent rise of Chinese scholarship after 2020, reflecting both the scale of its platform economy and its evolving regulatory frameworks.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

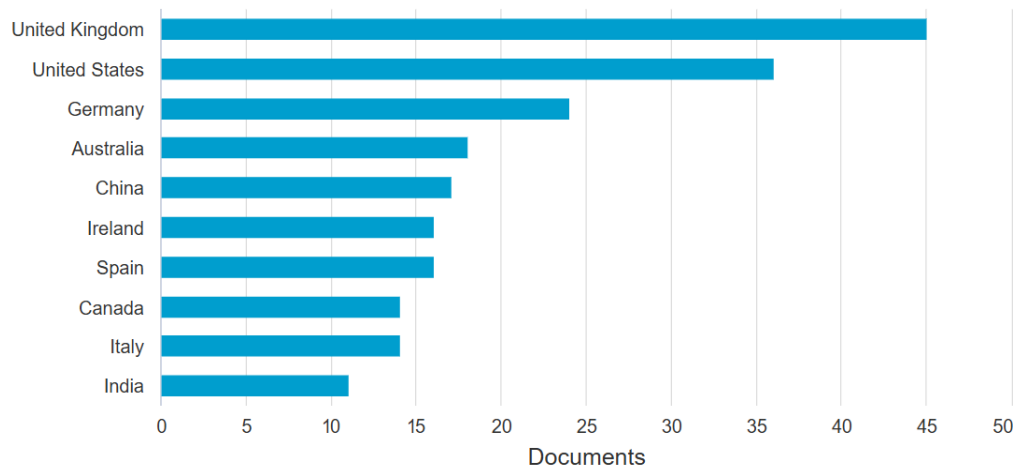


Figure 4 Geographical distribution map

The author co-citation network (Figure 5) illustrates how scholarship at the intersection of LPT and the gig economy has developed through overlapping intellectual trajectories rather than a single dominant tradition. The prominence of Wood et al (2019), positioned as a highly cited yet relatively independent node, underlines the influence of his work on platform labour and worker power. His contributions serve as a reference point across otherwise diverse strands of research, signalling both the centrality of worker agency to contemporary debates and the continued appeal of labour process categories for theorising digital work.

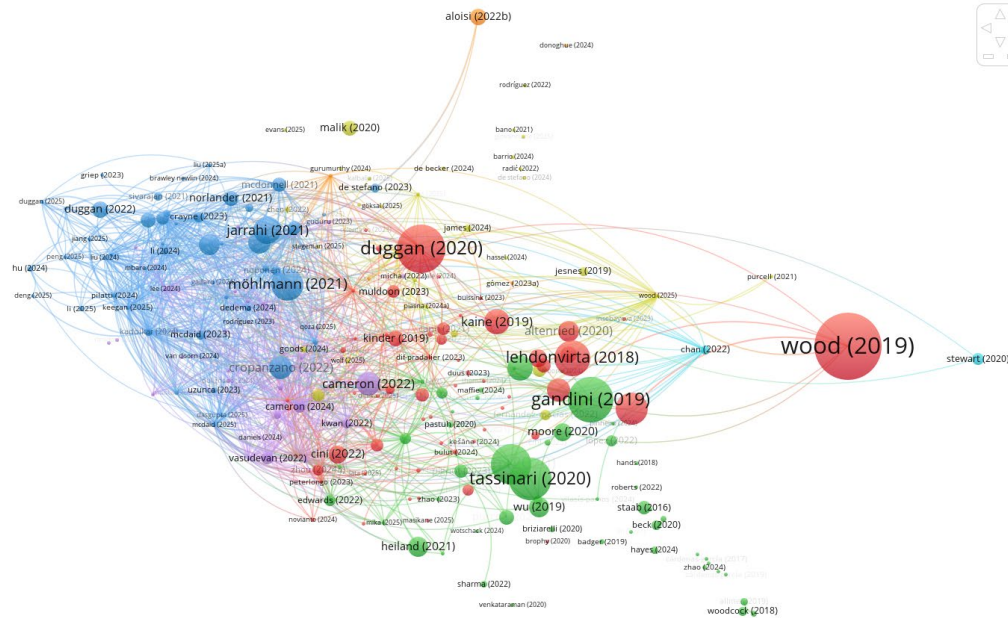


Figure 5 Citation network diagram

Other frequently co-cited authors, such as Duggan et al (2020), Lehdonvirta (2018) and Gandini (2019), are situated at the core of the network and function as bridges between multiple disciplines. Their work foregrounds algorithmic management as a new form of control and links case-based studies of gig work to broader political-economic discussions about precarity, commodification, and surveillance. The density of connections around these authors indicates that they provide shared conceptual resources across sociology, political economy, and employment relations, consolidating a critical vocabulary for analysing platform work.

A further layer of scholarship highlights everyday practices and adaptive strategies of workers, represented by authors such as Tassinari and Maccarrone (2020), Wu et al (2019), and Heiland (2021). These studies show how gig workers negotiate and repair algorithmic systems, creating informal solidarities and tactical adaptations that challenge the traditional resistance-consent binary. Their position within the network, often linked simultaneously to sociological and organisational studies, illustrates how worker-centred perspectives have become increasingly integrated into the field.

Legal scholarship also intersects with these debates. Figures such as Aloisi (2022) and Stewart and Stanford (2017) contribute analyses of employment classification and regulation, establishing connections between socio-legal approaches and sociological examinations of control. Their presence on the periphery, yet with strong citation links, demonstrates the permeability of disciplinary boundaries in shaping the discourse on gig work and LPT. Taken together, the network reflects a research landscape that is not divided into discrete camps but interwoven through shared references, with classical labour process insights continually reinterpreted in light of platform-mediated labour.

The country-level co-citation map (Figure 6) shows the United Kingdom and United States as key bridges connecting European nodes (Germany, Italy, Spain) with Asian contributors (China, India). This pattern suggests that while research networks remain anchored in established academic centres, the conversation on gig work and LPT has become increasingly transnational.

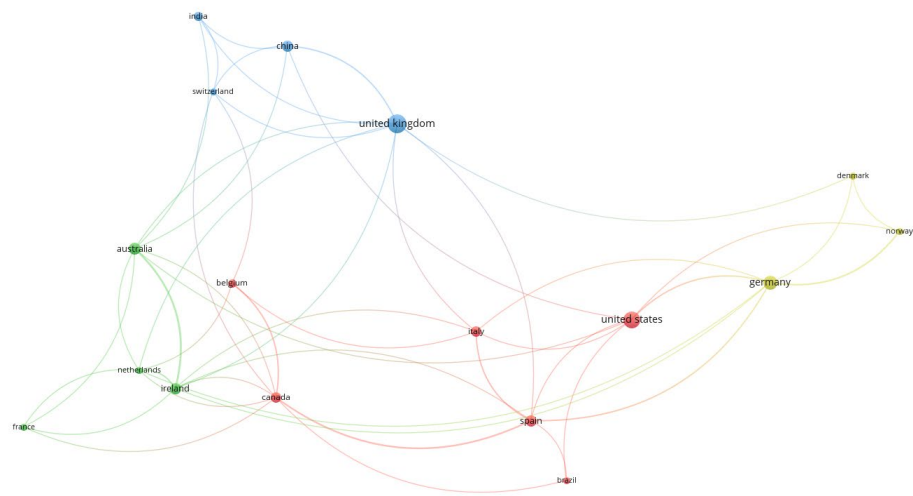


Figure 6 Co-citation country network visualization

4.2 Knowledge Structure and Research Clusters

The bibliographic coupling and keyword co-occurrence maps (Figures 7 and 8), together with the thematic synthesis in Table 1, reveal how scholarship at the intersection of LPT and the gig economy has consolidated around a set of recurring themes. Rather than forming isolated camps, the clusters illustrate overlapping debates that extend classical labour process concerns into the algorithmically mediated environment of platform work.

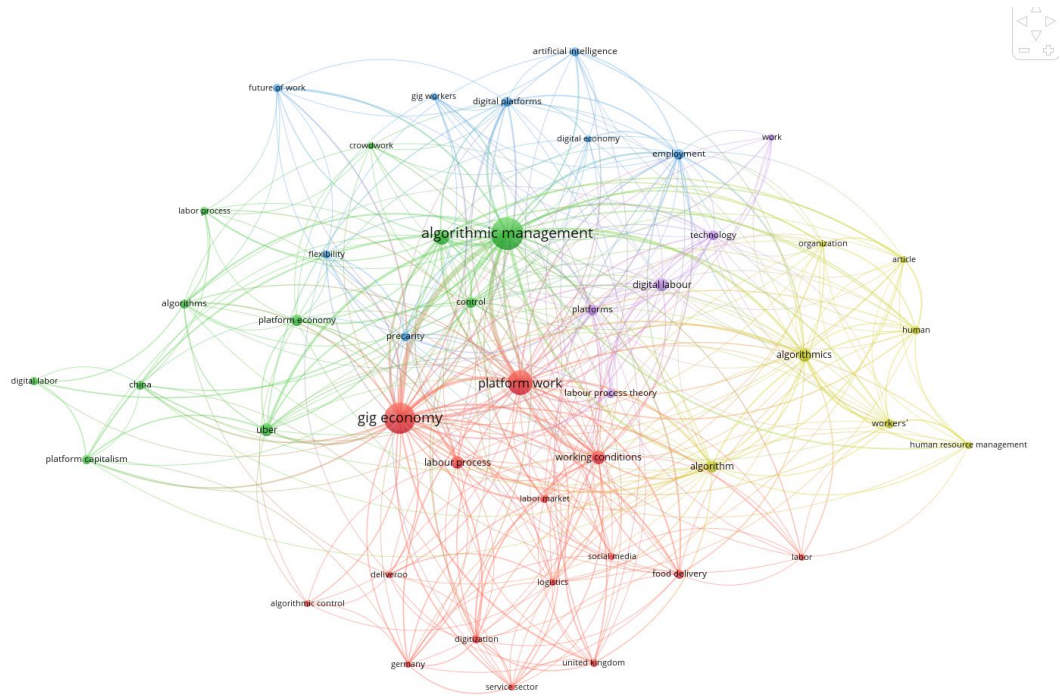


Figure 7 Keywords Bibliographic coupling map

capped commission fees, and union involvement (Z. Li & Qi, 2014; Xiang, 2024; C. Zhao et al., 2023). Such findings reaffirm the need for LPT to remain grounded in political economy and sensitive to institutional diversity.

Finally, a smaller but significant cluster addresses the transformation of HRM and the future of work. Research in this area examines how recruitment, appraisal, and reward systems are reconfigured under algorithmic mediation, leading some to conceptualise “algorithmic HRM” as a distinct paradigm (Meijerink & Arets, 2021; Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). Others situate gig work as a laboratory for exploring the porous boundaries between employment and entrepreneurship (Kuhn et al., 2021). Forward-looking contributions consider the implications of emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain, and digital identity systems, suggesting that future transformations may once again test the adequacy of LPT’s conceptual apparatus (Mendonça & Kougiannou, 2023; G. Sun, 2023; Vincenzo Maccarrone et al., 2024).

Taken together, the clusters demonstrate how LPT is being rearticulated around four thematic fronts: algorithmic control, adaptive agency, institutional mediation, and HRM transformation. Figures 7 and 8 visualise the intellectual structure underpinning these debates, while Table 1 distils their conceptual contributions. Rather than replacing classical categories, these themes extend them, affirming LPT’s enduring relevance while identifying the refinements needed to capture the complexities of platform-mediated labour.

4.3 Thematic Synthesis: Updating Labour Process Theory

To synthesise the results of the bibliometric mapping, Table 2 summarises the four core themes identified at the intersection of LPT and gig work. For each theme, it outlines the core focus, representative works, extensions or challenges to LPT, and comparative insights from the Chinese context. The following sub-sections (4.3.1–4.3.4) elaborate on these themes in greater detail.

Table 2 Core themes and theoretical extensions

Theme	Core Focus & Insights	Representative Works	Extension/Challenge to LPT	Comparative Insights from China
Algorithmic Control and Datafied Taylorism	Platforms deploy algorithmic management to monitor, evaluate, and discipline workers, often intensifying labour process fragmentation and re-Taylorization.	(Gandini, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Mareike & Lior, 2017; Veen et al., 2020)	Extends LPT’s control/resistance dialectic by emphasizing data-driven surveillance and real-time management.	Food-delivery and ride-hailing platforms show stronger algorithmic opacity and labour intensification than Western contexts (Chan, 2021; Sun & Qian, 2024).
Worker Agency and Structured Resistance	Despite strong algorithmic control, workers exhibit adaptive agency, ranging from tactical evasion to collective mobilization.	(Rosenblat, 2016; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Wood et al., 2019)	Shifts LPT from deterministic control to more contingent, negotiated processes; highlights “structured agency” under platform conditions.	Chinese workers’ “informal resistance” (e.g., using group chats to share algorithmic loopholes) illustrates culturally distinct agency forms.
Regulation and Co-Governance	Legal debates and policy reforms (AB5 in California, EU Platform Work Directive) reshape the employment relation; hybrid models of co-governance emerge.	(Aloisi, 2022; De Stefano et al., 2016; Dubal, 2019; Prassl, 2018)	Extends LPT by embedding the labour process in institutional and legal frameworks beyond the firm.	China’s evolving state-led regulation (e.g., 2021 rider protection guidelines) represents a distinctive co-governance mode (state–platform–union).

HRM Transformation and Critical HRM	HRM functions are reconfigured: recruitment, performance appraisal, and reward systems are algorithmically externalized; critical HRM debates re-engage LPT.	(Edwards & Ramirez, 2016; Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2023; Thompson & Smith, 2009)	Repositions HRM as both subject and agent of algorithmic control, challenging its assumed strategic neutrality.	Chinese scholarship links HRM to national digitalization strategies, highlighting embeddedness in developmental state logics.
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The first theme concerns the reconfiguration of managerial authority into algorithmically mediated infrastructures. As Figures 6 and 7 indicate, a dense strand of scholarship examines how dispatch systems, rating mechanisms, and gamified incentives are deployed to monitor and discipline workers (Gandini, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020; Rosenblat, 2016). This dynamic has been described as datafied Taylorism (Moore & Joyce, 2020), extending Braverman's (1974) account of fragmentation and intensification of labour into the platform era. Rather than being exercised through supervisors or bureaucratic routines, control is now ambient, continuous, and opaque, operating through automated data capture and algorithmic decision-making (Mareike & Lior, 2017; Mateescu & Nguyen, 2019).

What is distinctive from an LPT perspective is the coupling of evaluation and allocation. In platform settings, ratings and metrics do not simply measure performance but also determine access to future jobs, visibility within the system, and income opportunities (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). This evaluative–allocative linkage magnifies precarity: each transaction recalibrates workers' standing in ways that are difficult to predict or contest. In effect, managerial prerogatives are embedded in technological artefacts that appear neutral but function as instruments of discipline—a phenomenon captured in Woodcock's (2020) notion of algorithmic despotism.

Comparative insights underline that these dynamics are context-specific. In China, food-delivery and ride-hailing platforms exhibit especially pronounced algorithmic opacity and labour intensification, with riders reporting constant recalibration of dispatch rules and heightened pressure from real-time tracking (Chang & Huang, 2023; Leihua et al., 2023; Shanghai BenCham, 2024). These cases highlight that algorithmic control not only extends LPT's control/resistance dialectic but also requires attention to institutional and cultural settings in which data-driven surveillance is embedded.

The second theme foregrounds the ways in which workers exercise agency under algorithmic regimes. As indicated by the bibliographic coupling map (Figure 6), scholarship increasingly recognises that workers are not passive recipients of digital control but actively negotiate and reshape the conditions of platform labour. Building on Burawoy's (1979) theorisation of consent and Thompson and Smith's (2009) insights into antagonism, studies document strategies such as multi-homing across platforms, tactical task rejection, gaming of acceptance rates, and reliance on peer-support networks to mitigate risk and stabilise income (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Dubal, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020).

A central insight from this body of work is what Gandini (2019) terms structured discretion: agency persists, though bounded by algorithmic rules. Gig workers often perform repair work to keep platforms operational—circumventing technical glitches, collectively interpreting opaque metrics, or devising informal guidelines for managing unpredictable systems (Barratt et al., 2020; Felix et al., 2023; Jabagi et al., 2019; Kellogg et al., 2020). Such practices sustain the viability of platform infrastructures even as they carve out limited spaces of autonomy. In this sense, agency is neither straightforward resistance nor compliance, but a hybrid mode that underpins both the reproduction and subversion of managerial control (Duggan et al., 2023; Heiland, 2021; Lang et al., 2023a; Liang et al., 2025; H. Zhao et al., 2025a).

This reframes the classical LPT dichotomy. As Rowlinson and Hassard (1994) reminds us, labour not only resists capital but also contributes to its reproduction. Within platform-mediated work, the paradox is that adaptive agency stabilises algorithmic control while simultaneously generating alternative logics of cooperation and survival. Comparative research underscores the contextual specificity of these dynamics. In China, delivery riders use WeChat groups to circulate information on algorithmic loopholes, coordinate schedules, and at times organise collective protests—illustrating how adaptive practices evolve into culturally embedded forms of “informal resistance” (Chang & Huang, 2023; Leihua et al., 2023; Z. Li & Qi, 2014; Shanghai BenCham, 2024; Xiang, 2024).

The third theme concerns the institutional and regulatory embedding of the platform labour process. In Euro-American contexts, much of the debate has focused on employment classification and litigation, with landmark interventions such as California's Assembly Bill 5 and the European Union's Platform Work Directive (De Stefano, 2015; Dubal, 2019; Prassl, 2018). These developments show how existing legal categories are being tested and redefined in order to address the challenges of platform-mediated employment. From an LPT perspective, they extend the analysis of labour control beyond firm-level strategies, situating it within broader legal frameworks that shape the extraction and contestation of surplus labour effort (Aloisi, 2022; Ang, 2023; Ndun et al., 2020; Nur et al., 2023).

Yet regulatory responses are far from uniform. Scholarship highlights how collective bargaining, trade union strategies, and hybrid forms of co-governance interact with statutory reforms. (Aloisi, 2022), for instance, points to models where regulatory law is supplemented by platform-level agreements or codes of practice, producing mixed regimes of labour governance. This demonstrates that labour process dynamics under platformisation are mediated not only by algorithmic systems but also by the institutional arrangements through which states, firms, and worker organisations negotiate protections (Marrone & Pirina, 2024; Wolf et al., 2025; H. Zhao et al., 2025b).

Table 3 Major Chinese policy initiatives on platform work and flexible employment

Year	Issuing Body	Policy Title	Key Content
2014	Standing Committee of the National People's Congress	New Regulations on Labor Dispatch	Defined labor dispatch as a supplementary employment form, mainly used for temporary, auxiliary, or substitute positions.
2017	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security	Notice on Implementing the Service Industry Employment Promotion Plan	Introduced supportive policies to encourage the development of the gig economy.
2020	National 'Two Sessions'	Premier's Government Work Report	Emphasized the concept of the gig economy in the national policy agenda.
2020	General Office of the State Council	Opinions on Supporting Multi-Channel Flexible Employment	Called for improved flexible employment channels and better social protection.
2021	State Council	Government Work Report	Highlighted gig economy development as a national goal in labor market reforms.
2021	Joint Ministries (HRSS, NDRC, Ministry of Transport, etc.)	Guiding Opinions on Protecting Rights and Interests of Flexible Workers	Emphasized protecting workers' rights in new employment forms, ensuring safety, fair wages, and social security.
2021	Joint Ministries (SAMR, CAC, etc.)	Opinions on Enhancing Rights Protection on Delivery Platforms	Promoted healthy development of online delivery platforms and enhanced rights protections for delivery workers.
2022	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security	New Social Security Regulations	Further safeguarded gig workers' labor rights and regulated platform responsibilities.

Comparative evidence from China illustrates a distinct regulatory trajectory. Rather than relying primarily on adversarial litigation, Chinese authorities have incrementally developed a series of administrative regulations and policy guidelines that directly govern platform operations and worker protections (Huang, 2023b; Z. Li & Qi, 2014; Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, 2023; Yang & Panyagometh, 2024; H. Zhang et al., 2023). These measures range from defining labour dispatch as a supplementary form of employment to recent rules on wage transparency, commission caps, and social security obligations. As Table 3 shows, the timeline of reforms between 2014 and 2022 reveals how the state has progressively institutionalised protections for platform workers and established a mode of state–platform–union co-governance (Huang, 2023a; International Labour Organization, 2019; Qi & Li, 2020; Wang et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2019b). In this way, the Chinese case underscores how regulatory governance is not peripheral but constitutive of the platform labour process, shaping both managerial prerogatives and worker agency.

HRM Transformation and Critical HRM A final theme concerns the implications of platform work for human resource management (HRM). While classical LPT debates largely focused on managerial control and worker resistance, critical HRM scholarship has emphasised that HR practices are not neutral techniques but contested terrains embedded in power relations (Omidi et al., 2023; Rick, 2007; Thompson & Smith, 2009). Research on platforms reinforces this perspective by showing how core HR functions—recruitment, appraisal, and reward—are externalised into algorithmic infrastructures. In this sense, HRM is both displaced and intensified: displaced because many tasks traditionally undertaken by line managers are now automated, and intensified because evaluation and reward are applied continuously to every transaction (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2023; Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022).

This reconfiguration positions HRM at the centre of the platform labour process. Performance management is enacted through ratings and metrics, compensation through surge pricing and gamified incentives, and recruitment through open-access digital interfaces. Such mechanisms challenge normative assumptions about fairness, procedural justice, and employee engagement (Sahu, 2025; Kuhn et al., 2021; Rahad, 2025). They also demonstrate that HRM cannot be analysed apart from labour process dynamics: rather than a set of managerial practices located within the firm, HRM becomes a dispersed infrastructure that mediates relations between platforms, workers, and regulators (Easa & Orra, 2021).

Comparative research underscores that these dynamics are institutionally embedded. In Europe, works councils and unions have begun to negotiate algorithmic transparency and minimum standards (Huws, 2003). In China, regulatory authorities and quasi-union organisations intervene directly in shaping wage policies, commission caps, and dispute resolution (Z. Li & Qi, 2014; Shanghai BenCham, 2024; Xiang, 2024). These findings indicate that HRM in platform economies is best conceptualised as part of a wider system of governance, one that extends beyond organisational boundaries and is co-constituted by institutional regimes.

■5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Implications for Labour Process Theory in Gig Work

The evidence assembled in this review underscores both the continuing relevance and the necessary recalibration of Labour Process Theory (LPT) when applied to gig work. Classical LPT, initiated by (Braverman, 1974) analysis of deskilling and refined through subsequent debates on control, consent, and antagonism (Burawoy, 1979; R. Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989), has consistently framed the labour process as a contested field in which managerial prerogatives are tested against worker agency. The patterns identified in Chapter 4 confirm that this analytical foundation remains crucial: employers continue to pursue surplus extraction, workers devise adaptive or resistant strategies, and institutional regimes significantly shape the contours of this struggle (Hyman, 2018; Thompson & Smith, 2009).

Yet, the characteristics of gig work reveal organisational dynamics that exceed the categories of classical LPT. Algorithmic management merges technical, bureaucratic, and normative forms of control within digital infrastructures, making managerial authority pervasive, continuous, and often opaque (Kellogg et al., 2020; Möhlmann et al., 2022). Worker responses are frequently repair-oriented and adaptive, which blur the traditional resistance–compliance dichotomy (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020; Veen et al., 2020). Moreover, regulatory frameworks and litigation extend the labour process beyond the boundaries of the firm into arenas of state policy and emergent co-governance arrangements (De Stefano et al., 2016; Nkechi et al., 2024; Prassl, 2018). At the same time, human resource management itself is reconfigured: processes of recruitment, appraisal, and reward allocation are increasingly mediated by algorithmic logics rather than solely by managerial discretion (Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2023; Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022).

The selection of the 2010–2025 timeframe reflects the period in which gig platforms and algorithmic management practices emerged, expanded, and became institutionalised. The early 2010s saw the diffusion of platform-mediated labour as a distinct organisational form, while the subsequent decade marked the consolidation of regulatory responses, new HRM practices, and evolving worker strategies. Anchoring the review in this window ensures that the recalibration of Labour Process Theory is grounded in the full developmental arc of digital labour—from early adoption to institutional embedding—rather than in isolated snapshots.

Taken together, these developments call for a rearticulation of LPT along four interrelated dimensions. First, the analysis of control must explicitly include algorithmic infrastructures and the coupling of evaluative and allocative mechanisms (Duggan et al., 2023; Gandini, 2019). Second, worker agency should be theorised not merely as resistance but also as structured discretion, improvisation, and repair (Heugens & Lander, 2009; Lilja et al., 2017; Pilatti et al., 2024a). Third, the labour process must be situated within institutional and legal frameworks that condition the exercise of managerial authority (Thompson, 2015). Finally, HRM needs to be repositioned within LPT as both an object and an instrument of algorithmic control. By integrating these dimensions, LPT retains its explanatory force while becoming more responsive to the complex realities of digital labour markets (Alabdali et al., 2024; Dupuis, 2025).

5.2 Implications for HRM and Employment Relations

Research on gig work demonstrates that human resource management (HRM) is neither marginal nor neutral but constitutes a crucial arena in which managerial authority, worker agency, and institutional regulation intersect. Algorithmic management reconfigures classical HR functions—such as recruitment, appraisal, and remuneration—by embedding them within digital infrastructures. What Meijerink and Bondarouk (2023) conceptualise as algorithmic HRM captures how responsibilities once held by line managers are increasingly delegated to automated systems, externalising HR tasks while simultaneously amplifying their scope (Meijerink et al., 2022; Townsend et al., 2022). This resonates with longstanding critical HRM debates but also extends them by showing how control is now dispersed and infrastructural rather than confined to hierarchical authority (Kuhn et al., 2021; Tweedie et al., 2019).

From the standpoint of employment relations, these shifts create new tensions around legitimacy and authority (Page-Tickell & Yerby, 2020; Tirapani & Willmott, 2020). Platforms often frame algorithmic decision-making as efficient and impartial, echoing managerialist claims reminiscent of scientific management (Kellogg et al., 2020). Workers, however, frequently encounter such systems as opaque and unpredictable, raising demands for transparency and accountability (Horneber & Laumer, 2023; Moore & Joyce, 2020; Tan et al., 2021). This paradox underscores a contemporary labour process dilemma: prerogatives of management no longer reside solely in supervisors but are embedded in algorithmic artefacts whose authority is simultaneously normalised and contested (Antonio, 2022; Omidi et al., 2023; O'Neill et al., 2025).

Cross-national variation reinforces this complexity. In parts of Europe, collective bargaining and works councils have sought to regulate algorithmic oversight and negotiate minimum standards (Eurofound, 2018; Huws, 2003; Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2019; Kullmann, 2022). In China, by contrast, regulatory mandates and quasi-union initiatives have been central in establishing protections and mediating disputes (Chang & Huang, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2019; C. Yin, 2025). These divergences confirm Rowlinson and Hassard's (1994) and (Thompson & Smith, 2009) argument that labour process analysis must be situated within institutional and political–economic contexts.

The broader implication is that HRM scholarship must move decisively beyond firm-centric perspectives. Critical HRM has long stressed that HR practices are embedded in wider power relations (Aust et al., 2020; Guest, 2025). Evidence from gig work substantiates this claim but also adds new dimensions: control is infrastructural, agency is adaptive, and institutions play a constitutive role (Cropanzano et al., 2022; Pilatti et al., 2024b). For practitioners, this implies recognising workers as co-producers rather than passive recipients, and balancing efficiency with transparency and fairness (Chiu et al., 2022; Salmah et al., 2024). For policymakers, it suggests that employment relations in the gig economy cannot be resolved through classification debates alone, but will depend on hybrid forms of co-governance that embed HRM within regulatory and institutional architectures (Duggan et al., 2020a; Kuhn et al., 2021; McDonnell et al., 2021).

5.3 Policy and Comparative Insights

The governance of gig work has become one of the most contested domains of labour market regulation (Haridarshan, 2024; Kadolkar et al., 2024; S. Li, 2023). In Europe and North America, policy debates have revolved around the legal status of workers, illustrated by initiatives such as California's Assembly Bill 5 and the European Union's draft Platform Work Directive (Celine & Margaret, 2019; Council of the EU, 2024; Elmassah & Hassanein, 2022). These interventions highlight both the ambition and the limitations of litigation-driven reform. While they aim to extend employment protections, the pace and scope of change remain constrained by corporate lobbying and the fragmented nature of platform labour markets. The result is a predominantly adversarial trajectory in which legal and judicial struggles define the parameters of employment relations (Collier et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2024; Sankararaman, 2024; Razniza et al., 2024).

By contrast, regulatory strategies in China have followed a markedly different pathway. Instead of relying on extended litigation, authorities have advanced incremental administrative measures—including guidelines on wage transparency, insurance contributions, and platform responsibilities—that collectively establish a form of institutionalised protection (Chang & Huang, 2023; Li et al., 2025; Tu & Wang, n.d.). As Table 3 summarises, reforms introduced between 2014 and 2022 illustrate an evolving system of state–platform co-governance that reflects broader developmental priorities. Comparable hybrid models have also emerged in parts of the Global South. In India and several Latin American countries, governments combine statutory oversight with platform-led compliance mechanisms, producing layered regulatory arrangements (Didier, 2022; Krishnamoorthy & Srimathi, 2019; Paunksnis, 2023; Scavarda et al., 2023).

For Labour Process Theory, such cross-national variations are analytically central. The interplay of algorithmic control and worker adaptation is filtered through distinctive institutional regimes (Dupuis, 2025). In systems with adversarial employment relations, contestation tends to be resolved through judicial and bargaining mechanisms (Collier et al., 2017; Souza Arruda, 2025; Doellgast et al., 2021). In systems with state-led regulatory frameworks, hybrid arrangements of co-governance emerge, distributing authority among governmental bodies, platforms, and labour organisations (Wu et al., 2019b; C. Yin, 2025; S. Yin, 2023).

These observations carry several implications for policy design. First, reclassification debates alone cannot resolve the structural insecurities of gig work if algorithmic opacity and evaluative–allocative coupling remain intact (Kadolkar et al., 2024; Lang et al., 2023b; Tan et al., 2021). Transparency, due process, and channels of worker voice are necessary conditions for reducing precarity (Ajonbadi et al., 2025; Dasgupta et al., 2024; M. Li et al., 2025; Semujanga & Parent-Rochelleau, 2024). Second, policy frameworks must be context-sensitive. In coordinated economies with strong traditions of collective bargaining, embedding algorithmic transparency through social dialogue may be viable (Aloisi, 2022; Dassori & Donini, 2024; Molina et al., 2023). In environments where the state occupies a central regulatory role, hybrid models of co-governance may deliver more effective protection. Rather than pursuing a universal template, regulators should focus on aligning algorithmic HRM with institutional capacities and societal contracts (Chang & Huang, 2023; J. Y. Chen & Sun, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2019; Tu & Wang, n.d.).

In short, comparative analysis shows that gig work is dually embedded: in technological infrastructures that structure control, and in institutional regimes that condition outcomes. Recognising this dual embeddedness clarifies why regulatory trajectories diverge across jurisdictions and points toward pragmatic, context-specific strategies for governing the future of work.

6.0 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

This review consolidates a fragmented field by combining a semi-systematic search with bibliometric mapping and interpretive synthesis across 2010–2025. It documents the rapid growth of scholarship after 2016, a Euro-Atlantic centre of gravity with rising Chinese contributions, and four recurring fronts—algorithmic control, worker agency, institutional mediation, and HRM transformation. Building on these findings, we recalibrate Labour Process Theory (LPT) through a triad of Algorithmic Control, Adaptive Agency, and Institutional Co-Governance, showing how classical concerns with control, consent, and antagonism are re-articulated within algorithmic infrastructures and institutional regimes. The study contributes an updated map of LPT-informed HRM research on platform work, a clarified framework and propositions for algorithmic HRM, and practice and policy implications centred on transparency and hybrid governance.

At the same time, several design choices limit inference. The dataset is Scopus-based with a fixed cut-off, which may exclude relevant work in non-indexed outlets or newly published sources. Search terms privilege Anglophone vocabulary, while reliance on English abstracts for non-English papers risks classification bias. Bibliometric thresholds and counting parameters shape network boundaries, making descriptive patterns robust but marginal connections more sensitive. Interpretive synthesis inevitably involves judgement; although triangulation across representative studies was applied, alternative codings remain possible. Finally, constructs such as “algorithmic control” and “adaptive agency” vary in granularity across studies, complicating systematic comparison. These constraints define the scope of our contribution rather than undermine its validity.

To advance a cumulative and comparative account of algorithmic HRM within LPT, future research should broaden evidence bases across databases and languages, integrate grey literature, and employ bilingual coding to reduce Anglophone bias. Developing validated measures of evaluative–allocative coupling, adaptive agency, and co-governance intensity will allow comparative testing of propositions across sectors and jurisdictions. Methodologically, scholars should combine ethnography and interviews with panel or administrative data, exploiting natural experiments such as policy shocks or platform rule changes. Future studies also need to examine transparency and accountability mechanisms, identify which disclosure and appeal processes enhance fairness without undermining efficiency, and map how HRM functions migrate from line managers to infrastructures in both platform and traditional workplaces.

Finally, attention to worker well-being, psychosocial load, and long-run employability across governance regimes will be essential for designing sustainable models. Advancing along these lines can keep LPT theoretically integrative and empirically robust, enabling research on platform labour to sharpen explanation and improve governance rather than merely document precarity.

Conflicts of Interest

None

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