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Dynamics of the Working-Class Authoritarianism and Power Relations in the GIG Economy Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of working-class authoritarianism and power relations in Indonesia's gig economy, with a focus on online transportation workers. The research addresses the paradox of why workers positioned in vulnerable and exploitative labor structures often accept platform domination and resist collective opposition. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving nine informants from government and private-sector backgrounds. The findings show that the relationship between digital platforms and workers is structurally asymmetrical, despite being framed as an equal partnership. Platforms exercise control through algorithms, incentives, ratings, and sanctions, while workers remain economically dependent on the system. The study also finds that ideological hegemony operates through narratives of flexibility, independence, and digital entrepreneurship, which normalize inequality and weaken critical class consciousness. In this context, working-class authoritarianism emerges as a psychosocial response to economic insecurity and the need for stability. The study concludes that domination in the gig economy is sustained not only through technological and economic control, but also through the production of consent. These findings highlight the need for stronger labor protection and the development of workers' critical awareness in the digital economy.

Keyword: *Authoritarianism; GIG; Indonesia; Working-Class*

Introduction

The changes in the global economic structure driven by information technology advancements have given rise to a new form of work organization known as the gig economy (Tolba, 2021). In Indonesia, this phenomenon is very visible in the online transportation sector, which has become one of the largest absorbers of informal labor in urban areas. Digital platforms like Gojek and Grab not only revolutionize the way people access transportation services, but also reshape the labor relationship between companies, workers, and consumers within a framework that is flexible yet full of uncertainty. Online motorcycle taxi drivers, as a representation of the new working class, operate in a space not bound by formal contracts, rely on algorithmic ratings, and are subject to company policies that are unilaterally set and often change suddenly.

The gig economy is often positioned within the spectrum of flexible economies that promise freedom and work autonomy (Acevedo, 2022). However, in practice, the power relations formed within this ecosystem actually give rise to a new form of subordination that is algorithmic and non-transparent. Information

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asymmetry, digital control through applications, as well as the absence of social guarantees and collective representation, make gig workers a vulnerable group within the post-industrial economic structure (Alonso & Rodríguez, 2023). Although in a vulnerable position, many online transportation workers actually show an attitude of acceptance toward platform domination, and reject the discourse of collective resistance such as labor unions or strikes. This phenomenon reveals a sociological paradox: why do the working class exploited in this system not immediately reject the forms of power that oppress them, and in some cases, even show a tendency toward authoritarian attitudes?

Working-class authoritarianism is understood as a tendency to support a hierarchical social order, leaning towards conservatism, and being anti-pluralistic, especially in the context of economic uncertainty (Cheok, 2024). This attitude does not always arise from certain ideological affiliations, but more often is a psychosocial response to structural anxiety and a feeling of loss of control in daily life. In the context of Indonesia's gig economy, this expression of authoritarianism manifests in the form of absolute compliance with platform rules, glorification of the 'digital entrepreneurship' narrative, and resistance to narratives of collectivism or workers' rights.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony becomes a relevant epistemic framework. Hegemony does not occur through open coercion, but through consent built culturally and ideologically. Online transportation platforms are not merely economic actors, but also ideological agents who produce narratives of freedom, hard work, and digital meritocracy as dominant values. In this hegemonic process, gig workers internalize these narratives and make them the main framework for interpreting their position in the world of work (Hickson, 2024). Critical consciousness as an exploited class becomes dull, replaced by the logic of individual competition and the aspiration for false social mobility (Aksakallı, 2025). Thus, power relations in the gig economy are not only in the form of economic domination, but also a hegemonic articulation that envelops workers' class consciousness with cultural legitimacy.

Academic debates regarding the gig economy and the agency of the working class show a wide spectrum of views. Proponents of the platform capitalism approach such as Srnicek (2021) emphasizing how the accumulation of capital now operates through digital infrastructure and data exclusion. Maccarrone et al., (2023) shows that gig workers have limited agency but can still mobilize resistance, even though it is often sporadic and unorganized. In the context of Indonesia, studies on gig workers still tend to focus on wage issues, legal protection, and labor policies, while exploration of how power operates through ideological and cultural mechanisms has received minimal attention.

In the context of changes in work structures due to the penetration of digital platforms, the gig economy phenomenon in Indonesia's online transportation sector becomes an important arena for understanding the transformation of contemporary labor relations. This application-based work system promises flexibility, independence, and economic opportunities for urban community groups who were previously marginalized in the formal sector (Ghosh et al., 2021). However, on the other hand, work schemes that do not provide social protection, income uncertainty, and the dominance of algorithmic control by digital platforms have created new forms of subordination that are not yet fully understood conceptually. The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand not only the economic and legal structures of the gig economy, but also how power operates culturally and ideologically in shaping attitudes, perceptions, and the acceptance of the working class toward the inequalities they experience.

This research becomes interesting because it attempts to uncover the sociological paradox occurring in the field: why online transportation workers, who are objectively exploited by the digital work system, actually show tendencies towards authoritarianism and acceptance of the hegemonic narrative constructed by the platform. By combining the theory of working-class authoritarianism and hegemony (Gramsci, 1999), This research offers a critical approach to understanding how power operates subtly through cultural consent and not merely through direct domination. The research questions of this study are: 1) How is the power relationship between digital platforms and online transportation workers built and reproduced in everyday work practices? 2) How does ideological hegemony work through narratives and practices within the gig economy ecosystem, thereby shaping the working class's acceptance of oppressive structures? The next part of this article will discuss the theoretical foundation, methods, discussion, and conclusion.

Literature Review

GIG Economy

The gig economy is a concept that refers to an economic system based on temporary, flexible, and on-demand work (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021). In this context, work relationships are no longer determined by long-term formal contracts, but rather by algorithms, user ratings, and market demand dynamics. In Indonesia, the gig economy is rapidly developing along with the increasing use of online applications such as Gojek, Grab, Maxim, and similar platforms that offer easier access to technology-based services. This model promises flexibility and economic opportunities, but at the same time creates new forms of uncertainty, minimal social security, and vulnerability to exploitation.

Theoretically, the gig economy is studied within the framework of the post-Fordist labor regime, where stable, hierarchical, and institutional work arrangements shift to being more flexible, decentralized, and dependent on individual risk. Srnicek (2021) In his work Platform Capitalism, he emphasizes that the gig economy is not just a new form of work. In the gig economy, labor becomes an asset that can be mobilized instantly and commodified extremely, while platforms act as intermediaries that hide the production relations behind the service interface. Labor relations in this system are marked by a power asymmetry between the platform and the worker, where responsibility for risk and uncertainty is entirely borne by the individual (Zlatanovic & Ostojic, 2021).

This model is often coated with a pseudo-entrepreneurial narrative, where workers are considered independent business partners, even though structurally they are in a subordinate position. The gig economy has become a significant support for the informal economy, especially for the working-age population affected by stagnation in the formal sector and rapid urbanization (Akarsu, 2025). However, the emergence of online transportation platforms does not automatically bring sustainable social mobility. On the contrary, this concept places drivers in a trap of boundless time-flexible work, working under constantly changing incentive pressures, and exposed to the logic of intense competition among workers. Understanding the gig economy cannot be separated from the political-economic dimensions that accompany it, including how power is exercised, accepted, and negotiated by the actors within it (Ness et al., 2023). In this study, the gig economy is positioned as a space of complex social relations, a place where the dynamics of worker class authoritarianism and ideological hegemony occur and reinforce each other in daily practice.

Working-Class Authoritarianism

The concept of working-class authoritarianism was first systematically introduced by Lipset (2000) as part of his effort to understand the relationship between social class and the political orientation of society in modern democracies. Lipset argued that authoritarianism among the working class is not merely the result of a particular ideology, but rather a psychosocial expression of economic insecurity, limited education, and structural conditions that make individuals feel a loss of control over their lives. In this context, the working class tends to show a preference for social stability, rejection of pluralism, and support for authoritative figures who promise order and certainty. The working class, especially those in the lower economic strata, often develop conservative attitudes, intolerant of differences (Sivonen & Heikkilä, 2024). This authoritarian attitude emerges as a response to structural uncertainty and continuous economic pressure, which create

a sense of frustration, alienation, and threats to identity and social status. In other words, authoritarianism is not a deviation of political behavior, but rather an adaptation to socio-economic conditions that are perceived as unfair and threatening.

Lipset identifies several key indicators of working-class authoritarianism, including: 1) Resistance to rapid social change; 2) Support for coercive state actions in maintaining order; 3) High trust in populist or authoritarian leaders; and 4) Suspicion towards minority groups, immigrants, or outsiders considered to threaten social homogeneity. Working-class authoritarianism often emerges in contexts where participation in political organizations or labor unions is declining (Nordlinger, 2021). In this case, authoritarianism is understood as a psychosocial mechanism to maintain symbolic control over an uncertain life (Osborne et al., 2023). This approach is considered relevant in explaining the emergence of reactionary political support from groups that are objectively excluded from the benefits of economic modernization.

However, this view has also been criticized for being seen as reducing the complexity of the political consciousness of the working class and stigmatizing them as a group that is inherently intolerant or anti. A number of Marxist thinkers and critical sociologists, for instance, argue that authoritarian attitudes in the working class are not essential, but rather are the result of the hegemonic structures of capitalism that suppress spaces for alternative political articulation (Cole, 2022). Other critics stated that Lipset's focus overly emphasized individual and psychological factors, and failed to read the historical and structural dynamics that shape the political identity of class (Disch, 2021). In the current context, several studies even show that authoritarianism also develops in the middle class or economic elite, not limited to the working class.

Hegemony Gramci's Theory

The theory of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci in the Prison Notebooks is one of the most significant contributions in the Western Marxist tradition (Gramsci, 2024). Gramsci emphasized the importance of the cultural and ideological dimensions in maintaining class power. Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is not merely the coercive domination of power, but rather a form of active consent obtained by the dominant class from subordinate classes through social institutions such as education, religion, media, and public discourse. Within this framework, power becomes stable not merely because of coercion, but because of the success of the dominant class in shaping a worldview that is accepted as a 'shared truth'.

Concept of hegemony Gramsci (2024) includes several main indicators, among others: 1) The ability of the dominant class to build a common sense or general awareness that appears natural and unquestionable; 2) The formation of a historical bloc, namely social and ideological alliances across classes to support the power structure; and 3) Domination through social institutions that shape society's values, morality, and aspirations. Hegemony is not a single domination, but a dynamic negotiation process between power and consensus (Hall, 2024). Gramsci also distinguishes between hegemony and domination, where the former is based on ideological consent, while the latter is based on coercive control (Osman, 2025). In the contemporary social context, hegemonic analysis becomes important for understanding how systems of power maintain their continuity through structures of meaning and dominant narratives, rather than solely through repressive institutions.

In the context of Indonesia's gig economy, particularly in the online transportation sector, Gramsci's hegemony theory is very relevant to explain why workers continue to submit to a system that oppresses them without meaningful resistance. Narratives such as "partners," "freedom to set your own schedule," and "digital entrepreneurship" are examples of how platforms successfully create the illusion of freedom, whereas in practice, workers remain in subordinate relations. Drivers' acceptance of exploitative working conditions is not merely the result of economic pressure, but also the result of the internalization of hegemonic discourse that normalizes inequality as a logical consequence of a free market and digital meritocracy (Kast, 2021).

However, criticism of hegemony theory comes from two directions. First, some structuralist Marxists consider Gramsci's approach too focused on the superstructural aspects and neglecting the role of a more deterministic economic domination (Hall et al., 2013). Secondly, the post-structuralist and postmodern circles such as Grimm (2022) criticizing that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is too focused on consensus and homogenization, whereas in reality power is dispersed, fragmented, and operates through networks of more micro relations and is not always linear. Nevertheless, the theory of hegemony remains a very useful analytical framework for examining hidden power relations, including in the digital work environment. In this study, Gramsci's theory is used to explain how the power of digital platforms operates not only through technological control but also through the production of discourse and values widely accepted by gig workers, thereby shaping the structure of acceptance and false consciousness regarding their working conditions.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design (Putra et al., 2024). Phenomenological study was chosen because it is able to deeply explore the meaning of subjective experiences experienced by online transportation workers as part of the working class in the gig economy ecosystem in Indonesia. This approach is relevant for uncovering the dynamics of awareness, acceptance, and the way workers interpret power relations that occur in their daily work practices (Chukwu et al., 2025). Phenomenology focuses on the effort to understand how social actors give meaning to the social reality they directly experience. This approach is very suitable for reading the ideological and hegemonic dimensions that operate implicitly in workers' consciousness, as analyzed within the framework of Gramsci's theory and the concept of working-class authoritarianism.

The data collection techniques in this study include three main instruments, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation (Xu et al., 2025). In-depth interviews are conducted with public official stakeholders with the aim of uncovering narratives of work experience, the meaning attributed to the role of public policy holders. Observations are conducted to directly examine social interactions, work patterns, and responses to incentive or punishment systems in application, thereby providing empirical context that enriches the narrative data (Seo et al., 2021). Meanwhile, documentation is used to examine secondary materials such as work guidelines, partnership contracts, platform media campaigns, as well as public discourse circulating on social media or mass media, as part of the ideological construction that shapes workers' perceptions. The informants of this study are:

Table 1. Research Informant

No	Name Informant	Position	Classification of Informants
1	ZE	Wadirreskrimsus Polda Jatim	Key Informant (Government)
2	AM	Deputy Speaker of the East Java Regional House of Representatives	Key Informant (Government)
3	FAY	Regent of Gresik	Key Informant (Government)
4	ARM	Deputy Mayor of Surabaya	Key Informant (Government)
5	CM	Commission XI of the Indonesian House of Representatives	Key Informant (Government)
6	BAT	Central Kadin Supervisory Board	Key Informant (Government)
7	ML	Chairman of HIPMI Surabaya City	Additional Informant (Private)
8	RS	BPD HIPMI East Java Industry Department	Additional Informant (Private)
9	TH	Developer Specialist	Additional Informant (Private)

Source: Data processed by Author (2026)

The determination of informants was carried out using the purposive sampling technique, namely the deliberate selection of informants based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives (Pahwa et al., 2023). Informants were

chosen from public officials who can directly implement policies. The selection of purposive sampling is considered appropriate because in phenomenological studies, what is prioritized is not statistical representation, but the depth of experience and the informants' capacity to reflect on the phenomena being studied. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously while the data collection process was ongoing, using triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings. The researcher applied source triangulation, which involves comparing information from various informants with different backgrounds and experiences. In addition, data triangulation was also used, which combines data from interviews, observations, and documentation to strengthen interpretation and avoid researcher bias. Analysis was conducted through a tiered interpretative process, starting from transcription, open coding, thematic categorization, to the synthesis of more abstract meanings based on the theoretical framework used.

Result

Interpretation of Working-Class Authoritarianism Data

The results of interviews with informants from government and private sector elements indicate that the tendency of working-class authoritarianism in the context of this study arises as a response to the need for economic stability, policy effectiveness, and a preference for decisive leadership. Therefore, the interpretation was conducted by linking the interview findings with the indicators of the Working-Class Authoritarianism theory from (Lipset, 2000). The indicator of the need for order and stability is reflected in the views of government informants who emphasize the importance of economic certainty as the primary priority of society. Informant ZE, as the Deputy Director of Special Criminal Investigation of the East Java Regional Police, affirmed that:

> "Under conditions of economic pressure, people tend to be more accepting of policy approaches that are firm in order to maintain social stability and security."

This statement is reinforced by FAY, the Regent of Gresik, who conveyed that:

> "Working people expect policies that are quick and have an immediate impact on welfare rather than long and procedural processes. Preference for authority is not merely an ideological choice, but a response to practical needs."

This situation confirms that the working class tends to prioritize economic stability over procedural democratic values. Indicators of compliance with authority can be seen from how informants view the relationship between society

and policymakers. Informant AM, as the Deputy Speaker of the East Java Regional People's Representative Council, stated that:

> "In many cases, society is more receptive to top-down policies as long as those policies are able to deliver tangible results."

A similar statement was made by ARM as Deputy Mayor of Surabaya who assessed that:

> "The effectiveness of policy often depends on the government's ability to make decisions quickly without too much resistance from the public. There is a tendency to accept hierarchical patterns of relationship."

This reflects the internalization of compliance values that develop from the social experiences of the working class within a structure that demands discipline and subordination. Indicators of a pragmatic orientation toward democracy also appear strong in the interview results. CM, as a member of Commission XI of the Indonesian House of Representatives, conveyed that:

> "The business world and workers tend to require regulatory certainty and policy stability rather than overly fluctuating political dynamics. Democracy is understood instrumentally, that is, as far as it is able to produce economic benefits."

From the perspective of working-class authoritarianism, this condition indicates that the working class is more tolerant of an authoritarian approach as long as their material needs are met. Indicators of social conservatism and resistance to changes considered risky are also evident from the perspective of private sector informants. ML, as the Chairperson of HIPMI Surabaya, stated that:

> "Business actors and workers are often cautious about policy changes that happen too quickly because they have the potential to disrupt business stability and income."

RS from BPD HIPMI East Java added that:

> "Adapting to economic changes takes time, so policies that are too progressive without safeguards can create uncertainty."
>
> TH, as a developer specialist, also revealed that:
>
> "Rapid technological transformation is not always positively received by workers due to concerns about job loss. Resistance to change is not merely an ideological attitude, but a reflection of efforts to maintain economic security. This is in line with Lipset's view that the working class tends to develop conservative attitudes as a form of protection against uncertainty."

The interview results show that the tendency of working-class authoritarianism in this study is formed through the interaction between economic conditions, policy structures, and the social experiences of the working class. The informants, from both government and private sectors, consistently emphasized the

importance of stability, effectiveness, and certainty as key factors in shaping society's preference for strong leadership. This reinforces Lipset (2000) argument that authoritarian orientation among the working class is a rational response to the limitations of resources and structural pressures they face. The interpretation of this data suggests that working-class authoritarianism cannot be understood as a static ideological tendency, but rather as a product of socio-economic conditions that demand stability and certainty. The higher the perceived level of economic uncertainty, the greater the tendency of society to accept forms of firm and centralized leadership (Eaosinsup & Kulachai, 2025). Therefore, strengthening substantive democracy in this context requires an approach that not only focuses on procedural aspects but also on improving economic welfare and increasing the political literacy capacity of the society.

Data Interpretation of Gramsci's Hegemony Theory

The results of interviews with informants indicate that the practice of power in the context of this study occurs not only through coercive mechanisms but also through the process of forming social consent as explained in Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Power is exercised subtly through discourse production, policy legitimacy, and the internalization of certain values that make society accept domination as something normal. In the interview, ZE, as the Deputy Director of Special Criminal Investigation of the East Java Regional Police, explained that:

> "Social stability is maintained not only through law enforcement but also through a persuasive approach that instills public awareness of the importance of order. The success of social control greatly depends on the ability of officers to build public trust, so that society voluntarily follows the applicable rules."

This narrative shows that power is not merely repressive, but also works through shaping collective consciousness that supports the legitimacy of the state. From Gramsci's perspective, this reflects the function of state apparatus in building hegemony through a combination of domination and consensus. A similar view was conveyed by AM as Deputy Speaker of the East Java Regional House of Representatives, who emphasized:

> "Public policy must be communicated with a narrative that can be accepted by the public in order to gain broad support. The legislative process does not stop at making regulations, but also includes efforts to shape public opinion so that the policy is seen as a collective necessity."

In the interview, it was observed that political elites play an active role in producing discourse that normalizes certain policy directions. This aligns with Gramsci's concept regarding the role of political society in guiding society through intellectual

and moral leadership, so that domination is not felt as coercion. FAY, as the Regent of Gresik, emphasized that:

> "The success of regional development is largely determined by the government's ability to align development visions with the aspirations of the community. The regional government actively builds communication with the community to create a sense of ownership of the programs being carried out. In practice, the community not only becomes the object of policy, but is also involved in the process of legitimizing that policy."

This narrative shows that hegemony is built through a process of interaction that produces social consent, not merely through top-down instructions. Within the Gramscian framework, this reflects how the state builds consent by integrating societal interests into the development agenda. ARM, as Deputy Mayor of Surabaya, revealed that:

> "Policy effectiveness greatly depends on the government's ability to shape the public's perception of the programs being implemented. The same policy can be accepted or rejected depending on how the policy is packaged and communicated. Therefore, the government strives to build a narrative that emphasizes direct benefits for the community so that the policy gains legitimacy."

This statement indicates that power operates through the production of meaning and the management of public perception. From Gramsci's perspective, this is a form of cultural hegemony in which dominance is maintained through control over discourse and the interpretation of social reality. CM, as a member of Commission XI of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI), highlighted that:

> "National economic stability does not solely depend on fiscal policy, but also on public trust in the direction of that policy. The government needs to build public confidence that the policies implemented are the best steps for the common good, even if in the short term they may cause discomfort."

The interview showed that the legitimacy of economic policy is built through narratives of rationality and collective interest. This aligns with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which emphasizes that class domination is maintained not only through economic control but also through ideological leadership accepted by society. A BAT informant from the Central Chamber of Commerce Supervisory Board stated that:

> "The business world plays a strategic role in supporting policy stability through the creation of a conducive economic climate. Business actors tend to follow government policy directions as long as there is regulatory

certainty and consistent narratives. In practice, the private sector also reinforces state hegemony by reproducing the discourse of stability and growth as the primary goals of development."

This narrative demonstrates the collaboration between the state and economic actors in maintaining dominance through consensus mechanisms. Within Gramsci's framework, this condition reflects an alliance between political society and civil society in building and sustaining hegemony. From the private sector perspective, ML, as the Chairman of HIPMI Surabaya City, explained that:

"Entrepreneurs not only adapt to government policies but also play a role in socializing entrepreneurial values to the community. The importance of economic independence and innovation becomes part of efforts to shape the mindset of society in alignment with the direction of economic development."

In the interview, it was evident that non-state actors also contribute to the formation of collective consciousness that supports the existing economic system. This aligns with Gramsci's view that hegemony is not only built by the state but also by actors within civil society. The RS informant from BPD HIPMI East Java added that:

"The process of industrialization and economic transformation requires strong social support to be effective. Society needs to be convinced that economic change is something positive and should be accepted, even though there are accompanying risks. Structural changes do not only depend on policy but also on the success in building social legitimacy for those changes."

From Gramsci's perspective, this reflects how hegemony works in directing society to accept transformations that are actually part of the agenda of power. TH as a developer specialist revealed that:

"The development of digital technology has changed the way society understands economic and social reality. Innovation, efficiency, and modernization are continuously reproduced, thereby shaping the perception that technological change is something inevitable."

In the interview, it was seen that technology functions as a medium that reinforces hegemony through the dissemination of dominant discourse. This aligns with Gramsci's concept regarding the role of cultural institutions in shaping public consciousness and maintaining ideological domination (Gramsci, 2024). The interview results show that hegemony in the context of this research is built through interactions between the state, the private sector, and society in producing and reproducing discourse that supports stability and certain developmental directions. Power is not only exercised through formal instruments, but also through the

formation of collective consciousness that makes society accept domination as something rational and necessary (Brown, 2025).

Discussion

Power Relations Between Digital Platforms and Online Transportation Workers

The power relationship between digital platforms and online transportation workers shows a relationship that formally appears equal, but is substantively asymmetrical (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021). The platform positions workers as "partners," yet still controls key aspects of the work, such as access to orders, rate setting, incentives, performance evaluations, and sanctions. In this position, workers do not have equivalent power to determine the terms of work, so the flexibility offered by the platform is essentially within boundaries set unilaterally (Rainone, 2022). This situation aligns with various studies on the gig economy, which emphasize that work control today is no longer always exercised through direct supervision, but rather through algorithmic systems. Platforms use applications as control tools that manage job distribution, assess worker performance, and continuously shape work behavior (Möhlmann et al., 2021). Platform power does not operate visibly as in classic industrial labor relations, but through a digital system that seems neutral, yet greatly determines workers' income and job continuity.

In empirical practice in various countries, including Indonesia, online transportation workers do have freedom in determining their working hours. However, this freedom is illusory because workers are still driven to follow the platform's logic in order to continue receiving orders, maintain ratings, and achieve incentive targets. (Rahman et al., 2024). As a result, workers often adjust their work rhythm not based on personal autonomy, but based on the demands of the system (Reiche, 2023). At this point, flexibility transforms into a new form of control that is more subtle but effective. Power relations are also reinforced through customer rating and evaluation systems. (Cheng et al., 2024). Consumer evaluations not only serve as service feedback, but also act as a disciplinary tool that affects workers' chances of getting the next order. Workers ultimately have to maintain compliance not only with the platform, but also with consumer preferences, even though these standards are often unclear and variable. This situation shows that the platform has successfully built a layered control mechanism without having to be directly present in the daily work relationship.

Moreover, partnership status serves as an important basis for platforms to avoid employment obligations common in formal work relationships. Operational risks, such as vehicle expenses, fuel, maintenance, long working hours, and income uncertainty, are largely shouldered by the workers. Meanwhile, the platform

continues to earn profits from transactions occurring within the system it controls (Bonina et al., 2021). In the context of the digital economy, this condition shows that platforms are not merely technological intermediaries, but actors who hold structural power over the labor market. Platforms control data, consumer access, operational rules, and evaluation mechanisms, while workers rely on the system to maintain their income. This dependence makes workers' bargaining position tend to be weak, especially when formal employment opportunities are limited and the informal sector becomes the main option.

The power relationship between digital platforms and online transportation workers is essentially a new form of subordination wrapped in the narrative of partnership, flexibility, and innovation (Kougiannou & Mendonça, 2021). This relationship shows that behind technological efficiency there is a work structure that places workers in a vulnerable position, while platforms maintain dominance through algorithmic control and system mastery. This discussion emphasizes that the digital transformation in the transportation sector does not eliminate power relations, but rather reproduces them in a more modern and less recognizable form.

Ideological Hegemony in the Gig Economy Ecosystem Against Oppressive Structures

Ideological hegemony in the gig economy ecosystem operates through the production and reproduction of discourse that normalizes unequal labor relations as something rational, flexible, and beneficial for workers (Tirapani & Willmott, 2023). Digital platforms consistently build a narrative about work freedom, economic independence, and unlimited opportunities, which in practice conceals an exploitative work structure. Within Antonio Gramsci's framework, this condition reflects how domination is executed not only through economic and technological control but also through the formation of collective consciousness that leads workers to accept these conditions as a natural choice. Various studies show that the gig economy does not merely create new forms of work but also shapes workers' way of thinking about work itself. Research Yao (2022) emphasizes that gig workers tend to internalize the values of flexibility, productivity, and competition as part of their work identity. In this context, workers do not see themselves as exploited parties, but rather as individuals who are "free" and responsible for their economic success or failure. This process of internalization is a form of ideological hegemony, where dominant values are accepted without coercion because they are considered common truths (Marginson, 2023).

Empirically, the narrative of flexibility becomes the main instrument in building that hegemony. The platform emphasizes that workers have the freedom to determine their working hours and the amount of income they want to achieve

(Halliday, 2021). However, in practice, this flexibility is conditioned by algorithms, incentive systems, and market demand dynamics that cannot be controlled by workers. International studies show that gig workers often work longer to earn a decent income, so the promised flexibility actually transforms into a form of indirect control. In this case, hegemony operates by blurring the line between free choice and structural compulsion (Kapadia, 2025). In addition, the ideology of entrepreneurship also becomes an important part of hegemony in the gig economy. Workers are positioned as "partners" or "independent entrepreneurs" who are responsible for the means of production, working hours, and economic risks. This concept reinforces the individualization of risk, where economic failure is no longer understood as a result of an unjust structure, but as a lack of individual effort or strategy.

Ideological hegemony is also reinforced through cultural and technological mechanisms, including digital media and the application systems themselves (Pringle, 2021). Platforms not only regulate work but also shape workers' perceptions through notifications, incentive targets, and performance visualizations. These elements create an illusion of progress and achievement that encourages workers to remain engaged in the system. In this context, technology functions as an ideological tool that reproduces values of productivity and compliance. Gaudio (2021) study shows that pseudo-transparency in digital systems actually reinforces dominance because workers do not have access to the algorithmic logic that governs them.

In the context of developing countries like Indonesia, this hegemony is increasingly strong due to the limited alternatives for formal employment and the high level of labor informality. Many workers enter the gig economy not as a fully free rational choice, but as a survival strategy (Kuhn et al., 2021). However, the narrative of flexibility and independence that is continuously reproduced makes these conditions not perceived as structural coercion. As a result, the oppressive structure is not critically questioned but rather accepted as part of the dynamics of the modern economy. Ideological hegemony in the gig economy also hinders the formation of collective awareness among workers (Hornung et al., 2021). The emphasis on individual competition and personal achievement weakens solidarity, so collective efforts to demand structural change become limited. Within the Gramscian framework, this condition indicates stable domination due to the absence of organized resistance. Workers tend to adapt to the system rather than challenge it, because the system has successfully shaped their perspective on work reality (Parker & Grote, 2022).

Ideological hegemony in the gig economy ecosystem not only sustains an uneven labor structure, but also continuously reproduces it through the shaping of

consciousness and social legitimacy. Oppressive structures are no longer imposed directly, but are accepted as normal, even desirable. This emphasizes that the main issue in the gig economy is not only economic and regulatory, but also the ideological dimension that shapes how workers understand and respond to their conditions. The gig economy represents a form of modern hegemony in which platform dominance is maintained through a combination of technological control and the production of ideology. As long as the narrative of flexibility, independence, and entrepreneurship continues to be accepted without criticism, unequal work structures will persist. Therefore, efforts are needed to build workers' critical awareness as well as a policy framework capable of balancing digital innovation with social justice in labor relations.

Conclusion

This study shows that the power relationship between digital platforms and online transportation workers is asymmetric, even though it is framed as an equal partnership. Platforms control the distribution of work, rates, incentives, and performance evaluations through algorithmic systems, while workers rely on these systems to earn income. As a result, flexibility in the gig economy is more illusory because workers remain subject to the logic of the platform and the market. This study also finds that ideological hegemony plays a role in maintaining an uneven work structure. The narrative of flexibility, independence, and entrepreneurship encourages workers to accept inequality as something normal. From Gramsci's perspective, platform domination not only occurs through technological and economic control but also through the formation of social consent. This study is limited to the scope of informants who do not fully represent the direct perspectives of workers and to a qualitative approach that limits generalization. Therefore, further research needs to expand the informants and combine a quantitative approach so that the results are more comprehensive.

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