

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN THE DIGITAL LABOR MARKET: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE RESILIENCE OF GIG ECONOMY WORKERS IN BALI

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the digital labor market has driven the emergence of the gig economy, which offers both opportunities and challenges for workers, especially in developing regions. This study aims to explore the survival strategies and resilience of gig workers in Bali, Indonesia, within the context of a digital platform-based economy. The study employs a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews of six gig workers from various digital platforms. Data Collection Techniques: 1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews (primary method): duration: 30-60 minutes per respondent using audio recordings (with permission), and field notes in Indonesian, 2) Participant observation: observing daily work activities. Record actual practices, environmental context, and social interactions, 3) Data triangulation by combining interviews, observation, and documents to enhance credibility. The findings indicate that gig work is generally carried out to supplement household income, but its unpredictable and fluctuating nature makes it difficult for workers to plan for the future or save money. Work schedule flexibility is seen as a major advantage because it allows workers to balance economic activities with cultural and family obligations, but on the other hand, it demands high self-discipline and exposes workers to the instability of demand. In addition, workers also face serious challenges in the form of fictitious orders, which result in the financial risk being entirely borne by the workers and exacerbate job insecurity. This study concludes that the resilience of gig workers in Bali is shaped not only by individual adaptive capacity but also by socio-cultural support, such as community networks that play a role in reducing economic vulnerability. However, structural challenges remain, particularly concerning the lack of protection from digital platforms and the absence of adequate government regulation. These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive policies and platform accountability to create fairer working conditions and ensure economic security for gig workers within Indonesia's digital labor ecosystem.

Keywords: Digital Labor Market, Gig Economy, Resilience, Survival Strategies, Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

The shift in labor market structure towards digital platforms has accelerated the growth of gig workers, those who work on a task/short-term contract basis through applications and online platforms. Globally, this work model offers flexibility and quick income opportunities, but it also brings income uncertainty, minimal access to social protection, and algorithmic control mechanisms that limit worker autonomy. This phenomenon calls for an in-depth study of how workers develop adaptive strategies and resilience to sustain their economic continuity and well-being under such uncertain conditions.

In the Indonesian context and relevant to Bali as a region with a combination of a formal economy, tourism, and a strong informal sector, empirical research shows the complex experiences of gig workers: besides taking advantage of platform opportunities, workers experience unfairness in profit distribution, vulnerability to changes in platform incentives, and gaps in legal protection. Field studies in Indonesia

underscore the need for research that maps daily practices, multiple income strategies, social networks, and the use of digital skills as forms of resilience built by the workers themselves.

Bali has a unique digital labor market dynamic because it is heavily influenced by the tourism sector, which serves as the backbone of the local economy. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many formal workers in the tourism industry lost their jobs and shifted to the gig economy, such as online transportation, food delivery services, and digital freelance work. This shift demonstrates that the gig economy has become one of the primary survival strategies for the Balinese community affected by the crisis. However, gig workers in Bali face double challenges: dependence on fluctuations in tourist demand and regulatory uncertainty for platforms. In this context, the resilience strategies they develop are not only economic but also cultural, for example by leveraging the solidarity of traditional communities, social networks based on the *banjar* system, and diversifying other informal jobs to cover the risk of unstable income.

In addition to economic factors, the resilience of gig workers in Bali is also influenced by local social and cultural structures. The *banjar* system and strong communal bonds provide spaces for solidarity, moral support, and even informal economic networks that can help gig workers cope with financial and psychological pressures. This makes survival strategies in Bali not only reliant on the flexibility of digital platforms but also on deeply rooted social and cultural strength. This phenomenon shows that the resilience of gig workers in Bali cannot be separated from the local social context, unlike studies of the gig economy in Western countries, which focus more on aspects of individual resilience.

Furthermore, tourism, which is a characteristic of Bali, creates a pattern of gig work demand that is seasonal and highly sensitive to global fluctuations, such as pandemics and international economic instability. When the flow of tourists increases, gig workers gain greater earning opportunities through online transportation services, homestay management, and digital-based freelance services. However, when tourist visits drop sharply, many gig workers have to combine platform jobs with side businesses, such as family farming or small-scale trading, to maintain sustainable income. This situation shows that the survival strategies of gig workers in Bali are not only adaptive but also creative in leveraging the available local opportunities. A qualitative study on the resilience of gig workers in Bali is important because it can reveal how the combination of economic, social, and local cultural factors shapes distinctive adaptation patterns that differ from other regions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development of the digital economy has transformed the structure of the global labor market, particularly through the emergence of app-based platforms that connect service providers and consumers. The concept of digital labor platforms emphasizes flexibility and efficiency, but also creates vulnerable working conditions due to the absence of social security and long-term employment contracts. According to Vallas & Schor (2020), the digital economy produces new forms of temporary work that often fall outside formal labor regulations.

The gig economy is generally seen as a new job opportunity, especially in developing countries, but it is still accompanied by the challenge of uncertainty. Glavin & Schieman (2022) emphasize that dependence on platforms can lead to mental and economic vulnerability due to non-transparent algorithmic mechanisms. In the context of Bali, this is exacerbated by fluctuations in tourism demand, which make gig work highly seasonal.

Resilience in the context of employment refers to the ability of individuals or groups to adapt, endure, and recover from economic and social pressures. Bellesia (2023) shows that gig workers use various coping strategies, including income diversification and digital adaptation, to face the impacts of the pandemic. This theory is relevant for analyzing the strategies of gig workers in Bali who are dealing with the uncertainties of global tourism.

From the perspective of dependency theory, gig workers in developing countries are often trapped in a system that places them in a subordinate position within the global economic structure. Putri, Darmawan, & Heeks (2023) highlight the injustice felt by gig workers in Indonesia due to the uneven distribution of profits between platforms and workers. This shows that gig workers' survival strategies are not merely individual choices, but also a form of response to an exploitative economic structure.

The concept of social capital becomes important in understanding the resilience of gig workers. Coleman (1988) emphasizes that social networks can enhance economic opportunities through information support, solidarity, and collective resources. In the context of Bali, the existence of *banjar*

and traditional communities serves as social buffers that strengthen the resilience of gig workers in facing the uncertainties of the digital labor market. The study by Hafeez et al. (2022) also links social support to reduced stress among gig workers.

Becker (1993), through human capital theory, explains that skill enhancement is an important investment for individuals to improve their competitiveness. Fiers (2024) emphasizes that mastering digital skills becomes a vital element in gig workers' resilience, especially for those involved in online-based freelancing. For gig workers in Bali, digital skills not only open access to the global market but also serve as a survival strategy during periods of declining tourism.

Doeringer & Piore (1971) introduced the dual labor market theory, which distinguishes between the primary (formal, stable) and secondary (informal, unstable) sectors of employment. The gig economy is often placed in the secondary labor market due to the lack of certainty and protection. De Stefano's (2016) study shows that gig workers are often categorized as "independent contractors," thus remaining outside legal protection. This is relevant for explaining the position of gig workers in Bali, who exist between the formality of the tourism sector and the informality of digital labor.

The principle of justice (fairness theory) becomes important in evaluating the relationship between platforms and workers. According to Rawls (1971), distributive justice demands equal access to economic opportunities. However, research by Putri et al. (2023) shows that gig workers in Indonesia feel unfairly treated due to incentive systems that are unilaterally changed by platforms. In the context of Bali, this sense of injustice encourages workers to rely on local solidarity as a survival strategy.

Based on theory and empirical findings, the study of gig worker resilience in Bali can be seen as a combination of structural factors (platform and tourism uncertainty), individual factors (digital skills, agency), and socio-cultural factors (banjar social capital and local solidarity). Thus, the resilience of gig workers in Bali cannot be explained solely through digital economy theory, but requires a multidimensional framework that encompasses human capital theory, social capital, and agency. Qualitative studies will be able to capture this complexity more thoroughly.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design on gig workers in Bali. The aim is to explore in depth the experiences, adaptive strategies, and resilience constructions from the participants' perspectives. The research locations include several areas in Bali, namely Denpasar and Badung. The population consists of gig workers who actively use the digital platforms Gojek and Grab in Bali. The sampling technique is snowball sampling. The sample size is 6 respondents selected to provide a variety of experiences. Data Collection Techniques: 1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews (primary method): duration: 30-60 minutes per respondent using audio recordings (with permission), and field notes in Indonesian, 2) Participant observation: observing daily work activities. Record actual practices, environmental context, and social interactions, 3) Data triangulation by combining interviews, observation, and documents to enhance credibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research found that gig work is not merely viewed as a career, but rather as an adaptive strategy to expand economic opportunities and increase family income. Flexibility in working hours emerges as one of the main dimensions in gig workers' survival strategies in Bali. Based on interview results, respondents stated that they have complete freedom in determining their working hours, both in starting and ending activities on digital platforms. This contrasts with formal employment, which has a fixed time structure, thus gig work provides a wider space for autonomy for workers. Furthermore, work flexibility in the gig economy in Bali also contributes to the quality of life of workers. The freedom to manage their own time allows them to reduce stress levels caused by work pressures that typically arise in rigid formal work systems. On the other hand, flexibility also presents the challenge of requiring high self-discipline. Gig workers are expected to manage their own work schedules without direct supervision, making productivity highly dependent on individual discipline. Some respondents mentioned that the freedom to choose working hours sometimes causes them to postpone tasks, which in turn impacts their income.

One significant finding in this study is the emergence of fictitious order issues experienced by gig workers, particularly online drivers in Bali. Fictitious orders occur when workers receive orders from irresponsible users, but after the orders are picked up or executed, it turns out that the orders are invalid.

In such situations, gig workers have to bear all the losses, including fuel costs, time, and responsibility for the items that have been picked up. This phenomenon highlights the structural vulnerability in platform-based work systems, where risks are largely shifted to workers rather than the application-providing companies. From an employment perspective, the case of fictitious orders reflects the weak protection for gig workers. Unlike formal employees who have employment protection mechanisms such as work contracts and insurance, gig workers are in a position not fully recognized as employees. This situation causes losses from fictitious orders to be entirely borne by the worker without any compensation from the platform. In addition to material losses, the practice of fictitious orders also has psychological impacts on gig workers. Some respondents expressed feelings of frustration, stress, and loss of a sense of security at work due to the potential for recurring fraud. This situation adds to the mental burden of workers who are already facing uncertainty in daily income. In Bali, the phenomenon of fake orders has its own characteristics. With an economy still relying on the tourism sector, many gig workers compete fiercely to obtain limited orders, especially during periods of low tourist visits. In such conditions, the emergence of fake orders not only causes economic losses but also worsens the sense of job insecurity among workers. This indicates that their survival strategies not only face external challenges in the form of market demand fluctuations but also internal challenges in the form of unethical practices by platform users.

One of the important findings of this study is that gig workers' income in Bali tends to be unstable and fluctuating, making it difficult to be relied upon as a long-term source of livelihood. Respondents revealed that the amount of daily earnings is greatly influenced by the number of incoming orders, market conditions, as well as external factors such as the tourist season, fuel prices, and platform policies. This uncertainty makes gig work less likely to provide stable financial security, unlike formal employment which generally has a fixed salary. Income uncertainty also poses difficulties for gig workers in planning long-term finances, including efforts to save. Some respondents stated that the income they earn is mostly used for daily needs, while the ability to set aside funds is very limited. This condition indicates that although the gig economy offers flexible job opportunities, the nature of its income actually hinders workers from building financial security. In the context of Bali, the issue of income uncertainty is further complicated by the economy's dependence on the tourism sector. When the number of tourists decreases, the opportunities for online drivers and other gig workers to receive orders also decrease drastically. This situation makes workers' income highly dependent on external factors that they cannot control. Furthermore, income uncertainty also affects the long-term career prospects of gig workers. Most respondents expressed doubt about making gig work their future occupation due to the lack of income certainty and limited career development opportunities. This indicates that although the gig economy provides a short-term solution to earn additional income, in the long run, it cannot guarantee sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that gig workers in Bali develop various strategies to survive in the face of the dynamics of the digital labor market. The main findings indicate that gig work is primarily undertaken to supplement household income, whether as a primary or additional job, although the nature of the earnings tends to be uncertain. This income uncertainty causes workers to experience difficulties in financial planning, saving, and viewing gig work as a long-term career option.

In addition to income aspects, this study found that work-time flexibility is seen as a positive factor by gig workers. The freedom to set their own working hours allows them to balance economic demands with family activities and local culture. However, this flexibility also requires a high level of self-discipline, as productivity entirely depends on the individual's ability to manage their schedule.

On the other hand, gig workers face a number of serious challenges, especially fictitious orders that cause financial losses and create psychological pressure. These risks highlight the weak protection of workers in the platform-based work system, where losses are entirely borne by the workers without adequate compensation. This phenomenon underscores the vulnerable position of gig workers in the digital economy structure.

Overall, this study concludes that the resilience of gig workers in Bali is shaped not only by individual adaptive abilities but also by sociocultural support and creative strategies in leveraging local economic opportunities. However, to achieve sustainability, stronger policy interventions and structural protections are needed from both the government and platform companies to ensure that gig workers can



obtain more secure income and fair social guarantees.

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