

Dirassat & Abhath
The Arabic Journal of Human
and Social Sciences



مجلة دراسات وأبحاث
المجلة العربية في العلوم الإنسانية
والاجتماعية

EISSN: 2253-0363
ISSN : 1112-9751

Professional Challenges amid Platform Economy

الإشكالية المهنية في ظل اقتصاد المنصات

Dr. Zahia Chabounia

Senior Lecturer “B”, University of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia - Jijel, Faculty of Human and
Social Sciences, Department of Sociology,

zahia.chabounia@univ-jijel.dz

د. زهية شابونية

أستاذة محاضر قسم ب-، جامعة محمد الصديق ابن يحيى - جيجل، كلية العلوم الانسانية والاجتماعية،

قسم علم اجتماع،

zahia.chabounia@univ-jijel.d

تاريخ النشر: 2026/10/15

تاريخ القبول: 2026/09/18

تاريخ الاستلام: 2026/06/25

Abstract:

The current study is intended to analyze the platform economy as a new professional style and to examine the importance of algorithms as one of the main actors of digital platforms. Furthermore, this study considers the professional problems arising from the new economic style under discussion, paying special attention to the digital professional precarity of workers involved in the platform economy.

It is concluded that the digital platforms create the tripartite employment relation wherein algorithms operate as the main agent influencing the professional life of workers. While these platforms have helped create many employment possibilities, there is an emergence of digital precarity as a result of algorithmic bias and lack of job security

Keywords: Platform Economy; Digital Platforms; Algorithms; Automation; Digital Precarity.

المخلص:

تهدف دراستنا البحثية للتعرف على اقتصاد المنصات كنمط مهني جديد، والتعرف على الخوارزميات كفاعل رئيسي في هذه المنصات، كما سنتناول الإشكالية المهنية في ظل هذا النمط من الاقتصاد، مشيرين إلى الهشاشة المهنية الرقمية التي يتصف بها العاملون في ظل اقتصاد المنصات.

قد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن المنصات الرقمية أفرزت علاقة عمل ثلاثية الأبعاد تقوم فيها الخوارزميات بدور المحرك الأساسي في تحديد المصير المهني للعاملين، ورغم مساهمتها في توفير فرص مهنية واسعة بيد أنها تتصف بهشاشة رقمية متصاعدة تتجلى في التحيز الخوارزمي وغياب الاستقرار الوظيفي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اقتصاد المنصات، المنصات الرقمية، الخوارزميات، الأتمتة، الهشاشة الرقمية.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the last few decades, the global society has witnessed a fast-paced digital revolution, which is characterized by the quick advancement of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation. These phenomena had a deep impact on various aspects of people's lives and changed drastically not only their personal but also professional lives due to the digital revolution and growth of the platform economy. It is crucial to note that the growth of the platform economy is much larger than mere improvement of the technological processes because it represents an entirely new level of transformation and restructuring of occupations and employment forms. New production, operation, and communicational processes appeared due to this transformation leading to a new type of interaction between employees and customers. In addition, this process resulted in the appearance of a new type of workers known as independent workers or freelancers, thereby reshaping the professional aspect and generating new dynamics in work organization and organizational communication. In the light of this evolving economic type, digital labour platforms have emerged as one of the most important outputs of the digital revolution and one of the most obvious

expressions of the digitalization of the professional field. These digital labour platforms are spaces which have redefined professional interaction, established new practices of organizing work, and changed working environments. In doing so, they have changed the nature of employment management from human to algorithmic, where algorithms govern the way information is being filtered, ranked, and made available, and visibility and recognition of such labour become possible. As mediators between workers and customers, digital platforms have created an employment relationship that is characterized by tripartism and is governed by algorithmic power. The novel arrangement has brought about professional complexities ranging from innovations and openness to digital labour precarity.

Taking into account all the above factors, the main research question that will be considered in this study is:

How significant has been the impact of the platform economy on the transformation of the professional conditions of the employees, considering both opportunities for empowering and potential for digital precarity?

Subsidiary questions of the main research question include:

- What is the platform economy?
- What are algorithms?
- Why are algorithms important and what is their impact on labour relations in the platform economy?
- What professional difficulties may arise when working within the economic model in question?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To consider the platform economy as a new model of employment and professional activities.
- To explore the importance of algorithms as a crucial social actor in the platform economy.
- To diagnose digital labour precarity by identifying its principal indicators amid platform economy.

Methodology of the Study

The methodology of this study is descriptive-analytical since it is the best methodological tool that suits the character of this theoretical research. The subject of the study is a modern socio-professional phenomenon that needs to be examined through description in terms of its features and operation. The next step will be the analysis of the impact of algorithms on the professional paths of employees. The last step will be identification and analysis of the different aspects of the precarity of digital labour in the platform economy.

2. The Platform Economy, the New Shape of Occupations

The field of professional activity has rapidly transformed due to digitalization within the past two decades, which resulted in the emergence of new occupations replacing traditional types of job via digital platforms such as Amazon, Uber, Yassir, and Glovo. In the wake of the digital technological revolution, a phenomenon called the platform economy was established in the 1990s; it is also referred to using several different terms, namely, the collaborative economy, the peer economy, the gig economy, and the on-demand economy. The platform economy can be defined as “electronic services acting as intermediaries, offering their customers goods, services, or content, generated, delivered, or sold by contributors who may be either professionals or private citizens” (Souki & Asmani, 2022, p. 35). It can also be described as “a complex mixture of software, hardware,

processes, and networks” (Zaysman & Kenney, 2016).

Such platforms act as intermediaries for the workers and customers. Their function does not include only being an interface but also organizing content, prioritizing and displaying the information, allowing for communication between the stakeholders, and, in some cases, communicating with workers themselves in order to perform certain services.

It is important to distinguish between location-based labour platforms and online labour platforms. Location-based platforms involve provision of services to the physical location chosen by some individuals, which include delivery of foods, passenger transport or domestic services. On the other hand, online labour platforms allow people to offer remote services such as software design, translation and management of contents. Online labour platforms may also be subdivided into crowdwork platforms, freelancing platforms and competitive programming platforms. Some scholars have considered content creation platforms like YouTube as another sub category of online labour platforms (مؤتمر العمل الدولي، 2025، صفحة 12).

Therefore, platform economy is a new way of doing things and it has revolutionized the work's system. This new form of organization has brought about a new type of workers referred to as platform workers who offer services through digital labour platforms using the Internet irrespective of the type of contracts. Platform workers may be divided into two major categories; core workers, who are employees of the platform and who use the platform as the primary user and independent workers, who use the platform as an intermediary to connect them with clients to do platform-based tasks (بورغداد، 2025، صفحة 158).

These digital freelancing platforms have many advantages, such as reducing the amount of time, efforts, and money necessary for developing one's independent online store with the use of ready-made platforms where only information about oneself and one's professional activities should be entered to develop a quality portfolio; they allow completing payment transactions using different ways; they have an opportunity to work with extensive customers' base, do marketing activities on behalf of service providers, attract clients from their network and build trust between people. They act as a mediator and thereby assure client rights and transactions'

completion with confidence. Finally, commissions and fees from such platforms are relatively cheap comparing to the services rendered (بن جردال، 2019، صفحة 29).

Being new versions of old professions, economic platforms managed to occupy a good place due to many advantages provided by their technological nature. These advantages correspond to the features of modern society, which become more and more diverse, individualized and fastened. The most important advantages can be mentioned as follows:

- **Better Productive Efficiency:** By depending on AI and automation, the digital platforms will be able to automate tasks, thus saving time and energy in the process.
- **Marketing Advantages:** The platforms serve as intermediaries between service providers and the clients, hence allowing the providers to reach a significant number of clients without necessarily doing much marketing of their own.
- **Better Accessibility:** The digital platforms have made it possible for the services to be provided anytime and anywhere because of the ability of the platforms to harness many workers that work on demand.

3. The Role of Algorithms as Social Actors in the Platform Economy

The word "algorithm" comes from the name of the Persian mathematician Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi who was alive in the ninth century. For millennia, the word has been used to describe a series of steps or instructions designed to solve a particular problem or accomplish an intended task (Tobsharani & Kerner, 2024).

The field of mathematics and computer science is where algorithms came from. The English word "algorithm" denotes a finite sequence of well-defined instructions which aims at solving a particular type of problem or performing a computation and which can be carried out by a computer (مركز البحوث والدراسات، متعدد الاختصاصات).

An algorithm can be described as an automated program made up of instructions which are aimed at accomplishing particular tasks. Through these instructions, tasks are then filtered, assigned, and directed. Algorithms are a key element in platforms that need efficiency in matching supply and demand. Algorithms can sense a spike in demand and direct the service providers to the right time and place to provide

their services, thus saving transaction costs by avoiding any resource idleness. They also enable platforms to change the prices using dynamic pricing systems. In addition, algorithms help detect behavioural patterns and customer profiles in order to give personalized solutions to their needs (مؤتمر العمل الدولي، 2025، صفحة 12).

Algorithms have therefore become the main agents in the platform economy. As digital platforms serve as an intermediary between workers and consumers, professional relations have changed from direct relations between managers and employees to those regulated by algorithmic systems that workers do not fully understand or can negotiate with.

Although algorithms are designed by humans, they tend to transform into the tools of governance of humans. Algorithms decide whom to employ and whom to deprive of employment opportunities. They control the whole platform economy almost without giving workers any chance to contest such decisions or even understand why they were made. As a result, digital platforms turn from places where workers sought to find professional freedom and escape from the subjectivism of managers to environments where professional relations are based on what can be called work without employment, authority without a manager, and punishment without a right to appeal. It is mostly due to what is called algorithmic bias.

In the platform economy, the manager does not have any concrete identity as an individual who operates from his or her office where employees can approach for making any legal claims or seeking clarifications about the decisions impacting their jobs. Rather, the process of managing occurs with the help of algorithms which cannot be readily questioned. It is not because the algorithms are in themselves faulty but the way in which the algorithms have been used in digital platforms that causes new forms of professional discrimination. The programmers responsible for developing the algorithms might unintentionally or purposefully reflect the existing labour market inequities into the instructions programmed into the algorithms. This problem is especially pertinent for Arab countries which have structural issues like the digital divide, unequal education, and legislative gaps.

For instance, if the algorithms are programmed under the belief that men tend to be better drivers compared to women, then the

algorithm will give preference to the male workers while assigning the jobs.

In other words, algorithms can be considered the main social actors in the platform economy. In spite of their automation and data-driven nature, they are not neutral and do not exclude biases and subjective decisions that were common for managers working in traditional organizations. They have produced a new kind of discrimination called algorithmic bias. Algorithms can be regarded as invisible means of power and communication that perpetuate inequality in more sophisticated ways and remain largely resistant to critical evaluation.

Bias can be explained as an attitude or predisposition towards certain groups that has no justification or evidence. It involves any type of preference whether it is justified or unjustified. It is rather difficult to detect and overcome biases since different cultural perceptions of bias depend on users' experiences and cultural, social, historical, political, legal, and ethical factors. In this way, bias can be considered as a systemic error that impacts human behaviour and judgment of people depending on their membership in groups of certain attributes, including gender and age (بعلاش و سحنون، 2024، صفحة 706).

In effect, in the platform economy, the authoritarian type of manager who makes decisions based on personal judgments has been substituted by the algorithmic manager, who creates a non-participatory communicative environment. Decisions are made automatically, making the scope for discussion and negotiation rather narrow. Workers cease to be active participants in the process of organizational communication and become data points in the silent network of algorithms. Workers find themselves under constant surveillance and control. In such circumstances, workers often find themselves unaware of the times when they might be barred from certain opportunities.

4. Digital Labor Precarity

While the platform economy is a new type of economic structure that came about as a natural consequence of technological, informational, and digital development along with the structural changes that many societies around the globe have experienced, it also provided great employment possibilities to unemployed people and those who require additional sources of income. However, several studies dedicated to digital labour platforms have noted several weaknesses of this form of economic activity. In

particular, in their report, the European Parliament pointed out several psychosocial risks related to the philosophy of on-demand services and the evaluation systems in place at digital labour platforms. These risks include job insecurity, which is the absence of clarity about one's future prospects of finding a job, demands of clients, and expected payment; permanent pressure on being friendly, effective, and helpful since any negative rating by the customer, even an unfounded one, can bring financial losses and even expulsion from the platform; and permanent readiness for work because any delay will mean that another employee receives the task. As such, against the belief held, shifting from a subordinate employer-employee relation to one that is commercial does not necessarily mean that the condition of employees will be (Souki & Asmani, 2022, p. 15).

The platform economy has thus helped to bring about a situation of precarity in digital labour, along with a number of risks associated with the peculiarities of working relations in an online and distant environment. In particular, such working relations include opaqueness in performance evaluation due to the use of algorithms, wage theft caused by rejecting the completion of tasks, unilateral alteration of terms and conditions of work and payment (including cancellation of fees and discounts), changes in the fee structure of platforms, increased control of workers' actions, and arbitrary dismissal or "deactivation" due to lockouts on the platform (Lettieri et al., 2019).

It can thus be said that the platform economy has a number of disadvantages caused by automation and algorithmic governance of the work process. Such disadvantages include:

4.1. Algorithmic Bias

Algorithmic bias is among the biggest factors adversely impacting workers using digital platforms. The lower the degree of algorithmic bias in any given platform, the lower the chances of professional exclusion of the worker. Output from algorithms is normally interpreted and applied by people who make mistakes easily. This implies that there might be human biases in the data set used and in the model itself without the practitioners knowing about it. Some of the biases that can be observed include decisional bias, belief bias, and interpretation bias. From a report issued by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, this type of bias is among the most common where institutions,

societies, and the system generally become the main causes of biases in artificial intelligence systems. This entails the influence of sociocultural, economic, political, legal, and ethical environments on AI (بعلاش و سحنون، 2024، صفحة 709).

The absence of diversity among development teams may play a crucial role in creating digital bias within the algorithmic system. The lack of diversity in terms of the cultural and social background of development team members and the dominance of technical programmers without including specialists from the humanities and social sciences may affect the kind of data which will be employed in the development of algorithms. Ultimately, this may lead to the creation of algorithmic bias since developers are concerned only about the financial benefits of the platform but not about cultural and social issues.

4.2. Continuous Performance Pressure

One of the main reasons why people choose to work in digital platforms is the fact that such platforms provide flexibility and become an additional source of income. However, despite the fact that people are sure that they can decide how and where they want to work, in reality, most of them are forced to adjust their schedule according to the preferences of consumers.

In addition, employees are under the system of platform governance that involves algorithmic management, where performance is constantly monitored, desired behavior by customers is promoted, and punishment for not adhering to those norms is enforced. Flexibility, which attracts employees, and control, which satisfies both platforms and customers, is perfectly illustrated by Wallace and Schor's (2020) concept of platforms being "permissive dictators" (Healy & Pekarek, 2024, p. 268).

In terms of algorithmic dependency, workers become involved in performing activities on a constant on-demand basis. The demands dictate what tasks have to be done and when they need to be accomplished. Otherwise, failure to meet these demands could put workers at the risk of being excluded from their profession as a result of filters used in the algorithms of platforms, whereby evaluation of workers takes place according to several factors, including the speed of service delivery and continuous availability.

4.3. Market Monopoly

Market monopoly remains one of the major drawbacks of the platform economy. Dominant platforms in a specific sector have enormous power to control the mechanism of pricing and conditions under which services should be provided. Such power is mainly based on growing value associated with growing number of users, commonly called the network effect. Apart from providing quality products and competitive prices, many major digital companies like Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google may establish market dominance due to their special market position. Such dominant platforms may engage in competition based on merit or use exclusionary measures to gain or maintain dominance (Herbert, 2021, p. 1952).

This issue becomes especially evident in relation to Amazon, which monopolizes a significant amount of global e-commerce activity. Not only does Amazon serve as an online marketplace for independent retailers, but it also directly sells its goods and, hence, can place certain restrictions on those who are selling via this platform. Moreover, the algorithmic regulation that Amazon exercises enables it to rank searches, control the visibility of various products, and dictate pricing strategies. Thus, the company may favour its products and those of certain partners over competing goods. In this regard, the platform economy negatively impacts not only independent retailers but also customers, as the visibility on the platform is often the only way for a retailer to make sales.

4.4. Job Insecurity

In the platform economy, freelancers and platform workers are usually considered to be independent contractors and, thus, individually liable for their successes and failures. This employment practice leads to high job insecurity of the workers, who do not enjoy any of the traditional labour regulations, including such benefits as health care, pensions, paid vacation, etc.

One major rationale for platforms to treat workers as independent contractors is to get rid of all obligations involved in employer-employee relationship including minimum wages, payment of overtime, social security payments and provision of safe working environments. As such, the cost of work is to be met completely by the platform workers including the cost of work equipment, training and making social security payments (Souki & Asmani, 2022, p. 42).

Another problem with platform workers relates to fair competition due to the secrecy

involved in algorithms used in these platforms and the workers can be deactivated without knowing the reasoning behind it.

An international report investigating into the platform business model and strategy on labour based on surveys carried out by International Labor Organization among roughly 12,000 workers in 100 countries showed large discrepancies in coverage of health insurance, occupational injury insurance, unemployment insurance, disability payments, old age pension and retirement. This report made use of the information gathered from workers using freelance platforms, outcome-based platforms, competitive programming platforms, micro-tasking platforms, ride hailing/delivery services. It was made up of interviews conducted from 70 firms, 16 platform firms and 14 platform worker organizations worldwide. However, based on these findings, access to social security is limited considerably. There are major occupational health and safety risks involved in working in app-based transportation and delivery platforms, especially for women. Moreover, the lack of sufficient social security coverage was a problem in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic for many platform workers, especially those working in location-based platform work (منظمة العمل الدولية، 2021، صفحة 11).

4.5. Absence of Trade Union Organization

In addition to being a problem in terms of job security, the employment status of platform workers as independent contractors also prevents them from organizing themselves collectively. This strategy does not allow for any real interactions between workers that can lead to Labour Solidarity. Further, the employment status of platform workers as independent contractors does not enable them to become members of trade unions and engage in collective bargaining procedures. Since platform workers do not hold the status of an employee, they are usually denied protection in terms of the rights of collective representation and bargaining. Also, platform work is usually associated with high turnover and short-term engagement of workers. They tend not to stay long on platforms, which makes it hard to form long-term relationships needed for organizing activities. The very notion of the workplace has changed radically in the age of information technologies. There is a need for reconsideration of the existing models of negotiation of working conditions and wages in a world where algorithmic systems take control.

Therefore, platform workers have the right to join or found trade unions that would represent them and protect their collective rights. This right is guaranteed by Article 2 of Convention No. 87 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning freedom of association and workers' right to collective organization (2019، بن جردال).

5. CONCLUSION

As the platform economy has appeared as the newest economic method that has been created as the result of the digital revolution that changed all fields of the modern life, including the field of occupations and jobs, it has brought about significant changes to the workplace, work processes, job communication, and work relationships. In this regard, the digital platforms have changed the traditional two-sided employment relationship and turned it into the three-sided one, where the platform functions as the intermediary managing the interaction between the workers and consumers with the help of algorithmic management.

These benefits and their importance for our age cannot be overlooked. They depend on the nature of the modern society, which is characterized by speed, specialization, flexibility, and openness. Although there is no doubt that the appearance of digital platforms created additional opportunities for young people to obtain work and other ways of earning money, at the same time they often became the source of additional vulnerability and silencing for those young people who were excluded from society in a different way. Unless these platforms are controlled in an appropriate way with respect to the ethical, sociological, and legislative aspects relevant to their social and cultural context, the danger of algorithmic governance will increase.

In other words, the task of scientists and researchers today is not in the refusal from digitalization, but in following this process with appropriate social criticism and regulation to restore the central role of humans in decision making. Otherwise, algorithms, which originally were tools used by humans for something, will turn into tools to control humans themselves with the help of artificial intelligence.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Strengthen social, ethical, and legislative oversight** of digital technologies to ensure that they function as instruments of empowerment rather than mechanisms of exclusion.

- ✓ **Enhance the legal protection of platform workers** through the development of comprehensive regulatory frameworks governing labor relations on digital platforms.
- ✓ **Promote the involvement of social science experts** in the design, evaluation, and monitoring of algorithmic systems to ensure greater social responsibility and fairness.
- ✓ **Require algorithmic transparency** as a fundamental condition for the operation of digital platforms in order to promote fairness, accountability, and equity in employment practices.
- ✓ **Support digital skills training and capacity-building programs** for vulnerable groups, particularly young people, women, and residents of underserved or remote regions.
- ✓ **Encourage sociological research on digital labour** by promoting empirical studies that examine the impact of algorithms on work, employment relations, and social inequality within platform-based economies.

6. Bibliography List :

- Lettieri , N., Guarino, A., Malandrino, D., & Zaccagnino, R. (2019, July 23). Platform Economy and Techno-Regulation-Experimenting with Reputation and Nudge. *Future Internet*, 11(163).
- Healy, J., & Pekarek, A. (2024, septembre 16). The triangular relationship in platform gig work: consumers, platform beneficence and worker vulnerability. 40(2).
- Herbert, H. (2021). Antitrust and platform monopoly. *Yale Law Journal*, 8(130).
- Souki, H., & Asmani, A. (2022). Le travail dans une économie numérique : vers un nouveau modèle organisationnel. *National Forum NATIONAL: Moderniser les relations de travail à*

la lumière de la transformation numérique : défis et enjeux (p. 35). Université d'Alger - 1 - Ben Youssef Ben Khedda.

- Tobsharani, F., & Kerner, S. M. (2024, 10 16). Types of AI algorithms and how they work. Retrieved from <https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/tip/Types-of-AI-algorithms-and-how-they-work>
- Zaysman, J., & Kenney, M. (2016). The Rise of the Platform Economy. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 32(3), 61-69. Retrieved 08 20, 2025, from <https://issues.org/rise-platform-economy-big-data-work/>
- آمال بن جردال. (30 جوان، 2019). أي وضع اجتماعي لعمال المنصات الرقمية. *حوليات جامعة الجزائر*، 1، 33(2).
- آمال بورغداد. (01 06، 2025). العمل عبر المنصات الرقمية وأثره في الأجور. *دفاتر البحوث العلمية*، 13 (1).
- عصام بعلاش ، و خالد سحنون. (12، 2024). إشكالية التحيز الخوارزمي للذكاء الاصطناعي في الخدمات المالية. *مجلة المنهل الاقتصادي*، 7(2).
- مركز البحوث والدراسات متعدد الاختصاصات. (بلا تاريخ). الخوارزميات تعريفها وأنواعها. تاريخ الاسترداد 08 20، 2025، <https://www.mdrscenter.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-/algorithms>
- منظمة العمل الدولية. (2021). *لمحة عامة عالمية عن العمالة والشؤون الاجتماعية*. دور منصات العمل الرقمية في تحويل عالم العمل. جنيف.
- مؤتمر العمل الدولي. (2025). *تحقيق العمل الاتق في اقتصاد المنصات*. جنيف: منظمة العمل الدولية.