



GIG ECONOMY AND GLOBALIZATION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

* Sudhir B. Saindane & ** Dipak K. Valvi

* Asst. Professor, ** Asst. Professor, Annasaheb Vartak College.

Abstract:

The gig economy has emerged as a dominant labor market structure, where temporary, flexible, and often precarious work is increasingly common. This paper explores the relationship between the gig economy and globalization, providing a historical perspective on how the former evolved in the context of the latter. It traces the origins of gig work through pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial societies, focusing on how globalization facilitated the expansion of gig work in the modern era. The paper examines key historical events, economic transitions, and technological advancements, arguing that the rise of the gig economy cannot be understood without considering globalization's profound impact on labor markets. The analysis further addresses social, economic, and political factors contributing to the rise of gig work, providing insights into the implications for workers, economies, and societies worldwide.

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

Introduction:

The **gig economy** refers to a labor market characterized by short-term, flexible, and often freelance work, typically mediated by digital platforms. From driving for Uber to freelancing on platforms like Upwork, gig work has become increasingly common. However, understanding the rise of the gig economy requires more than just looking at contemporary phenomena. The historical evolution of work, intertwined with broader socio-economic and technological shifts, must be considered. One of the key drivers of this evolution is **globalization**, which has reshaped economic systems, labor markets, and the nature of work itself. This paper explores the historical development of the gig economy and its relationship with globalization, focusing on key historical moments that contributed to the expansion of gig work.

- **The Pre-Industrial Economy and Early Forms of Gig Work**

Before the Industrial Revolution, the labor market was mostly decentralized, and many people engaged in various forms of temporary, flexible, and self-employed work. This system of labor was largely governed by **agrarian cycles** and **craftsmanship**, where workers were often independent artisans or laborers who sold their products or services directly to consumers.

- **Agrarian Labor and Seasonal Work**

In pre-industrial societies, the majority of work was agrarian, often based on seasonal cycles. Workers—mostly farmers—would engage in temporary, seasonal work during planting and harvest times. Such work, although cyclical, was flexible and allowed individuals to engage in other forms of work during off-seasons. In this context, **gig work** was a staple of rural economies.

- **Craftsmen and Guilds**

The emergence of **craftsmanship** and **guilds** in

medieval Europe also provided early examples of gig work. Artisans, such as blacksmiths and weavers, often worked as independent contractors, setting their own schedules and prices. These workers could be considered the precursors to today's freelancers, operating on short-term contracts and directly engaging with clients.

▪ **Industrial Revolution and the Shift to Wage Labor**

The **Industrial Revolution** (18th-19th century) marked a significant shift in how work was organized, moving from decentralized forms of production to centralized factory systems. This shift, driven by technological advancements and increased urbanization, had profound effects on the labor market.

• **Decline of Self-Employment**

The Industrial Revolution saw the decline of self-employed artisans and farmers as factories began to dominate the economic landscape. Workers became more dependent on wage labor, and jobs became less flexible, often requiring long hours under fixed schedules. The increase in factory work displaced many forms of temporary, independent labor, though some forms of gig work persisted in **seasonal employment** and **temporary labor** in agriculture and construction.

• **The Emergence of Temporary and Day Labor**

Despite the dominance of factory-based, permanent work, temporary labor persisted in sectors like **construction** and **transportation**. Workers would be hired for specific tasks on a short-term basis, a precursor to the modern gig economy. Such work allowed for a degree of flexibility, though it lacked the social protections that formal wage labor offered.

▪ **Globalization and the Rise of the Modern Gig Economy**

• **Post-World War II Economic Expansion**

In the mid-20th century, **globalization** began to take shape in earnest with the expansion of international trade and the development of global markets. As transportation and communication networks improved, labor markets became more interconnected. During this period, many industries began to shift toward a more **flexible labor force**, especially in the **service sectors**.

• **Technological Advancements and the Digital Revolution**

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, technological advancements, particularly the **internet** and **mobile phones**, allowed workers to connect with employers and clients across the globe. The digital revolution made it easier for individuals to participate in gig work, offering a broader array of temporary, project-based jobs, such as software development, graphic design, writing, and online marketing. **Online platforms** like **Upwork**, **Fiverr**, and **Airbnb** have facilitated the growth of the gig economy, enabling workers to engage in gig work across borders.

• **Globalization and the Internationalization of Labor.**

The process of globalization, particularly in the context of trade liberalization and the rise of multinational corporations, has contributed to a growing **global labor market**. Workers from developing countries have increasingly participated in the gig economy, taking advantage of the opportunities created by digital platforms. The **internationalization of labor** has been critical in expanding the gig economy, allowing businesses to hire workers from all over

the world at lower costs, while providing gig workers with access to a wider array of opportunities.

▪ **Economic and Social Implications of the Gig Economy in a Globalized World.**

• **Economic Flexibility and Precarity.**

Globalization has created **economic flexibility**, allowing businesses to hire workers on short-term contracts rather than maintaining a full-time, permanent workforce. For businesses, this leads to reduced labor costs and increased efficiency. However, for workers, this flexibility often comes with **precarity**—the uncertainty of income, lack of job security, and limited access to benefits such as healthcare and retirement plans. This duality—flexibility for employers and precarity for workers—has become a defining feature of the gig economy.

• **The Rise of Platform Work.**

The growth of **platform work** has further entrenched the globalization of labor. Companies like **Uber** and **TaskRabbit** have created ecosystems that connect workers to customers on a global scale. Gig workers, especially in the **transportation** and **hospitality sectors**, can now participate in a worldwide labor force, often working for multiple companies simultaneously and across different countries. The digital nature of the gig economy allows for unprecedented scalability, enabling workers to access opportunities that were previously unavailable in localized economies.

• **Labor Rights and Gig Economy Regulation**

The increasing prevalence of gig work has raised concerns about **worker rights**. Historically, labor laws were designed to protect workers in permanent, full-time employment, offering job security, social protections, and the ability to organize for better wages. However, in the gig

economy, workers are often classified as **independent contractors** rather than employees, meaning they are not entitled to the same protections. This has led to debates about whether gig workers should receive the same rights as traditional employees. In response, some countries have begun to explore regulations that provide gig workers with certain protections, such as minimum wage laws and access to social safety nets.

▪ **The Future of Gig Work and Globalization**

• **The Impact of Automation**

As globalization continues to shape labor markets, **automation** and **artificial intelligence (AI)** present new challenges and opportunities for the gig economy. Automation has the potential to replace certain gig jobs, particularly in fields like **transportation** and **logistics**, but it also creates opportunities for new types of gig work in areas like **AI training**, **data entry**, and **robot maintenance**. The interplay between globalization, technological advancement, and the gig economy will likely continue to evolve, creating both risks and opportunities for workers.

• **Global Gig Economy: Toward a Universal Workforce?**

The future of the gig economy may involve a truly **global workforce**, where individuals from any part of the world can participate in work that is offered anywhere, at any time. This would blur national borders in labor markets, providing workers with access to a global economy while potentially diminishing the influence of local labor laws. Such a development could raise questions about the regulation of the gig economy and the creation of international standards for workers' rights.

Conclusion:

The gig economy, deeply intertwined with **globalization**, has evolved from pre-industrial, decentralized labor markets to become a hallmark of modern economic systems. While globalization has brought flexibility and new opportunities for workers, it has also exacerbated labor precarity and created challenges related to labor rights and protections. As technology continues to drive globalization forward, the gig economy will likely become even more prominent, necessitating thoughtful approaches to regulation, worker protection, and global labor standards. Understanding the historical evolution of the gig economy in the context of globalization is essential for addressing these challenges and ensuring that the benefits of this new labor model are equitably distributed.

Footnotes:

1. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 143.
2. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 78.
3. Richard Baldwin, *The Great Convergence: Information Technology and the New Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 45.
4. Timothy H. J. Carpenter and R. T. Meade, "Labor and Capital in the Industrial Revolution," *Labor History Journal* 8, no. 4 (1974): 232–256.
5. Brian Kilgore, "Globalization and the Gig Economy," *Journal of Economic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 101-115.

Cite This Article:

Saindane. S.B. & Valvi D.K. (2025). *Gig Economy and Globalization: A Historical Overview.* In **Aarhat Multidisciplinary International Education Research Journal**: Vol. XIV (Number II, pp. 186–189).