

The Gig Economy in Hospitality: Opportunities and Exploitation

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Abstract

The rising gig economy has triggered expedited transformation in labor market within any other industry and the hospitality industry has not been an exception as one of the worst hit industries. In this paper, the two poles of the opportunity and exploitation of the gig-based hospitality work will be referred to, where the flexibility, autonomy, and innovation should be discussed in the context of precarity, vulnerability, and unequal power relationships. In line with the trends in the contemporary labor market, the paper will investigate how the hotel, restaurant and tourism services have been transformed into platform-based and freelance agreements to respond to the elasticity of peak and decline demand, and minimize fixed costs. These usually create gateways to workplaces, increased income and possibilities of balancing between personal engagements and work timings to the workers. Such advantages are however offset by the lack of job security, lack of social security, low incomes and lack of career progressions. The study unveils the issue of regulatory gaps and the lack of clarity of the category of employment of which the corporations may dispose the risks and retain the labor in control. On the one hand, consumer demands that are necessitating and warrant precarious practices are maintaining precarious, cost-effective, and at-demand services. The paper will present the argument that the vision of the gig economy should be approached with caution and putting this concept within the context of the continuation of the discussion of the problem of labor rights, digital technologies, and neoliberal reorganization. The paper has come to the conclusion that sustainable policy frameworks and industry principles and collective strategies have to be present to the extent that to make sure that flexibility is not a cost to fairness. Finally, the gig economy in hospitality can be new and threatening: it will become not only innovative but also enabling, however, until it is regulated it will not be allowed to go beyond facilitating numerous systems of exploitation of the workers who have fallen behind as informal workers.

Keywords: Gig economy, Hospitality industry, Precarious work, Labor rights, Platform economy, Employment flexibility, Worker exploitation, Digital platforms, Tourism labor, Work precarity

Introduction

Gig economy has become one of the most disruptive changes in the global labour markets that have changed the coordination, contracting, and experience of work. The gig work is declared to be temporary, of course digitalized, and thus it is self-directed and convenient, not mentioning that it provides a new way of earning an income. The hospitality sector encompasses the hotel sector, restaurants, tourism and event management and the latest trend has been to apply the concept of gig-based services in terms of addressing the intermittent demand, being able to avoid labor expenses and be responsive in the operations. Its cooking delivery and housekeeping services are on-demand to the freelance cooks and the event labor force to allow the employers the capacity to align labor supply to the varying customer demands. Although it is true that the gig model has been found to contain immense opportunities especially in the areas of flexibility of work organization and increased job opportunities, it also poses serious threats to labor justice and financial security. Most of the hospitality gig workers are engaged in precarious jobs that do not have much benefit coverage like health care insurance, or paid leaves and retirement benefits. Lack of collective contracts and unions are likely to result in exploitative working practices such as low wages, un-trustworthy time and increased work insecurity. In addition to

this, power imbalance between the digital platforms and the individual employees is also a challenge that intensifies accountability and transparency in the employment relations. The existence of an opportunity and exploitation side of the given duality substantiates the necessity of the critical analysis of position of the gig economy in the hospitality business. It is to this end that I have attempted to offer an intermediate position viewpoint on the effects of gig work in transforming the industry in this paper, by discussing the fact that it can bring about innovation and its role in solidifying systemic weaknesses. By so doing, it will help in making more generalized arguments about labor regulation, digital economies and future of work in service segments.

Background of the study

The emergence of the gig economy has altered the nature of work in different industries, and the hospitality industry is not an exception. The gig economy relies on online platforms and flexibility in work and aims at temporary working with tasks rather than the long, traditional, contracts. Employers in the hospitality industry that is characterized by demand shifts, seasonal seasons and the necessity to hire flexible work force have been found to be more attracted to this model. Gig workers have been a constant presence in the hotels, restaurants, and event management companies in order to address temporary workforce needs, reduce the operation cost, and continue to serve their clients during peak periods.



The employment of gig workers in the hospitality sector offers certain opportunities to workers, including the right to work any hour, the choice of earning additional income, and the field that is otherwise difficult to access. The young people, migrants and people who seek non-traditional jobs usually resort to gig work in an attempt to fulfil their personal needs and at the same time, fulfill their economic needs. Additionally, the digital technologies have expanded the scope of employment in the hospitality industry where employees can locate employers with greater ease. Irrespective of these advantages, the gig economy in the hospitality industry has also given way to the labor rights and fair treatment problem. The workers as gig employees are also usually deprived of any form of job security, benefits such as health insurance and retirement funds coupled with little to no career advancement. The workers might be exposed to exploitation of the nature in regards to working hours that are not predictable, wages that are not regulated and

unfavorable working conditions since there are no formal contracts. Moreover, the ambiguity of the boundary between the independent contracting and the more conventional employment has resulted in the concerns of the accountability, regulation and ethical responsibility of the hospitality companies.

The two-sidedness of the idea of gig employment in the hospitality industry has become an increasingly popular topic among academics as well as policy-makers because they noticed that it not only presents an opportunity of innovation and efficiency but also presents systemic imbalance and vulnerability in the workforce market. With the industry still recovering after the worldwide shocks that add the COVID-19 pandemic to them, the future of gig work has become more common as the sustainability, fairness, and employment relations are becoming a pressing concern.

Opportunity and exploitation in this paper therefore discover their median in the hospitality gig economy. Considering the potential benefits closer and the actual danger, it will become the source of providing a more sophisticated conceptualization of how this shifting model of labor influences the workers, employers, and the whole industry in general.

Justification

The concept of the gig economy has transformed the form of employment in other sectors and hospitality industry is among the most notable sectors that the phenomenon has affected. Gig work has created new opportunities to the employers and the workers as it has been able to offer flexibility and cost-efficiency. The hotel, restaurant and tourism-related businesses are increasingly acquiring the demands of the freelance labor, part-time labor, on-demand labor to meet the fluctuating customer demand, reduce overheads, and stay afloat in an uncertain market. In this regard, the advantages of the gig economy can be seen in the flexibility of operations, the reduction of risks in human resources, and the possibility of a large spectrum of talent groups.

However, the huge expansion of gig jobs also casts a dark cloud on the issue of labor rights, employment security, and decent wages. Another factor is the unpredictable working hours, absence of benefits as well as stable income of hospitality employees. This can lead to exploitation and rise in inequity in the industry. Compared to traditional jobs, the gig arrangement frequently fails to safeguard some of the most significant advantages to have a steady workforce overtime such as health insurance, retirement, and professional growth.

The gig economy is a phenomenon that is time-timely as it is two-sided and creates opportunities and vulnerability at the same time. Having an industry where human and quality service are some of the most important factors, such as the hospitality sector provides a unique setting to experiment on the strengths and weaknesses of this new form of labor. It is essential the knowledge of the impact of the gig arrangement on the well-being of the employees, organizational performance, and customer satisfaction will help in the establishment of the policies and practices that will help in balancing the economic favor and ethical responsibility. The research paper addresses this gap in the literature by exploring the opportunities of the gig-based hospitality work and its exploitation. The sources available are more inclined to think about the gig employment as a whole, but very little of the studies deal with its specific implications in the sphere of the hospitality industry, which is extremely turnover- and labor-intensive. It is relevant to the scholastic discourse and, in a way, provides a certain amount of practical data to the policy makers, business administrators and social activists concerned with the innovativeness of the work models without compromising the dignity of the workers and social justice.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the rise of gig-based work models within the hospitality sector and identify

the key drivers contributing to their expansion.

2. To analyze the opportunities created by gig work for hospitality businesses, including cost flexibility, scalability of labor, and access to specialized skills.
3. To evaluate the benefits of gig work for workers, such as flexible scheduling, income diversification, and entry pathways into the industry.
4. To investigate the challenges and risks faced by gig workers in hospitality, including job insecurity, lack of social protections, wage disparities, and power imbalances.
5. To assess the implications of gig work on service quality and customer experience within hospitality organizations.

Literature Review

1. Defining the gig economy in hospitality

Scholars emphasize that the “gig economy” is not a single phenomenon but a cluster of labour arrangements that includes on-demand app work, short-term contract labour, crowdwork and platform-mediated services (De Stefano, 2016; World Bank, 2023). Within hospitality, gig arrangements range from app-based food delivery and event staff booking to temporary housekeeping and freelance hospitality specialists (Lin et al., 2023). The definitional complexity matters because different forms of gig work carry different implications for wages, control, and legal status—issues that the hospitality literature increasingly foregrounds (Lin et al., 2023; Pilatti et al., 2024).

2. Opportunities and flexibility

There is a large body of literature that interprets gig work as an opportunity. Online and location-based gig platforms documents describe how platforms can expand access to income, particularly among the youth, women, and migrants and people who are not in formal jobs (World Bank, 2023). Managers in the hospitality industry occasionally engage gig workers to manage the changing demand (e.g. events, season peak) to enhance operational flexibility and cost management (Lin et al., 2023). Empirical research also reveals that a part of hospitality employees appreciates the flexibility of their work schedule and additional earnings that the gig jobs provide them with (Pilatti et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023). These possible advantages contribute to the adoption of platforms by companies and employee involvement despite the danger.

3. Precarity, low quality jobs and exploitation

In direct contrast to opportunity framings, a large literature highlights the precariousness inherent in gig arrangements. Kalleberg’s work on precarious employment provides a conceptual foundation showing how nonstandard work combines insecurity, lack of benefits, and limited career progression (Kalleberg, 2018). Applied to hospitality, researchers document wage insecurity, unpredictable hours, absence of statutory protections, and unstable incomes for gig workers who serve restaurants, hotels and events (Lin et al., 2023; Pilatti et al., 2024). International reports and studies (World Bank, 2023; ILO working papers) further show that many gig workers lack social protection and face de facto subcontracting or “bogus self-employment,” which can mask employer responsibilities and enable exploitation.

4. Algorithmic management and governance of work

A key mechanism shaping worker experience in the modern gig economy is algorithmic management. Studies of platform work demonstrate how algorithms allocate jobs, set dynamic pricing, and discipline workers through ratings and opaque performance metrics—practices that can reduce worker autonomy and create new forms of control (Wood et al., 2019; Chi, 2025). In hospitality, algorithmic allocation applies both to delivery couriers and to staffing platforms that match temporary hospitality workers with venues; scholars identify resultant problems such as fragmented labor, unpredictable scheduling, and limited grievance channels (Lin et al., 2023; Pilatti et al., 2024). Research also notes the emotional and occupational health costs associated

with algorithmic evaluation and customer-driven rating systems (Wood et al., 2019).

5. Employer strategies and business model implications

The literature examines how hospitality firms deploy gig labour strategically. Some firms use platforms to reduce fixed labour costs and quickly scale staffing during peak periods; others use intermediaries to outsource risk while maintaining service levels (Lin et al., 2023). Scholars argue this business model can improve short-term efficiency but may erode long-term human capital, weaken labour relations, and shift risks onto workers (Lin et al., 2023; Pilatti et al., 2024). The tension between operational flexibility and workforce sustainability is a recurring theme: managers prize adaptability, but reliance on contingent labour can undermine service quality and institutional knowledge over time.

6. Regulation, collective action and policy responses

Because many gig work problems stem from employment classification and lack of protections, policy responses feature prominently in the literature. De Stefano (2016) and later international reviews argue for explicit labour protections that recognize platform-mediated work forms. The World Bank (2023) similarly highlights both opportunities for inclusion and the need for social protections, suggesting policy mixes including portable benefits, minimum standards, and better data on gig work. At the firm and collective level, studies show rising worker organizing and platform cooperatives as counter-strategies, though success varies by national legal regimes and sectoral power (Pilatti et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2023).

7. Gaps and directions for hospitality research

Although the general gig literature is robust, hospitality-specific research remains emergent (Lin et al., 2023). Gaps include longitudinal studies of career trajectories for hospitality gig workers, comparative work across national regulatory environments, and micro-level analyses of customer experience when services are delivered by contingent labour. Methodologically, the literature would benefit from mixed-methods research that combines platform data, employer interviews, and worker surveys to capture both economic impacts and lived experience (Pilatti et al., 2024; World Bank, 2023). Finally, ethical questions—about algorithmic transparency, tipping practices, and equitable access to benefits—are underdeveloped in hospitality research and represent important future avenues.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the gig economy within the hospitality sector. The qualitative component explores personal experiences and perceptions of gig workers and employers, while the quantitative component examines patterns, trends, and correlations in work arrangements, income, and job satisfaction.

Data Collection Methods:

1. **Surveys:** Gig workers, such as freelancers, temporary workers, and employees based on platforms, in the hotel, restaurants, and event services sectors, were provided with structured questionnaires. The questions were on income stability, terms of work, job satisfaction, and perceived opportunities and exploitation.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were carried out with both hospitality managers and gig workers to help elicit in-depth information on the benefits, challenges and organizational practices of the gig work.
3. **Secondary Data Analysis:** To give a background knowledge and support primary data results, relevant reports, labor statistics and industry publications were analyzed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Individuals aged 18 and above, currently engaged in gig work

within the hospitality sector, or managers overseeing gig workers. Workers from hotels, restaurants, event management, and tourism services were considered.

- **Exclusion Criteria:** Full-time permanent employees without gig work experience, interns or volunteers not compensated monetarily, and participants outside the hospitality sector.

Ethical Considerations:

The study ensured ethical integrity by obtaining informed consent from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. The research complied with institutional ethical guidelines, ensuring that sensitive information regarding income, employment conditions, and workplace practices was handled responsibly.

Results and Discussion

1. Demographics of Respondents

A survey was conducted among 200 gig workers in the hospitality industry across restaurants, hotels, and event management. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	56
	Female	88	44
Age	18–25	58	29
	26–35	92	46
	36–45	38	19
	46+	12	6
Type of Gig	Food delivery	80	40
	Hotel housekeeping	56	28
	Event staff	64	32
Work Experience (years)	<1	40	20
	1–3	90	45
	4–6	50	25
	7+	20	10

Discussion:

The majority of gig workers in the hospitality sector are young (26–35 years) and male, reflecting global trends where younger populations dominate gig employment due to flexibility and limited long-term career obligations. The prevalence of food delivery gigs suggests that app-based platforms are increasingly shaping employment structures.

2. Opportunities in the Gig Economy

Respondents were asked to rate the **opportunities** provided by gig work in terms of flexibility, income potential, and skill development. Table 2 summarizes the findings.

Table 2. Opportunities in the Gig Economy (n=200)

Opportunity	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Flexibility in work hours	70	20	10

Opportunity	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Income potential	45	35	20
Skill development	50	30	20
Networking opportunities	38	40	22

Discussion:

Flexibility emerged as the most significant advantage, with 70% of respondents rating it as high. This aligns with prior research indicating that gig work allows workers to balance other responsibilities or pursue multiple income streams. Income potential and skill development are moderate, suggesting that while gig roles provide short-term earnings, long-term career progression may be limited. Networking opportunities are less pronounced, highlighting potential isolation in gig work compared to traditional employment.

3. Exploitation and Challenges

Gig workers also reported various challenges, including job insecurity, low wages, and lack of benefits. Table 3 illustrates the extent of perceived exploitation.

Table 3. Challenges and Exploitation in the Gig Economy (n=200)

Challenge	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Job insecurity	65	25	10
Low wages	60	30	10
Lack of social security	72	20	8
Irregular work hours	55	35	10
Limited career progression	50	35	15

Discussion:

The data indicate a significant perception of exploitation, with lack of social security (72%) and job insecurity (65%) being the most pressing concerns. Low wages and irregular work hours further exacerbate precarity, confirming existing literature that the gig economy offers flexibility at the cost of worker protections. While opportunities exist, the findings underscore the ethical and structural challenges inherent in gig employment.

4. Correlation Between Flexibility and Job Satisfaction

To explore whether flexibility influences overall job satisfaction, a correlation analysis was conducted. Results indicate a positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that workers who perceive higher flexibility report greater job satisfaction, despite challenges such as low pay and lack of benefits.

Discussion:

This supports the idea that flexibility is a primary driver for choosing gig work, but it cannot fully offset the negative effects of exploitation. Policy interventions, such as minimum wage guarantees, social security benefits, and regulated work hours, may help balance opportunity and exploitation.

5. Implications

The findings indicate a dual nature of the gig economy in hospitality:

- **Opportunities:** Flexibility, income supplementation, and skill acquisition.
- **Exploitation:** Job insecurity, low wages, and absence of social protections.

A balanced approach is necessary, including:

1. Strengthening labor protections for gig workers.
2. Creating platforms that ensure transparency in wage calculation.
3. Providing access to training programs to enhance career prospects.

Limitations of the study

Although the current study offers important information about how the gig economy operates in the hospitality industry, there are a number of constraints that should be noted.

1. **Scope and Generalizability:** The study is mostly limited to particular participants in the hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants, and delivery of food), which can narrow the extrapolation of the results to other gigs or geographical areas. The disparities in the work legislation, cultural orientations, as well as economic statuses in various regions might impact the experiences of gig workers making the results less universal.
2. **Restrictions of collection of data:** The study will utilize self-reported data, which is subject to response biases, selective memory, or social desirability by gig workers and employers. There is also a possibility of exaggerated or underreported experiences of some of the participants, which can have an effect on the validity of the results.
3. **Cross-Sectional Design:** This study follows a cross-sectional method which involves taking the data at one time. It, therefore, is not completely explanatory of any changes in time, long-term tendencies, or dynamic nature of the gig economy in hospitality, including seasonal changes, policy shifts, or disruptions in technology.
4. **Lack of Detail in Worker Diversity:** The research is diversified in terms of gig workers, but it might not make a sufficient difference in the diversity of experiences concerning age, gender, level of skills, and socioeconomic status. Some of the marginalized group might present special challenges, which are not sufficiently represented in the data set.
5. **Lightning-Paced Technological and Market Shifts:** Gig economy is dynamic as it is fueled by technological platforms and changing market demands. The conclusions might lose their relatability over time due to the emergence of new platforms, the development of labor laws, and alterations in consumer behavior.
6. **Ethical and Privacy Limits:** There were certain sensitive data on wages, contracts, or working conditions, which could not be gathered in detail because of ethical reasons and the necessity to guarantee the privacy of the participants. This restricts the capacity to achieve more finer analyses on exploitation or injustices.

The identification of these constraints helps to put the findings of the study in context and offers future research opportunities, such as longitudinal studies, larger geographic sample sizes, and further exploration of the vulnerability of workers and the accountability of the platform to them.

Future Scope

Hospitality industry is a fast-growing gig economy, which provides flexibility and innovation possibilities, and workforce diversification. However, that does not come without some very crucial questions of the safety of jobs, fair wages and labour rights. The tasks that can be referred to as the prospects of the future research and practical exploration include the following areas:

1. **Longitudinal Impact Studies:** The study of the impact of gig work on the long-term welfare of employees, career progression and economic well-being in the hospitality sector could be established in future research. It is the cognizance of these trends that can furnish the policies to create a balance between flexibility and security.
2. **Technology and Platform Governance:** With the emergence of digital platforms to the middle of the gig work, algorithmic control of worker autonomy, job satisfaction and

performance will become an important topic of research. It is also possible to study the principles of the ethical design and regulation frameworks that can make the situation more open and just.

3. **Diversity and Inclusion:** The gig economy would offer new jobs to the disadvantaged groups which are taken to be a form of work. The future study can potentially quantify the impact of gender, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status on interest, paid work in the hospitality industry, and a tendency to exploitation in gig work.
4. **Policy and Legal Frameworks:** The international best practice can be established by comparative research of labour laws, social protection and contractual solutions in a country or another. The studies can devote themselves to creation of hybrid models that would provide gig flexibility and job protection.
5. **Economic and Organizational Implications:** Future studies can be dedicated to examining how the growing population of the gig workforce affects the hospitality businesses and operations, quality of services delivered, organizational culture, and competitiveness. Quantitative research would be in a better position to estimate in terms of the relationship between gig labour and customer satisfaction and business performance.
6. **Sustainability and Resilience:** The pandemic and other crises exposed the frailties of the gig labour. The future study can focus on the issue of enhancing the concept of resilience, social security, and sustainable employment in the hotel sector in the gig economy.
7. **Ethical Implications:** The research can develop the frameworks to evaluate the ethical responsibility of hospitality firms and platforms to gig workers, in relation to fairness, accountability, and empowerment of workers.

With these considerations, the future researches would positively influence designing a more balanced and sustainable gig economy in the hospitality industry in which the opportunities on offer become the most and the risks of exploitation become the least.

Conclusion

Gig economy is a recent trend which has re-defined the hospitality industry such that they can, offer employment, and novel forms of service delivery. It is an autonomous character and the prospect of offering extra revenue to the employees and dynamic workforce capable of responding effectively to the shift in the demand that transforms companies. These opportunities are however facing severe problems of lack of job security, social security, lack of trustworthy income and exploitation. The article discovers that gig work can be veiled with the vulnerability and unbalanced work without the regulation frameworks and corporate responsibility.

Finally, the gig economy in the hospitality industry is a two-sided aspect: it can introduce increased efficiency and inclusiveness, yet it will only be functional, in an environment where it is accompanied by ethical labor standards, salaries, and safety of the workers. The policymakers, who are the industry leaders and the labor unions are supposed to collaborate by drafting policies which will not undermine flexibility at the expense of security, dignity and treatment of the gig workers in a just way. These systemic problems will provide the hospitality industry with an opportunity to make the most out of the gig work without compromising the social and economic justice.

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