

Manuscript ID:  
IJEBAMPSR-2025-020617

Volume: 2

Issue: 6

Month: December

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 3065-9140

Submitted: 08-Nov.-2025

Revised: 15-Nov.-2025

Accepted: 18-Dec.-2025

Published: 31-Dec.-2025

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19060589

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19060589>



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**How to Cite this Article:**

Pimpalkhare, M. V. (2025). Reimagining Work: Labour Perspectives on the Digital Economy. *International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture and Management Towards Paradigm Shift in Research*, 2(6), 107–111. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19060589>

# Reimagining Work: Labour Perspectives on the Digital Economy

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## Abstract

*This paper analyses how algorithmic management reshapes the labour process in platform-based digital economies. Using the concept of digital Taylorism, it shows how contemporary platform business models embed managerial control within opaque computational systems that intensify monitoring, fragment tasks, and constrain worker autonomy. Drawing on Labour Process Theory and critical perspectives on digital capitalism, the paper examines how these forms of control reorganise relations of dependence and insecurity in the platform economy. Based on a qualitative review of the academic literature, the analysis highlights how platform firms externalise risk while maintaining effective control over work without conventional employment relationships. The paper contributes to debates on digital labour by demonstrating that precarity in platform work is not a transitional outcome of technological innovation, but a structural feature of platform capitalism. It argues that algorithmic management should be understood as a mode of governance within the labour process, rather than as a purely technical system, highlighting how control and insecurity are produced through organisational and economic arrangements in platformised economies.*

**Keywords:** Digital Taylorism; Algorithmic Management; Platform Work; Labour Process Theory; Digital Capitalism

## Introduction

Digital commerce has become a central feature of contemporary capitalism, reshaping not only markets but also the organisation and experience of work. Platform-based e-business models increasingly mediate how labour is recruited, coordinated, evaluated, and compensated. While these models are often celebrated for efficiency and flexibility, they have also generated new forms of insecurity, opacity, and control that challenge established understandings of employment and labour protection. A growing body of research has drawn attention to the ways in which managerial authority in digital economies is exercised through algorithmic systems rather than through direct human supervision. Tasks are allocated, performance is monitored, and rewards or sanctions are administered through data-driven mechanisms that remain largely inaccessible to workers. These systems reorganise power within the labour process, shifting control from visible managerial hierarchies to technical infrastructures that operate continuously and at scale. Scholars have increasingly described this transformation as a form of *digital Taylorism*. The concept highlights the continuities between classical scientific management and contemporary algorithmic control. Although the tools have changed, the underlying objectives of labour intensification, predictability, and managerial oversight remain intact. What distinguishes the digital context is the embedding of control within opaque computational systems, which workers must navigate without meaningful insight into how decisions affecting their livelihoods are made.

At the same time, platformisation has altered the spatial and social organisation of work. Digital labour markets integrate workers across regions and national boundaries, often in the absence of stable employment relationships or collective workplaces. This has contributed to fragmented work identities, uneven access to income and protection, and heightened dependence on platform intermediaries. These developments are particularly visible in forms of work characterised by short-term tasks, reputational metrics, and constant evaluation. This paper examines how platform-based e-business models are reshaping the labour process and producing new configurations of precarity in digital economies.

Drawing on Labour Process Theory, political economy perspectives on digital capitalism, and scholarship on platform governance, the paper offers a critical analysis of algorithmic management as a contemporary mode of labour control. Rather than treating technological change as an autonomous force, the analysis situates platform work within broader structures of power, accumulation, and governance. In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on how work, control, and worker autonomy are being redefined in the digital age.

### Research Objectives and Methodology

This paper examines how the expansion of platform-based e-business models is replaying the labour process in digital economies. Rather than treating digitalisation as a neutral technological shift, the analysis approaches platform work as a socio-economic transformation that reframes the relations of control, dependence, and insecurity within contemporary capitalism. The study is guided by three interrelated objectives. First, it analyses the mechanisms of algorithmic management through which platforms organise and control work. Particular attention is paid to how data-driven systems structure task allocation, performance evaluation, and discipline, and how these practices reconfigure forms of managerial control identified in Labour Process Theory. The focus is not on technological design as such, but on its implications for worker autonomy and dependence.

Second, the paper places these changes in the labour process within broader debates on digital capitalism. It explores how platform business models reorganise risk and control, shifting insecurity onto workers while embedding managerial authority within computational systems. The result is a form of precarity that appears structural rather than transitional. Third, the paper highlights the analytical value of understanding algorithmic management as a mode of governance within the labour process. Here, governance is understood as the everyday organisation of power and control at the point of production, rather than as a matter of formal regulation or policy design.

The analysis draws on a qualitative and interpretive review of the academic literature. It engages with peer-reviewed research in labour economics, economic sociology, and political economy, focusing in particular on scholarship addressing algorithmic management, platform labour, and digital capitalism. This literature is read thematically to identify recurring analytical concerns related to control, precarity, and transformations in the labour process. Methodologically, the paper adopts an exploratory and analytical approach that brings together insights from labour process analysis and critical

political economy to clarify how platform-based work reorganises control, insecurity, and dependence in digital economies.

### Theoretical Perspectives

Understanding the transformation of work in platform-based e-business requires an analytical framework that goes beyond the surface descriptions of technology and innovation. While digital platforms are often presented as neutral intermediaries or efficiency-enhancing tools, a growing body of scholarship has emphasised their role in restructuring power relations within the labour process (Srnicsek, 2017). This paper draws on three complementary bodies of literature—Labour Process Theory, political economy perspectives on digital capitalism, and platform governance scholarship—to examine how control, value extraction, and regulation operate in algorithmically managed work environments.

### Labour Process Theory and Algorithmic Control

Labour Process Theory (LPT) has historically focused on how managerial strategies seek to control labour in pursuit of productivity and profitability. Braverman's (1974) foundational work demonstrated how scientific management fragmented tasks, reduced worker discretion, and transferred control over knowledge from workers to management. Subsequent developments in LPT have extended this analysis beyond the factory floor, showing how control adapts to new organisational and technological contexts. In platform-mediated work, managerial control is exercised less through direct supervision and more through algorithmic systems embedded within digital infrastructure. These systems allocate tasks, monitor performance, and enforce discipline in real time, often without direct human intervention (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020). Workers are evaluated through performance metrics such as ratings, response times, and completion rates, yet typically lack access to the logic by which these metrics are constructed or weighted (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). From an LPT perspective, this represents not a departure from earlier forms of control but their reconfiguration through technical means. The concept of *digital Taylorism* captures this continuity between classical scientific management and contemporary algorithmic control. While stopwatches and supervisors have been replaced by dashboards and automated thresholds, the underlying objective of labour intensification remains intact. Control is increasingly internalised, as workers modify behaviour in anticipation of algorithmic evaluation rather than in response to explicit managerial instruction.

## **Digital Capitalism and Data as a Source of Value**

From a political economy perspective, platform work forms part of a wider transformation in how capitalism creates value. Data, in this account, is not incidental to economic activity but central to it (Fuchs, 2014; Srnicek, 2017). By capturing and monetising data produced through work, consumption, and social interaction, platforms blur traditional distinctions between productive and unproductive activity. In e-business contexts, this blurring is particularly pronounced. Workers generate value not only through the completion of tasks but also through activities such as maintaining profiles, responding to clients, and sustaining platform reputations. Even unpaid or semi-visible forms of labour—often described as “ghost work”—play a critical role in sustaining digital services and artificial intelligence systems (Gray & Suri, 2019). From this perspective, labour precarity is not an accidental outcome of digitalisation but a structural feature of platform capitalism. By classifying workers as independent contractors and fragmenting work into short-term tasks, platforms retain flexibility while externalising risk and responsibility (Standing, 2016; Graham & Woodcock, 2021). These dynamics weaken workers’ bargaining power and reinforce asymmetries between platforms and labour across global value chains (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2020).

## **Platform Governance and Asymmetries of Power**

Platform governance scholarship shifts attention from the labour process itself to the regulatory role played by platforms as private actors. Unlike traditional firms, platforms establish and enforce rules that govern access to work, visibility, pricing, and dispute resolution across entire digital ecosystems (Gillespie, 2018; Kenney & Zysman, 2020). This mode of governance is characterised by significant informational asymmetries. Platforms possess extensive knowledge about market demand, worker performance, and algorithmic ranking criteria, while workers have limited insight into how decisions affecting their livelihoods are made (Duggan et al., 2020). Sudden changes to algorithms or platform policies can therefore have immediate consequences for workers, often without explanation or avenues for appeal. These dynamics pose challenges for existing labour regulation, which is typically premised on identifiable employers and bounded workplaces. Platform governance theory thus provides a useful lens for understanding why contemporary regulatory debates increasingly focus on transparency, accountability, and the right to explanation in algorithmically mediated work.

## **Platformization and the Reconfiguration of Work**

Platformization has become a defining feature of the contemporary digital economy. In e-business, platforms no longer operate merely as intermediaries facilitating exchange; they function as coordinating infrastructures that organise labour, logistics, and data flows across global value chains. This transformation has altered the structure of work itself, weakening traditional employment relationships and replacing them with fragmented, mediated forms of labour (Kenney & Zysman, 2020; Srnicek, 2017). A key characteristic of platformization is the displacement of direct contractual relations by algorithmic intermediation. Workers engage with platforms rather than identifiable employers, even as platforms exercise substantial influence over task allocation, pricing, and performance evaluation. This organisational shift complicates the application of labour protections that have historically been anchored in stable employment relationships and bounded workplaces.

## **Automation and the Hybridisation of Labour**

Automation within e-business is frequently discussed in terms of labour substitution, particularly through robotics and artificial intelligence. Empirical research, however, suggests that platformised work is more accurately characterised by a hybridisation of human and machine labour rather than wholesale replacement. Automated systems increasingly organise and pace human work, shaping how labour is performed rather than eliminating it. In logistics and fulfilment operations, digital technologies synchronise human workers with automated inventory management, routing, and tracking systems. Labour is performed within tightly monitored environments where work rhythms are defined by machine-generated benchmarks, leaving limited scope for discretion (Cant, 2020). Similarly, in online service work and freelancing, algorithms structure workflows by matching workers to clients, ranking profiles, and predicting availability, thereby influencing both access to work and income stability (Wood et al., 2019). This hybridisation produces a persistent tension. While platforms often frame digital tools as enabling flexibility and efficiency, workers frequently experience them as mechanisms that intensify effort and narrow autonomy. Technology thus operates less as an emancipatory force and more as an instrument of managerial coordination and control.

## **Algorithmic Management as Infrastructural Control**

Algorithmic management represents a significant shift in how labour is governed within platformised environments. Unlike traditional supervisory systems, control is embedded within

technical infrastructure that automates decision-making processes related to task assignment, performance evaluation, and remuneration (Kellogg et al., 2020). These systems operate continuously and at scale, often without direct human oversight. From the worker's perspective, algorithmic management is marked by opacity. Performance is translated into numerical indicators—such as ratings, response times, and completion rates—that appear objective but are shaped by platform-specific design choices (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Limited transparency regarding how these metrics are calculated or weighted makes contestation difficult, reinforcing workers' dependence on platform systems. Research on gig and app-based work highlights how such feedback mechanisms encourage behavioural self-regulation. Workers modify availability, pricing, and task acceptance in anticipation of algorithmic evaluation, internalising platform expectations without explicit managerial instruction (Shapiro, 2018; Duggan et al., 2020). This infrastructural form of control extends beyond transport and delivery services into areas such as content moderation, digital marketing, and online customer support, indicating the broader diffusion of algorithmic management across the digital economy.

### **Precarity, Fragmentation, and Work Identities**

One of the most significant consequences of platformization is the intensification of labour precarity. Platform work is typically characterised by irregular income, limited access to social protection, and weak mechanisms for collective representation (Standing, 2016; Wood et al., 2021). The fragmentation of work into short-term tasks or “gigs” undermines continuity and makes long-term economic planning difficult for workers. This fragmentation also reshapes work identities. Platform workers often engage with digital labour markets as isolated individuals rather than members of collective workplaces. Opportunities for skill development and career progression are uneven, with a small group of high-skilled workers able to secure stable contracts while a much larger segment remains confined to low-paid, repetitive tasks (Graham & Woodcock, 2021). Gender and geography further structure these outcomes, with women and workers in the Global South disproportionately represented in precarious segments of digital labour markets (Graham et al., 2020). The social consequences of these arrangements extend beyond income insecurity. Empirical studies document rising levels of stress, burnout, and anxiety associated with constant evaluation, income volatility, and the threat of sudden account deactivation. Precarity, in this sense, encompasses both economic vulnerability and psychosocial strain.

### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

Taken together, the analysis suggests that platform-based work is better understood as a reorganisation of established relations of control and dependence rather than as a rupture produced by new technologies. Algorithmic management does not replace managerial authority; it embeds it within technical systems that shape how work is accessed, evaluated, and sustained, often in ways that are difficult for workers to observe or contest. From a labour process perspective, the notion of digital Taylorism captures this continuity. Longstanding concerns around work intensification, task fragmentation, and asymmetrical power relations remain central, even as they are mediated through data-driven systems. In this context, insecurity appears less as a temporary outcome of technological change and more as an organised feature of platform-based work. Situating these dynamics within the political economy of digital capitalism helps to clarify why precarity has become such a persistent condition. Platform business models depend on flexibility, data extraction, and the externalisation of risk, integrating workers into global processes of value creation while leaving them only weakly connected to labour institutions designed for more stable forms of employment. Bringing labour process analysis together with critical political economy highlights the value of seeing algorithmic management as a form of governance embedded in everyday work. Algorithmic systems reflect organisational priorities and power relations, shaping how work is carried out and how control and insecurity are distributed. Future research would benefit from closer attention to how algorithmic control is experienced and negotiated across different platform settings. Comparative work on worker strategies, collective responses, and emerging forms of resistance can deepen understanding of how power operates within algorithmically managed labour processes, and of the conditions under which alternative forms of organisation and accountability may develop.

### **Acknowledgment**

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune for providing the necessary facilities and support to carry out this research.

### **Financial support and sponsorship**

Nil.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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