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COMPENSATION AND INDUSTRIAL HARMONY IN THE GIG ECONOMY ERA: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Compensation is the human resource management instrument most directly experienced by workers; however, the emergence of the gig economy has fundamentally shifted the conventional logic of wages, benefits, and fairness perceptions at work in a global context. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 1.9 billion informal workers worldwide face income uncertainty and minimal social protection, a figure that continues to rise with the expansion of digital platform economies (ILO, 2021). In Indonesia specifically, the proportion of gig workers has increased from 7.3 million in 2019 to 15.2 million in 2023, encompassing ride-hailing drivers, platform-based freelancers, and logistics couriers whose compensation varies without legally binding minimum standards. This article aims to comprehensively analyze how compensation systems for gig workers in Indonesia affect the creation of industrial harmony, and to identify emerging challenges faced by human resource management practices in designing fair compensation within flexible, algorithm-mediated work relationships. The methodology combines quantitative and qualitative approaches through a systematic literature review of 25 accredited national and international journal articles (2021–2025), analysis of labor statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and the Ministry of Manpower Indonesia, and examination of applicable labor regulations. Findings indicate that algorithmic incentive-based compensation schemes place gig workers in a vulnerable position with income fluctuating 35–45% monthly on average, absence of minimum wage protection, and limited access to social security, thus significantly increasing potential industrial disharmony. The study identifies algorithmic transparency, worker community involvement in social dialogue, and development of sui generis legal frameworks as essential prerequisites for balancing work flexibility with decent work principles. The study concludes that human resource management in the gig economy requires a renewed compensation paradigm based on procedural and distributive justice, and necessitates multi-stakeholder coordination to create a sustainable and inclusive platform work ecosystem in Indonesia.

Keywords: compensation, gig economy, industrial relations, human resource management, platform workers, algorithm, procedural justice

INTRODUCTION

Industrial relations in Indonesia have historically been built on a solid tripartite foundation between workers, employers, and the government bound by standard employment contracts with protection clauses, regional minimum wages set annually based on transparent scientific calculations, and comprehensive mandatory social security contained in Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and an integrated dispute settlement mechanism through Industrial Relations Settlement Agency. This model assumes a clearly identified employer with clear legal responsibilities, structured working hours with a maximum standard of forty hours per week as stipulated in Article 77 of the Labor Law, and predictable monthly compensation with a high degree of certainty for workers and their families, thus allowing long-term financial planning and the fulfillment of basic family needs. This framework has been proven to provide stability and relational fairness between parties in the employment relationship, although in practice there are still many violations and gaps between formal regulations and practices in the field.

Since the mid-2010s, the emergence of digital platforms such as online transportation services (Gojek, Grab, and other operators), food delivery (GoFood, Shopee Food, and the like), and digital freelance jobs (Freelancer, Fiverr, Upwork, and Indonesian platforms such as Blibli and Tokopedia) have fundamentally and structurally changed Indonesia's employment landscape. These changes are not only about the technological aspect, but rather about a complete transformation of the logic of the work organization, the determination of compensation, and the form of the working relationship between workers and the company. This change has given rise to a new work model known internationally as the gig economy or platform economy, which is a temporary, flexible, and task-based work pattern bridged by mobile applications and digital algorithms that manage the matching between supply and demand for services. A fundamental characteristic of the gig economy is that work is no longer perceived as an ongoing working relationship with a single employer, but rather as a series of discrete and independent transactions facilitated by technology platforms.

Workers in the gig economy are generally legally positioned as business partners or independent contractors, not as workers or laborers in the sense of Article 1 paragraph 2 of the Labor Law which defines a worker as any person who works by receiving wages or other forms of rewards. This legal position has substantial and far-reaching implications, as the provisions on wages (including minimum wage), maximum forty hours per week, collective rest and leave, and compulsory social security (health, work accidents, pensions, and death insurance) applicable to formal workers are not automatically attached to gig workers, creating a legal status of ambiguity and significant regulatory loopholes. As such, gig workers are beyond the reach of employment law protections that have been built over the years through the labor movement's struggles and public policy advocacy at the national and international levels.

The phenomenon of the growth of gig workers is not a marginal or niche problem for human resource management and industrial harmony in Indonesia, but rather a massive and rapid transformation with significant economic and social implications. National employment statistics data released by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the proportion of informal workers, including gig workers, continues to increase significantly and currently accounts for more than 60% of Indonesia's total workforce of 141 million people as of 2023. More specifically, gig workers in the online transportation and logistics sector have grown exponentially from 0.8 million in 2018 to 8.5 million in 2023, an increase that reached a factor of 10.6 times in five years, while digital platform-based freelancers grew from 1.2 million to 6.7 million in the same period, reflecting an average annual growth rate of 35% that far exceeds the growth of formal employment opportunities of only 2-3% per year. The economic contribution of the gig economy is also increasingly significant, with an estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) generated from the platform economy projected to reach 4-5% of Indonesia's total GDP in the coming years, making this sector one of the engines of national digital economy growth. International data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) shows that at the global level, the platform economy has produced more than 1.9 billion informal workers who face similar welfare challenges, making this issue urgent for the sustainable development agenda as stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 which explicitly mentions decent work and economic growth as universal development targets. According to the World Employment and Social Outlook report from the ILO (2021), the gig economy has fundamentally changed the structure of the global labor market, with projections that by 2030, up to 42% of the total global workforce will be in the form of non-standard work, including gig workers, freelancers, and independent contractors.

Gig workers in Indonesia, especially ride-hailing driver-partners and logistics couriers, face multidimensional and profound welfare challenges characterized by income uncertainty with fluctuations of an average of 35–45% per month, far beyond the standard of maximum fluctuation limit considered reasonable in the conventional economy. In addition to income uncertainty, they also face high self-borne operational costs (such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, insurance) that on average spend 40-50% of their gross income, very limited access to basic social protection as guaranteed for formal workers, and high occupational safety risks on the road without comprehensive coverage such as occupational accident insurance or disability compensation. Empirical research by Sitorus & Kornitasari (2024) on a sample of 1,200 gig workers in five major Indonesian cities found that the welfare level of gig workers, when measured using a composite welfare index that combines indicators of income, health, education, and access to social protection, is classified as vulnerable with a score of 45 out of 100, far below the formal worker score of 72 out of 100. Another study by Annazah et al. (2023) that focused on occupational health and safety aspects found that gig workers experienced a 3.2 times higher rate of death from work accidents than formal transportation workers (conventional motorcycle taxis and conventional taxis), without a guarantee mechanism that ensures compensation for the families left behind.

The issue of compensation for gig workers cannot be separated from the algorithmic management mechanism, which is the management of work and performance carried out by the platform's algorithmic system in determining task allocation, performance rating, and the amount of incentives or wages automatically, dynamically, and often not transparently for affected workers. This mechanism fundamentally replaces the role of human supervisors or human resource managers who in traditional management concepts are responsible for providing constructive feedback, guidance, and space for dialogue with workers. Instead, algorithmic systems unilaterally assign rates, performance bonuses, and cost-cutting schemes without a formal negotiation process or a clear and accessible appeal mechanism for workers, leaving workers with no channels to object or understand the rationale behind decisions affecting their income. The large information imbalance between platforms and workers creates a significant and structural power imbalance, potentially giving rise to new industrial disharmony that differs in characteristics from conventional industrial disharmony.

Traditionally, industrial disharmony occurs when there is a difference of interest between workers and employers regarding wages, working hours, or working conditions, and this disharmony can be articulated through formal channels such as unions, collective bargaining agreements, or other legally recognized workers' organizations. In the context of the gig economy, workers do not have such formal channels to negotiate the compensation structure as formal workers have through trade unions or collective bargaining agreements regulated in Law Number 21 of 2000 concerning Trade Unions. Empirical research conducted by Wulansari et al. (2024) on 450 online motorcycle taxi drivers in three major cities (Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya) found that the flexibility narratives sold by platform companies in marketing campaigns often hide the true structural vulnerabilities of workers, including their powerlessness in influencing fare schemes that change at any time without notification or opportunity for discussion. With compensation satisfaction rates reaching only 28% among the 450 respondents surveyed, a figure that is much lower than the satisfaction rate of formal workers which is generally in the range of 65-75%.

The Government of Indonesia has made efforts to respond to the dynamics of this fast and complex gig economy through a number of diverse policy initiatives, including the issuance of Minister of Manpower Regulation Number 6 of 2023 which for the first time formally recognizes the existence of platform workers as a separate category and provides guarantees in the form of Hari Raya Allowances, as well as the discourse on the establishment of a special legal framework for platform workers that is under discussion in various forums multi-stakeholder and parliamentary commissions. However, these measures are still partial, incrementalistic, and have not answered the fundamental question of how fair, transparent, and predictable compensation can be designed in employment relationships that are no longer in the form of conventional employment relationships with explicit minimum income guarantees and comprehensive protection mechanisms. Quantitative research by Wahyuni & Asy-Syifa (2025) using a quasi-experimental design methodology showed that the Pre-Employment Card Program designed by the government to improve workers' skills was significantly correlated with an increased probability of an individual's decision to become a gig worker, with an odd ratio of 2.34 (95% CI: 1.78-3.08), indicating that public policy interventions focused on increasing human capital could be one of the pathway to improve the bargaining position of gig workers in the long term. However, these interventions are still individual-level and have not touched the root of structural problems regarding compensation uncertainty, algorithm transparency, and the mechanism of collective representation of workers in the platform economy.

Thus, this article aims to systematically and comprehensively examine how the gig worker compensation system in Indonesia, with its unique and complex characteristics, influences the formation of industrial harmony in a broader definition, as well as identify strategic challenges and opportunities for human resource management practices in designing fair, transparent, procedural and distributive justice compensation schemes. and sustainable in this era of digital economy and technological transformation. This study is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the development of wage policies and protection of platform workers, enrich the literature on Indonesian human resource management which is still relatively limited in discussing the issue of non-standard workers' compensation, and become the basis for further in-depth empirical research on the compensation mechanism of the gig economy and its implications for worker welfare and national socio-economic stability.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, with an emphasis on the analysis of numerical data from various sources to build a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between compensation, working conditions, and industrial harmony in gig workers in Indonesia. The quantitative components of this study include: (1) descriptive statistical analysis of employment data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) for the period 2019–2024 including the number of gig workers, sectoral distribution, annual growth rate, and demographic characteristics; (2) extraction and tabulation of numerical data from 25 accredited empirical research articles that conducted quantitative measurements of variables such as average income of gig workers, fluctuations in monthly income, number of hours worked, level of compensation satisfaction, access to social security, and other welfare indicators. These quantitative data were then analyzed using meta-synthesis and narrative quantitative summary techniques to identify patterns, trends, and consistency of findings among various studies.

The primary data sources of this study are articles from accredited scientific journals in the Ministry of National Education's SINTA (Science and Technology Index) system and reputable international journals, Indonesian labor laws and regulations, as well as official publications from state institutions including the Central Statistics Agency, the Ministry of Manpower, and international organizations such as the International Labour Organization. Literature searches were conducted systematically through the Google Scholar electronic database, SINTA, ScienceDirect, SSRN, and ResearchGate portals using structured keywords such as: ("compensation" OR "wages" OR "income" OR "earnings") AND ("gig workers" OR "platform workers" OR "gig economy") AND "Indonesia", as well as variations in Indonesian. The search was conducted in January 2025 with a publication range of 2021–2025 to ensure contextual relevance to the latest developments in the digital economy in Indonesia. Inclusion criteria include: peer-reviewed journal articles that have DOIs, the use of quantitative or mixed-methods research methods with measurable empirical data, a substantial focus on the issue of compensation or welfare at work in the context of the gig economy or non-standard workers, and the availability of full-text access. Articles that do not meet these criteria or are opinion papers without empirical research are excluded from the analysis.

The stages of data analysis are carried out in stages including: (1) identification and thematic categorization of each source based on the main theme of the research, resulting in a comprehensive literature mapping; (2) extraction of specific quantitative data from each article including the mean value, median, standard deviation, percentage, odds ratio, or effect size reported, with accurate recording of the methodology, sample, and context of the research; (3) quantitative meta-synthesis analysis through the calculation of the average

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value, range, and coefficient of variation of key indicators such as gig worker income, monthly income fluctuations, and social security access levels; (4) categorization of findings into three main discussion clusters: characteristics and mechanisms of compensation for gig workers, their implications for industrial welfare and harmony, and potentially effective human resource management strategies; and (5) a narrative-qualitative synthesis to formulate conceptual conclusions that integrate quantitative findings with the theoretical framework of industrial relations and conventional compensation management. The internal validation process is carried out through cross-checking between sources and identification of argument consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A systematic literature search yielded 25 research articles that met the inclusion criteria, with a distribution: 14 articles (56%) published in SINTA Level 2–3 accredited national journals, 11 articles (44%) in Scopus or Web of Science indexed international journals, from 19 different research institutions throughout Indonesia and 8 international partner countries. The temporal characteristics indicate an increase in publications: 3 articles in 2021, 5 in 2022, 8 in 2023, 6 in 2024, and 3 in 2025 (as of January), reflecting the increase in academic interest in this topic as the dynamics of the platform economy increase. Quantitative data analysis from empirical studies reveals that gig worker compensation in Indonesia has three main structural characteristics: (1) it is variable with an average income fluctuation of 35–45% per month, compared to a fluctuation of 5–8% for formal workers; (2) the absence of a safety net in the form of a legally binding minimum wage, with the median daily income of online transportation workers ranging from Rp 150,000-300,000 without a fixed component; and (3) high reliance on algorithmic systems in determining assignments, rates, and bonuses with limited transparency.

Meta-synthesis from quantitative data from 18 studies shows that the average gig worker in Indonesia works 48–56 hours per week (exceeding the standard of 40 hours), with the level of access to compulsory social security (health, employment, pension) reaching only 22–28% of the total gig workers, well below the 95% figure for formal workers (Sitorus & Kornitasari, 2024). The findings of the literature also confirm the existence of a significant gap between the flexibility narrative promoted by platform companies and the reality of working conditions in the field: 67% of respondents in 8 qualitative-quantitative studies reported that work flexibility in practice is conditional on high daily incentive targets, forcing workers to work over long periods of time. Permana et al. (2023) in a quantitative analysis of 2,847 platform workers in six Indonesian cities found that gig workers are spread across more than eight service sectors with significantly varying compensation patterns, making it difficult to establish a single universally applicable compensation standard, creating additional complexity in regulation. Average calculation data from five studies showed that 73% of gig workers rely on this job as the family's main source of income, while only 14% have a formal side job, indicating high dependency and economic vulnerability.

In the dimension of well-being and industrial harmony, data analysis from 12 studies measuring indicators of satisfaction, well-being, and potential conflict showed that the average level of satisfaction with gig worker compensation was only 31% (range 18–48% depending on sector and location), with the satisfaction rate of formal workers reaching 64% for comparison. A quantitative analysis of the incidence of worker withdrawal from the platform shows alarming figures: an average of 42% of gig workers leave their jobs in less than 12 months, with the main reasons being income uncertainty (68% of the reasons for withdrawal), unilateral tariff changes (54%), and lack of social protection (51%). The Tobing study (2024) involving 380 online motorcycle taxi drivers found that the perception of procedural fairness (how compensation is determined) actually has a stronger correlation with satisfaction and retention than the nominal amount of compensation, with a correlation coefficient of 0.68 versus 0.42. Data from Wahyuni & Asy-Syifa (2025) using a quasi-experimental methodology on 1,200 participants of the Pre-Employment Card Program showed that the increase in skills correlated with an average increase in gig income of 23%, but this effect disappeared within 6 months if it was not accompanied by a clear certainty of compensation structure.

Discussion

The results of this literature review confirm that the gig worker compensation system in Indonesia has fundamental characteristics that are different from the formal workers' compensation system, so it cannot be fully understood through the framework of conventional compensation theory that prioritizes internal equality (equity among jobs) and external (competitive positioning). In the context of the gig economy, employer organizations in the traditional sense do not come with a clear hierarchical structure, so the reference to compensation fairness shifts from a comparison between positions in one organization to a comparison between the risks, time, and energy expended by workers with the incentives provided by the platform's algorithm unilaterally. This shift creates both conceptual and practical challenges for human resource management, as the principles of transparency, worker participation, and grievance mechanisms commonly applied to formal workers become difficult to implement when compensation decisions are determined by algorithmic systems that are black-box and not easy for both workers and regulators to understand.

This tension between the narrative of flexibility and the reality of structural vulnerability has direct implications for industrial harmony in a broader sense. Harmonious industrial relations according to Indonesia's regulatory framework are characterized by intensive and continuous communication between workers and employers, the empowerment of trade unions as workers' representative organizations, and the settlement of disputes through a fair and participatory tripartite mechanism as stipulated in Law Number 2 of 2004 concerning the Settlement of Industrial Relations Disputes. However, when the legal status of gig workers is positioned as partners and not as formal workers, this mechanism for resolving industrial relations disputes is formally inaccessible to them because the provisions of the law textually only apply to employment relationships that meet the elements of organizational unity, subordination, and continuity. As a result, conflicts related to unilateral fare reductions, termination of application access without due process, or changes to incentive schemes are often resolved informally through driver community forums without binding legal force, leaving workers without adequate legal protection. This creates a new structural vulnerability that differs from conventional industrial relations conflicts, because the parties dealing with workers are not negotiable human managers but algorithmic systems whose representations are legally vague and difficult to hold accountable.

The findings on work motivation and perceptions of fairness of gig workers provide important insights for the reorientation of compensation strategies. Controlled field experiments by Butschek et al. (2022) on platform drivers in five European and Asian countries showed that highly intrinsically motivated workers do not always respond positively to purely controlling financial incentive schemes, and in fact their performance may decline when incentives are perceived to be unfair or overly controlling (crowding-out effect motivation). These findings are relevant to the Indonesian context, where the majority of gig workers choose this job because of a combination of urgent economic needs and a desire for flexibility in working hours, so compensation schemes that only emphasize short-term incentives without considering the perception of fairness can actually accelerate burnout and turnover. Skrzek-Lubasińska & Szban (2024) in a meta-analysis of 34 studies on gig worker motivation found that the variables procedural justice and interactional justice had a significant impact on job satisfaction and worker retention, with effect sizes of 0.58 and 0.52, while the direct impact of nominal compensation had a smaller effect size of 0.31. The practical implication is that to increase satisfaction and reduce the turnover of gig workers, the policy focus is not enough on increasing the nominal wage, but rather needs to be integrated with efforts to increase transparency in the compensation determination process and provide workers with the opportunity to understand the logic behind the incentive schemes implemented.

Based on this analysis, three strategic pillars can be recommended for the reorientation of human resource management in the gig economy era. First, algorithmic transparency needs to be placed as an integral part of fair compensation practices, including disclosure of information regarding the variables that affect rate determination, bonus calculation mechanisms, cost reduction criteria, and the appeal process when workers feel unfair compensation. Platform companies can do this through the publication of algorithms (open-sourcing) or at least provide a written explanation that is easy for workers to understand about how the compensation determination system works. Second, platform companies and regulators need to open up spaces for social dialogue involving associations or communities of gig workers in the discussion and development of incentive structures, although this form of representation does not have to be identical to conventional unions, but can be in the form of bilateral consultation forums or worker advocacy panels that have access to decision-makers in platform companies. Third, a sui generis legal framework (new legal category) is needed, namely the recognition of the typical characteristics of platform workers in laws and regulations, without having to impose a rigid binary classification between workers and business partners, so that minimum provisions regarding a decent income, access to basic social security, and occupational safety protection can be applied proportionately in accordance with the risk and autonomy characteristics of each type of gig work.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review concludes that the gig worker compensation system in Indonesia has fundamental characteristics that differ from formal workers, including income variability (fluctuations of 35–45% per month), algorithmic basis in determining rates and incentives, and the absence of a legal safety net in the form of a minimum wage and mandatory social security. These characteristics pose a serious challenge to the creation of industrial harmony because the inequality of bargaining position between workers and platforms cannot be resolved through conventional industrial relations mechanisms regulated in labor laws, and directly has implications for the unfulfilled principles of decent work for platform workers, especially in terms of income security, social protection, and meaningful worker representation. Human resource management in the gig economy era requires a fundamental paradigm shift from a compensation orientation oriented towards attendance and job levels to an orientation that emphasizes procedural and distributive justice, with three main mechanisms: increased transparency of algorithms in the determination of rates and incentives, the opening of inclusive social dialogue spaces between platforms and the working community, and the drafting of sui generis legal frameworks that recognize distinctive characteristics Platform workers without eliminating work flexibility. Further research empirically is needed to test the effectiveness of various compensation management strategies in different gig economy sectors (transportation, logistics, creative freelancers) in Indonesia, considering that this study is still conceptual-theoretical and based on the synthesis of available literature. The policy implications emphasize the need for cross-stakeholder coordination involving the Ministry of Manpower, platform companies, workers' associations, and academia to develop a sustainable, equitable, and inclusive compensation framework for Indonesia's platform work ecosystem.

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