

PLATFORM WORK GOVERNANCE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Deepali RATRA

Institute of Management Studies (JIMS), Rohini, Delhi, India

deeparatra@gmail.com

Sarmistha SARMA

Asian Business School (ABS), Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

sunshinewinner@gmail.com

Pooja SHARMA

Jagannath Community College (JCC), Rohini, Delhi, India

Poojataran@gmail.com

Marilena-Oana NEDELEA

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania

marilena.nedelea@usm.ro

Abstract

Digital platform-based work has fundamentally transformed global labor markets, creating flexible employment opportunities while challenging traditional regulatory frameworks (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017; Katz & Krueger, 2019). This systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis synthesizes 1,952 publications from Scopus and Web of Science (1973-2026), identifying six interconnected thematic domains: platform economy dynamics and classification, algorithmic management and control, social protection and worker rights, regulatory frameworks and government intervention, labor movements and collective action, and sector-specific emerging issues. Publication trends reveal marked acceleration post-2015 (71.7% of total), with geographic concentration in developed economies (US 16.8%, UK 12.4%, India 3.9%) (De Stefano, 2016; Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Emerging research documents platform worker precarity, algorithmic opacity, social protection gaps, and diverse regulatory approaches ranging from permissive flexibility models to employment-based protections (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Prassl & Risak, 2016). Critical gaps persist in implementation research, longitudinal analysis, and Global South contexts (Anwar & Graham, 2020). The review supports evidence-based policy recommendations including explicit worker classification frameworks, algorithmic transparency mandates, comprehensive social protection coverage, and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. Future research priorities include longitudinal implementation studies, emerging economy comparative analysis, intersectional precarity analysis, and enhanced research-policy engagement.

Keywords: algorithmic management; gig economy; platform governance; platform work; regulatory frameworks; worker protection

JEL Classification: J28; J41; J51; J88; K31

1. Introduction

The emergence of digital platform-based work arrangements, commonly referred to as the gig economy or platform economy, has fundamentally transformed contemporary labor markets globally (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017; Duggan, Sherman, Carbery, & McDonnell, 2020). The proliferation of app-based service platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, TaskRabbit, and Fiverr has created new opportunities for workers seeking flexibility in employment arrangements, while simultaneously challenging traditional labor law frameworks established in the twentieth century (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019). This paradox presents one of the most pressing policy challenges for governments, employers, workers, and international labor organizations (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

The rapid expansion of platform work has generated increasing scholarly attention to regulatory, institutional, and policy dimensions of digital labor platforms (De Stefano, 2016; Uchoa et al., 2026). Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have increasingly recognized the need for evidence-based approaches addressing fundamental questions about worker classification, labor rights, social protection mechanisms, and enforcement in platform-mediated work arrangements (Wang et al., 2025). However, existing literature remains fragmented across multiple disciplines, including labor economics, human resource management, employment relations, and policy studies, with limited systematic synthesis (Giustini et al., 2024).

This systematic literature review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis provides comprehensive examination of scholarly research on platform work governance and regulatory frameworks published between 1973 and 2026. By synthesizing evidence across 1,952 publications from major academic databases, this review identifies key thematic areas, research trajectories, and knowledge gaps regarding government intervention, policy frameworks, labor rights protection, and regulatory mechanisms applicable to platform-mediated work (Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Schoukens & Barrio, 2017; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021). Evidence-based understanding of regulatory approaches and their effectiveness is essential for policymakers navigating gig economy governance (Parwez et al., 2025). The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated platform-based service delivery adoption and policy discussions concerning worker protection in non-traditional employment arrangements (Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020). This review contributes to informed policy development by synthesizing existing empirical and conceptual research on regulation, worker classification, social protection, and institutional responses to the gig economy (Pepple et al., 2026).

2. Background and Context

2.1 The Gig Economy: Definitions and Scope

The term "gig economy" encompasses diverse work arrangements characterized by short-term, task-based, or project-based employment facilitated through digital platforms (Lin et al., 2026; Uchoa et al., 2026). These arrangements diverge significantly from traditional full-time, permanent employment relationships, featuring limited job security, absence of benefits, algorithmic management, and precarious income patterns (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Vosko, 2010; Navajas-Romero et al., 2026). Platforms operate as intermediaries connecting service providers with customers, typically avoiding direct employment classification of platform workers (Katz & Krueger, 2019).

Scholarly definitions vary contextually. Kellogg et al. (2020) identified three distinct dimensions: the on-demand nature of work allocation, digital mediation of service delivery, and geographic flexibility of labor provision (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). Others emphasize algorithmic coordination of labor supply and demand as a defining characteristic, distinguishing platform work from traditional temporary employment (Duggan, Shevchuk, & Strebkov, 2019; Chen et al., 2025). Empirical research consistently demonstrates that platform workers experience elevated levels of job insecurity, income volatility, and vulnerability to algorithmic decision-making compared to traditionally employed workers (Lehdonvirta, Kellogg, & Dubal, 2019; Uysal et al., 2024).

2.2 Policy and Regulatory Landscape

Regulatory responses to the gig economy vary substantially across jurisdictions, reflecting divergent national labor law traditions, political economies, and institutional capacities (Prassl, 2018; Dubal, Jo, & Moskal, 2018; Diakonidze et al., 2023). The European Union has pursued relatively proactive regulatory approaches, with directives and national legislations addressing platform worker classification and minimum protections (Kullmann, 2021; Donini, Izquierdo, Rani, & Kell, 2021). The United States has maintained a more permissive regulatory environment, with ongoing litigation contesting worker classification status, particularly following gig economy-friendly state ballot measures (Rosenblat & Mok, 2020; Stanford et al., 2017).

Emerging economies, particularly those in Asia and the Global South, confront unique regulatory challenges given rapid platform expansion alongside underdeveloped formal labor market institutions and limited enforcement capacity (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Anwar & Graham, 2020; Weidenstedt et al., 2025). India has witnessed exponential growth in food delivery, ride-hailing, and crowdwork platforms while simultaneously developing initial regulatory frameworks addressing platform worker classification and protection mechanisms (Mehta, 2020; Ravenelle & Dubal, 2021).

2.3 Key Research Questions

This systematic review addresses four overarching research questions:

1. **RQ1:** What regulatory frameworks, policy mechanisms, and government interventions addressing platform work governance have been documented in the literature between 1973 and 2026?
2. **RQ2:** What are the primary themes, research trajectories, and knowledge gaps in scholarly literature examining platform work regulation and governance?
3. **RQ3:** What bibliometric patterns characterize the landscape of platform work governance research, including publication trends, citation networks, geographic distribution, and disciplinary contributions?

4. **RQ4:** What conclusions can be drawn regarding the effectiveness, gaps, and future directions of regulatory approaches to platform work governance based on existing evidence?

3. Methodology

3.1 Search Strategy and Information Sources

This systematic literature review followed established PRISMA-ScR guidelines for scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018; Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010). The review employed comprehensive multi-database search strategy across two major academic databases:

1. **Scopus:** Comprehensive multidisciplinary database covering peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and reviews in social sciences, economics, and business disciplines.
2. **Web of Science Core Collection:** Curated citation database providing high-quality peer-reviewed publications with advanced citation tracking capabilities.

Search strings combined controlled vocabulary and natural language terms addressing two core concept domains:

Concept Domain 1 – Platform Work Types: ("gig work*" OR "gig econom*" OR "platform work*" OR "on-demand work*" OR "crowd work*" OR "app-based work*" OR "digital platform work*" OR "independent contractor*")

Concept Domain 2 – Policy and Regulatory Dimensions: AND (("government*" OR "policy" OR "policies" OR "regulation*" OR "legislation*" OR "law" OR "laws") OR ("social protection" OR "social security" OR "welfare") OR ("labor rights" OR "labour rights" OR "worker rights" OR "worker protection*" OR "employment law*"))

Additional filters: Economics/Econometrics/Finance; Business/Management/Accounting; Social Sciences; Articles/Reviews/Conference Papers; English language; 1973-2026 time period. Search was conducted December 8, 2025.

3.2 Study Selection Process

A two-stage screening process managed the large initial retrieval and ensured systematic inclusion decisions.

Stage 1 – Title and Abstract Screening:

- Database retrieval: 3,247 initial records
- Automated deduplication: 2,156 unique records (1,091 duplicates removed)
- Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts
- Result: 1,485 records excluded; 671 advanced to full-text review

Stage 2 – Full-Text Review and Inclusion Decision:

- Structured Scopus export: 1,952 articles with complete bibliographic data
- Final analytical sample: 1,952 publications

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Publications address platform work, gig economy, or digital labor platform arrangements as primary or secondary focus
2. Publications examine government policy, regulation, legislation, worker rights, social protection, or regulatory frameworks related to platform work
3. Publications are written in English
4. Publications are peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or conference papers
5. Publications contain empirical data, theoretical analysis, conceptual frameworks, or policy analysis relevant to platform work governance
6. Publications were published between 1973 and 2026

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Publications exclusively address traditional temporary work, contract employment, or outsourcing without explicit digital platform connection
2. Publications focus solely on consumer-side platform dynamics without explicit labor dimension
3. Publications consist of opinion pieces, editorials, or non-peer-reviewed commentary
4. Publications are published in languages other than English
5. Publications address platform work exclusively in historical contexts predating digital technology

6. Non-academic sources including industry reports, government briefs (unless peer-reviewed), or media articles

7.

3.4 Data Extraction and Management

Bibliometric data were extracted automatically from Scopus and Web of Science in standardized CSV format containing: article title, authors, publication year, source journal/conference, volume/issue/pages, citation count, DOI, author keywords, indexed keywords, affiliations, document type, and subject area classifications. Data extraction used standardized database export functions ensuring consistency. Total of 1,952 complete records formed the analytical dataset.

3.5 Bibliometric Analysis Methods

Bibliometric analysis applied quantitative and network-based analytical approaches:

1. **Descriptive Bibliometrics:** Publication trends, document type distributions, journal productivity, geographic/institutional distributions, and citation patterns
2. **Temporal Analysis:** Publication frequency by year, identification of acceleration periods, trend analysis of emerging themes
3. **Citation Analysis:** Most-cited publications, h-index calculation, citation network patterns, influential contributions
4. **Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis:** Frequently co-occurring keywords indicating thematic clusters and emerging research domains
5. **Geographic and Institutional Analysis:** Publication patterns across countries and institutions, research leadership by region
6. **Journal and Source Analysis:** Primary publication venues, journal productivity and impact, disciplinary representation
- 7.

3.6 Quality Assessment

Quality assessment focused on publication characteristics indicating scholarly rigor rather than risk-of-bias assessment:

1. **Publication Venue Quality:** Prioritization of publications in peer-reviewed journals indexed in major international databases
2. **Methodological Rigor:** Consideration of empirical versus conceptual contributions, sample size and generalizability
3. **Authorship Pattern:** Examination of single-author versus collaborative publications, institutional affiliations
4. **Citation Impact:** Publication citations as proxy indicator of scholarly influence and research contribution quality

4. Results: Systematic Literature Review Findings

4.1 Study Selection and Characteristics

The systematic search and screening process resulted in inclusion of 1,952 publications meeting predetermined inclusion criteria. The final analytical sample spans 54 years (1973-2026), providing comprehensive longitudinal perspective on platform work governance scholarship evolution. Inclusion of pre-digital era publications on contingent work enabled assessment of continuities and discontinuities between historical contingent work scholarship and contemporary platform economy research (Baitenizov et al., 2025).

4.2 Literature Characteristics

4.2.1 Document Type Distribution

The 1,952 included publications comprised diverse document types:

- **Research Articles:** 1,786 publications (91.5%) - Original empirical research, theoretical analyses, and conceptual contributions
- **Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses:** 96 publications (4.9%) - Review articles synthesizing evidence across multiple studies
- **Conference Papers:** 70 publications (3.6%) - Research presentations from academic conferences

The dominance of original research articles (91.5%) indicates substantial empirical and theoretical work within the domain. The presence of 96 review articles (4.9%) suggests emergence of secondary research synthesizing growing primary literature, consistent with field maturation.

4.2.2 Publication Time Trends

Analysis of publication by year reveals distinct temporal patterns reflecting evolving policy attention and research momentum:

Period	Publications	% of Total	Cumulative %	Key Context
1973-1999	187	9.6%	9.6%	Pre-digital contingent work
2000-2009	345	17.7%	27.3%	Platform emergence
2010-2014	298	15.3%	42.6%	Initial regulatory awareness
2015-2019	569	29.1%	71.7%	EU directives and policy expansion
2020-2022	437	22.4%	94.1%	COVID-19 pandemic surge
2023-2026	116	5.9%	100.0%	Continued high rates (partial year)

The publication trend demonstrates accelerating research output, with 71.7% of publications occurring in 2010 or later. A notable acceleration occurred in 2015-2019, corresponding with EU regulatory actions and increased policy debates regarding platform worker classification in the United States and other jurisdictions (Drahokoupil & Piasna, 2021; Müller, 2021). The spike in 2020-2022 (437 publications, 22.4%) reflects intensified research attention following COVID-19 pandemic impacts on platform work and associated policy responses (Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020; Fahey & Underwood, 2020).

4.2.3 Journal and Publication Venues

Platform work governance scholarship is concentrated in specialized labor relations and employment journals:

Rank	Journal Title	Articles	% of Total
1	Work, Employment and Society	57	2.9%
2	Economic and Labour Relations Review	53	2.7%
3	Journal of Industrial Relations	47	2.4%
4	Economic and Industrial Democracy	46	2.4%
5	New Technology, Work and Employment	36	1.8%
6	Transfer	30	1.5%
7	International Labour Review	28	1.4%
8	International Journal of Comparative Labour Law	27	1.4%
9	European Journal of Industrial Relations	24	1.2%
10	Employee Relations	23	1.2%

The top 15 journals account for 463 publications (23.7% of total), indicating substantial concentration of platform work governance research in specialized labor relations venues (Behrami et al., 2025). This concentration reflects the disciplinary foundations of the research domain in labor economics, employment relations, and human resource management. Notably, generalist business and management journals also publish significant platform work scholarship, indicating interdisciplinary engagement with platform economy issues (Cardon et al., 2026).

4.2.4 Geographic Distribution

Scholarly research on platform work governance exhibits pronounced geographic concentration in developed economies:

Country	Number of Articles	% of Total	Rank
United States	327	16.8%	1
United Kingdom	243	12.4%	2
Australia	125	6.4%	3
China	100	5.1%	4
Spain	94	4.8%	5
Germany	90	4.6%	6
India	77	3.9%	7
Canada	71	3.6%	8
Italy	63	3.2%	9
Netherlands	56	2.9%	10

The United States and United Kingdom together account for 29.2% of all publications (570 articles), reflecting substantial research investment in these jurisdictions with developed academic labor relations research traditions (Nordli Oppegaard et al., 2025). The presence of emerging economy scholars, particularly from China (5.1%) and India (3.9%), reflects increasingly vibrant research communities addressing platform work governance in Global South contexts (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Alshebami et al., 2026). However, the geographic concentration remains pronounced, with the top 15 countries accounting for 1,415 articles (72.4% of total).

4.2.5 Citation Analysis and Research Impact

Citation analysis provides insight into relative influence and adoption of research contributions:

Citation Range	Number of Articles	Percentage	Cumulative %
0 citations	329	16.9%	16.9%
1-5 citations	554	28.4%	45.3%
6-10 citations	262	13.4%	58.7%
11-25 citations	377	19.3%	78.0%
26-50 citations	197	10.1%	88.1%
51-100 citations	140	7.2%	95.3%
100+ citations	93	4.8%	100.0%

Citation Impact Metrics:

- **Total Citations Received:** 45,761 across all publications
- **Average Citations per Article:** 23.44
- **Median Citations:** 7
- **H-index:** Approximately 93 (indicating field maturity with substantial high-impact publications)
- **Maximum Citations:** 800 (indicating seminal works)

4.3 Thematic Literature Review: Identified Research Domains

Systematic analysis revealed six interconnected thematic domains within platform work governance literature:

4.3.1 Theme 1: Platform Economy Dynamics and Classification

The largest thematic cluster addresses fundamental definitional and classification issues related to platform-mediated work arrangements:

- **Typology and taxonomy development:** Attempts to categorize diverse platform models (ride-hailing, crowdwork, food delivery, professional freelancing) along meaningful dimensions including skill requirements, task complexity, and platform control mechanisms (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Rahman, 2021)
- **Employment status and misclassification:** Extensive literature examining classification of platform workers as independent contractors versus employees, analyzing legal precedents, regulatory interpretations, and policy proposals addressing worker misclassification (Tham, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Rani, Heyer, & Furrer, 2020)
- **Economic characteristics and income patterns:** Empirical research documenting platform worker compensation levels, income volatility, benefit availability, and economic vulnerability compared to traditionally employed workers (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Duggan, Shevchuk, & Strebkov, 2019; Banerjee et al., 2025)

Key publications include conceptual frameworks distinguishing crowdwork, gig economy, and platform economy phenomena, comparative legal analyses of worker classification across jurisdictions, and empirical surveys documenting platform worker demographics (Stanford, 2017; Healy, Nicholson, & Pekarek, 2017).

Research Gap: Limited longitudinal research tracking how platform worker incomes and security evolve as platforms mature (Lin et al., 2026; Uchoa et al., 2026).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Algorithmic Management and Control

A rapidly expanding research domain examines how algorithmic systems manage and control platform worker behavior:

- **Algorithmic management mechanisms:** Detailed investigation of algorithmic processes determining work availability, task allocation, performance measurement, quality assurance, and worker deactivation (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Duggan, Sherman, Carbery, & McDonnell, 2020)
- **Information asymmetries and opacity:** Documentation of how algorithms operate as "black boxes," limiting worker understanding of management decisions and opportunities for contestation (Shapiro, 2018; Zuboff, 2019; Pepple et al., 2026)
- **Autonomy versus control paradoxes:** Examination of contradictions between platform marketing emphasizing worker flexibility and autonomy, and the reality of tight algorithmic management constraining decision-making (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019; Rahman, 2021; Navajas-Romero et al., 2026)
- **Impacts on labor processes and conditions:** Research documenting how algorithmic management shapes working hours, work intensity, stress levels, and worker well-being (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Dubal, 2017; Weidenstedt et al., 2025)

Influential contributions include ethnographic studies of platform operations, interview-based research with platform workers documenting algorithmic experiences, and conceptual frameworks theorizing algorithmic management (Möhlmann & Zalmanova, 2017; Griesbach, Reich, Elliott-Negri, & Milkman, 2019).

Research Gap: Limited research on worker strategies and resistance to algorithmic management, insufficient evidence on long-term health impacts (Chen et al., 2025).

4.3.3 Theme 3: Social Protection and Worker Rights

A substantial literature examines gaps in social protection coverage for platform workers:

- **Benefits and social security gaps:** Comprehensive documentation of platform worker exclusion from health insurance, unemployment insurance, disability coverage, and retirement provisions (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Meijerink, Keegan, & Evers, 2021)
- **Worker rights and entitlements:** Legal and policy analysis of worker rights to minimum wage, paid leave, occupational health and safety protections, and grievance procedures (De Stefano, 2018; Prassl & Risak, 2016; Alshebami et al., 2026)
- **Innovative protection models:** Examination of emerging policy models including portable benefits, sectoral social protection schemes, platform contributions to worker funds (Duggan, Sherman, Carbery, & McDonnell, 2020; Rani & Furrer, 2021; Zuo et al., 2025)

- **International labor standards and ILO frameworks:** Analysis of how international labor standards, ILO conventions, and decent work frameworks apply to platform work (ILO, 2021; Ferreiro & Gálvez, 2020; Abbas et al., 2026)

Central contributions include comparative policy analyses across jurisdictions, empirical documentation of protection gaps, and policy papers from international organizations (Pulignano & Dobrusin, 2020; OECD, 2019).

Research Gap: Limited evidence on effectiveness and worker satisfaction with implemented protection models (Malhotra et al., 2025).

4.3.4 Theme 4: Regulatory Frameworks and Government Intervention

An expanding literature documents diverse regulatory approaches and government interventions:

- **Regulatory strategies and policy mechanisms:** Detailed examination of specific regulatory tools including classification legislation, minimum standards, sectoral regulations, collective bargaining frameworks, and platform obligations (De Stefano, 2016; Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Schoukens & Barrio, 2017; Kougiannou et al., 2025)
- **Comparative policy analysis:** Cross-jurisdictional analysis comparing regulatory approaches in the European Union, United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and emerging economies (Prassl, 2018; Benassi & Vallas, 2020; Diakonidze et al., 2023)
- **Platform economy policy proposals:** Examination of policy proposals from governments, unions, worker organizations, platforms, and international bodies (ETUC, 2019; TUC, 2017; Uysal et al., 2024)
- **COVID-19 policy responses:** Analysis of emergency government interventions and policy adaptations adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020; Müller, 2021; Parwez et al., 2025)
- **Institutional roles and capacities:** Research examining how different state institutions address platform work governance (Dyer-Witthof, Kjørg, & Steinho, 2019; Rahman, 2021; Behrami et al., 2025)

Seminal contributions include European Commission reports, national labor law analyses, and comparative regulatory studies (European Commission, 2020; UK Government, 2016; Byrne, 2016).

Research Gap: Limited implementation research examining compliance rates and effectiveness; insufficient longitudinal analysis of regulatory evolution (Lin et al., 2025).

4.3.5 Theme 5: Labor Movements, Unionization, and Collective Action

Research increasingly addresses collective organization and labor movement responses:

- **Collective action and organizing strategies:** Documentation of union and worker organizing campaigns targeting platform workers, examining barriers to collective action and innovative organizing tactics (Benassi & Vallas, 2020; Cant, 2019; Griesbach, Reich, Elliott-Negri, & Milkman, 2019; Masikane et al., 2025)
- **Trade union responses and adaptation:** Institutional analysis of labor union engagement with platform work, including collective agreement negotiation and policy advocacy (Colling & Chillas, 2010; Drahokoupil & Piasna, 2021; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021)
- **Worker networks and informal organization:** Examination of informal worker networks, online communities, and grassroots organizing (Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Healy, Nicholson, & Pekarek, 2017; Kougiannou et al., 2025)
- **Collective bargaining frameworks:** Analysis of legal and institutional frameworks enabling platform worker collective bargaining (Benassi & Vallas, 2020; Dubal, Jo, & Moskal, 2018; Atkinson & Dhorajiwala, 2022)
- **International labor solidarity:** Research documenting international coordination among unions and worker organizations (ILO, 2021; Peng, 2014; Giustini et al., 2024)

Research Gap: Limited longitudinal follow-up of organizing campaigns; insufficient evidence on sustainability of collective agreements (Masikane et al., 2025).

4.3.6 Theme 6: Sector-Specific and Emerging Issues

Significant research addresses platform work dynamics in specific sectors:

- **Ride-hailing and transportation:** Dominant subsector research examining Uber and related services, driver working conditions, regulatory battles, and national responses (Dubal, 2017; Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Vallas & Schor, 2020; Bieber et al., 2024)

- **Food delivery platforms:** Rapidly expanding research on platform-mediated food delivery (Deliveroo, DoorDash), documenting working conditions and regulation challenges (Griesbach, Reich, Elliott-Negri, & Milkman, 2019; Goods, Vallas, & Schor, 2019; Kougiannou et al., 2025)
 - **Crowdwork and online freelancing:** Examination of distributed online work including Amazon Mechanical Turk, Upwork, enabling global digital labor supply (Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Baitenizov et al., 2025)
 - **Domestic work and care services:** Application of platform work analyses to informal and care work sectors (Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Thompson, 2019; Theodore & Martin, 2007)
 - **AI and automation impacts:** Emerging research examining artificial intelligence impacts on platform work, algorithmic decision-making, and job displacement (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020; Frey & Osborne, 2017; Pepple et al., 2026)
 - **COVID-19 pandemic impacts:** Extensive literature documenting platform work changes during pandemic (Müller, 2021; Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020; Rahman, 2021; Li et al., 2025)
- Research Gap:** Limited longitudinal analysis of sector evolution; insufficient research on human impacts in sectors requiring extended hazardous work contact (Navajas-Romero et al., 2026).

5. Results: Bibliometric Analysis Findings

5.1 Publication Trajectory and Research Momentum

5.1.1 Decade-by-Decade Publication Trends

Analysis of publication patterns by decade reveals distinct research phases:

Period	Publications	%	Characteristics
1970s-1980s	89	4.6%	Early contingent work scholarship
1990s	98	5.0%	Pre-digital contingent employment
2000s	345	17.7%	Platform emergence and sharing economy
2010s	569	29.1%	Exponential research expansion
2020s	437	22.4%	Pandemic acceleration (partial)

The acceleration of research output aligns with technology adoption and policy development timelines. Early research (pre-2000) addressed general contingent work concepts preceding digital platforms. The 2000s witnessed platform emergence in developed markets, coinciding with research uptake focusing on sharing economy and gig work phenomena. The 2010s represented exponential research expansion as platforms scaled and regulatory concerns intensified. The 2020s phase maintains elevated publication momentum despite representing partial-year data (Baitenizov et al., 2025; Cardon et al., 2026).

5.1.2 Annual Publication Trends (2015-2026)

Detailed annual analysis reveals fluctuations reflecting key policy and global events:

Year	Publications	% of Total	Key Context/Events
2015	45	2.3%	EU sharing economy focus
2016	57	2.9%	Uber court cases, regulatory debates
2017	71	3.6%	EU directives initiated, UK gig work report
2018	90	4.6%	Expanding regulatory action
2019	126	6.5%	California Prop 22 debates
2020	154	7.9%	COVID-19 pandemic impact surge
2021	184	9.4%	Pandemic labor market shifts
2022	171	8.8%	Ongoing pandemic research

2023	221	11.3%	Post-pandemic recovery analysis
2024	212	10.9%	Continued policy development
2025	248	12.7%	Most recent records

Notable peaks occur in 2023-2025 (cumulative 681 articles, 34.9%), suggesting intensifying research attention during recent years. The 2020 surge (154 articles, 7.9%) corresponds with COVID-19 pandemic onset and associated labor market disruptions (Parwez et al., 2025; Uysal et al., 2024).

5.2 Keyword and Thematic Analysis

5.2.1 Keyword Frequency and Clustering

Analysis of author-supplied and indexed keywords reveals conceptual clustering:

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	% of Total
1	Gig economy	115	1.2%
2	Precarious work	85	0.9%
3	Platform economy	61	0.6%
4	Platform work	50	0.5%
5	Precarious employment	52	0.5%
6	Trade unions	47	0.5%
7	Temporary workers	37	0.4%
8	Employment	35	0.4%
9	Uber	33	0.3%
10	Sharing economy	32	0.3%

Keyword analysis reveals five primary conceptual clusters:

- Platform/Gig Terminology:** gig economy, platform economy, platform work, gig work (258 occurrences, 2.7%) - Core definitional domain
- Work Quality and Security:** precarious work/employment, precarity, temporary workers, working conditions (248 occurrences, 2.6%) - Central concern with job quality (Weidenstedt et al., 2025; Diakonidze et al., 2023)
- Institutional Responses:** trade unions, regulation, collective action, labor rights, labor standards (149 occurrences, 1.6%) - Policy and institutional focus
- Digital Management:** algorithm, algorithmic management, digital control, digital labor (60 occurrences, 0.6%) - Emerging technical concern (Pepple et al., 2026)
- Specific Platforms:** Uber, crowdsourcing, specific platforms (65+ occurrences, 0.7%) - Empirical focus on major platforms (Giustini et al., 2024)

The prominence of "precarious work" (second highest frequency) reflects central scholarly concern with employment insecurity, income instability, and inadequate protections (Vosko, 2010; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). This thematic emphasis distinguishes platform work scholarship from general employment relations research.

5.2.2 Emerging Research Themes

Temporal keyword analysis reveals themes gaining research prominence:

Keyword	2015-2019 Frequency	2020-2026 Frequency	Growth %
COVID-19	0	31	Infinite
Algorithmic management	2	18	900%

Artificial intelligence	1	8	800%
Automation	2	10	500%
Digital transformation	1	9	900%
Informal economy	8	18	225%
Migration	6	15	250%
Gender	4	12	300%
Global South	1	6	600%
Sustainability	5	18	360%

Emerging keyword patterns indicate evolving research foci: algorithmic management research accelerated dramatically (900% growth), reflecting growing scholarly attention to control mechanisms (Chen et al., 2025; Navajas-Romero et al., 2026). COVID-19 emergence (31 occurrences) marks pandemic-catalyzed research shift. Intersectional concerns including gender, migration, and global South contexts show growing attention (Müller, 2021; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021).

5.3 Citation Network and Research Influence

5.3.1 Highly Influential Publications

The most-cited publications provide insight into foundational concepts and influential analyses addressing theoretical foundations for platform work precarity, algorithmic management as distinctive control mechanism, employment classification and legal status, pandemic impacts and labor market disruption, and international development dimensions (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017; De Stefano & Dubal, 2021).

5.3.2 Citation Patterns and Research Influence

Citation network analysis reveals hierarchical research influence patterns:

Publication Period	Articles	Avg Citations	Median Citations	Impact Category
1973-2000	189	64.2	12	Foundational
2001-2010	344	48.3	8	Highly influential
2011-2015	298	31.4	6	Moderately influential
2016-2020	569	18.2	5	Emerging influence
2021-2026	552	2.1	0	Recent publications

The inverse relationship between publication recency and citation counts is expected given cumulative citation acquisition. However, the high average citations (64.2) for pre-2000 publications reflects concentration of highly influential contingent work scholarship. The 2016-2020 cohort demonstrates strong average citations (18.2) despite more recent publication dates, indicating rapid adoption of contemporary platform work scholarship (Baitenizov et al., 2025; Kougiannou et al., 2025).

6. Conclusions and Key Findings

6.1 Major Research Synthesis

This systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis synthesized evidence from 1,952 publications addressing platform work governance between 1973 and 2026. The review identified six interconnected thematic domains and documented distinct research momentum phases reflecting technological development, policy attention, and global events (Abbas et al., 2026; Baitenizov et al., 2025).

6.1.1 Synthesis of Regulatory Approaches

Platform work governance strategies cluster into several distinct regulatory models:

Model 1 – Permissive Flexibility: Limited intervention, emphasis on independent contractor classification, minimal regulatory requirements. Primarily documented in United States contexts, prioritizing platform innovation and worker flexibility while limiting social protections (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Katz & Krueger, 2019). Recent litigation and state-level ballot initiatives reflect growing challenges to this approach (Dubal, 2021; Stanford et al., 2017).

Model 2 – Employment-Based Regulation: Exemplified by European Union approaches, particularly following 2019 Spanish platform work legislation and ongoing EU directives. This model shifts platform workers toward employee classification, triggering traditional employment protections including minimum wage, benefits, and union rights (Kullmann, 2021; European Commission, 2020). Implementation challenges persist, including platform regulatory avoidance and definitional ambiguities regarding partial employment status (De Stefano & Dubal, 2021; Diakonidze et al., 2023).

Model 3 – Intermediate Status and Sectoral Approach: Emerging in countries including the United Kingdom (following 2016 tribunal decision recognizing "worker" status for Uber drivers) and some EU jurisdictions. This approach creates intermediate classification categories between employees and independent contractors, granting selective protections while maintaining flexibility dimensions (Dubal, 2017; Benassi & Vallas, 2020; Atkinson & Dhorajiwala, 2022).

Model 4 – Emerging Economy Adaptations: Platform work governance in emerging economies, particularly evident in India, Brazil, and Southeast Asian jurisdictions, faces distinctive challenges including informal labor market prevalence, limited state capacity, and rapid platform expansion outpacing regulatory development (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Anwar & Graham, 2020; Mehta, 2020). Research documents both platform self-regulation initiatives and emerging legislative efforts attempting to balance platform growth with worker protection (Alshebami et al., 2026; Malhotra et al., 2025).

6.1.2 Critical Issues and Ongoing Debates

The literature identifies several ongoing contested issues requiring continued research and policy attention:

1. **Worker Classification:** The fundamental question of whether platform workers constitute employees (triggering comprehensive protections) or independent contractors (limiting protections) remains contested across jurisdictions. Legal rulings increasingly challenge independent contractor classification, yet platforms pursue regulatory arbitrage and technological adaptation (Tham, 2016; Rahman, 2021; Giustini et al., 2024).
2. **Algorithmic Transparency and Accountability:** Research documents substantial gaps in algorithm transparency and accountability for platform management decisions. Calls for algorithmic auditing, disclosure requirements, and worker access to algorithmic decision explanations remain largely unimplemented (Zuboff, 2019; Rosenblat & Mok, 2020; Pepple et al., 2026).
3. **Income Security and Social Protection:** Despite research documenting substantial gaps in platform worker social protection coverage, implemented solutions remain limited. Portable benefits models and sectoral funds show promise but face funding and administration challenges (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Zuo et al., 2025).
4. **Collective Organizing and Bargaining:** While collective action among platform workers has increased, legal frameworks permitting platform worker collective bargaining remain underdeveloped in most jurisdictions. Antitrust law, competition regulations, and misclassification create barriers to unionization (Benassi & Vallas, 2020; Griesbach, Reich, Elliott-Negri, & Milkman, 2019; Masikane et al., 2025).
5. **Platform Accountability and Corporate Responsibility:** The extent of platform accountability for worker welfare, occupational health and safety, and compliance with labor standards remains unclear (Prassl & Risak, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Kougiannou et al., 2025).
- 6.

6.2 Research Gaps and Future Directions

6.2.1 Identified Knowledge Gaps

Significant gaps remain in the platform work governance evidence base:

1. **Implementation Research:** Limited research examines actual regulatory implementation, compliance rates, enforcement effectiveness, and real-world impacts of policy interventions (Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Diakonidze et al., 2023).
2. **Longitudinal Analysis:** Most studies provide cross-sectional snapshots rather than longitudinal analysis tracking worker outcomes, organizing efforts, or regulatory evolution (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Weidenstedt et al., 2025).
3. **Emerging Economies and Global South:** Substantial research concentration in developed economies leaves insufficient evidence regarding platform work governance in emerging economies with different

institutional contexts (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Alshebami et al., 2026).

4. **Platform Diversity:** While Uber dominates scholarly attention, other platform models (crowdwork, professional freelancing, domestic work platforms, care services) receive less research focus despite significant worker populations (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019; Baitenizov et al., 2025).

5. **Intersectional Analysis:** Insufficient attention to how platform work precarity intersects with gender, migration status, race, disability, and other social positioning dimensions (Müller, 2021; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Banerjee et al., 2025).

6. **Long-term Worker Outcomes:** Limited research on sustained health outcomes, income trajectories, and life course implications of extended platform work (Duggan, Shevchuk, & Strebkov, 2019; Kougiannou et al., 2025).

7. **Technological Change and Automation:** Emerging research on artificial intelligence and automation impacts on platform work remains limited despite rapid technological change (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020; Pepple et al., 2026).

6.2.2 Future Research Directions

Priority directions for future platform work governance research:

1. **Longitudinal Implementation Studies:** Research tracking regulatory implementation in jurisdictions adopting employment-based or intermediate status frameworks, measuring actual worker and platform outcomes (Lin et al., 2026; Parwez et al., 2025).

2. **Emerging Economy Comparative Research:** Systematic comparative analysis of platform work governance challenges and solutions across emerging economies, examining how institutional differences shape regulatory approaches (Wang et al., 2025; Malhotra et al., 2025).

3. **Worker Agency and Voice Research:** Studies documenting platform worker organizing strategies, collective action effectiveness, worker perspectives on governance solutions (Masikane et al., 2025; Uysal et al., 2024).

4. **Technological Impact Assessment:** Research examining algorithmic management impacts on worker well-being, health outcomes, skill development, and prospects for worker technological literacy (Chen et al., 2025; Pepple et al., 2026).

5. **Interdisciplinary Integration:** Enhanced collaboration between labor relations scholars, legal scholars, technologists, and economists (Navajas-Romero et al., 2026; Behrami et al., 2025).

6. **Policy Experimentation and Evaluation:** Prospective involvement of researchers in evaluating emerging policy experiments, sectoral initiatives, and multi-stakeholder governance arrangements (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Abbas et al., 2026).

7.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge and Policy

6.3.1 Scholarly Contribution

This systematic literature review contributes to platform work governance scholarship through:

1. **Comprehensive Synthesis:** First systematic review synthesizing 1,952 publications, providing holistic overview of research landscape across thematic domains, time periods, and geographic contexts (Baitenizov et al., 2025).

2. **Thematic Clarification:** Clear delineation of six interconnected thematic domains, improving conceptual clarity within fragmented literature (Cardon et al., 2026).

3. **Bibliometric Evidence:** Detailed bibliometric analysis documenting publication trends, citation patterns, geographic distribution, and disciplinary contributions (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017).

4. **Research Agenda Setting:** Identification of specific knowledge gaps and priority future research directions, supporting research funding agencies and researchers (Abbas et al., 2026; Kougiannou et al., 2025).

5. **Methodological Guidance:** Documentation of diverse methodological approaches employed in platform work research (Giustini et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2025).

6.3.2 Policy Contribution

The review contributes to evidence-based platform work governance policy through:

1. **Comparative Policy Analysis:** Comprehensive documentation of regulatory approaches across jurisdictions, providing policymakers with evidence on different governance models (Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Diakonidze et al., 2023).

2. **Worker Protection Evidence:** Synthesis of research documenting platform worker vulnerabilities and social protection gaps, supporting policy arguments for comprehensive worker protection frameworks (Parwez et al., 2025; Alshebami et al., 2026).
3. **Implementation Recommendations:** Synthesis of implementation research providing evidence-based recommendations for policy design, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional arrangements (Lin et al., 2025; Zuo et al., 2025).
4. **Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** Review structure highlighting contributions from diverse research and advocacy communities, supporting multi-stakeholder governance dialogue (Masikane et al., 2025; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021).
5. **Emerging Economy Context:** Explicit attention to platform work governance challenges in Global South jurisdictions, supporting context-sensitive policy development (Wang et al., 2025; Rani & Furrer, 2021).

6.4 Limitations of the Review

The systematic review acknowledges several limitations:

1. **English Language Limitation:** Restriction to English-language publications limits inclusion of scholarship from non-Anglophone research communities (Tricco et al., 2018).
2. **Database Coverage Limitations:** Reliance on Scopus and Web of Science may omit important research from non-indexed venues (Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010).
3. **Time Period Framing:** Including pre-digital era publications on contingent work, while providing historical context, stretches scope and potentially conflates distinct phenomena.
4. **Thematic Clustering Judgments:** Thematic domain assignment reflects researcher judgments; alternative theoretical frameworks might yield different clustering (Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019).
5. **Policy Evidence Limitations:** The review documents policy approaches but provides limited evidence on implementation and effectiveness (Stewart & Stanford, 2017).
6. **Methodological Diversity:** The wide range of methodological approaches creates challenges for standardized quality assessment (Rahman, 2021).

7. Recommendations and Strategic Implications

7.1 Recommendations for Policymakers

Based on research synthesis, the review offers several recommendations:

1. **Establish Clear Worker Classification Framework:** Develop explicit legislative frameworks clarifying platform worker classification status, specifying which platform work arrangements trigger employee status. Evidence suggests ambiguity creates litigation, regulatory uncertainty, and compliance challenges (Tham, 2016; Giustini et al., 2024).
2. **Implement Comprehensive Social Protection Coverage:** Establish mechanisms ensuring platform workers have access to minimum social protections including health insurance, unemployment coverage, disability insurance, and retirement provisions. Portable benefits models and sectoral funds offer potential solutions (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Zuo et al., 2025).
3. **Strengthen Algorithmic Transparency and Accountability:** Require platforms to disclose algorithmic management practices, provide workers with algorithmic decision explanations, and establish grievance mechanisms. Evidence documents worker concerns regarding algorithmic opacity (Zuboff, 2019; Pepple et al., 2026).
4. **Support Collective Worker Organization:** Establish legal frameworks facilitating platform worker collective organizing, collective bargaining, and union representation. Evidence suggests platforms maintain technological and structural barriers to unionization (Benassi & Vallas, 2020; Masikane et al., 2025).
5. **Adopt Multi-Stakeholder Governance Approaches:** Establish forums bringing together government, platforms, workers, and civil society organizations to develop coordinated governance approaches. Evidence indicates multi-stakeholder dialogue supports legitimate and sustainable policy development (Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021; Abbas et al., 2026).
6. **Prioritize Implementation and Enforcement:** Ensure adequate government capacity and resources for effective regulatory implementation. Evidence suggests regulatory development outpaces implementation capacity, limiting policy effectiveness (Diakonidze et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2025).
7. **Support Differentiated Approaches by Sector and Context:** Recognize sectoral variations in platform work characteristics and adapt governance approaches accordingly. Food delivery work presents different

challenges than crowdwork; emerging economy contexts require different solutions than developed economies (Uysal et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2025).

7.2 Recommendations for Researchers

The review suggests several research priorities:

1. **Conduct Implementation Research:** Move beyond policy documentation to systematic research on actual policy implementation, compliance rates, enforcement effectiveness, and real-world worker outcomes (Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Parwez et al., 2025).
2. **Strengthen Longitudinal Research Designs:** Employ longitudinal methodologies tracking worker outcomes, organizing efforts, and platform evolution over time (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Kougianou et al., 2025).
3. **Expand Geographic Scope:** Conduct comparative research across diverse geographic contexts, particularly prioritizing emerging economies and Global South jurisdictions (Rani & Furrer, 2021; Alshebami et al., 2026).
4. **Develop Intersectional Approaches:** Examine how platform work precarity intersects with gender, migration, race, disability, and other social dimensions (Müller, 2021; Banerjee et al., 2025).
5. **Enhance Methodological Rigor:** Apply rigorous quasi-experimental and experimental methodologies where possible to establish causal relationships between policy interventions and worker outcomes (Wang et al., 2025; Giustini et al., 2024).
6. **Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Collaborate across disciplinary boundaries (labor relations, economics, law, technology) to develop integrated understanding (Behrami et al., 2025; Pepple et al., 2026).
7. **Strengthen Research-Policy Linkages:** Engage directly with policymakers and worker organizations in research design, implementation, and dissemination (Abbas et al., 2026; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021).

7.3 Strategic Implications for International Organizations

The review offers strategic implications for international organizations:

1. **Develop Platform Work Guidance:** Build on existing ILO frameworks to develop specific guidance for platform work governance adapted to diverse institutional contexts (ILO, 2021).
2. **Support Capacity Building:** Provide technical assistance to emerging economy governments developing platform work governance capacity (Rani & Furrer, 2021).
3. **Coordinate International Standards:** Facilitate international dialogue on minimum standards for platform worker protection (Ferreiro & Gálvez, 2020).
4. **Support Worker Organization:** Provide resources supporting international coordination among unions and worker organizations (ILO, 2021; Masikane et al., 2025).
5. **Monitor Policy Implementation:** Establish mechanisms monitoring implementation and effectiveness of platform work governance policies (OECD, 2019; Pulignano & Dobrusin, 2020).

8. Conclusion

This systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis synthesized evidence from 1,952 publications addressing platform work governance and regulatory frameworks (1973-2026) across 15 primary publication countries. The review identified six interconnected thematic domains characterized by expanding research output, increasing citation impact, and growing policy salience.

Platform work governance emerges as a mature research domain with established scholarship across multiple disciplines (labor relations 27.8%, economics 23.4%, management 16.0%) and diverse methodological approaches (qualitative 38%, quantitative 34%, mixed methods 12%, conceptual 16%). The field demonstrates geographic concentration in developed Anglophone and Western European economies, with emerging representation from China, India, and other emerging economies (Alshebami et al., 2026; Rani & Furrer, 2021).

Key research contributions include: (1) theoretical and conceptual foundations characterizing platform work as distinctive contingent employment form marked by algorithmic management and precarity (Pepple et al., 2026; Navajas-Romero et al., 2026); (2) comparative analysis of diverse regulatory models ranging from permissive flexibility to employment-based protection frameworks (Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Kullmann, 2021); (3) documentation of platform worker vulnerabilities and social protection gaps (Zuo et al., 2025; Banerjee et al., 2025); (4) analysis of collective organizing efforts and labor movement adaptation (Masikane

et al., 2025; Benassi & Vallas, 2020); and (5) emerging research on pandemic impacts and technological change (Parwez et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025).

Significant knowledge gaps persist, particularly regarding policy implementation research (Diakonidze et al., 2023), longitudinal worker outcome analysis (Weidenstedt et al., 2025), emerging economy governance (Wang et al., 2025), intersectional precarity analysis (Müller, 2021; Rani, Furrer, Galperin, & Silberman, 2021), and technological change impacts (Pepple et al., 2026; Baitenizov et al., 2025). Future research should prioritize longitudinal implementation studies, emerging economy comparative analysis, and enhanced research-policy engagement (Kougiannou et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2025).

The evidence synthesis supports key policy conclusions: platform workers require explicit classification frameworks (Giustini et al., 2024; Atkinson & Dhorajiwala, 2022), comprehensive social protection coverage (Alshebami et al., 2026), algorithmic transparency mechanisms (Pepple et al., 2026), legal support for collective organization (Masikane et al., 2025), and multi-stakeholder governance approaches. Differentiated approaches adapted to sectoral and contextual variations recognize that one-size-fits-all regulation cannot address diverse platform work contexts (Uysal et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2025).

Platform work governance represents one of the defining labor policy challenges of the contemporary era, requiring continued scholarly attention, evidence-based policy development, and multi-stakeholder engagement. This systematic literature review contributes to informed policy development and research priority-setting by synthesizing existing evidence while identifying critical knowledge gaps requiring future investigation (Abbas et al., 2026; Baitenizov et al., 2025; Cardon et al., 2026).

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