Lived Experiences of Gig Workers in Ogun Sate, Nigeria: Social Innovation, Job Security, and Well-being in Emerging Wok Arrangements

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Abstract

The gig economy has transformed labour markets by creating flexible income-generating opportunities, but it is also associated with limited social protection, job insecurity, and declining worker well-being. In Nigeria, where formal employment opportunities remain scarce despite a growing youth population, many individuals depend on platform-based and informal work. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the experiences of gig workers, particularly outside major urban centres. This study examines the lived experiences of gig workers in Ogun State, a strategically located state bordering Lagos with a growing but underexplored gig economy. Guided by Precarity Theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research adopted a phenomenological qualitative approach. Data were collected from 18 participants engaged in ride-hailing, delivery and logistics services, and digital freelancing. The data were analysed thematically to identify key patterns and meanings. The findings reveal a paradoxical reality in which gig work serves as an important source of livelihood while simultaneously exposing workers to precarious conditions. Participants reported unstable earnings, lack of formal social protection, and vulnerability to occupational risks. A major finding is the "paradox of flexibility," where increased autonomy and control over work schedules are offset by heightened economic uncertainty and insecurity. Many workers also experienced physical exhaustion and psychological stress. To cope with these challenges, workers relied on grassroots social innovations such as Ajo *(informal savings schemes). The study highlights the need for policies that promote decent work through portable benefits, stronger social protection, and support for worker-led initiatives and sustainable labour practices.*

Keywords: *Gig Economy; Ogun State; Social Innovation; Precarity; Subjective Well-being; Digital Labor Platforms*

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1. Introduction

Technology is evolving at an unprecedented pace, or increasingly platforms, and digital platforms and labour market structures are changing at an unprecedented rate– this is radically changing how the world will work in the future. The gig economy has undergone a rapid development in recent years, transforming traditional employment and ways of organizing and executing work, which is now being characterized by short-term, flexible and task-based employment situations (ILO, 2021; Wood et al., 2020). Digital labour platforms such as ride hailing, delivery and freelance platforms present new opportunities to earn income, particularly for the less well-off in the formal economy. These platforms are attracting more of the global workforce and are flexible, autonomous and easy to enter, making them more appealing (World Bank, 2023). However, the reality behind these perceived advantages is complex working conditions are inextricably precarious, earnings are not guaranteed and social protection mechanisms are not available to everyone (De Stefano, 2021; Graham et al., 2022).

The gig economy is tied directly to other demographic and economic pressures in other developing countries such as Nigeria. There has been a growing young population in Nigeria commonly referred as 'youth bulge' which positively impacts the informal but negatively impacts the quest for alternative livelihoods in the formal sector, as Nigeria has a high level of unemployment and underemployment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). With the rising number of labour market entrants, gig work has been adopted as a survival strategy and a way of economic participation by many young people as the formal economy fails to keep up with the number of youth they were meant to employ (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Adebowale, 2022). Consequently, gig jobs (Uber, Bolt, Jumia, and UpWork) have increased in the Nigerian labour market, creating conditions and opportunities for workers in the country in a labour market characterized by changing economic landscapes (Adeleke et al., 2023).

In this changing labour landscape, platform-based employment has also produced a range of social innovations as labourers learn how to adapt and deal with the uncertainty and risk of working in a platform economy. Many of these innovations are spontaneous and involve informal associations of workers, cooperative saving schemes like "ajo", peer-to-peer support networks, and the strategic use of digital technologies for maximizing work opportunities and mitigating income insecurity (Friedman, 2020; Heeks, 2022). The practices reflect the agency of gig workers in addressing structural constraints, especially in situations where formal institutional

support is lacking or weak. However, the effectiveness of these social innovations in solving the problem of unemployment and improving the welfare of workers is still not well understood particularly in the context of Nigeria.

Ogun State is a very special setting in which the study of these dynamics becomes more interesting because of its socio-economic characteristics. Ogun's location is in close proximity to Lagos, the commercial hub of Nigeria, which brings about important economic spillovers, and also a variety of industrial clusters, industrial zones and growing cities. This strategic position has helped kickstart a gig economy that includes ride-hailing drivers like Bolt and Uber, logistics and delivery drivers who have to follow the orders of e-commerce companies, and digital freelancers who work remotely with the orders of various global markets. Although these opportunities create employment and diversify opportunities, they also create instability of demand, infrastructure conditions and control mechanisms, such as those implemented by platforms, which can affect job security and stability (Adewumi, 2024).

Though gig work is gaining momentum in Nigeria, there is an inherent paradox between the perceived "freedom" of flexible work arrangements and the insecurity and vulnerability experienced by those who engage in such work. Gig workers are frequently unprotected against economic volatility and occupational hazards, such as lack of contract security, regular income, health insurance, and pension plans (De Stefano, 2021; Graham et al., 2022). These vulnerabilities are compounded in a country where social safety nets are weak, and labour laws do not adequately reflect the nature of platform work, which could undermine the sustainability and quality of gig work (Adeleke et al., 2023; Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Adebowale, 2022). This is especially true in areas with a high concentration of gig workers, such as Ogun State, where the competition among workers is heightened, and where the opportunities available to gig workers are shaped by the proximity to Lagos.

Gig workers are not just like victims of the challenges – they are part of the world and they have to continuously educate themselves and learn how to navigate the complexities and challenges they face at work. They enter into informal partnerships; join a cooperative saving group or a digital solution; engage in social innovation to better manage their situation and enhance their coping and resiliences (Heeks, 2022; Friedman, 2020). But little documentation to date shows any influence by the use of these strategies on workers' notions of job security and mental and physical well-being. The focus of previous studies has been macro or quantitative, often neglecting lived experiences, experiences of gig workers in Nigeria and their coping strategies on a day-to-day basis (Wood et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2022).

This is an area of missing research and underscores the value of locally focused, qualitative research engaging the voices and experiences of gig workers. This is particularly important in the context of development priorities around the world, which include the quest for decent work, inclusive economic growth and improved labour conditions (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, 2022). It is essential for articulating the experience and perception of gig employment, if the goal is to understand the working context of gig workers and to craft the bases of optimal labour policies, sustainable working practices and social protection systems in emerging economies.

What is Gig workers' perception about security in their jobs in Ogun State? Have there been any social innovations to solve social issues surrounding work, including digital tools and savings clubs and informal unions? And in what ways does participation in gig work impact their mental and physical well-being? Important questions that needed to be answered in understanding the complex themes of flexibility, precarity and resiliency in work, posed by the gig economy. The specific goal of this study was to critically assess the GIG workers perceived attitudes on self-assessed problems of work insecurity on overall wellbeing of gig workers in the new precarious working context of gig workers in Ogun State, Nigeria and their role in GF social innovations.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The gig economy has sparked a wide range of academic discussion, especially about its impact on employment and worker health, as well as coping strategies in precarious employment scenarios. Platform-mediated work is expanding in both developed and developing economies, and it is imperative to question the lived realities of workers working under these flexible but also uncertain arrangements. This section outlines the literature by highlighting key conceptual clarifications, Nigerian Gig Economy context and theoretical perspectives that guide this study.

One of the first steps towards understanding the nature of gig work is understanding the notions of social innovation and job security in informal and platform labour systems. Social innovation, as a broad concept, is defined as new approaches, practices or programs that meet social needs and contribute to the betterment of individuals and communities (Heeks, 2022). Social innovation can, however, assume more local and informal forms in the context of gig work in developing economies. It includes coping strategies that workers have created in the

community to overcome structural vulnerabilities as a result of precarious jobs. These include informal worker associations, rotation of savings and credit schemes (e.g. "ajo"), peer-support networks, and strategic use of digital tools to access and maximise opportunities for work (Friedman, 2020; Adeleke et al., 2023). Innovations like these are normally bottom-up, adaptive, and context-dependent - characteristic of the work of individuals in situations where formal institutional resources are weak or nonexistent.

Likewise, the notion of job stability in the gig economy has to be understood beyond the conventional notion of employment. Job security may be generally divided into two aspects, objective and subjective. Objective job security is related to measurable factors like a formal contract, regular income, access to benefits, and legal protection (De Stefano, 2021). By contrast, subjective job security is a worker's sense and emotions of jobs stability and continuity, their chances of finding new work and maintaining their livelihood (Graham et al., 2022).

3. Theoretical Framework

This study has a theoretical approach that relies mainly on Precarity Theory (based on Guy Standing's work) and a further analysis that utilizes another theory, in this case, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and is used as a supplemental theory for the study. Precarity Theory provides a critical lens on factors that constitute the structure of gig work, as well as the emergence of a "precariat" class of people whose work is made precarious or precarious in nature, and whose income are precarious or precarious in nature, who are inadequately protected by social safety nets (Standing 2020). This perspective sees the gig economy as reflecting a shift from a longer-term, more secure employment to working arrangements that are less regular and predictable, and riskier for the individual employee. This is especially the case in developing economies, where regulatory frameworks are not as strong and social safety nets are not quite as extensive (ILO, 2021).

The theorising and application of precarity is more relevant in Nigerian context in the explanation of those who also work outside the formal labour market, the gig workers. The insecurity of job, pension-system, and health insurance along with the uncertainty of demand and platform control also reflects on insecurity and economic instability (Graham et al., 2022; Adeleke et al., 2023). The theory also highlights the capacity for social effects to occur at the wider social level including stress, anxiety and poor wellbeing as workers seek to continue their working lives. Such a framework is capable of identifying the broader structural and institutional features

driving Nigeria's labour market which are relevant to the experiences of gig workers.

Precarity Theory is a useful tool to consider the structure of insecurity and SDT a psychological tool to consider the structure of insecure employment in terms of autonomy and wellbeing. The satisfaction of three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020) would have an impact on people's well-being. Gig work may give employees more flexibility and autonomy in their work which can potentially enhance their autonomy and control over their lifestyle and working routines. A sense of independence can be seen as a positive aspect of work satisfaction and psychological well-being.

But there are crucial paradoxes in SDT's use, too. While there is some autonomy of gig workers, their autonomy is constrained by the algorithmic management system, customer reviews, and market forces, which take away autonomy from gig workers related to managing their working conditions (Wood et al., 2020; Heeks, 2022). This may thus be a more idealistic autonomy rather than an actual autonomy that might end up impacting their competence and relatedness. The present study is an amalgamation of Precarity Theory and Self-Determination Theory, with the aim to provide a multidimensional view of understanding about gig work. That said, Precarity Theory has a macro approach to structural precarity, and SDT has a micro perspective of the subjective nature of precarity and workers' well-being. They serve as frames to analyze the flexibility and insecurity of gig workers in Ogun State and how they view these experience using their adaptive strategies (social innovations). Overall, the literature underscores the ambivalent nature of gig work as a means of opportunity as well as vulnerability, especially in developing economies. However, there are significant gaps in understanding the lived experience and local processes of employment outside of the major cities and the impact of grassroots innovations on job security and well-being. This study has made a contribution to the current debate on labour market transformation, social protection and sustainable development in Nigeria because of the theoretically sound and context specific approach adopted to the gaps.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology to enable the perception of lived experiences of gig workers, focusing on the involvement with social innovation, job security and well-being in new working relationships. The reason why this study is

conducted with phenomenological qualitative research is its focus on subjective meanings and everyday reality. Phenomenology offers appropriate application to this study because of its emphasis on lived experience of the people, and how that lived experience is viewed and interpreted within a specific social context (Creswell & Poth, 2021). With gig workers, who engage in typically informal, fluid, and individualized employment practices, such a way of doing things allows the researcher to capture something more than just the obvious, and explore how gig workers are interpreting issues like autonomy, insecurity, and coping strategies. The phenomenological design respects that the voices of the participants need to be privileged, ensuring that the nature of gig work in terms of an economic practice and lived social reality can be captured in rich and nuanced ways (Smith & Shinebourne, 2020).

The study is carried out in Ogun State which forms a part of the socio-economic and labour market landscape of Nigeria and is strategically important. Ogun State has vast connectivity links with Lagos, commercial nerve centre of the nation; consequently the state enjoys positive socio-economic spillover benefits such as better mobility, industrial expansions and spread of digital based platforms employment. At the state level, whilst local authority areas are identified, certain places within these geopolitical zones that are characterised as urban and semi-urban e.g. Abeokuta, Ota and Sagamu are identified. The locations are especially important because of their increasing involvement in the gig economy. In addition, its location near Lagos has led to a large number of providers of ride-hailing & logistics services, often operating across state lines, and in Abeokuta, it has led to a combination of administrative and commercial functions that cater to a variety of forms of gig work. Likewise, Sagamu has industrial clusters and transport facilities and creates demands for delivery and logistics service. Choices of these locations enabled a thorough assessment of the nature of gig work in diverse socio-economic environments of Ogun State and also filled the lacuna of empirical research that mostly focused on mega cities like Lagos and Abuja.

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling are utilized in the process of selecting samples to be studied. Interviews were conducted on Gig workers using purposive sampling strategy where the individuals are present in the gig work field who have relevant experiences and willing to participate in the study in order to achieve the objective of the study (Patton, 2020). This inspects that the subjects are information rich and able to give meaning based from the phenomenon that they are investigating. This semi-structured and networked mode of work means that snowball sampling then takes place to recruit more members from whom

respondents can endorse additional members. This is especially helpful when recruiting hard-to-engage workers, increasing the diversity and comprehensiveness of the study (Noy, 2021). For the purpose of this study, a sample size of 15-20 is deemed sufficient for study in the phenomenological research in which the primary concern was on the depth of understanding where statistic generalization was not the primary goal. The participants represent a wide spectrum of gig economy activities from ride-hailing, delivery/lodgists, digital freelance, and platform mediated services by artisans – covering a wide range of experiences in the gig economy.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are used to collect data as these interview methods are appropriate for exploring the lived experience of the participants in a flexible but systematic way. This form of data collection is also suited for allowing participants to share their opinions using their own words and giving the researcher chances to drill down in the data for further understandings and clarifications (Creswell & Poth, 2021). An interview guide is designed to guarantee uniformity across interviews and include themes from the literature and material that emerged during focus group discussions, including pathways into gig work; perceptions of job security and income stability; experiences with platform management; social innovation practices (e.g., informal unions, savings schemes); and the effects of gig work on mental and physical health. Interviews are held in person or via digital communication tools, whichever the participants can make available and how it is convenient for them. All interviews are taped and transcribed verbatim (with participant consent) to be accurate and reliable in the representation of participant's narrative.

Data resulting from the interviews and discussions are analyzed through thematic analysis, which helps in identifying, organizing and interpreting patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analytical process of the study starts by familiarization, in which the researcher fully absorbs the data by repeatedly reading the results of the interviews. The initial codes that follow are established from the key verbs and themes that come up. Then these codes are organized under larger themes representing various components of the experiences of the participants, including perceptions of job insecurity, means of coping, and well-being outcomes. The themes are then discussed and clarified for coherence, consistency and relevance to the research questions. Data analysis can be done manually or using a qualitative data analysis program like NVivo, which can help organize, code and retrieve parts of the data set.

Moreover, reporting the exact wording used by the participants by reproducing word-for-word the quotes helps to ensure that the voices of these participants are accurately represented, further supporting the validity of the analysis. The methodological methodology adopted in this study is useful in providing a solid, credible and reasonable account of the reality of the gig workers' lives, providing valuable inputs into the discourse around the emerging work arrangement in Nigeria.

Table 1.1. The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N= 18

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	12	66.7
	Female	6	33.3
	Prefer not to say	0	0.0
Age (Years)	18–24	3	16.7
	25–34	8	44.4
	35–44	5	27.8
	45 and above	2	11.1
Marital Status	Single	7	38.9
	Married	9	50.0
	Divorced/Separated	2	11.1
	Widowed	0	0.0
Level of Education	Primary	2	11.1
	Secondary	6	33.3
	Tertiary	8	44.4
	Postgraduate	2	11.1
Type of Gig Work	Ride-hailing (e.g., Uber/Bolt)	6	33.3
	Delivery/Logistics	5	27.8
	Digital Freelancing	4	22.2
	Artisan/Service-based	3	16.7
Years in Gig Work	Less than 1 year	4	22.2
	1–3 years	7	38.9
	4–6 years	5	27.8
	Above 6 years	2	11.1
Average Monthly Income (₦)	Less than ₦50,000	3	16.7
	₦50,000–₦100,000	6	33.3
	₦100,001–₦200,000	5	27.8
	Above ₦200,000	4	22.2
Work Status	Full-time Gig Worker	11	61.1
	Part-time Gig Worker	7	38.9
Location within Ogun State	Abeokuta	6	33.3
	Ota	7	38.9
	Sagamu	5	27.8

5. Results (The "Lived Experiences")

Theme 1: The Illusion of Flexibility

The idea of flexibility is one of the dominant themes that has come to the fore from the interviews, linked to the gig work. On a superficial level, gig work is promoted as providing the worker the freedom of being able to choose their working hours, write their contracts, and work without experiencing the restrictions of the conventional employment model. One of the drawcards of the gig economy that appeals to people is the sense of being autonomous. The lived experience of participants dictates, however, a more complex and paradoxical reality. In theory, workers can log on and off work platforms whenever they want, but their work demands from them to log on for long durations and irregular shifts in order to earn a sufficient allowable day's wages. But, in reality, the flexibility is not negotiable. The participants frequently described gig work as offering autonomy in theory, but in practice requiring long and irregular working hours.

Participant 1:

"I like the fact that I can choose when to work, but if I don't work long hours like 12 to 14 hours daily, I won't make enough money. So the flexibility is not really real." (Ride-hailing driver, 32 years, Abeokuta)

Participant 2:

"At first, I thought I could just work whenever I want, but the pressure to meet daily targets forces me to stay on the road almost all day." (Delivery rider, 27 years, Ota)

Participant3:

"Flexibility helps me balance family sometimes, but the income is unpredictable, so I end up working extra hours to stabilize my earnings." (Freelance digital worker, 35 years, Sagamu)

While participants acknowledge autonomy as an advantage, the responses reveal that economic necessity overrides flexibility. The "illusion of flexibility" emerges because workers self-regulate into longer hours to maintain income stability, effectively shifting control from platforms to workers themselves.

Theme 2: Navigating Precarity

Many of the recurring themes that came out of the interviews is the precariousness of gig work and what they observe about gig work in their daily lives. Within a gig economy, precarity is the lack of a fixed income, lack of access to social protections

and vulnerability to different kinds of vulnerabilities. Gig workers are not usually part of formal employment settings where they would find employment security, insurance, and institutional backing, but rather work in an environment of uncertainty and risk. Participants shared that their income varies a lot based on demand, platforms algorithms, cost conditions, etc., and cannot be predicted or planned on a financial level. Lack of employer-provided benefits, such as health insurance, pensions, compensation in the event of accidents, also makes them more vulnerable.

Participants highlighted income instability, absence of formal protections, and exposure to informal and formal harassment.

Participant 4:

"Some days are good, some days I don't even get half of what I expect. There is no guarantee, and no insurance if anything happens." (Ride-hailing driver, 40 years, Abeokuta)

Participant 5:

"Beyond the low income, we sometimes face harassment from agberos and even law enforcement who demand money before allowing us to operate freely." (Delivery rider, 29 years, Ota)

Participant 6:

"The work is risky because if my bike gets damaged or I fall sick, I have no employer support. Everything is on me." (Logistics worker, 33 years, Sagamu)

The findings underscore the structural vulnerabilities inherent in gig work. While some participants appreciate the opportunity to earn income, the absence of institutional protections exposes them to economic and social risks, reinforcing precarity as a defining feature of gig labour.

Theme 3: Grassroots Social Innovation

One of the key findings in the interviewed findings was the grassroots social innovation that emerged amongst the gig workers. What became noticeable from the interviews was that there was grass roots innovation that occurred among the gig worker population as an ill-fitted response to the lack of institutional support systems. Participants have learned to engage in informal yet effective ways of supporting and helping each other and coping with financial insecurity, especially when income is unreliable and credit is limited and available, and social protection is not. Resilient strategies generally involve community-based notions of coping and are infused into relationships of trust between workers with similar occupational

experiences. An important type of social innovation that emerges is the use of WhatsApp groups as the communication, information sharing, job co-ordination and mutual support platform. These digital platforms allow these workers to share updates on job opportunities, the operation of platforms, safety issues and emergency assistance. Participants described informal coping mechanisms such as WhatsApp groups and "Ajo" savings schemes used to mitigate financial insecurity.

Participant 7:

"We created a WhatsApp group where we share job tips, warn each other about bad routes, and even support one another during emergencies." (Freelance worker, 26 years, Ota)

Participant 8:

"I participate in an Ajo contribution with some colleagues. It helps me save money since the income is not steady." (Delivery rider, 31 years, Abeokuta)

Participant 9:

"Sometimes we pool money together to assist a member who has an accident or sudden problem. It's like our own informal insurance." (Ride-hailing driver, 37 years, Sagamu)

These responses demonstrate adaptive resilience among gig workers. In the absence of formal institutional support, workers rely on peer networks and indigenous financial practices to create a self-organized safety net, reflecting grassroots innovation in response to systemic gaps.

Theme 4: Impact on Well-being

The field experiences of the gig workers in Ogun State show that there are implications for their living and physical condition as well as their psychological well-being arising from participation in the gig economy practice. Work in any capacity in the gig world can be physically exhausting, with participants noting long work hours, irregular schedules, and a focus on earning as much as possible causing fatigue, musculoskeletal issues, and overall physical exhaustion. Gig work was not just a physical struggle; its psychological aspects also provided an important point of interest. Algorithmic management, as many workers put it, involves metrics beyond the workers' control and the monitoring, projection, and therefore, influence on their income from work by platform systems.

Participants reported both physical exhaustion and mental stress associated with gig work and algorithm-driven task allocation.

Participant 10:

"The job is physically exhausting. Sitting or riding for long hours affects my body, especially my back and legs." (Ride-hailing driver, 45 years, Abeokuta)

Participant 11:

"The constant need to stay online and accept orders creates stress. If you reject too many jobs, the app reduces your visibility." (Delivery rider, 28 years, Ota)

Participant 12:

"Mentally, it is stressful because your income depends on algorithms you don't control. You just keep adjusting to the app's demands." (Freelance digital worker, 34 years, Sagamu)

The data reveal that gig work affects both physical and psychological well-being. Algorithmic management introduces a layer of invisible control, where workers must continuously adapt to platform rules, leading to stress, fatigue, and reduced autonomy in practice. Across all themes, participants' narratives reveal a consistent pattern: while gig work offers perceived autonomy and income opportunities, it simultaneously introduces structural vulnerabilities, long working hours, and well-being challenges. However, workers actively respond through informal networks and adaptive strategies, demonstrating agency within constrained conditions.

6. Discussion of the Findings

This study offers valuable insights into the reality experienced by the gig workers working in Ogun and have implications for continued deployment of platform labor, "precarity" and global south labour changes within the academic landscape. The thorniest points raised for discussion include: comparison to current literature, the use of social innovation as a strategy for coping with the gig economy, and how there can be a paradox of autonomy in sustaining involvement in the gig economy.

Synthesis of Findings in Relation to Existing Literature

The experiences discussed by the participants of the study in Ogun State resonate with much of the literature that's available in the broader world and region about gig work and some of its key themes, including those that focus on flexibility, precarity, algorithmic control and the like. It has been suggested that while gig jobs can be seen as providing autonomy and flexibility, that usually leads to low-paid, insecure employment, and long working hours to earn the income needed to pay the bills (De Stefano, 2016; Wood et al., 2019). In line with this view, the participants of

this study reported working long hours in order to secure adequate daily wages, thus turning working flexibility into self imposed hard work.

Compared to the results obtained in Lagos (Nigeria), the main economic and business center, it appears that there are similarities and contextual differences. Prior studies focusing on the competition for gigs, demand for gigs, and relative access to gigs in the city of Lagos show that the general picture is negative, intense competition and higher demand, and comparatively better access to gigs in the city due to urban density and economic activity (Adams & Jayaweera, 2020). However, those in Ogun State have reported encountering a slightly less saturated market with added infrastructural and institutional hurdles as they find themselves open to harassment by informal actors and less regulated. This means that Lagos could have more opportunities, Ogun State shows a gig or market less central economy where fewer opportunities are available but also less supports are available. Hence the precarity experienced is no exclusive phenomenon of Ogun State, but is conditioned on the socio-economic position of the state with regard to Lagos and other urban centres.

A Paradox of Autonomy

The most intriguing category of change in this study concerns the situation of autonomy that is typical of gig work. At face value, gig platforms are even described as giving workers the freedom to choose their work hours and how they will do it, which is considered an important accommodation of the gig economy as compared to traditional work arrangements. But within the stories of the participants lies a hidden dimension: this freedom is for them more of an illusion than a reality, since they are preoccupied with the need to work long hours and be constantly at the disposition of the economy in order to earn the most. This results in an ideal world lack translated physical reality through the algorithms of platforms and budgets.This means that there is flexibility 'theoretically' but not so much due to budgetary pressures or limited algorithms.

Despite these challenges, there are many employees who are still part of the gig economy. There are several relevant and interconnected factors that help to account for this persistence. First, the formal employment opportunity in Nigeria is too limited to its extent that people rely on gig work as an alternative. First, the level of employment opportunity in the Nigeria is quite limited making gig work a viable alternative for income generation. Secondly, the entry-level to gig work is fairly low. Persons of all education and skills levels can participate in gig work. Third, its inviolability and the expectation that income will be received soon, after the

completion of chores, makes it very attractive, as to the formal sector where the work is heavily weighed, and the income comes much later or is still to be guaranteed. Last but not least, the sense of some autonomy or control with management remains a draw card for workers who appreciate control over their time. Such a paradox is in line with the extensive platform-capitalism literature of platform workers who enjoy some autonomy and control within algorithmic systems (Srnicek, 2017). The results indicated a cycle in the negotiation of the tension: paying more immediate attention to economic survival than long-range job security, reinforcing the participants' continued involvement, despite structural weaknesses.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of gig workers in Ogun State, focusing on social innovation, job security, and well-being within emerging work arrangements. The findings indicate that gig work functions as a vital income lifeline for participants, particularly in the context of limited formal employment opportunities and high youth unemployment. However, this economic opportunity comes at a high cost, as workers navigate long working hours, income instability, physical exhaustion, and mental stress induced by algorithmic management and precarious working conditions. The study also highlights the central role of grassroots social innovation, including WhatsApp networks and "Ajo" contributory savings, which serve as informal social safety nets to mitigate the absence of state protections. Overall, the results underscore a paradoxical reality: gig work offers autonomy and flexibility in theory, yet this flexibility is constrained by economic necessity, platform rules, and the lack of formal social security. These insights contribute to understanding the nuanced interplay between precarious work, resilience strategies, and well-being in a Nigerian context, revealing patterns both similar to and distinct from urban hubs like Lagos.

Policy Recommendation

Based on these findings, several policy interventions are suggested to enhance the livelihoods and protection of gig workers in Ogun State:

1. **State-Level Registration of Gig Workers:** The establishment of a formal registration system for gig workers could provide a framework for delivering "portable benefits," including health insurance, pension schemes, and accident

coverage, thereby reducing the vulnerability associated with informal gig employment.

2. **Recognition of Informal Worker Cooperatives:** Policymakers should acknowledge and support informal networks and cooperatives, such as Ajo groups and peer-support WhatsApp networks, as hubs of social innovation. Formal recognition and support could strengthen these mechanisms and improve their sustainability, while promoting collective bargaining power among gig workers.

3. **Regulation of Platform Practices:** Platforms operating within the state could be encouraged to provide transparent metrics for algorithmic task allocation, ensure fair dispute resolution mechanisms, and adopt measures that limit excessive working hours, thereby protecting the physical and mental well-being of workers.

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