Worker agency in the gig-economy: The case of food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg, South Africa

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts Sociology at Sol Plaatje, Kimberely. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other University.

DECLARATION

I declare that the attached research report is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion.

Signed: 

Date: _____

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First, I want to acknowledge and give praise, glory, and honour to the almighty God for His goodness and unmerited favour towards me throughout the duration of the research endeavour. Truly, all glory and honour belong to you Lord and this piece of work is testimony that “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Prayer has been my continuous source of strength; thus, I would like to thank my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for being my constant source of strength.

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Dedication

To my grandmother who went to be with the Lord on 28 November 2022.

Your memory lives on – Annah Moroane (1928 – 2022).

Abbreviations and Acronyms

4IR – Fourth Industrial Revolution

App- Application Programme

CBD- Central Business District

COVID-19- Coronavirus disease

CV- Curriculum Vitae

GPS- Global Positioning System

HR- Human Resource

ID- Identity document

LPT- Labour Process Theory

Mr D- Mr Delivery[1]

SREC- Sol Plaatje University Senate Research Ethics Committee

UK- United Kingdom

[1] Mr Delivery is a food delivery company that was acquired by Takealot a logistics company in 2014. Both brand names are currently in use. Mr D usually refers to the food delivery service whilst Takealot refers more broadly to logistics business: See: https://www.takealot.com/about/takealot-delivery-team#:~:text=Takealot%20acquired%20a%20controlling%20stake,be%20a%20very%20successful%20partnership.

Abstract

The rise of the platform-based gig-economy globally has been linked to the disruption in the labour process and worker agency. We have seen the proliferation of digital platforms and gig-work in recent years following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Available studies pay little attention to workers as independent agents providing services to both global and local capital as well as in small urban settings which may present a unique geography either constraining or enabling worker agency. This study explores ways in worker agency in the gig economy shapes the new work structure represented by gig work. This study explores ways in which food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work drawing from Rustenburg in the Northwest Province of South Africa. The study is based on a qualitative research design drawing from constructivist worldview to understand the underlying dynamics of control, power, and resistance in the food delivery gig work. The study deploys the Labour Process Theory (LPT) to understand this phenomenon. I argue that food delivery gig work represents a fundamental disruption and reorganisation of the labour process, beyond the rearrangement of tasks between human and algorithms. It disrupts the labour process and the relationship between labour and capital creating new forms of worker identity and subjectivity. The study argues that food delivery gig workers deploy agency to exercise control over the labour process through selective participation. Workers possess tacit knowledge about the geography and the rhythm of the city which enables them to understand and decide which place, hours, and days of the week ideal for work to secure better returns and avoid overworking. This study further proposes that food delivery gig workers do not willingly surrender to the dictates of the platforms; they are assertive and able to collectively organise themselves and challenge the platform through various means such as appropriating the use of social media to advance their interests. I argue that food delivery gig workers appropriate social media into a space where they can forge communities to navigate some of the problems, they face at work such as alienation and individualisation. Food delivery gig workers use social media space such as Facebook, to reclaim their freedom and avoid the gaze and surveillance from the platforms. They appropriate technology and forge common identity and subjectivity which allows them to generate space for collective resistance. I further argue that food delivery gig workers deploy agency by drawing from personal networks to share operational and logistical information which enhances social relations of production. Furthermore, as workers they can deal with structural factors beyond the workplace drawing from social networks as anchors of support. For example, they appropriate social media and use it as a space to challenge the logic and dehumanisation associated with algorithm management. However, the ways in which the food delivery gig workers exercise agency is not new but adapted from past practices and other work experiences. Moreover, it is not just about workers exercising control over their work but in many ways may also advances the interest of capital by enhancing productivity. Thus, the deployment of worker agency in this case is paradoxical as it on one hand benefits the workers by enhancing how they exercise control on how they do their work while on the other hand, it may also enhance productivity. The study suggests new ways of understanding food delivery gig work labour process and that workers capacity to exercise agency is critical in understanding the underlying dynamics and labour process.

Key Words: Worker agency, gig work, social media, digital technology, labour process, subjectivity, surveillance, algorithm.

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) characterised by digital technological advancement and the increasing use of digital platforms has changed how we understand work organisation considerably since workers are no longer homogeneous but rather segmented and fragmented into marginal groups (Rosenblat, 2019). Digital platforms are the newest technological wave reshaping and reconfiguring the economic and labour landscape (Liang., Aroles., & Brandl, 2022). These digital platforms comprehend a broad range of services that rely on an ever-increasing labour pool to respond to on-demand requests (Liang et al., 2022). Digital technological innovation is propelling the rise of new forms of work that is distinct from the traditional forms of employment through what is referred to as the gig economy. This refers to an economic system where digital platforms connects workers and consumers for the completion of a piece of work in exchange for a fee (Sherman, et al., 2020).

In the gig economy people use platform apps to sell their labour power (Taylor et al., 2017) to irregular work which is based on customer demand. Gig work is characterised by algorithms which refers to a computational tool which makes decisions based on predetermined rules and statistical models which develop perpetually through an iterative process of learning by going (Sherman, et al., 2020). This changes how we understand work and control over the labour process and even how duties are executed in the context of the so called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) era. One recent development in gig work has been a rise in the use of digital technology in food delivery. We have in recent years witnessed the proliferation of app-based food delivery services both in the global north and south. This rise has in recent years been propelled by the COVID-19 lockdowns which affected most of the countries globally. The

institution of lockdowns in many countries has pushed many workers to work remotely from home (Mhlanga and Moloi, 2020). This together with measures to avoid the spread of the corona virus has propelled a rise in digital work in many parts of the world including in the South African context.

Food delivery app work presents complex work arrangements and labour processes that subvert the traditional employment relations and work model. The 'gig-economy' is seen by Hoosen (2021) as a phenomenon of the digital age, which offers services to the public in a restructured, reorganised and digitally mediated way. As a result of the Forth industrial revolution (4IR), the platform economy places workers at the centre while their roles and relationship are redefined. Food delivery platforms function as digital companies that proclaim that they do not offer delivery services but only operate as "neutral" market intermediaries connecting "independent contractors" to individual "gigs" through their digital infrastructure (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Thus, the way work is organised in this context is rapidly being transformed by these digital labour platforms.

This study seeks to investigate the labour process in the gig economy to understand how gig workers[2] exercise agency and freedom in how they conduct their work considering the way this form of work is organised drawing from the subjective experiences of food delivery gig workers in a small South African town.

1.1 Study Background

This study examines the platform-based food delivery sector in a small urban settlement in South Africa. Digital platforms and gig-work have been accelerating in recent years gaining more currency following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Platform-based food

[2] There is an ongoing global debate on whether food delivery gig workers are workers or subcontractors (See: https://mccabes.com.au/incoming-significant-decision-in-deliveroo-australia-pty-ltd-v-diego-franco-2022-fwcfb-156/). In this report they are identified as workers.

delivery companies organise work differently from the traditional form top-down management and capital-labour relationship (Gandini, 2019) in a sense that they mediate in a single task, activity, or service rather than a job in the traditional sense. Digital platform system connects workers and consumers for the completion of a piece of work in exchange for a fee (Sherman, Duggan, Carbery and McDonnell., 2020). This raises sociological questions on how work in the context of digital platform is organised and the effect it has on worker agency i.e., how the workers exercise control on how they perform their work.

The contradictions between this emerging sphere of work and the social conditions of labour are also intensifying in the current pattern of growth. Due to its digital nature, platform work avoids current rules of employment, corporate taxation, and social protection (Vandaele, 2018) by classifying workers as independent contractors. The regulatory differentiation and the traditional self-employment are presented as unsolved in the gig-economy model (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2017). The argumentative relationship between food delivery workers and the platform forms a part of a long history of contestation between labour and capital within the capitalist system of production (Burawoy, 1985). Control of the labour process; working hours, location, wage, etc. is central to this conflict. The gig-economy has reformed the relationship between capital and labour; thus, the commander of the labour process is not clearly defined or rather obscured. The degree of agency which workers can exercise over their labour, legal relationship and the standard operating procedure is also ambiguous as a result of the technological intervention in the labour process. The question of how food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work is the central focus of this study.

Digital platform facilitates provision of a service mitigated by technology through a device which works as a structure of control which is seen by Hoosen (2021) as constraining worker agency (Hoosen, 2021). The worker is managed and controlled by an apps that allocate tasks and monitor performance. Platform based food delivery companies maintain that its workers

are independent contractors who set their own schedule and make money on their own terms (Mr D food delivery website, 2022). However, these platforms do not have specific requirements and standards rules outlined to workers as to how they should conduct their work. Workers are just presented with the opportunity to start their own business and 'make money' independently while managed and controlled by the digital platform. As part of the food delivery business model, workers under management and control of the digital platform decide the best work location, choice of restaurants to pick orders from and the performance on how to serve their customers and interact with restaurant workers in order to make money based on their operational terms. This brings a significant interest to how we should understand how gig workers' agency shape the new work structure presented by the gig economy.

Worker agency in this study refers to how workers can exercise control in how they conduct their work (Sewell, 1992). Agency can be mixed with the concept of power, as power is also a mechanism that enables and constrains actors' actions. (Webster et al, 2008). Workers have irreducible needs and desires. They are capable of independent thought and action. In other words, they have agency. They are active subjects, not passive objects. Agency may take some form of accommodation and or resistance to existing norms and structures (Sewell, 1992). Furthermore, agency can be understood as how worker's actions are enabled and constrained (Coe & JordhusLier, 2010). Through worker agency, we can understand workers' capacity to resist and transform the commodification of their labour power. This means that workers have some autonomy over the labour process, within certain constraints, they can determine how well, for how long and under what conditions they are willing to work for their specific employers (Castree, Coe, Noel, et al. 2004). My understanding of worker agency and how it relates to gig work as a structure is informed by Sewell (1992) who argues that structures do not determine behaviour, but rather influences it. In order for us to understand worker agency, both structure and agency should be viewed as mutually constitutive.

1.2 Rationale

There have been several studies focusing on the gig-economy in South Africa (Geitung, 2017, Kute, 2017, Chinguno, 2020, Hoosen, 2021). However, most of these studies focus on global capital; for example, emphasising how they replicate their western operations in the South African context especially in the metropoles (Gauteng, Cape Town, and others). This study takes a different focus by paying special attention to the workers as independent agents in a small urban South African settlement who provide service to both local and global capital through various platforms.

Technology plays a significant role in revolutionising the food delivery service. It has also contributed to changes in consumer preferences. Dependency on technology motivates consumers to do almost everything online, including getting cooked meals delivered to their doorsteps (Ali, Khalid, Jadev, and Islam; 2021). While technological innovation has revolutionised the food delivery service it has also created new job opportunities and directly contributed towards easing the problem of unemployment in South Africa (Magwentshu, Rajagopaul, Chui and Singh; 2019). Gig work in South Africa constitute at least 1% of the workforce, and this number has been increasing by 10% annually (Fairwork, 2021). In the online-based food delivery sector, platforms remain in control of the labour process creating conditions for and heavily regulating the rules of what Burawoy (1979) viewed as "work-game".

Gig work presents new forms of organising work and regimes of control and resistance. As platform companies reconfigure the organizational boundaries of businesses and redefine workers' status, the question emerges how these platforms relate to their workers and how the platform-mediated labour process is shaped. A growing body of literature is concerned with the distinctive features of platform labour and the reliance on digital technology in the

composition and surveillance of work (De Stefano, 2016., Tassinari, et al., 2017., Vandaele, 2018., Sherman et al., 2020). Less attention is paid to how platforms control regimes dynamically interact with workers' experiences and coping strategies in the configuration of the platform labour process. At surface value, the gig-economy appears to have reconfigured the relationship between labour and capital in a way that the commander of the labour process is not clearly defined (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) and as if workers have unlimited freedom. In such a context there is no clear cut as to how work is organised, the nature of the employment relation, the value of worker agency and particularly how workers may shape the new work order in the context of the gig-economy.

1.3 Problem statement

Recent work on the gig-economy in South Africa has given considerable attention to the taxi e-hailing platforms such as Uber, Bolt and Taxify (Geitung, 2017, Chinguno, 2020, Hoosen 2021). Geitung (2017) and Chinguno (2020) for example, examined the collective power dynamics among Uber and Bolt drivers and postulated that drivers always find creative ways of exercising agency and resisting capital hegemonic practices. Furthermore, many of the studies on the gig-economy in South Africa view the platform as a structure which limits worker agency (Hoosen, 2021). These studies are important in understanding change of work, new forms of work and reconfiguration of the labour process but leave several gaps which this study aims to fill. This study closes a particular gap in the literature on the gig economy in South Africa by unpacking how workers exercise control in how they conduct their work in line with existing norms and structures. It unpacks how this plays out in a small urban setting which may pose a new geography constraining or enabling worker agency.

Discussions of the gig-economy have mainly revolved around critiquing the employment status of workers who are presented as independent contractors (De Stefano, 2016, Tassinari, et al.,

2017). However, there is an emerging debate on labour agency in the gig-economy by several scholars who did not expect workers in some of the world's economically marginalised regions to have much agency against platforms as structures (Anwar & Graham, 2019). This perspective plays down the fact that gig workers are not just receptive but have agency critical in shaping the new work structures. It is from this point that food delivery gig work presents an opportunity for examining worker agency, its value and manifestation in a South African context. Worker agency here refers to how workers can exercise control in how they conduct their work in line with existing norms and structures (Sewell, 1992). This study contributes and advance scholarship in sociology of work articulating how ordinary workers shape the new structures of capitalism. This brings back to the fore focus on the labour process in a new emerging sector which in recent years has taken a backstage in South Africa's labour studies (Kenny & Webster, 2021). In bringing back the labour process debate to the fore as noted by Kenny and Webster (2021), the study focuses on workers who are on the margins and labelled as precarious and are in a new emerging sector.

1.4 Research Site

The city of Rustenburg was identified and selected as a case study where the study was conducted. It qualifies as a boomtown due to its rapid population and economic growth attributed to the growth in its platinum mining industry (Ntema, 2019). The city has changed greatly post-apartheid because of the surrounding mines which have seen many malls and shopping facilities emerging. Rustenburg is amongst other South African cities which experienced the rise of food delivery gig work particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic spike. Prior to the pandemic, food delivery had a relatively small footprint in the city centre areas but now one can observe their increase in geographic spread even in townships within the city. The trend has made the gig economy more visible, and it can be argued that the

visibility has given gig workers a voice and thus more power over platforms especially in food delivery. (Chesta et al., 2019). Africa accounts for around 4.5% of the global gig economy workers and the rise of this sector in recent years is attributed to the recent COVID -19 pandemic (Webster, 2020). This shows how the gig economy has managed to gain momentum in the African continent propelled by the worldwide pandemic. Since the gig economy is an emerging form of organising work in a town that is historically dominated by work in the extractive industries, it will be interesting to understand how gig workers are able to exercise agency in shaping the new work structure presented by the gig-economy and whether this can be a space for future growth given that the extractive sector has limited life span.

1.5 Research Aims and Objective

The aim of this study is to examine ways in which gig workers' agency shape the new work structure presented by gig work. The objective of this study is to understand the organisation of work and how food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work drawing from a particular South African context.

1.6 Research Questions

The study employed the interpretive paradigm drawing from a qualitative research approach to generate data which answered the following main question:

- In what ways do food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work?

The following secondary questions also informed the study:

- How is the work for food delivery gig workers organised and the effect this has on worker agency?

- What are the factors that inform how food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work?
- What is the value tied to worker agency by food delivery gig workers?

1.7 Outline of Chapters

This report consists of five chapters. Below is a summary of each of the respective chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting the background, focus, purpose, and rationale behind the study. The chapter further presents the research problem, significance as well as the aim and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework employed in the study which will help us understand how work in the gig economy organised drawing from the labour process theory. This study also deploys labour geography theory to understand the geographical landscape of Rustenburg town and how it informs how food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work. Lastly, the chapter reflects from Bourdieu's theory of practice (i.e., cultural capital, the field, and habitus to unpack) the value tied to worker agency by food delivery gig workers. This chapter further review relevant literature unpacking the conceptualisation of the gig economy, gig work, platform economy. It further engages the debate on Platform capitalism, algorithm management, piece-rate and the rating system which constitute the gig economy ecosystem.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design, methods and techniques used to explore the questions raised by the study. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and observations. Through the use of purposive sampling technique, 10 food delivery workers from Rustenburg were interviewed. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. Participants

who agreed to be interviewed signed an informed consent form which clearly stipulated the purpose of the study and also assured them confidentiality through pseudonyms. A discussion on reflexivity captures the researcher's positionality and how it influenced the research process and how this was managed.

Chapter 4 presents and critically analyse the empirical evidence A number of themes are drawn from the analysis process. The chapter gives a special focus on the labour process of food delivery sector to address the question of how work is organised and how the workers exercise control in how they perform their work. Furthermore, this chapter highlights worker agency of food delivery workers as it was captured through their day-to-day work interaction. It further explores factors which informs the manner in which food delivery workers exercise control in how they conduct their work through the labour geography theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice.

Chapter 5 draws the conclusion of the project. It provides a critical summary of the study as well as concluding remarks, followed by recommendation for future research.

Chapter 2

2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework and reviews relevant literature that underpins the study. The review draws relevant literature which unpacks concepts that capture the gig economy phenomenon to gain a better understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to worker agency in gig food delivery sectors. This study deploys the labour process theory to examine how we should understand how food delivery workers can exercise control on how their work is organised in the context of the contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, the study also draws from labour geography theory to unpack the question of space and spatiality and how this plays out in configuring worker agency in the city of Rustenburg. This informs workers decision making and the power relations between labour and capital. The study engages with the labour process theory to understand the organisation of work in the context of platform capitalism characterised by algorithmic managerial control in the gig food delivery sector.

The second part of this chapter unpacks how the gig economy phenomenon is conceptualised There are various definitions and concepts which captures this phenomenon, and they are also understood differently depending on the context. This includes gig work, platform-based work, Platform capitalism, algorithm platform and management. Lastly the review focuses on feedback rating system as seen and experienced in the gig economy.

2.2. Unpacking worker agency

Worker agency is grounded on the idea that workers are not passive or timid but rather active, creative, and resilient reactors to capitalist and managerially defined structures. The ability of workers to socially organise work in ways that makes sense to them has long manifested itself in Taylor's scientific management despite his (Taylor, 1911) failure to recognise workers as a significant social actor within the workplace (Phakathi, 2013). Studies in sociology of work have shown the various ways worker agency plays itself out in the workplace (Phakathi, 2013; Stewart, 2013). Worker agency may either take the form of accommodation and or resistance to the existing norms and structures and is not fixated. Literature highlights that shop-floor workers exercise their agency in a variety of forms (Burawoy,1979, Legassick, 2007). In the workplace, shop-floor workers often informally exercise their agency to resist, oppose, accommodate, consent and/or both resist and consent to management initiatives in ways that make sense to them and enable them to maintain autonomy over production and the effort to bargain (Legassick, 2007). In Burawoy's (1979) seminal ethnographic study of machine operators, workers show agency through the game of making out and through worker's informal responses to new forms of work such as teamworking and performance-based payment systems enticing workers to expend effort at the point of production (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

According to Herod (2001), worker agency can shape how labour is integrated in the production process as well as the economic space itself. Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu (2008) have also shown the ability of workers to exercise agency by highlighting the importance of labour agency as part of labour geography thesis. According to Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu

(2008), geographies of capitalism are shaped by both the deliberate choices and effects of workers. Therefore, worker agency may be explained differently based on the intended outcome, institutional constraints, spatiality, and relations to social reproduction (Cumbers, Featherstone, and MacKinnon, 2016). Furthermore, worker agency can operate on different scales, either informal or formal, collective, or individual, spontaneous or may be goal directed (Buhlungu & Bezuidenhout, 2008). Coe & Jordhus Lier (2011) drawing from Herod, view worker agency as the ability of workers to create their own economic geographies through pursuing their own spatial fixes and scalar strategies. According to this thesis workers through agency can shape and produce economic spaces (Herod, 2001).

Workers' everyday practices are said to be a useful analytical term which show how forms of resistance, resilience and reworking are created through practices (Geitung, 2017). Furthermore, Geitung (2017) argues that resistance is seen as workers gain rights outside the formal structures. Reworking involves strategies which workers use to improve their working conditions both at and outside of work, while operating within existing social relations (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2011). On the other hand, Warren (2019) explains reworking as the lowest level of agency which consists of a small act of coping under adverse socio-economic conditions. Such acts are deemed necessary to understand worker agency in the gig-economy (Anwar & Graham, 2019). However, such acts also have a potential to emphasize the trajectory of capitalist socio-spatial relations which has created adverse circumstances (Warren, 2019). According to Herod (1997), labour geography (how space is used) plays a fundamental role in understanding labour agency. He further states that, through labour geography, we can understand how labour agency plays a role in reshaping the landscapes of capitalism (Herod, 1997).

Strauss (2020) highlights the fact that individual and collective expressions of labour agency shapes the geography of capitalism through actions and interactions of workers. Historically,

Collective agency was understood through trade union actions (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2011). However, agency need to be considered widely beyond trade unions' actions since individual actions of workers are equally important (Rogaly, 2009). Workers' agency should be understood as influenced by horizontal factors which include aspects such as gender, age, caste, migrant status, space, and social network in making and constraining agency (Dutta, 2016). Since the world of work is changing rapidly, labour agency has also expanded to accommodate the geographies of non-unionised workers such as gig workers. Thus, the emergence of the gig-economy has the potential to further expand how we should understand workers' agency.

2.3 The Labour Process Theory

The study is informed by the labour process theory to understand how gig workers exercise control in how they work in the context of digital capitalism. Influenced by Marx, the Labour Process Theory (LPT) focuses on work and organisation under capitalism. This theory provides "a distinctive and penetrating account of how work is organised in capitalist societies" (Knights and Willmott 1990:38). It provides a useful tool to assess the role of the digital platform in mediating the labour and capital relation by helping us understand the extend of capital's control and worker agency in the food delivery gig economy.

Braverman (1974) focuses on the degradation of work under the capitalist system of production and his work is largely responsible for focusing attention on labour process theory and seeing work as a labour process (Spencer, 2000; Ackroyd, 2009). Braverman (1974) argues that in a capitalist mode of production workers sells their labour power (capacity to work) to the capitalists. His central thesis is the separation of conception and execution of work, a development which he views as a degradation of work (Littler, 1990). Furthermore, the basic principle of labour process theory according to Braverman (1974) is that the organisation of

the labour process changes because of the drive to make production more efficient for capital by using technological advancements to extract more surplus value which in turn culminate in the deskilling of the workers. Accordingly, the key managerial problem for capital is the activation of labour effort, including the need to simultaneously obscure and secure the extraction of surplus value (Barratt, et al., 2020). The labour process theory provides several tools that can help us to understand forms of capital appropriation, including the use of digital technology as a mechanism of control and monitoring in a workplace (Chai & Scully, 2019).

The Capitalist mode of production as seen by Braverman (1974) is driven by an ever-increasing complex division of labour which involves new technologies as a mode of labour control. A critical argument is that capitalist mode of production has the nature of manipulating automation and mechanisation to divide and deskill labour to an extent that work can be performed by unskilled labour. His broad idea is that under capitalism, workers have been subordinated, dominated, and oppressed by managers and employers who own the means of production. He further suggested that the modern capitalist class has transformed labour, creating inhumane conditions of work and obscuring labour's real value (Braverman, 1974). The point of analysis in the labour process theory of the capitalist production unpacks the relationship between capitalists who owns the means of production and workers who sell their labour power. The main emphasis on the labour process theory is the logic behind managerial control used by employers and workers' individual and collective agency deployed as a form of coping mechanism and the ability to resist and rework managerial control (Gandini, 2019). In the context of the platform-mediated gig-economy, Gandini (2019) argues that the platform itself is a distinctive, digital-based point of production where social relations are repurposed, fenced off and transformed into relations of production invested in the labour process of gig work. For Braverman (1974), the key element of labour process theory is centred around the issue of managerial control. Furthermore, Braverman (1974), asserts that the historical

development of managerial control is linked to the progressing trend of deskilling labour. This entails that, the labour process being broken down into its simplest elements, with management exercising full control over the knowledge and design of production processes (Kitay, 1997).

The managerial problem of control is handled through alienation of labour process from labourers as the execution and conception of labour are separated. The principle of scientific management in particular Taylorism brought the expropriation of skills and knowledge from direct producers into the hands of management. Introduction of advanced technology in the labour process deskills and fragments work while also creating an apparatus of conception which turned the labour process in itself a subject to separation of conception and execution. Thus, deskilling of labour constitutes a means of control and reduction of labour costs, while at the same time this controlling power is used to cheapen and deskill labour (Spencer, 2000).

While Braverman's deskilling labour thesis has been challenged on both empirical and theoretical grounds, it is now established that a deskilling approach to managerial control constitutes one of a variety of strategies that employers deploy when introducing new technologies (Thompson, 1999). Edwards' (1979) understanding of the labour process was that capitalists have developed different modes of control in response to new forms of worker resistance in the production system, noting how control strategies have developed from simple control in the form of organisation to additional forms of control, both technical and bureaucratic, to maintain the interests of the capitalist class. According to Edwards (1979), control is the power of management of the firm to force employees to operate in the manner intended by the organization. These controls are adjusted based on the relative strength of labour and capital (Reid, 2003).

Both Friedman (1977) and Edwards (1979) highlighted that these changing forms of control arose from conflict between management and labour (Kitay, 1997). According to Burawoy

(1979), Braverman's deskilling thesis underestimates the degree to which workers give consent to the fundamentals of capitalism. Burawoy (1979) places workers subjectivity at the centre of his analysis of the question "why workers work as hard as they do" since Braverman's (1974) work does not explain worker subjectivity and resistance.

For Burawoy (1979), beyond direct coercion there is managerial method of co-optation, subtle coercion, and the manufacturing consent. Based on his ethnographic work as a labourer in the piece rate machine shop in the 1970's, Burawoy (1974) highlighted that management control workers by creating an "illusion of choice" in a highly restrictive environment. However, Burawoy (1974) illustrates worker agency through strategies workers use to lighten their workload or by negotiating their pay rates. Burawoy (1979) argues that basing labour process analysis on conflictual foundations could not account for the prevalence of cooperation in most workplaces much of the time. Instead, management is able to control workers by giving them the 'illusion of choice' in a highly restrictive environment, designing workplace activities in a manner perceived as more favourable to employees. Worker participation in choosing how to conduct their work generates consent to the rules of the work game (Burawoy, 1979). According to Burawoy (1979), management manufactures consent by using a variety of strategies or 'games', which attracts workers' attention away from its expropriation of surplus value towards activities which appear to give them the chance to outsmart the management system that is presented to them. Burawoy (1979) argues that games provide a fitting "metaphor" for understanding how and why factory workers consent to the extraction of surplus value of their labor. Thus, the unpredictability of receiving bonus pay, caused by the "piece-rate" remuneration system motivated workers to play the game of "making out" (Burawoy, 1979). Since workers recognised that they could earn bonus pay by producing in surplus of their piece-rate, machine operators improvised tools and speed up machinery to greatly increase their outputs. Making out not only provided workers the ability to optimize

their daily earnings, but as Burawoy (1979) himself experienced, playing the game garners "social and psychological rewards", such as "prestige, sense of accomplishment, and pride". According to Burawoy (1985), workers create "games", which provide them with satisfaction in their work and provide their employers with their workers' consent. The 'making out' game allowed management to reduce the potential for class consciousness and workforce conflict while maximising productivity. In the South African context, Phakathi (2005) has referred to "planisa" to describe how mineworkers 'make out' underground, by literally "making plans" over the constrained conditions of their work.

Burawoy's (1979) notion of hegemonic control, argues that capitalism has co-opted choice to workers to embrace and defend capitalism as the preferred ideology. He further states that "We are compelled to play the game, and we then proceed to defend the rules" (Burawoy, 1979:93). For Burawoy (1979) the way in which choice and ideology are operating together as tools to prop up the capitalist system in both the piece-rate factory system and gig work speaks to a second Marxist inspired ideological framework, Althusser's (1971) Ideological State Apparatus. This refers to a system of belief which seeks to naturalize, legitimize, and reinforcing the interests of the dominant class.

The third and fourth generation of the labour process theorists such as Knights and Willmott (1989) draw from the post-existential and anti-phenomenological ideas and concepts. They are informed by what can be termed as a Foucauldian labour process theory. This generation of scholars criticized the classical labour process theorist for not acknowledging worker subjectivity in their analysis. They argue that ignoring the presence and significance of subjectivity complicates the analysis of how relations of capital and labour are practically accomplished and challenged at the point of production (Knights, 1990). This school of thought acknowledges the issue and that the question of subjectivity opens for inspection the "complex-

media" of capital-labour relations, that difficult space where work organization gets produced and reproduced in the everyday accomplishments of agency and social interaction.

For Michel Foucault (1977) within the realm of the community of a workplace, workers are subjects in relation to other subjects. However, becoming a subject at work requires other subjects to co-construct occupational identity. Becoming a subject in a community also means becoming an active agent, and this is based on the subject's reflective awareness of her/his identity position in the community (Foucault, 1977).

The Foucauldian labour process is based on the concept of governmentality. Foucault's thesis on governmentality is critical in how we should think about worker agency in a neoliberal context. Governmentality refers to organized practices and control techniques that makes society and subject governable and is associated with willing participation of the governed given that individual action may not be regulated by coercion all the time. Neoliberal governmentality according to Foucault is a way of viewing and interacting in a particular way which focuses on economic logic defined by self and individual interest. It is characterized by transposing the economic grid into the social realm. The economic logic become applicable and enforced in the social life to shape our behaviour and how we make sense of ourselves and others, ideas, and values (Foucault, 1977). Neoliberal governmentality thus focusses on economic logic driven by self and individual interest which become normalized and internalized. Motivation is thus based on incentives, rewards, recognition, and variation of capital accumulation. Worker makes choices and adopt certain desired behaviours to self-regulate and prioritize certain strategies driven by this economic logic (Foucault, 1977).

Governmentality operates by editing desires and configuring individual habits, aspirations, and benefits. It thus relates to how disciplinary structures are formed and the way subjects are created and positioned differently and how they regulate own behaviour in response to power.

According to this thesis behaviour is not necessarily due to deep routed identities or personalities but is configured by broader functions of power and disciplinary action to behave in a particular way. Neoliberal governmentality is characterized by control of action for the benefit of the dominant class. It involves willing participation of the governed based on active consent of the populace (Foucault, 1977).

Finally, the labour process is ideal for analysing changes of work associated with digital technology as it focuses on the point of production (i.e., the design and Organisation of production) and the relations of production (i.e., the power relation between labour and capital). It is an important lens to understand how workers exercise control in how they work in the gig delivery work as it provides space to investigate how the relations of production are shaped by politics in the broader society.

2.4 Theory of Practice in the gig economy

This study also draws from Bourdieu's theory of practice to unpack the question around social capital and subjectivity in the gig economy (1986, 2013). Bourdieu (1986) expanded Marx's (1887) work by presenting a subjective view of class formation. According to Bourdieu (1986), everyone in the society is to some degree an owner of capital, unlike Marx who defines capital as an economic accumulation subject. Bourdieu's (1986) sees skills as a form of capital, therefore, any form of labour which requires a certain skillset to earn an increase income in his theoretical construct can be seen as earning income from capital. This will help us understand how food delivery workers use their skillsets to earn or even maximise their gig income and other forms of capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu's (1986) understanding of labour accumulates not only into traditional economic capital, but also into cultural and social capitals that is attached to a subject through ownership and embodiment. This approach will help us

understand how complex income stratification occurs in the platform capitalism by mapping out food delivery workers' forms of capital and their capacity to earn an income.

The theory of practice as explained by Bourdieu (1986) links our understanding of economic outcome to the cultural and social aspects of class expanding on Weber's (1964) theoretical approach. For Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is built up over time and it also takes forms of shape, which are the embodied state, the objective state, and the institutional state. The embodied state of cultural capital as explained by Bourdieu (1986) is that which has been internalised by individuals, in a form of long-lasting disposition of the mind and the body product, which is a product of an individual's socialisations and experiences. This can also include one's skillsets that a subject has; the capacity to call upon as well as mannerism that allow the subject to get ahead in the economy. Objectified cultural capital can be physically obtained as "cultural goods" (Bourdieu,1986). In case of this study, it could be the use, access and ownership of bikes and the use of cell phones by food delivery workers which allows them to succeed economically. The cultural capital as seen and explained by Bourdieu will help us to understand the value tied to worker agency by food delivery workers.

2.4. Labour Geography

To understand the organisation of work and worker agency in the gig-economy, this study adopted the labour geography theory. This is informed by Herod (2001) view that labour geography can help us understand how labour agency plays a role in the shaping of the landscapes of capitalism including worker agency. The notion that workers have agency, and that this agency is complicated by dialectic of class has not always been acknowledged within the economic geography. Number of studies which have sought to map out and explain the spread of capital have in the past tended to perceive labour in true form of commodity (Harvey, 1975; Massey, 1984; Smith, 2008). In the neo-classical location theory, economic space was

conceived as a pre-given stage for capital to operate upon, whereby firm based their locational choices upon categories of labour costs, skills, and other labour factors. Marxist geographers from the 1970s onwards have re-theorised the geographies of capitalism as contingently produced in ways which auger the accumulation and circulation of capital (Harvey, 1982; Smith, 1984; Massey,1984).

Harvey's (1982) understanding of labour geography is that capital continually faces an inherent contradiction between mobility and fixity, remedied using spatial fix. Most importantly, capital faces the constant imperative to move and locate in a "footloose" manner from one area to another in the constant pursuit of profits (Smith, 1984). Nevertheless, capital is also forced to place roots through investments in physical infrastructures (such as factories, office buildings, transportation networks etc) which enables sustained period of production and consumption to take place. Through producing the economic landscapes in certain ways, the built environment may act as "spatial fix" which absorbs excess capital, thus supporting the accumulation process. However, despite capital's seemingly "footloose" status, the sunk cost of these investment often place limit on capital's ability to uproot and move in practice (Harvey,1982; Castree et al. 2004). In an attempt to explain the changing spatial structure and uneven development of the UK economy, Massey (1984) argued that different capital continues to base their location decision on the need to source particular type of workers. By so doing, capital is shown to create and draw upon a spatial division of labour, marked in the UK by the concentration of core white collar or high-end jobs in England, in contrast to areas of the north which have struggled to attract new forms of work (particularly old industrial areas) (Massey,1984). Whilst providing a vital breakthrough in explaining the uneven spread of capital across space, such geographies of labour have tended to perceive workers as inherently passive and in receipt of capital's landscape.

Herod's (1997; 2001a) understanding of labour geography places workers at the centre of its analysis unlike Lefebvre (1974) and Harvey (1982) who based their understanding of economic space as produced by workers. For Herod (1997), labour geography can be understood through labour rather than capital centric lens. Herod (2001a) argues that groups of workers through their agency produce space in ways which further their own social reproduction. To this end labour geography makes a deliberate point of exploring worker agency and essentially workers' ability to resist different capitals and their attempt to control and shape work arrangements. Herod (1997; 2001a; 2001b) has focused on labour unions as the primary vehicle of labour agency however in response to specific acts of capitalist restructuring union have shown capacity to adopt scalar and spatial strategies which when successful have resulted in labour friendly rules for capital to adhere to. These rules may in turn form a spatial fix of labour 's own, as workers may secure rights and entitlements such as collective bargaining agreements at a national scale to limit the effects of whipsawing which benefit a group of workers as opposed to capital (Herod, 1997;2001a;2001b).

Accordingly, Herod (1997) presents the economic landscape as an ever-negotiated product, contested between both labour and capital. Furthermore, Herod (2001:36) noted that "ultimately, it is conflicts over whose spatial fix (capitalists or workers) is actually, set in the landscape that are at the heart of the dynamism of capitalism". Whatever its precise focus, Herod (2001) has argued that labour geography is central to workers and within the optimistic intention of helping the oppressed and disposed workers of the world.

Stepping back from the specificity of workplace struggles, several geographers (Peck,1996; Martin, 2000) have explore how institutional arrangements impact the culture and performance of workers within local labour markets. As noted earlier, and despite the spatial mobility of capital, companies are ultimately forced to rely on a local supply of labour imbued with skills, values, and patterns of behaviour distinct to that particular place. Accordingly, it is often in the

interests of capital to support and adjust the social production of workers through training programmes and housing support to socialise, prepare and deliver workers for particular roles. Jonas (1996:328) noted that:

> Labour control is more than simply a technically or cost-driven imperative in which capital finds new ways to improve efficiency and labour productivity. It is an irretrievably historical, cultural, and spatial process involving the uneven development of practices which smooth the transition of labour from the labour market to the point of production, reproduce a productive work force, co-ordinate conditions of pay and consumption, and thereby facilitate accumulation strategies Jonas (1996:328).

Jonas (1996) argues for the need for capital to substitute reciprocities between place of production and the sphere of reproduction and consumption through local labour control regimes. For Jonas (1996), the term "regime" refers to a place-specific network of locally unique institution and social relations which are designed to limit the tension between labour and capital at the same level. Particularly, institutional arrangements may often leave lasting impact on the values, skills and behaviour of workers and communities in question. A study conducted by Stenning (2005) highlights how a steel firm in Poland subsidised both housing and transport for local workers in a bid to foster a sense of community based around the steel work.

This notion of workers' agency is central to labour geography's epistemology and research agenda. Herod (1997; 2003) argues that workers, similar to capital, desire, and struggle to produce specific economic and political landscapes to ensure their reproduction and produce their own "labour spatial fix." The production of social space is crucial for workers' survival and their social reproduction. Labour's self-reproduction takes place in specific places which entails that they 'are likely to want to shape the economic landscape in ways that facilitate this self-reproduction" (Herod, 2001:6). Workers are heterogeneous as a result they have different spatial fixes or spatial strategies which allow survival and social reproduction.

Harvey (2006) claims that capital has "spatial fixes" which refers to strategic use of space to resolve overaccumulation crisis. Furthermore, Harvey (2006) explains the dialectic of fixity and mobility, as an important contradiction of capitalism. Fixity can be understood in a threefold sense, from the perspective of labour; capital; and the state. From a labour perspective, fixity is the quality of establishing and reproducing the dense social relations, as well as material resources and activities which sustain these relations, in the grounded places in which workers live and reproduce their lives (Hudson, 2001). For capital, fixity refers to the requirement to place and physically retain workers in the workplace (Smith, 2006). Thirdly, for the state, fixity of labour implies securing a workforce within the country to adequately staff the available means of production. The different meanings of 'fixity' of workers for different actors suggests the interpenetration of opposites (Ollman, 2003). Fixity from the perspective of one actor may mean mobility from the perspective of another. For example, fixing workers in the workplace for capital may entail an extended form of mobility for the migrant workers being so fixed. Mobility may contradict fixity, leading to the possible dissolution of fixed places by out-migration, but also may sustain places through the inflows of remittances or immigration.

Harvey (2006) outlines the importance of labour's mobility and fixity. For example, greater mobility of workers enables capital to adopt new labour processes and move location more easily. However, Harvey (2006), locates power over mobility with capital. Thus, capital for him uses labours to strive for a better life and manipulate mobility to its requirements, and so, both migrating and staying in a place can lead to the strengthening capital's hand rather than undermining it (Harvey, 2006). Harvey does not detail how labour's command of space may, for example, shape factory labour regimes (Harvey, 2006). A more fine-grained analysis of workers' spatial actions and practices is capable of adding extra explanatory value. Labour power is unspecified in that the capitalist can never fully ascertain the exact amount of labour

that will follow from buying labour power (Smith, 2006). Workers and management engage in work-effort bargaining to attempt to ensure an adequate transformation of labour power into labour to satisfy the capitalist's goals and, from the worker's perspective, to generate as high wages and benefits as possible. As part of this workers are able to leverage their freedom to move and sell labour services in different places into possible benefits, such as higher wages elsewhere (Smith, 2006). Mobility emerges as a terrain of struggle and workers can strategize around their mobility both occupationally and transnationally to reproduce their lives on more advantageous terms (Alberti, 2014).

Smith (2006) highlights that workers must engage in some form of fixity of employees before any production or labour process can begin; an idea which can be related to the notion of coercive and consensual labour regimes. For example, in South African mining, the migrant labour system also implied a spatial separation between work (production) and home (reproduction) (Benya, 2009). This separation has been facilitated by what Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout (2008) call spatial control. The focus on social production encourages consideration of who produces space, how, and to what ends. Labour emerges from dense sets of place-based, territorially confined relations which both facilitate and constrain workers' actions and practices. The labour market intermediaries actively shape labour markets, allowing flexibility for some individual workers and some firms while having a destructive effect on trade unionism by increasing worker fragmentation (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011). Space is understood not as a static ontological given but rather as produced through multiple social relationships and in on-going construction (Lefebvre, 1991).

For Herod (1997), recognising workers' agency enables understanding the contested nature of the production of space under capitalism since it is the conflict over whose spatial fix (capitalists' or workers') is actually set in the landscape that are at the heart of the dynamism of the geography of capitalism. Herod (2003) argues that in order to understand worker agency

one need to examine "how workers' spatial embeddedness may influence their behaviour, how workers must engage with the unevenly developed geography of capitalism and how workers seek (or not) to make common cause over space. This study aimed to address these questions by looking at workers' ability to exercise control in how they conduct their work, drawing upon labour geography's key insights, namely the emphasis on workers' agency, and the importance of space in shaping the class struggles.

Food delivery gig workers are characterised as "hunters of space", looking for the most efficient route (Heiland, 2021), through their position in the city. Workers construct their social world and make sense of their lives. Herod (2001) focuses on workers as "actors, who actively produce economic spaces and scales in some particular ways". He argues that workers produce space in ways which further their own social reproduction through their agency (Herod, 2001).

Herod (2000) views space as a source of power. He argues that workers and capital have an interest in how space is designed and controlled because it is a source of power and thus informs worker agency (Herod, 2001). Space is socially constructed and fundamental in organisation, distribution of power between labour and capital (Heiland, 2021). This view is important in understanding food delivery gig work. The labour geography theory will help us understand the labour process and how worker action varies across space and how they can actively influence and shape geographies of capitalism (Herod, 2001). Furthermore, this theory is useful in examining workers as active agents in the construction of social/power relations in everyday life.

2.5. Digital Taylorism

According to Alternried (2019), the use of digital technology to increase efficiency and work intensification signifies the emergence of a new labour regime referred to as "digital

Taylorism". For Alternried (2019), digitally mediated form of work automated management and control allow the strengthening of the classical element of Taylorism such as rationalisation, standardisation, deskilling, decomposition, and surveillance in labour. Taylorism as understood by Braverman (1974) is characterised by three main principles. Firstly, the labour process, which is dislocating the skills of worker, managers assume the burden of gathering all traditional knowledge which in the past had been controlled by the workmen (Braverman, 1974). When management appropriates the knowledge of how work is done and discovers what are the speediest methods, it is able to rationalise and standardize the labour process in an effort to exploit worker productivity. Secondly, the labour process is differentiated within the working class, such that it is no longer a homogeneous group, but is instead stratified internally by skill level. Most importantly, the execution of labour is separated from its conception, whereby all possible brain work should be removed from the shopfloor and be placed in the planning and laying-out department (Braverman, 1974). Thus, for Braverman (1974) the labour process centred around deskilling of workers. Workers are allocated simple and repetitious tasks, while they are kept ignorant about the greater whole of the production process. Gandini (2019) selects deskilling and emotional labor as concepts that can assist people realize their limited options for progress and coping mechanisms. The third principle of digital Taylorism as understood by Braverman (1974), is management's use of monopoly over knowledge to control the execution of every step of the labour process. According to Altenried (2019), the incorporation of surveillance, networked devices, and integrated software structures in systems of labour control, feedback and correction enables management to enforce Taylorist discipline in real-time and outside enclosed factory floors into urban space.

Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019) argue that algorithmic management represents a new form of Taylorism or digital Taylorism which is the focal point in the organisation of platform

work. Algorithmic management is conceptualised theoretically as a tool that is utilised by platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017) to maximise managerial control and labour exploitation. This undermines the promises of the gig economy of worker empowerment, autonomy, and flexibility (Schor et al., 2020; Shapiro, 2018). The mode of platform work has embedded set of rules, norms, standards, and regulations embedded into programmes dominated by algorithms in the Apps (Ashford et al., 2018). Therefore, platforms act as a "virtual automated manager" (Duggan et al., 2020: 120) whereby the working processes of app-based workers are coordinated and instructed by advanced algorithms step by step with close monitoring. The adoption of algorithms allows the platform to not only select workers and assign work but also assess workers performance according to real-time digital surveillance of labour process (Gandini, 2019). Forms of managerial control in platform work are systematically integrated with algorithmic technology which seem to be exercised more strictly than ever in the "golden age of automation" (Spencer, 2018). The algorithmic management particularly capture two transformation of labour process. The first process being organisational transformation, which (Curchod et al., 2019) argues that management activities are transferred from human to sophisticated algorithmic management systems. Through, the algorithm management is no longer a human practice, but a process embedded into technology (Schildt, 2017). The second transformation of labour process emerge from literature which argues that algorithmic management devalues and intensifies labour since workers engage in meaningless simplified tasks which are controlled by automated decisions of the algorithmic management (Curchod et al., 2019).

2.2 Contested definitions

Gig work presents an area of study that is relatively new and constantly evolving (Fairwork, 2021). As a result, the ideal concepts that capture this phenomenon are understood differently

to suite a particular context. There are debates around concepts used to understand the broader gig economy. Some of these contested concepts include gig economy, gig work, platform-based work, platform capitalism, algorithm platform and algorithm management. I engage these important concepts below as used in this study and this in no account can be exhaustive.

2.2.1 Gig-economy

This study focuses exclusively on the gig economy therefore it is important to unpack this concept. The term "gig economy," has been contested by scholars who claim that the transformation of work through the gig economy is often not clearly understood (Woodcock and Graham, 2019). According to Woodcock and Graham (2019), gig economy is better understood through what Srnicek (2016) has termed "platform capitalism". Srnicek (2016), have argued that platform capitalism-based structure changes how work is traditionally organized (Drahokoupil and Piasna, 2019) in a sense that, gig workers' tasks are planned digitally, and their work is usually remunerated on a piece-rate basis (De Stefano 2016). As argued by Stewart & Standford (2017) the gig-economy has work-organisational features that can be traced from the previous capitalistic eras therefore it is not just a technological company but a capitalist company which connect workers and consumers through the digital platform for the completion of work in exchange for a fee (Sherman, et al., 2020). The gig economy labour force in the South African context is dominated by a pool of thousands of migrant labour workers who make their way into the city as a result of unemployment and deteriorating economic conditions in their country of origin seeking employment wherever they wish. The digital platform companies, sought, and found ways to perpetuate the cheap labour system.

De Stefano, (2016) highlighted in his study that, the gig economy represents a new form of work, where workers are reimbursed on a piece- rate system, paid per delivery of each meal offered at a percentage determined by the apps. According to Tassinari & Maccarrone (2020)

the food delivery gig work is an on-demand work, for workers to be allocated a task and be paid for the work performed there should be a demand of orders. In instances where the demand is low, or no orders are coming in workers are generally not paid, despite being available for work. This can be seen as one of the factors that can influence or constrain worker agency of food delivery gig workers. Webster & Masikane (2021), argue that food delivery gig workers have little or no control over how much they are getting paid or control over their daily work.

According to Stewart & Standford, (2017), the gig-economy is embedded in technological, economic, and socio-political systems. Chinguno (2020) on the other hand argues that the gig-economy is organised around change, innovation and adoption of digital technology resulting in reconfiguration of production processes and work relations. The gig-economy can also be understood as a new form of work presented with new business model which emerged under what Webster (2020) termed platform capitalism. According to Webster (2020) platform capitalism generates a unique level of power which lies in the hands of a few individuals in a small number of corporates. Palm et al., (2019) highlights that, the emergence of the gig-economy, forms part of changes in the job markets across the society whereby part-time, short-term, and self-employment opportunities have become a norm. They further argue that technological advances in society have made it possible for work to be organised differently, where flexibility and freedom are considered more important than before (Palm, et al., 2019). However, Chinguno (2020) argues that the flexibility and the freedom proclaimed in the gig economy is paradoxical in the sense that the technology involved in the work organisation has control over the labour process and even how duties are executed. He further asserts that, workers cannot be said to be free when they do not have any other means of livelihood (Chinguno, 2020). Workers usually do not have the freedom to interact much with their co-workers or managers and are often isolated from social groups (Kellogg, Valentine, and Goods, 2020).

Fleming (2017) argues that the gig economy has an element of job precarity since it is influenced by neoclassical economic ideas that promotes individualism as the only way forward in the workplace, which in turn generates pressure on individuals to stay afloat economically since there is lack of outside support. The manner in which work is organised in the gig economy discourages collective agency of workers (Barratt, et al., 2020) yet encourages the expressions of individual agency to enable workers to materially improve their conditions in the sphere of production and reproduction. According to Webster (2020) individual agency put more pressure on workers ability to control their working hours and wages. This limit the potential of workers' agency to a level where their actions are often strengthened by the power of platform-based organisations and their non-conformity within the labour markets (Fleming, 2017). As a result, the potential of worker agency in the food delivery platform work is shaped by the job precarity which is revealed through their desire to collectively organise and engage in a socially protected labour market (Barratt, et al., 2020).

Challenges of collective organisation in the gig economy are highlighted by Webster (2020), who argues that the spatial distribution of gig work activity is one of the factors that inhibits workers' chances of building social relations. Webster (2020) supports this claim by pointing out the fact that gig workers are socially isolated, spread out across the country creates a barrier for them to collectively organise and engage in socially protected labour market. Chinguno (2020) concurs and highlighted that platform business undermines workers' collective agency through the use of digital technology which fragment work and isolate workers. However, platform workers could still overcome the obstacles and collectively fight against the platform through workers' online communicative networks (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020).

Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019), have articulated how the gig economy is characterised by the prevalence of 'bogus' employment. Platform gig workers are claimed to be independent contractors, yet in reality their working condition tells a different story. This

independent contractor claim is a strategy which the employer use to exploit the workers. Work in this context is undertaken digitally on the platform by workers who are paid directly through the same platform for the completed tasks (Gandini, 2019). Furthermore, they use their own resources, bikes, cars, and smartphones which is a clear indication that platforms save on structural costs (Webster & Masikane, 2021). Shantashree et al., (2019) has indicated that the food delivery market has particularly changed over the last few years with rapid urbanisation and endless influx from neighbouring places to cities. The conditions for gig workers are not by any means homogenous, hence there is a need to highlight differences among groups and explore different aspects of how this form of work is organised as well as ways in which workers exercise their agency shaping the new work structure of capitalism.

2.2.2 Platform based food delivery work

Platform-based gig work is an important branch of platform food-delivery work which represents a contractual reclassification and technological repacking of the traditional food-delivery service (Veen et al.,2020), with its organisational structure characterised by algorithmic management. Goods et al. (2019) examined job quality in the Australian context and found that food-delivery work is ‘fit’ for piece-rate workers individually. Cant's (2019) work provides evidence on food delivery workers' precarious working conditions in the southern UK. He argued that workers' precarity was exploited by platform capitalism. In the context of China, the labour conditions of food delivery are characterised by temporality and gamification (Chen & Sun, 2020). Chinese food delivery workers are not only passively subjected to digital ‘panopticon’ but also subvert the system by their own “organic algorithms” (Sun, 2019). Furthermore, he argued that, through online WhatsApp groups, workers formed

their own organic algorithms to subvert the managerial control system in place by giving each other work training, assisting each other with delivery of orders in case one is running out of time set by the algorithm each, they also shared strategies of how to maximise their income in those platforms.

Tassinari and Maccarrone (2017) studied workers' struggles against algorithmic management focusing on workers' agency and resistance. They provided two comparative case analyses of the mobilisation of food-delivery platforms between Italy and the United Kingdom and identified the sources of antagonism in the app-mediated model of work organisation and the factors that stimulate and hinder the consolidation of workers' solidarity and collective action (Tassinari & Maccarrone,2020). Their work resonates with Cant's (2019) ethnographic findings, which, from a class analysis, offers vivid pictures of Food delivery workers' precarious labour conditions and their class struggles under the algorithm-dominated control system of Deliveroo in Brighton in the United Kingdom. Cant (2019), argues that the resistance of platform delivery workers remains in an 'embryonic status'. Furthermore, Cant (2019) identified a similar control mechanism of food delivery workers and argued that the implementation of the algorithmic system of control is a black box, deliberately designed to remain obscure and mysterious to food delivery workers.

According to the labour process theory the workplace is a social structure where the control regime is contextualised since production activities cannot be understood outside the ideological realms of the organisation of production (Gardini, 2019). The contextualisation of control regimes and mechanism of algorithmic management enable the unpacking of how work for food delivery gig workers is organised and the effect this has on worker agency.

2.2.3 Platform Capitalism

Platform capitalism is a broad phenomenon that impacts multiple sectors socio-economic life. The central location of this new form of capitalist accumulation is the platform. The significance of the platform often results in this form of capitalism being referred to as "platform capitalism". Platforms presents a new way of connecting workers and employers and for providing service to the client. They introduce tools to bring together the supply of, and demand for, labour (Graham and Woodcock, 2018). Platforms are a different form of work organisation since they use digital technology to position the company (or 'platform') between the worker and consumer. This means they mediate the relationships between them (see figure 1). Furthermore, the platform can be understood through the work of Srnicek (2017) who see it as a digital intermediary that connects users and gives access to certain services and infrastructures. Srnicek's analysis of "platform capitalism" was an early critical account of platforms. Particularly important for this study is his identification of the "lean platform economy" (Srnicek, 2017). His examples of 'lean platforms' are that they operate through a hyper-outsourced model, whereby workers fixed capital, maintenance costs, and training are all outsourced (Srnicek, 2017). His work focused on the way low-wage work is being reorganised through platforms (Srnicek,2019). This involves the triangular business models between workers, customers, and platforms (Roy-Mukherjee and Harrison, 2020).

According to Woodcock and Graham (2019), platform work represents a shift in the organisation of work. Woodcock and Graham (2019) also identified three key factors driving this shift. The first driving factor in the gig work organisation is a set of changes in the economy which attributes to neoliberalism. Broadly, this entails a general attack on working-class organisation and the deregulation of capital. The second shift is technology, new forms of connectivity which has facilitated capital to recruit and manage workers at scale. Thirdly it's the flexibility, which plays a critical role for many workers searching for different ways to work or to escape their local labour market. Furthermore, Woodcock and Graham (2019)

explained that capital has also sought to exploit increasingly precarious workers. What happens with labour power on food delivery platforms is that the platform takes an order from a customer, charging them for the food and the delivery. This involves combining the price of the food and the delivery. The platform purchases the food from the restaurant, either taking commission or charging the customer a higher price. In order to realise the value of the purchase, the food needs to be delivered within a reasonable time frame to the customer. In other words, the platform is selling commodified food delivery, realising value from the restaurant's food (at the same time allowing the restaurant to realise value from the food being produced) and extracting value from the production of the food delivery. This brings us to Marx's (1867) argument that capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is essentially the production of surplus value through various means. Therefore, while food delivery workers are not producing a physical commodity, the social relation involves the platform laying out capital in a similar way. In the simplest terms, the platform extracts surplus value from the delivery labour process by charging the customers more than they pay the workers. The platform sells a commodified food delivery service, providing a customer with food delivered to their doorsteps.

2.2.4 The rise of Platforms

With the rapid and diverse development of technology, there is a rise of platforms which are defined differently according to their context. In the gig-economy, platforms are apps or websites that mediate online economic activities including paid work (Moore & Joyce, 2020). The term "mediate" captures the important active role played by platforms in regulating the economic activity they mediate. Bratton (2015) broadly gives a definition of a platform stating that it is "a standards-based technical-economic system that simultaneously distributes interfaces through their remote coordination and centralizes their integrated control through

that same coordination. The platform as explained by Bratton, (2015) is a structure that balances centralized control with peripheral autonomy. This also is the case for food delivery companies, the subject to this study. App based food delivery companies remotely coordinate a distributed network of workers through their centralized software. Platforms' control regime over workers starts with their control over their labour pool. They manage and restraint workers' access to delivery work by regulating who can register on the platform. This is described by (Schwarz, 2017) as "platform control," in which a platform maintains "exclusive control over the surface on which the exchange takes place".

Srnicek's (2017) highlights that, platforms open-up a space where "customers, restaurants and workers can meet"" to coordinate labour supply and demand. This is also seen in the food delivery sector, where their business model operates in a three-sided market centralised by the platform (See Figure 1). The platform which is usually known as the app enables workers, restaurants, and customers to encounter each other, and this is viewed by Webster (2020) as a point of production in the food delivery ecosystem. Furthermore, some of the platforms own few assets and have minimal fixed capital (such as cars, bikes, or employees). Srnicek (2017) sees them as "lean" since their primary asset are: "software and data analytics." This then qualifies platforms to claim counter-subconsciously to be 'technology companies' (Crouch, 2019) rather than take-away firms. Platforms are said to exploit structural inequality by relying on both massive accumulations of venture capital (Srnicek, 2017) and large pools of underemployed workers to operate (Healy et al. 2017). Furthermore, as De Stefano (2016) argues, the human cost of this pressure is often overlooked, as on-demand workers are often treated as merely instrumental extensions of their platforms, an undifferentiated mass that "could be expected to run as flawlessly and smoothly as a software or technological tool." Such inequalities result in what Malin and Chandler (2016) term "splintering precarity," since the risks and rewards of the platform economy are unevenly distributed, with workers employed

as independent contractors bearing much of the risks with little or no proportional compensation.

Platforms thrive across urban centres of the world and has also transformed the way in which people access mobility, food, care, and other services necessary for daily life. Platform companies often position themselves as 'disruptors' to traditional firms. They posit this "disruption" by presenting what can be seen as Schumpeterian gale of creative destruction, within a process of industrial transformation that continuously revolutionises the economic structure from within, continually destroying the old one and continually creating a new one (Schumpeter,1994).

2.2.5 Algorithm platforms and management

Algorithmic management represents a new form of Taylorism or digital Taylorism (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019), which is the focal point in the organisation of platform work. Algorithmic management is conceptualised as a tool that is utilised by platform capitalism (Srnicek,2017) to maximise managerial control and labour exploitation, which undermines the promises of the gig economy that empowers workers' autonomy and flexibility (Schor et al.,2020; Shapiro,2018). Algorithms are computer-programmed procedures that convert input data into the desired output in a way that is more comprehensive, instant, and interactive (Kellogg, Valentine, and Goods, 2020). They are designed to counter the much-promised flexibility of their workers. This management system uses what (Shapiro, (2018) sees as a soft form of control and surveillance. The algorithm management system according to Kaine & Josserand (2019), are management of labour by digital machine in a sense that it has taken over the position of human resource since it coordinates supply and demands, monitor performance which are usually functions performed by human resources (Hoosen, 2021, Sherman, et al.,

2020). In the platform work, algorithms assume management functions by automatically allocating tasks to workers through smartphone apps (Veen, et al., 2020). Through algorithm platforms, workers receive automated instructions regarding the allocated work, where to collect or drop off as well as the route they should use to locate the drop off point. In some cases, the use of algorithms allows the platforms to not only select workers and assign work but also to assess workers' performance according to real-time digital surveillance of the labour process (Gandini, 2019). Furthermore, Veen, et al., (2020) argue that routes taken by workers are shaped by algorithm affordances, geography, risks, and worker agency. Algorithms set rules and formulas used for programmed decision making that guides how tasks are performed (Sherman, et al., 2020).

Some scholars (Hoosen, 2021, Sherman, et al.2020) see the algorithm as having taken the role of the human resource management. Richardson (2019) argues that food delivery platforms use sophisticated algorithms to not only match supply with demand, but also to coordinate complex networks of various actors (Richardson, 2019). The algorithm matches restaurants with workers, determines routes, calculates pickup times and delivery duration, sets the fare, and communicates with all parties involved, the customer, the restaurant, and the worker. Furthermore, Sherman, et al., (2020) argue that algorithm platforms continuously manipulate the internal market by creating secured interest for themselves, by controlling the price settings and even calculating workers' wages. As a result, algorithms remain in control of the labour process (Sherman, et al, 2020). Therefore, the algorithm exercises its controlling power through food delivery distribution, pricing, and routes in their own interest and without the knowledge of the workers (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). For them, the "information asymmetries" limit the worker agency and enable them to exercise managerial power and control over workers (Rosenblat & Stark,2016). The algorithm, according to Hoosen (2020), limits worker agency by making decisions on behalf of workers based on its predetermined rules and

statistical models, which develop perpetually through an iterative process of learning-by-doing. This management system produces what Shapiro (2018) sees as a strict dependency management which leaves a negligible room for autonomy that workers should not be categorized as self-employed. Furthermore, Lei (2021) highlights how algorithmic management is manipulated to avoid the classification of platform workers as employees.

Another strand of studies focuses on workers' struggles against algorithmic management in terms of workers' agency and resistance. According to Cant (2020), algorithmic management is a breeding ground for self-organized delivery workers associations which could boost worker agency. The labour process in the gig-economy is controlled through the algorithm management system which may be viewed as constraining worker agency. Algorithmic management tracks and manages workers by optimizing decisions of their tasks (Schildt, 2017). In a way, algorithms take full control over the workers through coordinating supply and demand, monitoring performance of the workers (Hoosen, 2021). Food delivery platform workers receive automated instructions through their smartphones allocating them work, where to collect and drop off food as well as the route they should take when going to deliver the food (Veen, et al., 2020). Food delivery companies are able to use their ownership of the platform to exercise power by controlling the algorithm that defines trio distribution, pricing, and routes in their own interests and without the knowledge of workers. In this form of work, workers are no longer managed by humans but by algorithms, which take a leadership role in the work organization (Schildt, 2017). These information asymmetries limit the possible choices workers are able to make and exercise managerial power and control over them (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Shapiro (2018) have argued that this system of management produces strict dependencies and leaves negligible for autonomy that workers should not be categorised as self-employed.

In the gig economy, the algorithm app platforms act as "point of production" (Gandini, 2019) which controls and monitors the labour process. According to Cant (2020), the use of digital management systems has the advantage of facilitating workers mobilization. For Chinguno work in the gig economy is fragmented into tasks that are closely monitored and managed by the algorithm (Chinguno, 2020). Thus, gig work represents a fundamental disruption and reorganisation of the labour process as opposed to a rearrangement of tasks between workers and algorithms (Hoosen, 2021).

This study focuses on how gig work disrupts or is disrupted by worker agency. The primary difference in the decision-making processes is that through algorithmic management, decisions are based on data (Fountain, 2019). The algorithm makes all the decisions within the labour process since it has all the information (Cant, 2020). Hoosen (2020) explored the dynamics of power and control between platforms and platform workers unpacking the factors which informs the decisions workers make regarding their work. She made a distinction between traditional and institutional knowledge which positions parties towards decision making process (Hoosen, 2020). Thus, Platforms through the algorithm management adopts standard, fixed-term decisions regarding product offerings or rates since it has access to institutional knowledge about economic trends and clientele patterns. While platforms allow workers to make decisions regarding their working location and time since they have the traditional knowledge to make such dynamic and localised decisions in a profitable meaner (Hoosen, 2021). This is an indication of gig workers' agency at an individual level in a context of changing dynamics between labour and capital within the gig economy.

Chinguno (2020), further explained that the platform work enhances control by capital through the reconstruction of the labour process and relations enhanced by the adoption of the algorithm management. According to Chinguno (2020), the algorithm management and panoptic control give these labour platforms the privilege to allocate work and control how work is executed.

The gig economy ecosystem places the algorithm at the centre of the work game of global capitalism (Webster & Masikane, 2020). This algorithm is described by Scasserra (2020) as the “black box” responsible for the construction of the rules of the game for global capitalism. The black box uses programmed decisions that guides workers with the tasks they should perform (Sherman, et al., 2020). These algorithm platforms are where decisions which shape workers' lives are made and it is very much unfortunate that workers are unable to audit those decisions since they are protected by intellectual property standards (Webster & Masikane, 2021). The algorithm possesses knowledge over workers’ wage and tips gained from tasks performed (Scasserra, 2020). However, Moore & Joyce (2020) critique the position that work in the gig economy is centred around platform algorithms; they believe that there is more to the realities of the labour-capital power dynamic than just the algorithm management. They argue that power in gig platforms is distributed among customers, algorithms, and workers, so that workers know, at all times, that they can be monitored, without the need for constant individual monitoring (Moore &Joyce, 2020).

Algorithms can help consumers make consumption decisions by using the consumers revealed preferences and then recommending goods based on those preferences. The algorithm can see the whole collection of goods, whereas for a single consumer it would be realistically impossible. Even for platform workers, algorithmic control can be beneficial when it is used to, for example, increase workers’ safety (Kellogg et al., 2020). According to Lei (2021), algorithmic gamification can improve productivity and better engage workers on the platform. According to Richardson (2020), the creative use of algorithms changes the market. He argues that algorithm platforms do not only manage workers rather it coordinates complex networks of gig workers, customers, and restaurants, to offer a uniform good. He further explained that this complex network coordination significantly reduces the costs of decision making by restricting the possible choices awarded to the customers. Therefore, according to him, the

growth in popularity of on-demand-food-delivery service is attributed to the creative use of algorithms in organising a gig economy consisting of customers, gig workers, and restaurants. (Richardson, 2020). The organisation of food delivery gig work as seen by Richards (2020) is through the creative use of algorithms by coordinating complex networks of various actors.

2.2.6 The Feedback and rating system in gig-work

One of the sub-systems through which the algorithm soft control is exerted is through the rating mechanisms which are hardcoded in the food delivery apps. Gig workers are subjected to different regimes of control which include the feedback rating systems, ranking systems which are forms of managerial control embedded in the digital technology (Gandini, 2019). This form of managerial control can be viewed as either promoting or inhibiting food delivery worker' agency. Upon completion of a service, customers and workers are both prompted to rate the quality of the service using a scale range from 1 to 5 stars. One star rating represents the lowest quality service and 5 stars the utmost quality service experienced. Data drawn from the customers' rating is used to measure the quality as well as the level of productivity of workers (Chinguno, 2020).

According to Kellogg, et al., (2020), the rating system is a mechanism for guiding workers' behaviour through evaluation. A study by Rosenblat and Stark (2016) have shown that the customers are encouraged to embody the role of the manager. They further claim that customers act as middle managers through their ratings since they rate workers according to their subjective views (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). Furthermore, Hanser (2012) have argued that the problem that results from understanding the customer's role as a co-manager is that it obscures the material basis for power relations between capital and labour. The customer is not

causally situated between workers and managers but through their consumption which shapes the relationship between workers and managers.

Food delivery work is all about servicing, although their encounter with customers is limited, workers' efforts in producing a desired state of mind in the service recipients are elicited and monitored (Veen, et al., 2020). Consumption is an important part of the valorisation process (the final sale of commodity realises its value), which is the primary mediator between labour and capital. Customers have the power to influence the capital labour relationship as a variable component of the valorisation process (Wright, 1978). The more directly customers interaction mediates the production process of a service commodity, the more the customer influences the capacity to realise profit and thus the valorisation process as a whole. Thus, customer mediation has a significant implication of workers' control, cooperation, and resistance in the production process (Hanser, 2012).

The algorithm platforms rating system determines, manages, and monitors the quality of service provided and received through an anonymous rating system (Chinguno, 2020). Workers are expected to provide service according to the needs or expectations of customers. Failure to comply, workers are rated low by their customers. For example, if a restaurant supplied the worker with the wrong order or delivered the meal late as a result of not being able to locate the address; the worker will be confronted by an unhappy customer upon delivery (Sherman, et al., 2020) and risk being rated low by the unhappy customer. Delivery workers with a low average consumer rating are subjected to immediate deactivation on platforms (Kellogg, et al., 2020). Hoosen (2021) highlights drawing from Hochschild that workers are expected to perform emotional labour by managing their emotional capacity in service of their commercial interests. Platform workers are conscious that they are working under constant technologically based surveillance which pushes them to deploy emotional labour (Chinguno, 2020, Hoosen, 2021). For workers to guarantee positive feedback from customers they should

go out of their way to ensure that they provide the best customer service, they must navigate the digital and physical space to complete the "tasks" within the delivery time limit.

The rating system is also viewed as a mechanism used by capital to discipline and control workers (Chinguno, 2020). Hoosen (2021) on the other hand indicates that discipline and control in the rating system is not only used to punish underperforming workers but is also used to provide incentives to the high performers. This shows how platforms introduce "game elements" within the labour process to motivate workers to meet and exceed the targets. This is a form of gamification (Veen, et al., 2020) tied to prizes and rewards which leads to high worker productivity. The high performers are likely to be assigned more tasks than others (Griesbach, et al., 2019) as monitored by the algorithm management system.

The rating system is an important mechanism for controlling the labour process, but the underlying problem is that it is presented as an objective system, yet it is not so clear what one or five stars in the rating scale means. It is entirely based on specific subjective experiences which may not be universal (Chinguno 2020). According to Kute (2017), the rating system acts as an emotional straitjacket that limits and constrains worker agency since management interferes in the workers' mind and heart to generate a profit (Hochschild, 1985).

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

This chapter presents the research approach and design, selection criteria, data collection strategy, and the relevant ethical considerations. Furthermore, it reflects on the data collection process in the field and how that informs the study. This includes critical reflection on researcher positionality and strategies related to managing constrains presented by COVID-19 that was still in force when this study commenced.

1.1 Research Approach and Design

The research design is the strategic plan of the project that set out the broader structure of the research (Brewer, 2000). For the researcher to acquire a deeper understanding of the worker's ability to exercise agency shaping the new work structure presented by gig work, the interpretive paradigm which is subjective in nature was adopted. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), an interpretative framework is based on social constructivism, seeking an understanding of the world in which food delivery gig workers live and work. The adoption of the interpretive paradigm was largely aimed at exploring and making sense of worker agency of the food delivery gig workers. The interpretive paradigm acknowledges the view that there are many truths out there since reality is subjective and constructed from a person's life experiences, background and social interactions (Check & Schutt, 2012). Drawing from this

paradigm, a single event can be interpreted in various ways since reality is regarded as complex and multi-layered (Cresswell, 2014).

A qualitative case study design guided this study through in-depth interviews, Informal conversation, and observations. A qualitative research method relies heavily on subjectivism rather than positivism. It holds a human being's subjectivity in creating meanings in the world and in the process of explaining the casual link between theory and research (Cresswell, 2014). Bernard (2011) highlights that all facts and truths in the world are relative and not definitive contrary to the positivist perspective. The qualitative design was employed to understand ways in which food delivery gig-workers exercise control in how they conduct their work on their day to day lived experiences. I interacted with food delivery gig workers through a series of interviews and observations and discussions to gain in-depth insights. A qualitative research approach is holistic, naturalistic, and inductive in nature (Blanche, Durham, and Painter,2006). Adapting this approach was ideal since the aim is to understand the organisation of food delivery gig work as it unfolds in the real-world settings without any manipulation.

The interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach assisted in obtaining a deeper understanding of the nature of work performed by gig workers and drawing from their subjective understandings and interpretations. It also enabled the researcher to pursue and understand the organization of work performed within a technologically driven world, exploring the various perspectives, and interpreting them in a meaningful way (Cresswell, 2009). The data generated using the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach methods provided an opportunity for voices, concerns, and practices of food delivery gig workers of Rustenburg to be heard (Cole & Knowles, 2008).

Burawoy's (2003) reflexive ethnography also referred to as the extended case study was deplored to explore food delivery gig workers agency in a real-life context as well as the spatial

constitution of the industry. According to Burawoy (1998), this method is based on the premise of a reflexive model, which is a model which is concerned with not distancing itself from the persons it intends to study. Furthermore, this model is based on multiple methods such as dialogue, observation, and in-depth interviews in an interim journey to discover social realities about the respondents of interest. Burawoy also takes the position that methodology links technique and theory, that "it is the task of methodology to explicate methods of turning observations into explanations, data into theory" (Burawoy, 1991:5). Ethnography as a style of research uses various forms of techniques to collect data rather than a single method (Brewer, 2000). It enables social science researchers to understand social experiences of participants from their point of view as well as how these participants as social actors ascribe meaning and value to these experiences (Burawoy, 1991). It is worth noting that, the day-today experiences of workers emerge out of how work is organised and is tied to the politics in the broader society.

1.2 The extended case study/ reflexive ethnography

This study draws from Burawoy's (2003) reflective ethnography or extended case study as the overriding methodological framework. This allows the extension from micro-macro processes since social systems are not insulated from the broader context. This study started with theory (labour geography and the labour process theory) to problematize the question with the aim of rebuilding theory. According to Creswell (2013:92) and Burawoy (1998:54), theory guides the ethnographers' interventions. It helps in focusing attention during the research process. In this regard, theory was a critical lens to see how the empirical word challenges it. This is based on the following four dimensions as drawn by Burawoy (2003):

Extension of researcher into participant's world: This draws from the argument that we are part of the world that we study. In conducting this study, I became part of the participants'

world i.e. in their time and space as an observer. I spent quality time with the participants and interacted with them in their own space. I kept a small diary in which I recorded my observations. I tried as far as was possible to record key issues in my own private spaces. After each day of field work, I would type down field notes on what I would have observed and learnt throughout the day. Copious field notes taken about the discussion and visual presentations, were then analysed for content, narrative, or discourse (Bagele, 2020). Furthermore, the observations informed the second round of interviews to ensure that nothing significant was missed. Observation as a data collection method is important since the researcher can capture some things which participants do not always mention in interviews. Constantly being around their space of work enabled me to understand how they navigate different spaces in their work context.

Extension of observation over time and space: As part of the labour process, workers enter social relations, both with one another and with management. It is such social relationships that shape the meaning of work and how it is experienced (Burawoy, 1979). To understand those situational experiences in their space and time, I observed the day-to-day interactions and experiences of food delivery gig workers over a very prolonged period covering at least three months and in different times of the day, month, and locations within Rustenburg town. I deployed participant observation, also known as "natural sociology" (Burawoy, 1991). Burawoy (1991: 4) argues that the purpose of participant observation is not necessarily to strip oneself of biases nor to celebrate them, "but rather to discover and perhaps change" them "through interaction with others". Through participant observation, I was a research object rather than an impediment to the process of enquiry. Participant observation is described as "natural" because the time, location and setting of the research occur naturally; they are not constructed by the researcher (Wacquant, 2004) since people are in "their own everyday lives setting" (Burawoy, 1991). I employed this method since I was interested in the subtle,

instantaneous, and unnoticeable ways in which gig workers use to exercise agency in shaping the new work structures presented by gig work (Martin, 2006). This was important as it is common for participants to say something in the interview which turns out to be different from what they do. Participant observation also enabled me to explore my questions in depth, get nuances and complexities, tensions, and strains in the labour process of the gig-economy. The empirical evidence was gathered over an extended period as well as in various spaces in Rustenburg. This afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself into the daily activities and realities at the centre of the real world of work of my participants to enrich the data for the study.

Extension of micro to macro processes: Burawoy (2007) argues that social situations are not separated from the broader context because there cannot be a "micro process without macro forces or macro forces without micro processes". Adopting a case study approach enabled me to explore how the micro is shaped by the macro process. I draw from Burawoy (2003) argument that the micro-level understanding of the phenomenon may be a building block for a broader understanding of the variation in the labour process of the gig-economy at a macro-level.

Extension of theory: My intention from the onset is to explore the possibilities of extending and rebuilding the theory on the labour process and worker agency in the gig-economy. Chilisa, (2020) asserts that qualitative methods are best for building theory and can involve diverse social constructs. Theories are novel and unique. To problematize the research question, the study draws from Herod (2000) labour geography theory to understand worker agency in the gig-economy. The labour geography theory is central to this study as it concerns how power in work relations changes and gets reconfigured. My intention here is in line with Burawoy's (2007:7) thesis, that "we cannot see social realities without theory, just as we cannot see the

physical world without our eyes". According to Burawoy (2003) theories are our eyes in the research world.

Data collection methods

Ethnography is defined by Cresswell (1998) as the description and interpretation of a given social group. In other words, I examined a group of food delivery gig workers' form of work in their everyday social setting, through in-depth interviews and observations (Burawoy, 1998). Instead of only collecting data from key informants about how work is organised the researcher can also immerse in the world of the participants (Burawoy, 1998). The data to address the question raised in this study was drawn from a triangulation of interviews and observations. The rationale behind why I adopted a triangulation here is because participants often do not always say why and what they do in interviews. Part of this can best be exposed through observation. I conducted a series of interviews with the selected participants and triangulated this with observation of the participants. Follow up interviews with the participants helped me to unpack some of the scenes from observation to gain a more nuanced perspective of the workers' lived experiences. This was drafted into narratives which were later analysed.

I tried to sign up as a gig worker on Mr D (Takealot) food delivery platforms in Rustenburg as part of data collection process, but my application took long to be approved as well as my time in the field was limited to three (3) months. I submitted my application with all the required supporting documents at the reginal office in Rustenburg, which is referred to as the hub. They keep and process a waiting list of individuals interested in food delivery work. I met all the minimum requirements and presented myself and was put on the waiting list. However, to my surprise my application was not processed in time. I presumed that perhaps I did not meet the vetting criteria. Upon submission of my application, I was informed that the waiting list was long and even still if I could get hired, I will be placed on a probation where I will only

work weekends in order for them to assess my work performance before I could be allowed to work as and when I am available to work like any other food delivery gig worker. This experience highlighted to me the reality on the problem of unemployment and the availability of disposable labour desperate to be hired.

Signing up process for food delivery work was initially very straightforward and open to anyone interested and eligible when this model of work was introduced in South Africa. Workers were also not placed on probation upon their first months of work since this new form of work was new and required more workforce. Interested individuals knew that for them to join the work force, they had to go straight to the platform website, clicking on a portal, and selecting to become a Driver Partner. The minimum requirements of becoming a driver were that one must own a smartphone with android V6 or higher which enabled the delivery app. The prospective driver is also expected to also have a working GPS App in their smart phone, a valid driver's license and must own a motorbike or a light vehicle, an ID document/passport/asylum papers, proof of address, proof of bank details, and a clean criminal record. All the relevant submitted documents are verified by the platform company or through an agent. During my time in the field, the signing up process has been revised in a sense that food delivery platforms now require more documents in order to verify the eligibility of a prospective worker. The vehicle being used to conduct food delivery work must undergo vehicle inspection at a vehicle testing station which will require one to pay a fee before they can issue an inspection report which will form part of the supporting documents required by the food delivery platform. Once all the documents have been submitted and approved, the platform company will then send a confirmation to inform one that they are successful and can start come for training which will be facilitated by one of the workers who have been long in the system and understands this form of work well. In this form of work, some people work part time in order to maximise their income while others are doing this job on a full-time basis

working for different platforms to supplement their income. This in a way highlights the heterogeneity of the workforce.

An opportunity of working as a food delivery gig worker would have enabled me to have a more nuanced understanding of the everyday work activities conducted in the food delivery sector. Furthermore, this would have enabled me to examine the gig workers' world by getting into their lifeworld and becoming part of them. However, the goals of this study have been to provide a view into the lives and experiences of food delivery workers which I managed to draw from interviews and observation.

As part of data collection, I diarised food delivery workers' actions such as struggles or dramas that took place over time in the context of their working space. I draw from Burawoy (1998) thesis which explains that the extended case method can reflexively engage in multiple dialogues between the observer and participants to reach explanations of empirical studied phenomena (Burawoy, 1998). Burawoy further cautions us that such dialogues do not spring from outside space and time, they are guided by what he terms "reflexive science" which commands the researcher to unpack situational experiences through being part of the participants' space and time (Burawoy, 1998). It was thus important to observe the labour process within its field of location since it is a social- construction, produced every day through social processes which are shaped by social forces (Burawoy, 1998).

Reflexive science asserts everyday understanding of the social world from the standpoint of its structure, which is exactly how social forces broadly shape and are being shaped by everyday work experiences of food delivery workers (Burawoy, 1998). In the field I had to be self-reflexive and aware of my own positionality (Bourdieu, 1984).My biases, ignorance and prejudices were a painful process at times. Watching, listening, asking questions served as a data collection method (Lofland, 1971). I spent three months in and out of the field spending

time with participants trying to understand how their work is organised in the neoliberal context and how decisions are informed by structure and agency through observations, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations. An ethnographic approach was ideal to understand the labour process and the experiences of workers in the gig-economy since their daily experiences emerge from the way in which their work is organised (Burawoy, 2007).

1.2.1 Interviews

In-depth interviews with the selected ten food delivery gig workers were the primary data collection technique. In-depth interviewing is the most common qualitative research method as it allows the researcher to have a flexible and free-flowing interaction in which the respondent is given a good deal of leeway. Interviews were done in a semi-structured and in an informal conversation manner to explore how food delivery gig work is organised as well as the participants perspectives on worker agency. The informal interviews were in the form of conversations to get clarity or information about events or actions or things said or done. – Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data. Mason (1996) stated that face-to-face in-depth interviews offer the researcher an opportunity to gather information about the phenomena being studied from the perspective of the social actor or the person being studied. Food delivery worker's subjective views, feelings, and attitudes towards their everyday work activities and how they impact their social lives were accounted for in the process (Brewer, 2000). In-depth interviews in a practical sense involve "asking questions, listening, expressing interest, and recording what was said" (Neuman, 1994). Babbie and Mouton (2008) and May (1996) further state that in-depth interviewing allows for the observation of non-verbal cues when one engages in this purposeful conversation with the social actor. At times, respondents, especially when asked sensitive questions may give certain responses while their body language and/or nonverbal cues indicate another response. Respondents' verbal responses may contradict their body language. Therefore, this method allows the researcher to make a personal

assessment beyond what has been said. Moreover, the conversational nature of this data collection method gives the researcher the opportunity to develop rapport properly with the respondent as the conversation matures. Consequently, this leads to mutual trust and likeliness of reliable data (Marshall & Rossman 1996). Interview responses were open-ended and were all in English which is a language understandable to all participants. This enabled the researcher to understand the work is organisation of Rustenburg food delivery work as seen and narrated by the gig workers. Moreover, the researcher captured food delivery gig workers' points of views without predetermining them (Patton, 1990). To understand and highlight worker agency in the food delivery gig-economy, in-depth interviews allowed me to explore experiences of workers. As part of the preparation an interview guide was drafted (See Annexure C). This ensured that I collected similar data from all participants (Bagele, 2020). This enabled me to organise and remember what areas to cover in the interviews by outlining relevant topics and questions which helped steer the direction of the discussion and to make sure that the most important inquiries were not missed (Weiss, 1995). Questions asked in interviews were predetermined and asked in a continuous and systematic order, whilst allowing the interviewer the liberty to probe further beyond the provided answers (Berg, 2007).

When carrying out the in-depth interviews, I made use of both a notebook as well as an audio recorder. The use of an audio recorder was negotiated before-hand with participants; it was not imposed on them (see Annexure A). Food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg spend most of the time close to the food courts in Safari Tuine shopping centre parking space and some gather at Mc Donald's parking area in Rustenburg Waterfall mall which are both public spaces waiting for their calls. I established a good rapport with them to negotiate the best suitable time to conduct interviews. The best suitable time to conduct interviews were usually during the time when workers were waiting for their calls especially in the mornings when it was not peak time. My approach was designed not to disturb their work rhythm. I was very mindful not to

disturb the rhythm of the participant's work. Interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis in a private space so that they can be comfortable in the interview. Initially I had planned to hire a private space to conduct interviews with food delivery workers but because of the nature of their work, they preferred to always be near the restaurants so that the algorithm can pick them up and allocate them tasks. As a result, I conducted interviews with some of them in a private corner of the restaurant so that they do not miss an opportunity of being assigned a task. Some would get orders while we are in the middle of the interview, and we would have to pause and so that they may carry on with their delivery task then continue once they are done. Participants did not mind sharing their contact details with me so that if by any chance they may be assigned another task at a different restaurant and not be able to return they alert me through WhatsApp. I managed to do some follow-up interviews for some of the interviews disrupted by the call of duty. Food delivery work is a circular kind of work where an algorithm can decide to allocate anyone a task based on where they are located as well as their performance rate. This method was applied and proved successful during the duration of the research process.

1.2.2 Access to participants

I was born and raised in Rustenburg and overtime I have observed in recent years how work in the food delivery sector is evolving in many ways and affecting the town landscape. The number of food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg has in recent years increased significantly and this is open for anyone with a memory of the town and its history to notice. At one shopping mall which I visit almost every week there are at any given time more than 30 food delivery motor bikes of gig workers occupying one corner of the parking space. The gig workers in Rustenburg have appropriated public spaces close to the malls' food courts; for example, the Safari-Tuine shopping complex parking space and Mc Donald's parking space in Waterfall mall have all been occupied by food delivery gig workers. They use this space as a waiting area

where they spend time waiting to get called up for delivery. These two spaces are public spaces and I have identified them as spaces where I conducted my study. These spaces are critical in a sense that they allow workers to forge communities and solidarity as they enable them to meet fellow workers in the same sector.

In this sector it is normal and acceptable to see new workers who come in on a part time basis and might be engaged elsewhere. Gig workers provide services to any of the platforms that they may have signed up for and they claim that they are not employed by any of these platforms, they are independent contractors who are contracted by the food delivery platforms.

The focus of this study was on individual platform-based food delivery workers who work as independent contractors. These are the informants that I negotiated with on a case-by-case basis to secure interviews. I disclosed beforehand that the purpose of this research is to meet the degree requirements at Sol Plaatje University. I attempted to build networks and connections with food delivery workers I met while parking in one of the parking spaces they occupy while waiting for their orders. I identified this as the most efficient point of entry during the period of fieldwork given the nature of the work of food delivery workers and the limited time available to them in such spaces. Further, it allowed me the opportunity, while standing with them under the tree through informal conversation, to gain the attention and interest of workers. I was able to meet food delivery workers while standing in parking spaces for them to be allocated orders and strike up conversation. I would introduce my research to the workers and ask if they were interested in participating in my research. I did not ask any food delivery worker to participate in the study while in a group waiting to be allocated an order as I was concerned that they would feel compelled to agree or refuse given the fact that they might influence each other and either positively or negatively and not make an informed decision of participating in the study. Rather I shared my contact information with food delivery workers, and we communicated with each of them via WhatsApp to secure formal interview

appointments. I sought their permission to participate in the study as an interviewee and outline the research objectives and questions sharing the information sheet (See Appendix B) digitally via WhatsApp to allow them to make an informed decision to participate. I interviewed 10 food delivery workers who were mostly eight (8) males and two (2) women. I later observed that work in this sector is gendered. There is a glaring dominance of men and very few women are represented in the sector. All participants were of black race. I did not encounter any other racial groups and I presumed that they may not be represented in the Rustenburg food delivery sector.

Constantly visiting them and spending quality time with them under the tree close to restaurants and having informal conversations with them made them eventually open up and agree to participate in the study. Furthermore, I was able to observe their social interaction and workspace communication with their consent. The parking space interaction provided critical access to participants and allowed me to observe the interaction between food delivery workers which underpins my understanding of food delivery workers as a collective and how they exercise control in how they conduct their work.

Research participants were required to provide consent before the interview commenced and maintained the right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time. Interviews were conducted at a time convenient for participants and the appropriate location was selected for this purpose.

1.3 Targeted population and Sampling

This study made use of purposive sampling, to select the participants. The target population of this study are independent contractors of both men and women who are currently food delivery workers operating in Rustenburg, South Africa. Since the study is exploratory in nature its empirical evidence was drawn from ten in-depth interviews with selected food delivery

workers drawn from Rustenburg. The community of food delivery platform workers in South Africa is a very masculine space dominated by men food delivery workers. However, I managed to interview two female food delivery workers.

Selection of participants varied in terms of work experience, gender, work location and other forms of identity. I also follow the Facebook page of Rustenburg food delivery workers to observe the daily interactions and communication shared between workers in a group to reach the point of saturation. The page is open to anyone interested in platform food delivery work and not limited to only individuals who are already working for food delivery platforms. This page is a platform where common issues that workers are facing are discussed. These issues range from restaurants with long waiting times, challenges workers face with the platform, payment issues and advice on registering to become a delivery worker. Sometimes these social media platforms function as a self-defence mechanism for workers against theft or mugging. On other occasions they simply post humorous content, mostly to mock their employer, in a ludic activism used to express what Treré, (2015) calls "communicative resistance grammar". This platform also serves by providing orientation information to assist newly registered platform workers to understand the office requirements so that they can be able to allocate more days of work, but the group discussions were not limited to only the said topics. There is also an open market of app renting, scooter or bike renting as well as delivery bags and uniform selling in the Facebook platform. Following the food delivery workers Facebook page was done with an aim to understand the collective organisation of workers in a different space that is not visible to everyone. From the Facebook page I observed that most of the participants used what appear to be pseudonyms which I suspect is designed to escape the surveillance by the platforms.

1.4 Validity, reliability, and trustworthiness

A pilot test was conducted in order to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments and data collected. I interviewed three food delivery workers who were parked near Mc Donald's restaurant waiting to be allocated orders. I spend time with them observing the nature of their work, time one spent waiting to be allocated an order, what they do whilst waiting for orders, and how they interact with each other in that workspace. I then introduced myself to them, informed them about the nature of my study and requested their cell phone numbers so that I can contact them through WhatsApp voice notes and do some interviews with them. The interview process was long since there were pause in between. This is due to all the logistics involved with voice notes as the interviewer had to record the question and send it to the participant and only respond once the participant received the audio message and listened to it, then they would be able to respond.

Much as it seemed like WhatsApp voice notes would run smoothly and gather as much information as I would have wanted, it did not work well. Some would answer whenever they feel like answering the question, some would answer in short with not much details as I would expect. The other one became uncomfortable when asked about his country of origin and decided to withdraw from the interview. Majority food delivery workers in Rustenburg are cross border migrants of which some of them may be undocumented and not have work permits or some may have expired permit. I then realised that there was an issue of mistrust between me and my participants although at first, I explained myself and the nature of the study as well as its purpose. Some of the participants feared that they may lose their work if they participated in the study. They initially were not sure who I was and the motivation for the study. I also realised that conducting this study online was not possible. I went back to the field, at the parking space where I knew I would find them and talk to them in person as well as to gain their trust by properly explaining myself and the purpose of the study. Bagele, (2020), highlighted that, the amount of time spent in the field and constant engagement with

participants is important in a sense that it enhances the credibility of the study. I observed the day-to-day work experiences of food delivery workers in order to capture ideas and issues that were further explored in the in-depth interviews to enhance the credibility of the study.

The pilot test proved that conducting interviews through WhatsApp voice notes was not a reliable data collection method for this study since there was no conversation flow, consistency, and trustworthiness in answering the research questions. The research instrument (interview guide) proved the validity for the study since it captured data appropriately and accurately from the two remaining participants, since the other participant pulled out in the middle of the pilot interview. However, despite the challenges presented by the remote data collection strategy, Face-to face interviews, observations and becoming part of their Facebook community helped me to capture the lived experiences of food delivery workers. In order to gain their trust, I ordered a meal through the Mr D food App, and I introduced myself to the driver that came to deliver my meal. He did not have a problem with participating in my study and agreed to exchange his contact details so that we can schedule and interview when he had a free schedule. These particular participants then introduced me to his fellow colleagues who then became interested to know the nature of my study and what is expected of them.

1.5 Data Analysis

The aim of conducting a research study is to produce findings about a phenomenon under investigation. Osman (2009) explains that the process of data analysis involves taking data collected, analysing it so that it has order, structure and meaning. For Cohen et al. (2018), data analysis involves not only organising the data, but explaining the data by making sense of participant's definitions of a situation, patterns, themes, and categories. Deductive thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data obtained in this study.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants since there might have been a mismatch between the speed of writing and talking. As a result, data was analysed by choice of themes and sorting it into themes which fitted well to the data collected. After transcription I organised and presented the data for each research question. I identified themes patterns from the research questions. Emerging themes from the interviews were used to analyse and discuss the data. Themes emerged deductively from the literature reviewed, interview guide and the theoretical framework employed. Each theme was represented by extracts and observation field notes that represent rich and in-depth description of the theme (Davidson, 2009). The interviews and field notes were coded manually following the verbatim transcription of all audio-recorded interviews, field conversations and observable events. Transcripts were printed, read, and assigned alphabetic codes representing specific themes.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

According to Cohen et al. (2018), research ethics involve what the researcher must do in the conduct of the research study to ensure that the rights of the participants are respected, upheld, and protected. The fact that social research involves human subjects means that ethical issues cannot be overlooked. Research ethics provide guidance to researchers in respect of ethical issues and requires individuals to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Ethical clearance for this research study was obtained from Sol Plaatje University Senate Research Ethics Committee (SREC), thus this study followed the accepted protocols and procedures as laid down in the Sol Plaatje University code of ethics for the conduct of research involving human participants. The purpose and nature of the study were explained in English which is a language understandable to both me and all the selected participants. The informed consent was sought before commencing any interview.

1.6.1 Informed consent

The informed consent involves responsibilities of the researcher to explain to potential participants, what the research is about, the purpose of the research, why they are chosen as study participants and explain the terms and conditions of being a participant (Burgess, 1984). Before conducting interviews with participants, I explained that I am a postgraduate student at Sol Plaatje University, conducting a study for the fulfilment of a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. I obtained consent from participants by reading and explaining the written informed consent form (see annexure A) to them in English which was the language they all understood and were comfortable with, since most of them were cross border migrants. I ensured those participants understand the nature and the purpose of the study before we could start with the interviews. Participants were also asked to append their signature on a written informed consent form which was accompanied by the information sheet which had both my supervisor and my contact details (See annexure B). In instances where participants felt uneasy with signing the consent forms, I requested a verbal consent which I audio recorded before I started the interview.

1.6.2 Voluntary participation

Participants were provided with relevant information regarding the study (see Annexure A). I explained to them that they have a right to refuse and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were not incentivised for their participation in the study. Withdrawal from the study at any point of the interview was permitted without threat, intimidation, or consequences. When I was conducting a pilot study, one of the participants decided to withdraw from the study in the middle of the interview as he felt uncomfortable when I informally asked his country of origin. This particular participant was afraid of who I might be representing, and

this question made him question why I am conducting this study and why would I choose to speak to him. I then permitted the participant to withdraw from participating without any threat or intimidation. I became sensitive to this factor in all the subsequent interviews that I conducted. Most of the food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg are international migrants and I realised that the question on nationality had to be handled carefully to avoid losing the trust of the participants.

1.6.3 No harm to participants

Participants should never be exposed to any harm as a result of taking part in a study (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). This does not refer to physical harm but to information obtained from participants or questions that were asked. l informed the participants about safe keeping of the information given and assured them that none of the information given was to be used to cause harm or embarrassment. I made sure that participants clearly understood my intentions and why they are selected as study participants (See Annexure B). Participants were informed that they have access to any publication that may come from the interviews and research process.

1.6.4 Anonymity

Identity of all study participants was protected, this involved protecting the identity of participants through pseudonyms as well as their interview responses. Workers were told beforehand that their proceedings were treated as private and confidential. Their personal information was not in any way linked to their responses.

1.6.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality and privacy are very much important in social research since there is involvement of human subjects. Information gathered during research data collection did not harm any of the participants by violating their privacy (Thomas, 2003). Information collected

during field work was treated with utmost confidentiality. A group of participants subject to this study belonged to a socially vulnerable group and some of the sensitive information disclosed regarding their work situation during the process of this study was kept confidential. Identities of study participants were treated with utmost care and attention using pseudonyms in all my writing, no information can be linked to a specific person.

1.6.6 Data Storage

All interviews were audio recorded with consent obtained from the participants to use a recording device. Recordings were copied, stored, and uploaded on a google drive of a computer with a password. The google drive folder which contained audio recordings and the interview transcriptions was shared with my supervisor. After each day of fieldwork, saved audio files were uploaded into the google drive folder for safe keeping and back up. A protected password folder was created for the purpose of data storage. Transcription of interview recordings were saved under corresponding codes/pseudonyms and uploaded on a google drive folder shared with my supervisor.

1.7.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a crucial component of my study since this is a qualitative research study which looked at subjective views of food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg. Chilisa (2020), highlights that reflexivity is a strategy which ensures that possible bias will not threaten the credibility of the study. How personal bias and prejudice is managed is one of the major questions in social science which demands to be managed carefully. Furthermore, Chilisa (2020) argues that the truth-value of qualitative study is also affected by the closeness of the

relationship between the research participants and the researcher, which develops over a prolonged interaction considered to establish credibility. I was very much mindful of my position as a South African university middle class black female student trying to understand the subjective views of precarious workers who earn very little and are often despised and undermined by society the majority of whom are foreign migrants from the regional countries. Many of the food gig delivery workers are migrants and this in the local context is associated with prejudice. In recent years there has been growing hostilities against migrants in many of South Africa's townships. It was thus not easy for the gig food delivery workers to gain trust of a researcher who is of South African origin.

Burawoy (1991) highlighted that, the purpose of participant observation is not necessarily to strip oneself of biases or to celebrate them but to discover and perhaps change them through interaction with others. To shake off my own biases, I detailed reflective conversations with food delivery gig workers so that I become aware of some of my biases and ignorance. My thoughts, feelings, frustrations, fears, concerns, problems, and ideas were recorded throughout my field work. I exercised self-awareness to ensure that my research position did not hinder my understanding of the experiences of participants who are mostly cross border migrants and in a precarious line of work. Furthermore, it was important for me to be conscious of the language used when interacting with study participants from different walks of lives, levels of education and possibly multilingual from other countries. I always asked them beforehand which language they were comfortable with, they mostly preferred to communicate in English since it was a language, we both understood and, in a way, obscured their nationality. The adoption of a reflective sociology helped me to self-reflect on my position as a researcher as well as to have a better understanding of the work organisation gig work.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the methodology and methods informing the study. It has justified the selected methods and how this is ideal in answering the presented questions.

Chapter 4

Worker agency in a digitalised labour process

This study seeks to understand how workers in the platform food delivery sector exercise agency in a digitalised labour process. The food delivery gig work labour process is designed in a way to undermine worker agency and advance the interests of the platforms. This chapter presents and analyse the findings drawn from empirical evidence. It is organised into six themes, the first discusses how workers deploy agency to exercise control over the labour process. The second theme examines the deployment of worker agency to subvert algorithm management which is part of food delivery work labour process. The third theme unpacks how the food delivery workers make use of the social media to avoid the gaze and surveillance from the platforms. The fourth theme explores how technology may forge a common identity and subjectivity for food delivery workers which manifest as a form of resistance. This is followed by a discussion on the deployment of agency to enhance social relations of production and finally the last theme engages how food delivery workers use agency to deal with structural factors beyond the workplace.

Food delivery gig worker in Rustenburg

Rustenburg is a small town serviced by two of the main food delivery platforms in South Africa: Mr D and Uber Eats. Participants for this study provide their service to two main delivery platforms in the city: Mr. D and Uber eats. The two platforms have similar labour process which are however informed by different context and experience. Mr. D/Takealot

originated in South Africa. It started in 1990 as an ordinary delivery company servicing hotels and restaurant in many of South Africa's urban centers. Its modus operandi was turned around in 2014 following the adoption of platform-based mode of delivery and interaction between the service provider, customer, and riders. Uber Eats on the hand represents a new form of global digital capital accumulation regime driven by the quest to forge new digital spaces of accumulation on a global scale. Differences in contexts in which these two companies emerged and their experience is revealing in the way it has shaped their labour processes overtime and workers response and experience.

Takealot/Mr. D as a company that emerged locally has its own distinct ways of organizing space and the labour process. Drivers are required to wear branded uniforms and delivery bags. To become a driver on a given platform you must download the app and log in an application and submit the required documents. Prospective drivers for Mr. D /Takealot for example are required to upload a CV with personal details, copies of both sides of the ID, proof of residential address, vehicle registration (car or motor bike), vehicle insurance, vehicle certificate of roadworthy and payment of R75 for criminal record vetting. These documents may be uploaded via the app or can be submitted physically at the Takealot office in the CBD. For Uber Eats all the interactions and onboarding is conducted virtually through the app. According to the participants interviewed, it takes a waiting period of at least three months from signing to final verification before a new driver may be onboarded and can start work. This creates a period of idling for new drivers between signing up and the commencement of work.

Mr. D/Takealot has two distinct labour processes. It is involved in restaurant food delivery and is also into ordinary parcels logistics and online shop. The parcel delivery services are linked to its online store and other ordinary parcel deliveries in the city. Parcel delivery is usually assigned as morning shift work reserved for the senior drivers. They are assigned this work between 8am and 12 noon and in the afternoon may join the ordinary delivery gig food delivery

service in the city. According to the interviews, parcel delivery is reserved for the trusted drivers with long service and good track record. This work is usually reserved for drivers with at least three years' work experience and with a good track record. The parcel delivery service has its own labour process which is distinct to the food delivery gig work.

The gig delivery work is organized around an app which facilitates the interaction between the restaurant, workers, and the customer. The platform company is the one that designed and own the app, and the restaurant, worker and customers all have access to the app. The customer initiates the process by making an order which is transmitted to the service provider (restaurant). The worker is at the same time assigned the order for delivery. According to the participants interviewed; the restaurant is given 40 minutes to prepare the order. At the same time the order is assigned to a driver by the app who also has 40 minutes to collect it. The driver has 15 seconds to accept the order and a R10 penalty is charged for declining orders if someone is on duty. Once the order is ready the driver accept the order and must take a picture showing that the order is sealed, and that delivery has commenced. The driver is given 30 minutes to complete the delivery and once the delivery has been completed, he is required to confirm this through the app. At the end of the service the customer is requested to rate separately in the case of a restaurant the quality of food and that of the delivery service.

In terms of the geography Takealot/ Mr. D divides its operations into separate working zones. Each zone has its own designated delivery workers, an office which is manned by staff including an HR and operations manager. Each working zone has its own assigned drivers. A driver assigned in a particular working zone is not allowed to move to another zone without clearance. A driver intending to move to another zone will have to get a letter of transfer from the home zone to the other. For a small location such as Rustenburg the whole city is designated as a single zone with a regional office in the CBD which doubles as a warehouse and regional office where the drivers sign on and off duty.

Drivers are required to sign on duty to confirm their availability for a particular day. The workers have freedom to choose the signing on time. Each day has three scheduled signing on times: 0900am, 1100am and 1400pm. The knocking off time for everyone is set at 2100hrs every day. This means that the workers can work for a maximum of 12 hours in each day depending on which of the scheduled signing on they would have selected.

Takealot/Mr. D delivery workers are obliged to sign on at the regional office which is manned by an operations and HR manager. Each driver is required to complete a signing on form and insert their cellphone number. They are required to indicate the amount of change they have when signing on and should confirm that they are in proper branded uniform and have a delivery bag. The signing on time is also reserved for drivers to handover any cash received from previous shift. Takealot/ Mr. D clients have an option to pay for the delivery and this is collected by the driver.

Drivers are paid per delivery completed. Each working zone has a flat delivery fee of R27 which is credited to the driver. Rustenburg is designated as a single working zone and the distance to the point of delivery can be up to 10 kilometers. This means that long distance deliveries are costly to the driver. On average gig delivery workers in Rustenburg complete about 10 deliveries. The drivers total earning for each day and month is very unpredictable as it depends on many factors such as the number of working hours, location, demand, driver profile, the quality of the deliveries assigned and others. Drivers are paid every two weeks for the total earnings accrued in that period. According to the interviews the average net earnings per fortnight range from a low of about R4500 to a high of about R10000. This gives us a monthly range of R900 to R20000 per month. The participants interviewed highlighted that least 40 percent of the income is drawn from tips received from clients through the app and or in person when the delivery is affected. This highlights that a significant proportion of the driver's income is based on client benevolence.

At the completion of the delivery the customer is requested on the app to rate the- food from the restaurant and the delivery by the driver separately. This in a way provides feedback to two separate labour processes. The rating for the restaurant provides feedback for the restaurant labour process whilst that for the driver provides feedback for the delivery labour process. The rating from each client is not reflected to the driver. The driver is only able to see their overall rating. Any driver scoring a rating of less than 4.5 will receive deactivation warnings through the app and if they continue to receive a rating below 4.5, they will ultimately be deactivated by the algorithm.

As part of the labour process, Takealot/ Mr D food delivery gig workers are on a daily basis subjected to some forms of direct control by the regional office which requires them to report for duty on daily basis before they may successfully log on the App start work. All Takealot/Mr D drivers are obliged to sign on duty at the regional office in person before they may be cleared to go online. The regional office is linked to the online system which is controlled by the national food delivery office. The linked system enables them to control who is working for their company and at a particular time, day, and geographic location. One of the participants described how each workday begins at the regional office:

> The regional office is where we must all start our day, where we do our signing in and signing out like for instance if you have cash you have to take it to the Office at the end of your working day... since some customers may pay cash instead of paying on the App... I guess that is where we sometimes interact as workers and meet our fellow colleagues (Interview 3, 2022).

The centrality of this regional office in the everyday lives of the workers is such that sometimes they are subjected to supervision through the online system as well as through the WhatsApp group created by the regional office management for all the drivers in the city. The office has a screening form which they fill in for each worker on duty to ensure that they are ready for work and that they are properly dressed to represent their brand to the public.

Uber Eats has a similar labour process but with significant variations. Firstly, it does not have an office in Rustenburg. All its interaction with the drivers; from onboarding to the daily operations is conducted solely virtually through the app. It deploys a different regime of spatial organization. It's working area is global and not divided into zones and there is no scheduled signing on times for drivers. Uber eat drivers have the freedom to select their preferred working times and can work anywhere in the country and do not require to have a transfer letter. Uber drivers have the freedom to sign on whenever they may want to work. Its drivers have no uniforms or any form of branded material. This in a way makes them invisible workers. For Uber Eats a driver is expected to take self-picture every 5 days and upload on the app to validate their identity. This is designed to avoid the trading and renting of profiles. The drivers are on a random basis required to confirm their identity through facial recognition. This constitutes part of the monitoring and surveillance to avoid misuse and exchange of apps by drivers. The ability of workers to rent out their app profiles and switch between two apps in their daily work highlights how as workers they are able to forge their own ways to control how they conduct their work. Food delivery gig workers have agency to make such decisions regarding their everyday work experience. The dynamic of the decisions made by food delivery gig workers' demands localised experience driven knowledge to make effective decisions on how to navigate the labour process.

4.1. Agency and the labour process.

There are various ways in which workers exercise control in how they conduct their work in line with existing norms and structures. For the food delivery gig workers understanding of the geography and the rhythm of the city is critical as it has effect on how they conduct their work and the choices and work decision that they make. It has a direct effect on the organisation of work and the labour process.

The working area for Rustenburg food delivery workers may be divided into four main working points each of which serve a particular location and clientele. The food delivery gig workers select their respective working point/area based on their knowledge and rhythm of the city. The first working area/point is the Rustenburg CBD which also includes a mall and services the upmarket areas such as Geelhout park and Rustenburg north residential areas. The area serviced from this point is predominately upper middle class and have more affluent and whiter clientele.

Other food delivery workers prefer working at the Rustenburg square which has few restaurants. One can hardly see food delivery workers outside the restaurants at this point, but they are there to collect orders when there is demand. Rustenburg square working area/point food delivery gig workers focus on servicing the municipality offices, various corporate offices in the area and three private hospitals and one public hospital that are in the vicinity. Some of the food delivery gig workers prefer working from Safari tuine. They service a nearby multi-racial residential area which is predominately middle class. Lastly, other food delivery gig workers prefer working at the Waterfall mall which mainly service clients from the nearby gated communities within the suburb of Cashan. This is where the upper middle class of the city live and has been described as the most elite enclave in Rustenburg (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2015). In recent years Rustenburg has seen the proliferation of such gated communities driven by inequality. Those who are from affluent background feel secure in these gated communities. These working areas are tied to norms and structures which informs food gig delivery workers agency. The food delivery gig workers are selective in the way they conduct their work and how they deploy emotional labour. The workers perform what can be seen as selective participation when conducting their work.

Food gig delivery work is characterised by the piece rate system where workers are paid based on the task performed. This lead some of them to work long hours to enhance their income. A

close interaction with the food delivery gig workers highlighted that they have to have special knowledge about the social rhythm of the city in order for them to be successful in their work. They must know which are the most preferred restaurants by what clients and the times and fluctuation of demand. For example, clients from the black working class are said to usually prefer restaurants such as Nando's, Chicken Licken whilst white middle class and the more affluent are said to prefer restaurants such as Dros Grills and Ocean basket. This profiling of restaurants and clients is drawn from experience and constitute part of the knowledge which informs workers decisions on where and what time to work. Each of the areas has its own rhythms and a particular flow of demand. For example, Cashan working areas demands gets high in the late evenings as it services the affluent middle class residential areas whilst Safarituine and Rustenburg square gets busy during working days and hours as its services parts of the CBD which are working zones.

The unique expertise possessed by food delivery workers allows them to make optimised work decisions which are aligned with their objective of maximising their returns. I examined the factors informing food delivery workers decisions on how and why they select working in certain areas. The main factor informing their decision was said to be based on individual projection of the possible earnings from a particular area and this is informed by norms and structures tied to the particular area. One of the participants explained:

> I prefer to work around the suburbs, so most of my customers are white people... they really tip well... for example one of my customers tipped me on the App and when I got there, they gave me something extra as a tip again (Interview 3, 2022).

It is clear from the citation above that the food delivery gig workers have perceptions about the clients they service in a particular area and have certain expectations. For example, Cashan working area service more affluent clientele which is predominately white and is perceived to be more generous with tips. On the other hand, clients from the CBD or Tlhabane are mainly

working class and as a result they are said to be less generous with tips. As a result, delivery gig workers servicing this area have little expectations of getting tipped by their clients.

The worker's tacit knowledge about the city and the racial profile of the clients is critical for their everyday work decision. This developed overtime from their subjective experience. Hoosen (2021) argues that the traditional knowledge about the city and where workers choose to work is informed by the spatial geography of the city and how this relates to the economic hierarchies of the city and the knowledge possessed by gig workers. I also noted this when exploring the question of what informs food deliver gig workers decision on the working hours. I noted that this also driven by the traditional knowledge as seen by Hoosen (2021) and the experiences of workers. One of the participants explained:

> I would say every day between 6pm and 8pm is our peak hours but month end Fridays or 25th Fridays and the Fridays of the 30th or 31st just know that those are the busiest days, evenings are our peak hours... that's where we make serious money …. but every day we have peak hours like from the afternoon and the evenings especially during lunch time and dinner time, we get very busy (Interview 4, 2022).

The above citation suggest that the food delivery gig workers possess special tacit knowledge that allows them to exercise control on how they organise their work. Algorithmic control can lead to overwork, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion therefore, these workers have developed special knowledge about which hours of the day, week and month is ideal for high returns. This special knowledge ensures that they do not work whole day without making any income. It is important to note that this form of worker agency is also informed by the experience of the respective worker based on their understanding and knowledge of customers habits and trends in a particular geographical location. One of the participants highlighted that having a grounded knowledge about the rhythm of a particular area frees up time for the delivery gig workers and this makes it easy for some to handle more than one job as they have a better understanding of how food delivery work operates in a particular area. This according to the workers,

interviewed allows them to accommodate working in two different jobs without one of them suffering. One of the participants explained:

> I transport school children in the morning when it is not yet that busy on the app, also in the afternoon during after school hours, I rush to collect them then come back and do deliveries (Interview 2, 2022).

It is clear drawing from the above citation that food delivery workers have control over how they organise and conduct their work. Food delivery gig work is characterised by precarity. The special knowledge about the geography and rhythm of the city is critical in informing workers work decision. This nevertheless leaves gap for uncertainty. For example, the income of food delivery gig workers is a factor that remains uncertain even when possessing the tacit knowledge about the geography and rhythm of the city. As a mitigation some of the food delivery gig workers engage in several work and or income generating activities at the same time while also working full time as food delivery workers. The knowledge about the area and rhythm of the city informs worker decision on which ideal times to sign on and for doing other activities. The more experienced delivery gig workers usually have a better understanding of which areas and time are more lucrative. For example, the newcomers usually sign in the morning and work all day whilst the more experienced only sign on during specific times of the day and week. According to Barratt et al., (2017) precariousness and exploitative practices forms part of the reality of work in the gig economy and this is also evident since we see how the uncertainty tied to the nature of the job and how some gig workers address this problem by taking more than one job at the same time. Some work only during specific period for example, weekends with income targets in mind so that they can make out in this gig work game.

Furthermore, empirical evidence from this study, affirms the view that work in this sector is characterised by precarious low wages, insecurity, absence of social security and barriers to collective actions (Rubery et al., 2018). However, some of the delivery gig workers interviewed highlighted that income and condition of service are way better when compared to many other

sectors. For example, many of them indicated that they left sectors such as construction, agriculture, restaurants, and hospitality and others where the income was said to be lower when compared to the food gig delivery sector.

Work in the food delivery gig sector is unpredictable and this exacerbates systematic precariousness and control over the workers which eventually lead to workers adopting survival strategies. The way in which this new form of work is organised, attracts workers from other insecure jobs or small 'entrepreneurs' looking for better opportunities. The "independence", room to control one's income and the flexibility which is often presented with this type of work are factors which attract workers into this work with some leaving their previous jobs for greener pastures. One of the participants explained:

> I was working as a security guard here at McDonalds, the work was too much but the salary was very much less so I decided to work as a food delivery worker so that I can determine my own salary (Interview 1, 2022).

As highlighted in the citation above food delivery work is presented as work that comes with liberty and freedom which allows the workers to determine how and when they work and ultimately their earning. It is viewed as characterised by the flexibility of scheduling when and where one wants to work. There is, however, need to take a close look at these promises and interrogating their authenticity. Workers in this sector are quite heterogenous. There are some who work on a fulltime basis whilst others work on a part time basis which on its own has many varieties. For example, some opt to work certain hours of the day whilst other work only on certain days of the week. Some of the workers work on a contingent basis for example to meet a particular income target before exiting the sector. This in a way highlights the heterogeneity of the workers engaged in this sector. One of the participants explained:

> Since I am employed full time elsewhere... I normally give myself a target to say at least I must make R1700- R2500 for a weekend... So yes, I do decide my working hours depending on my schedule, like this Saturday, I had to go to work 1st before doing my normal delivery

> routine... then I logged on the platform after 12pm which I know it is lunch time and there will be more work demand (Interview 3, 2022).

The freedom to choose working hours, day and space represents a form of worker agency which is critical for the success of the worker. Furthermore, it is important to note that platform food delivery workers income is entirely made up of piece rate therefore platform food delivery workers have no choice but to consent to the rules of the game to maximise their income through making out (Burawoy, 1985). As outlined by Burawoy (1985), the more skilful the worker is at making out, the more profitability the company becomes from increased productivity. Workers are skilful in terms of their selective participation to overcome the burden of overworking for less. They learn these skills overtime while they are in the system which enables them to make workplace decisions in a profit-maximising manner.

As with the piece-rate system, gig workers are also incentivized to increase production rates through incentives and bonuses, evocative of what Burawoy (1979) calls the game of "making out". For Burawoy (1979) the game of making out creates the illusion that work is a game, which leads workers to deploy strategies and compete with one another (and themselves) to surpass production expectations.

The illusion that food delivery gig workers have control over their earnings is part of the freedom ideology that platform companies like Uber Eats and Takealot/Mr D exercise to get workers to consent, obscuring that the instability in hours and wages is borne out of how the platform is designed, rather than a reflection of how much effort one puts in. As a counter to the platform design of obscuring instability in hours and way, food delivery gig workers choose specific restaurants they prefer to service. This is a work-based decision designed to maximise returns and is informed by experience and is designed to avoid overworking. When asked why they prefer servicing certain restaurants, one of the participants explained:

> I prefer to take orders from fast-prepared restaurants such as KFC, Chicken licken and McDonalds. I know that I won't have to wait for more than 15minutes waiting for an order, they are very fast, and I will be able to deliver the order in time and come back to wait for another order (Interview 1, 2022)

The above statement reveals that food delivery gig workers are conscious of the labour process for the restaurants where they get orders. This is part of the tacit knowledge acquired overtime and is critical in how they navigate their workspace. They use this knowledge to decide and control how they work. This form of control is informed by their experience in this form of work as well as their insights of the labour process for each of the respective restaurant located at their respective working area/point. This comes from years of experience in the sector and working at a particular location. For this sector time spend on each task is of great importance therefore workers decide consciously which ideal restaurants to pick orders from to utilise their time in a way that enhances their income and which ones they should avoid.

4.1.1. The practise of renting profiles

Each profile is tied to a particular individual worker registered on the platform. One of the findings from this study's empirical evidence relates to the practise of renting of profiles by food delivery gig workers for various reasons. According to some of the participants interviewed, some of them rent out their profiles during periods when they may not be available for work. For example, one of the workers indicated that whenever he wants to take an off day, he would rent out his profile for the period for a fee to other available drivers who do not have their own profiles. Food delivery gig workers have no fixed working days or time. The workers decide the ideal times and day to take a rest. In a way the practise of renting app for the purpose of taking a break from work represent some form of selective participation by the workers which serves to overcome overworking and burnout and is outside the control of the platforms.

Empirical evidence highlights that the renting of profiles by delivery gig workers is a common practise which is outside the control of the platform and represent workers expression of

agency. This is reflected on the various Facebook pages for delivery gig workers and WhatsApp groups. The Rustenburg Food delivery workers WhatsApp group comprise of about 200 active members. Most of those who are active on the Facebook page for example use what are apparently pseudonyms for various reasons. The Facebook page is an important space for advertising for delivery gig workers renting their profiles notwithstanding that the platforms (Uber and Mr D) do not allow the transfer and exchange of profiles by workers. Ideally every worker is tied to a particular profile on the platform which also informs the allocation of tasks by the algorithm. For example, the algorithm link certain workers to clients based on previous positive interaction and feedback. The reality, however, is that delivery gig workers are not always tied to a particular profile as they are prevalent practise of renting of profiles amongst the workers which is out of the control of the platforms. A review of the Rustenburg food delivery gig workers Facebook page highlighted several adverts of workers renting out their profiles for a fee, a practise which is not condoned by the platforms. I explored the possible reasons the delivery workers engage in the exchange and renting of their profiles despite that its prohibited by the platforms.

As highlighted earlier, some of the workers highlighted that they rent out their profiles during the time when they take a break from work. According to the interviews, the renting out of profiles by some of the workers is ideal as it allows them to make money during the times that they may need to rest. For example, I observed that some of the workers rent out their profiles only on certain days of the week or month. Others for example are migrants from neighbouring countries and when they go on holidays, they take this opportunity to rent out their profiles to those who do not their own profiles. For example, one of the participants highlighted that when he had a bereavement in Zimbabwe, he rented out his app for the period he was not in town.

Food delivery platforms have certain minimum criteria before onboarding new workers on the platform. For example, a prospective driver for Mr. D/Takealot is required to upload a CV with

personal details, copies of both sides of the ID, proof of residential address, vehicle registration (car or motor bike), vehicle insurance, vehicle certificate of roadworthy and payment of R75 for criminal record vetting. These documents may be uploaded via the app or can be submitted physically at the Takealot/Mr D office in the CBD. Some of the individuals in need of work may not have all the required documents. Furthermore, there is a waiting period of at least three months from the period of application to the approval. This leaves some prospective workers in suspense and desperate to get work.

Those who are interested in the food delivery gig work yet do not meet the requirements or are impatient to wait for the system to put them on board according to the interviews are forced to reach out through social media such as the Facebook page to those who may be renting out their profiles (See figure 1). This in a way becomes an important means for them to access work which is beyond the control of the platforms.

Adverts from those renting out their profiles do not say much other than indication that they are renting a delivery profile, location, and the fees. They leave their contact details on the Facebook page and the details and terms of conditions are usually negotiated privately away from the gaze of the platforms. The participants interviewed highlighted that individual gig workers renting their profiles normally do not have a prescribed binding contract. The terms and working conditions or rental agreement are tacit and are said to be sealed through just a handshake. This in a way represents an exercise of agency by the delivery gig workers and is designed to subvert the gaze of the delivery platforms. The agency displayed in this case is double sided i.e., for the one renting out and for the other renting the profile. Some workers pointed out that what prompt them to rent other profiles is because of the protracted waiting period between application and final approval. This was said to take on average three months or longer for some. One of the participants explained:

> I rented an app because I have never been successful on my application, it has been three months since I have been waiting and I needed to start making money (Interview 5, 2022).

Figure 1 Source: Facebook, 2022

The practise of renting out profiles as highlighted in the interviews and on the Facebook, pages is prevalent in the sector. It also suggests that there are two categories of workers within this sector: those that have their own profiles and those who rent from others. Empirical evidence from this study highlights that there are several reasons why some of the workers resort to renting profiles of others. The selection criteria to access work in the food delivery gig workers' demands several documents including ID or passport etc which some of the prospective workers do not have. In addition, there is a waiting period between the time a prospective worker applies to be signed on and when he/she gets onboard.

The practise of renting profiles is a means for those who cannot easily have their own profile to access work. The renting of profiles thus in a way represents a doubled sided exercise of agency. It represents the agency of those workers who have their own profiles which they rent out to those who do not have and the agency of those workers who do not have their own profiles for various reason but would want to access work in the sector.

There are many reasons accounting for this practice. Empirical evidence drawn from this study suggests that the renting of profiles by food delivery gig workers can be partly explained as an expression of agency by those waiting to be on boarded. The workers waiting to be on boarded are not just waiting or docile subjects, but they have agency and the capacity to resist the structural constraints barring them from accessing work. On the other hand, we also see that

this also express another form of agency by workers renting out their App profiles when they want to take a day off or when they are unable to work for example due to family emergencies such as funeral or they may want to go home and rest or for holidays This is the case given that most of the delivery gig workers in Rustenburg are migrant workers.

The empirical evidence from this study also indicates that some of the food delivery gig workers have profiles on more than one platform. This in a way according to some of the workers interviewed is a strategy designed to maximise their chances of making more calls and enhances their income. I interacted with some of the workers and observed that some of them would be wearing Mr D branded uniform and in possession of the Mr D branded bag yet would deliver some orders placed on Uber Eats platform. Uber Eats delivery workers do not have a uniform or any form of visible identity or branding unlike Mr D which have branded- t-shirts and bags.

Initially when I started my fieldwork, I could not clearly distinguish between drivers working for Uber eats and those for Mr D. On one of my field days I used my app to order food on the Uber eat platform and another order on Mr D on separate occasions. My orders on the two occasions were coincidentally delivered by the same driver. I had previously interacted with this driver when I was doing my fieldwork and he had presented himself as working for Mr D. I later discovered that some of the workers are registered and work on more than one platform. This practise, however, is not condoned by the platforms. Out of interest I asked this specific delivery worker how he navigates working on two apps at the same time. He explained:

> With Uber Eats it is very much easy since one can just log online and wait to be allocated orders there is no human interaction but as part of their identity verification, they just require workers to take self-picture every after 5 days and upload on the app to validate your identity but I have noticed that customers around this town prefer to use the Mr D app because they are aware that it exist around town as they can see us when they come to the malls as well as on the roads (Interview 7, 2022).

As highlighted above it is clear that the food delivery gig workers can control how they work, and this is informed by what they perceive as the preferences of their clients. It is important to note that the renting out of App profiles and switching between two app is prohibited by food delivery companies, yet these workers can pull it off successfully. Although it comes with risk the delivery gig workers in Rustenburg can make a choice to switch in between platforms in pursuit of maximising their returns and this often is informed by the local context.

4. 2. Navigating algorithm management

Food delivery platforms make use of algorithm management system which are computer-programmed procedures that convert input data into the desired output in a way that is more comprehensive, instant, and interactive (Kellogg, Valentine, and Goods, 2020). This involves a system of soft form of control and surveillance and management of labour by digital machine. The system is based the displacement of human resource management by digital technology which assumes the role of coordinating supply and demands, monitor performance (Hoosen, 2021, Sherman, et al., 2020). The algorithms assume management functions by automatically allocating tasks to workers through smartphone apps (Veen, et al., 2020). Through algorithm platforms, workers receive automated instructions regarding the allocated task, where to collect or drop off as well as the route they should use to locate the drop off point. They work not only through an understanding of the rhythms of the market, but also through developing and understanding how the platforms they work for internalise, process, and intervene into these rhythms through the active management of the labour distribution algorithm. In some cases, the use of algorithms allows the platform to not only select workers and assign work but also to assess workers' performance according to real-time digital surveillance of the labour process (Gandini, 2019). This means workers develop both intuitive knowledges of the area they work in, and how the platform behaves in that area. Furthermore, to perform successfully, food

delivery workers must be able to route their way around the city. Veen, et al., (2020) supports this perspective and explored how routes taken by food delivery workers are shaped by algorithm affordances, geography, risks, and their worker agency. Platform food delivery apps provide maps for their workers and calculate their pay based on the distances of the routes they recommend and not the route workers actually take. Whilst the app may do the work of route planning for their workers, presenting it neatly on a cleanly drawn map with an arrow for direction, this representation of space is abstracted from the complex realities the city presents to the driver. However, it is ultimately still the driver who must make informed decisions about how to traverse urban space, considering the messy realities that exist beyond the elements depicted on phone screens. To deploy these learned tacit knowledges is essential to the successful performance of gig work. Braverman (1974), presents what he refers to as the dissociation of the labour process to argue that capital attempts to control workers by controlling the decision-making process. Thus, workers must arrive to work at a specific location, at a specific time, in a specific manner, and so a degree of productivity is guaranteed by controlling such decisions. Food delivery workers display a degree of agency in which route to take when conducting their delivery work in order for them to become productive. This can be seen as a part of the 'disruption' of the platform food delivery, as an attempt to reorganise the labour process. It is highly important that orders are delivered on time since there is consequence associated with late deliveries. One of the participants explained the consequences associated with late deliveries:

> If the delivery is late certain number of times in a week, management (the algorithm) reduce your allocation of orders since late orders significantly increase bad customer reviews and complain (Interview 10, 2022).

The above statement suggests that management relies on digital technology to monitor how workers conduct their work and gives them feedback on their performance. It is evident that

there is a highly subjective element to the way such labour is performed and experienced which is entirely dependent on the two parties (driver and customer) involved in the transaction. The exact functioning of the algorithm's monitoring and management of worker performance is obscured from workers; however, this confirms the existence of an algorithmic black box (Scasserra, 2020). The elements of platform's human management that remain are obscured, making contestation of platform's control regime increasingly difficult. Conflicting labour-capital interests between workers and the platforms are diffused onto the juxtapositions between workers, on the one hand, and customers and restaurants, on the other. Through the rating and feedback system, customers and restaurants are mobilized in the management of food delivery workers' labour.

The algorithm, according to Hoosen (2020), limits worker agency by making decisions on behalf of workers based on its predetermined rules and statistical models, which develop perpetually through an iterative process of learning-by-doing. Empirical evidence drawn from this study highlights the various way delivery gig workers deploy their agency to subvert the various forms of control that comes with algorithm management. All drivers and management for Mr D in Rustenburg have a WhatsApp group named Rustenburg team. The WhatsApp group was created by the regional office as a platform for communication between management and the workers and amongst the workers on matters related to work. This group is an initiation of the management as part of their strategy to enhance control of the labour process. Management use this platform to communicate to the drivers when the demand may be high and not proportionate to the drivers on the ground and to communicate other operational issues. One of the participants explained how this WhatsApp group is used:

> Normally what we report through this group are incidents where your allocated delivery time is exhausted or its on minus ten minutes, you have to report reasons of the delay like maybe say I can't find the customer and I am at the gate and the customer is unreachable, management will also try to reach the customer, so it's important the we communicate such challenges on the group so that management is

> aware of our challenges and know how best to deal with the particular problem (Interview 9, 2022).

It is clear as highlighted in the above citation that the WhatsApp group is an important space for the workers to challenge some of the automatic decisions by the algorithm. Finding destinations, especially when they are apartments, can be extremely difficult, for example because of inconsistency in the numbering system. Drivers are unable to rely on GPS navigation for the entire part of the delivery and must therefore use their problem-solving skills and communicate by phone calling sometimes angry customers, who "don't necessarily understand how to use the app". Workers become the target when something go wrong during a delivery, as customers often do not understand that delivery workers generally have very little control over aspects of the delivery. These misunderstandings can directly impact the livelihoods of workers when customers leave bad reviews or even lead to a suspension or deactivation. This reveals the burden of risk gig workers carry when doing this work, and the power of the consumers have over them. The consumer at some point is subverted to a manager when they switch on to the rating of the service provided. One of the participants pointed out that:

> Sometimes we come across the challenge of a road accident or a roadblock which this system is not designed to detect and inform the customer, so what we do when we come across this is that we take a picture as evidence and share it in a group for management to see (Interview 5, 2022).

According to some of the workers interviewed; to mitigate negative rating in cases where the driver fails to locate the client in good time perhaps because of gate closed or the client may not be on site; the drivers would take a picture and share it on the WhatsApp group. In some cases, the delay may be a result of a roadblock or there may be an accident along the way. In such cases some of the interviewed drivers indicated that they would counter the risk of discipline from the algorithm by taking a picture and share it on the WhatsApp group that have the regional management and other fellow workers. In this instance the WhatsApp group is a

critical space for the workers to challenge the automatic decisions by the algorithms which may negatively affect driver- ratings.

As a counter measure some of the drivers would take these challenges to the WhatsApp group. This in a way is designed to challenge algorithm automatic decision and to make it accountable. This in a way present a challenge to a system that is otherwise presented as beyond reproach. By providing pictures as evidence on the WhatsApp group, workers will be in other ways be presenting a case against the automatic decisions by the algorithm. The pictures provide hard evidence to management that the situation was beyond the control of the worker and could not be mediated by the algorithm. This in a way is an exercise of agency by the workers challenging the dehumanising approach of viewing the labour process by the algorithm. This serves as a counter movement challenging the algorithm.

The empirical evidence shows that Mr D food delivery gig workers use the same WhatsApp group created by management to in a way that makes the system work for them. The way Mr D workers use the WhatsApp group to challenge decisions by the algorithm may also be viewed as a way allowing workers opportunity to talk back management to counter the dehumanisation effects of managing labour process associated with the algorithm management.

The WhatsApp group can also be seen as a space for constructing a "counter-hegemony" or "weapon of the weak" (Scott,1995) that promotes workers collective solidarity. The WhatsApp becomes a channel of change as this unity is also what is creating their collective power. The positive outcome of this WhatsApp group is that it enables the workers to create a community and forge a sense of collective solidarity which reinforce their interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Mr D/ Takealot workers appropriate the WhatsApp group to influence the ways they desire their work to be organised. According to the participants interviews some of the more experience gig delivery workers use their informal network to establish the demand at a

particular time and use the information shared to decide the time to sign on duty. This in many ways represents the deployment of worker agency to influence the labour process.

4.2.1 The tipping culture in the gig economy

Embedded in the algorithm management a tipping system which encourages the workers to deploy emotional labour to solicit tips from their customers. The culture of tipping has traditionally been part of the norm in the hospitality and restaurant sector. It was never incorporated as part of the app for food gig delivery sector. Food delivery platforms were forced to adopt it in response to pressure from the workers and upon realising that they can take advantage and use this as a space to extract surplus value and to maximise their returns.

Overtime- the culture of tipping in the food delivery gig sector has become entrenched and was institutionalised and embraced as part of the labour process. It is now incorporated on the app and customers are prompted to indicate the percentage which they are willing to give as a tip. The other way of viewing this is that it is a way adapted by the platforms to relegate the responsibility to pay the workers a decent wage to the customers. The customers are in a way expected to assume part of the employer responsibility of compensating the workers for their services.

In addition to their remuneration per delivery, workers can receive tips through the app or in cash upon delivery and this depends on customer benevolence. The bonus paid to a worker is directly proportional to the tips earned through their productivity. The customer upon placing an order on the App will choose a certain percentage of the total amount of the food ordered (Figure 2) towards tipping the driver who will be delivering their order at the comfort of their doorstep.

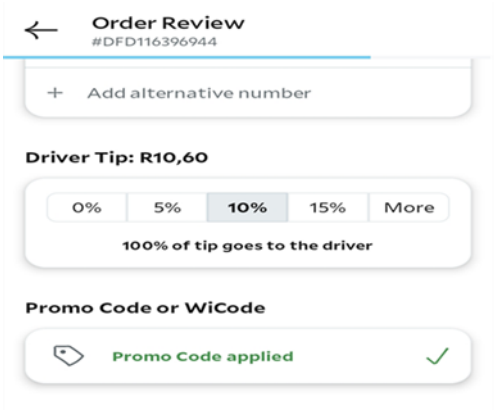

Figure 2 Tipping on the app . Source: Food delivery App, 2022

Empirical evidence from this study highlights that the tipping system which has now become institutionalised and incorporated on the app encourage workers to deploy emotional labour to manipulate the customer experience to solicit for tips. These workers perform emotional labour (Hochschild,1985) to manage their emotional capacity in service of their commercial interests. Food delivery gig workers manufacture feelings of welcome and friendliness for customers, performing affective labour to create a sense of warmness for the customer (Hardt,1999). One food delivery worker pointed that constant communication with customers is very critical for their form of work. He highlighted that although the app would notify the customer that their order has been picked up at the restaurant, it is also important for the person delivering the order to communicate with the customer through the App chat box and update them on their order. Workers find this impressive on the side of the customers and would maximise their probability of getting tipped on top of their delivery rate. One of the participants reflected on the importance of maintaining constant communication with a client and the deployment of emotional labour:

> Communication is important, when you arrive at your point of delivery, the manner in which you communicate with the customer is important, if that person did not give you a tip that day, next time that customer will give you a tip based on how you communicated with them… it's also important that you alert the customer when the order is ready and picked up because they also rate us based on

> that…… so communication is very much important…very much important (Interview 4, 2022).

Constant communication with the customer represents a form of agency which workers possess to elicit customer favours and positive feedback. From their experience they understand that customer service is important and maintains the lines of communication updating the clients on who has their order and that they have left the restaurant. Furthermore, it is not just constant communication which elicit customer benevolence. Sherman et. al (2007) highlighted that when workers play "tipping games", they start to tailor their service offerings to the wishes of their customers to elicit tips, thereby voluntarily showing the type of work behaviour that benefits the customers. The culture of tipping elicits food delivery workers to perform their work in a manner that would benefit customers' experience. They are conscious that their smile and way they speak to the client constitute part of extracting surplus value for their benefit. One of the participants shared his experience:

> Customers want to be treated with respect... so, you have to always be humble, especially when you're talking to the customer…the 'Customer is the King' … so when presenting yourself in front of the customer you have to always be humbled because most of the customers are very emotional, so it is important to be cool, speak politely and show care... you begin to study the behaviour of the customer and it will direct you on how to interact with that customer (Interview 4, 2022).

From the above statement food delivery workers deploy emotional labour in a particular way to inform customer experience. Food delivery gig workers according to one of the workers interviewed study the behaviour of their customers to understand how best to interact with them. This form of labour requires one to induce or suppress feelings to sustain the outward expression that produces the proper state of mind in others (Hoschild, 1983). This implies a form of agency which workers possess in order to manage their tipping game. Furthermore, the culture of tipping which has been adopted by the delivery gig sector raises questions about worker subjectivity**.** We may from this draw the argument that delivery gig workers have a

particular form of subjectivity which is different from the ordinary workers. The tipping culture suggest that delivery gig workers do not only have expectation to be rewarded by the platforms but also expect part of their compensation to be drawn from the clients. This in a way ease pressure on the platforms as the workers expectations for compensation are not entirely focused on them but also lie with the clients.

4. 3. Social media and the surveillance and gaze

This study empirical evidence highlighted a very high use of various social media by food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg. Social media is very effective in that it can reach out to enormous amount of people at the same time. It also functions as a platform of engagements as it allows for digital interaction amongst the users. For food delivery gig workers social media platforms such as Facebook have become a very important spaces for workers to exercise their agency to subvert the surveillance and gaze from the platforms. Chinguno (2020) draws from Foucault (1991) to illustrate how the monitoring and surveillance technologies act as a form of panoptic control where gig workers are made hyper visible to platform technologies. The constant super-surveillance and gaze on the surface, or super-vising required that worker act in accordance with the platform algorithm rules, with its deep-rooted techniques of power.

Rustenburg food delivery gig workers have a Facebook page where they share various information related to their work and the everyday experience. This allows them to self-express themselves. From a cursory review of the page one can read their hearts about how they feel in relation to their work. The Facebook page is open to anyone who may be interested in food delivery gig work in the city. I joined the group as part of an attempt to understand how work in the sector is experienced. The page is used for general information and marketing and to share experiences by the workers. At the same time the workers use this page to vent out

frustration tied to their work. The page has created a community of delivery workers in Rustenburg and those interested in the work that they do.

As a result of the gaze and digital surveillance delivery gig workers are under constant fear of reprisal from the platforms. As a result, many of those who are active on the Facebook page do not use their real identity. They use pseudonyms to disguise their identity (See figure 3). I thus argue that the use of pseudonyms on the Facebook page allows them to overcome the gaze and surveillance from the platforms and the fear associated with that practise. A cursory review of the Facebook page highlights how through participating on the page they as workers can overcome fear and reclaim their freedom as there is no risk of reprisal from the platform.

Figure 3 The use of Pseudonym Facebook,2022

Facebook is a public space; it however provides space for gig workers to be under the radar which presents them with an opportunity to express themselves freely away from management gaze. The opportunity to hide their identity allows them to subvert the gaze of the platforms. The fear of surveillance for these workers is a reality. Whilst social media platforms open space for delivery workers to create communities and which may sustain worker collective solidarity, the flip side of this is that on social media there are limited opportunities for serious conversations and relationships amongst these workers.

Chinguno (2020) highlighted that, the intervention of technology in the gig economy is what makes it difficult for workers to have direct physical interaction, shared work experience and collective solidarity. The work activity of food delivery workers is organised as a non-collective process since on a day-to-day basis workers interact almost exclusively with the App which allocates them delivery work. Empirical evidence drawn from this study indicates that workers use the technology to their advantage by creating communities outside the control of the platforms. They use this space to exercise their agency and forge common identity and collectives that helps them to navigate the problem of alienation and individualisation that comes with this form of work.

The Rustenburg food delivery gig workers Facebook page is used primarily to share logistical and operational information and is also an open market for buying and selling uniforms (figure,3), bikes and parts and accessories. Food delivery gig workers sell their extra pairs of uniforms or rent out their bikes to other workers. This becomes an important to extract additional surplus value. Other information shared on the page includes how one may become a delivery worker and information that is helpful for the orientation of new workers. The Facebook page also support production in many ways that benefit the platforms.

Figure 4 A delivery bag on sale from the Facebook page: Source: Facebook

Workers also indicated that they have other WhatsApp groups some of which exclusively are for the food delivery workers. For example, delivery gig workers have their own WhatsApp group which does not include management. Some of the groups are for delivery gig workers who are from the same areas of origin and or ethnic group. For example, there is a WhatsApp group for delivery workers from Zimbabwe and another for those from the democratic republic of Congo. The social media platform works as support networks for workers. One of the participants explained:

> We have another personal WhatsApp group which management is not aware of… this group is especially for drivers who are doing food deliveries and are all from Zimbabwe, this group includes all drivers in all South African provinces, most of the discussions in this group is about supporting each other about selling of bikes, police harassment issues and documents related issues and issues of sending money home (Interview 8, 2022).

These networks are also used by the delivery gig workers to support each other socially and financially. For example, one of the participants interviewed highlighted that as delivery gig workers they learn the basics of the local language through the WhatsApp group. The learning of the basics of the local language is critical as it allows them to navigate the everyday interaction with their clients. The WhatsApp groups for delivery gig workers are also critical spaces that offer support for women delivery workers who are often a minority in the sector. Food delivery works may demand that the delivery by the worker to some secluded space which may not be safe for some of the workers. There is a general prevalence of gender-based violence targeting women in the South African society. As a result, women delivery gig workers must be extra careful in their everyday work engagement. When they go on a call, they normal share personal information like their live location, trip information, driving incidents on WhatsApp. This is designed to allow fellow workers to keep track on one another and possibly dispatch a group member to assist if needed. I observed that women food delivery gig workers often do not get out of their car when delivering an order to or they do not get inside

customer premises or meet them at their doorstep. They always ensure that they call the customer and inform them that they are at the gate where they handout their order while inside the car.

4.4. Identity and subjectivity in the digital age

The spatial dispersal of work activity reduces chances of food delivery workers forging strong social relations built around a sense of common identity. On the 22nd of March 2022, Food delivery gig workers embarked on a three-day national shut down. E-hailing platforms such as Uber, Uber Eats, Mr D, Bolt and In Driver which have between 50,000 and 70,000 drivers were affected by the strike. The delivery gig workers simply agreed to turn off their apps as part of collective action demanding better condition of service. Workers logged out from the App, causing work stoppage that lasted on-and off for six days. These workers used WhatsApp to communicate and solicit the support of the strike nationally. This provided a space in which strikers tried to convince other workers to join the action. Some of the workers I interacted with were working in Johannesburg where the protest was heated, reflected that that the 'home boy' WhatsApp group which has a national network was utilised to inform and gain the support from fellow delivery workers nationally The WhatsApp group in this case played an important role in building collective solidarity and identity.

The strike was centred around the demand for fair pricing, accountability, and proper vetting of new workers into the sector. In a way, these workers were fighting against the leading edge of capitalist technological innovation, which subjects them to the most advanced forms of control. The strike came as a surprise as many had ruled out the possibility of collective action for delivery gig workers. This case therefore provides an important example of how workers' power can be built, despite the challenges and potential blockages of the technical composition

that comes with the nature of this mode of work. Tassinari et al. (2020) also argue that despite the isolation of food delivery gig work, the combination of online spaces and physical meetups, helps them to overcome the problem of individualism and develop solidarity among their peers for example, part-time or migrant workers often expressed their support through less risky forms of action such as encouraging consumers to boycott the food delivery Apps. In both cases, some food delivery gig workers also opted to not log on the app during wildcat strikes or planned boycotts of the app, without physically joining the collective action.

Ethnicity or migrant background also appeared to shape patterns of participation in mobilisation of the protest. Foucault (1991) highlighted how an individual comes to understand themselves in relation to a particular social subjectivity. He further stipulates that this is not a neutral process, and that being constituted as a national subject has implications for how the individual assesses, interprets, and relates to their social surroundings. As food-delivery workers are mostly migrant workers, their informal employment status substantially undermines their collective bargaining power. Therefore, through this protest police saw an opportunity to harass migrant food delivery gig workers which even led them to withdraw from the food delivery gig work. As a result of their withdrawal, the food delivery platforms experienced a serious shortage of labour force. The same networks were also used to share information when it was time to return back to normal business.

Most delivery gig workers in Rustenburg are said to be migrants from the regional countries in particular Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. As a result, they are often easy target for police harassment. Police often mount roadblocks targeting them and sometime some of them get arrested for offences related to violation of migration laws or traffic related. One of the ways that the delivery gig workers deal with police harassment is the payment of bribes to avoid arrest or in some cases they use their networks to get their arrested colleagues released before they are charged in court. The participants interviewed revealed that police demand

bribes from as little as R50. In some cases where possible, the information on police operation or roadblock is shared on the WhatsApp group and the delivery gig drivers are alerted to avoid the route and find other alternatives. One of the participants explained how they deal with police harassment:

> It is part of the communication… we update each other about roadblocks on certain route or traffic police at a corner of a certain location (Interview 6, 2022)

Collective solidarity as highlighted in the citation above transcend beyond the delivery workers relationship with the platforms. The WhatsApp group creates space where the workers are able to share experiences and support each other in navigating some of their everyday challenges such as dealing with police brutality. This space is critical for sharing and to motivate each other when things are down. Food delivery gig workers make use of social media space to perform the labour of care to their peers. Furthermore, the WhatsApp groups for food delivery gig workers also serve as a space to socialize and meet people with similar interests. Maffie (2020) highlights that digital spaces such as online forums and social media pages are crucial for gig workers to create communities and for forging a collective identity. Although this is a virtual space some in the end eventually meet up for lunch and become friends in real life.

4.5. The use agency to enhance social relations of production

Food delivery platforms employs a pool of thousands of migrant workers who make their ways into South Africa sometimes as undocumented migrants. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2015) highlighted the Rustenburg's spatial order post -apartheid is characterised by the continuity of the migrant labour system. Interviews with some of the participants highlighted for example , the challenges of securing a motorbike drivers licence in South Africa. There are very few

driving schools offering lessons on how to ride a motorbike in South Africa in general. Many of the migrants desperate to enter the delivery gig work sector do not have the documents for them to be eligible to acquire motorbike driver's licence. To overcome this challenge many of the migrant workers resort to securing the drivers licence from their country of origin where it was said to be relatively easier than in South Africa. In some of the cases some of the driver's licences are said to be counterfeit but cannot easily be detected by the South African police. As a result, they are able to use them in South Africa without any problems.

According to one of the participants interviewed "they want to work and since getting a valid driver's licence in South Africa is difficult, they resort to using foreign drivers' licences which allows them to work". There is no database or a system to validate foreign licences. This means that the fake licences may just get away with it. There is a thriving market of trading counterfeit documents in Johannesburg. Documents such as driver's licences are essential for delivery workers to create their self-employed status. This can be seen as a form of agency to enhance the social relations of production since these individual gig workers take risks by acquiring fraudulent document to access work as food delivery workers. This ultimately serves the interest of the platforms. Agency as shown in this case is not only about enhancing the interest of the workers but also that of the platforms.

4.6. Agency and other structural pressures beyond the workplace

Service work such as food delivery is generally characterized by "low skill" jobs that require little prior knowledge or training to get into. Many of food delivery gig worker in Rustenburg said to be undocumented migrants. Ravenelle (2019) finds that those who possess skills and capital before entering the gig economy are often Success Stories. The study highlights that many of the food delivery gig workers are undocumented migrants. Gig work is usually

characterised by low entry barriers and as a result often attracts migrants. They take up the decision to leave their countries of origin to try their luck in a foreign land which in a way represent an expression of agency. They come to South Africa because they believe that they can make it. The status of being undocumented migrants presents several challenges which they must navigate.

To be a delivery gig worker you should be able to use a motorbike and have a driver's licence. Many of the delivery gig workers use motorbikes as they are cheaper to buy or rent and operate. Using a motor bike is cheaper compared to a motor vehicle. It is makes it easier to navigate the city routes and to manoeuvre when there is traffic jam. This flexibility is critical for the drivers to deliver their orders in time before the customer becomes impatient. I observed that there are few South Africans who are doing this type of work despite a record of unemployment in recent years. Most of the Black South African youth are not exposed to riding motorbikes and for many it's a challenge to get that skill. I observed and learnt that some of the migrant delivery gig workers for example from Malawi and Mozambique have been exposed to a culture of using motorbikes in their countries of origin where these are used as part of public transport. This skill become very critical for them when they move to South Africa. Many of the migrants from Malawi and Mozambique are said to have abandoned work in agriculture and retail and joined the food delivery gig sector following the proliferation of work in the delivery gig sector as they already had the critical skill and knowledge on how to ride a motorbike. Furthermore, income in the delivery gig sector is said to be better compared to agriculture and retail sectors. In this case the ability to use a motorbike using Bourdieu (1986) represents a form of possessed capital which allows the drivers to deal with structural challenges that comes with having a migrant status.

I was also alerted that in some cases some of the delivery gig migrant workers use false identity documents and permits. For example, some of them have overstayed in South Africa and have not regularised their stay and are said to be using the counterfeit of the special dispensation permits that were issues to migrants from selected Southern African countries. It was said in some of the interviews that they get these permits for a fee from downtown Johannesburg where there is a thriving market. This in a way is an expression of worker agency which also on one hand benefit the platforms. I draw from this the argument that; worker agency does not only enhance worker control but may also benefit the platform by enhancing productivity. Lastly, this chapter has presented and discussed the findings from the study drawing from empirical evidence. The following chapter draws the conclusions from the study.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

This study has sought to understand the organisation of work and how food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work. The aim was to understand the underlying dynamics of control, power, and resistance within food delivery gig sector. Gig work is characterised by algorithm management which works as a structure of control which is viewed as constraining worker agency and creates the problem of surveillance, individualisation, and alienation (Hoosen, 2021). Food delivery gig workers are managed and controlled by an app that allocate tasks, monitor workers' performance, and discipline them in case of transgression if they fail to meet set minimum standard of performance. This study examines how workers exercise agency in a digitalised labour process. It explores how workers exercise control in how they conduct their work in line with existing norms and structures in order to maximise their earnings and at the same time exercise freedom.

In trying to understand worker agency this study deployed the labour process theory (LPT) which has proved to be a resilient analytical tool within the study of work despite the changing nature of work. The labour process theory drawn from Marx's (1973) is relevant in understanding capital-labour relations in the context of gig work. Marx (1973) set the foundation of the LPT in his views on the nature of the employment relationship which he argued is characterised by conflict between labour and capital. Conflict in this context become the driver of change and technological innovation and the way the work is organised. The LPT has overtime evolved from Marx's initial ideas but remains critical in helping us understand the relationship between labour and capital. The first generation within the labour process theory framework is linked to Braverman (1974) whose subject was the study of "the structure of working class, and the manner in which it had changed" (Braverman, 1974: 3). Braverman's

(1974) theory suggested that work in the capitalist context was characterised by de-skilling . He was responding to Taylors' (1911) principle of Scientific management. Taylor (1911) argued that we can secure maximum benefits by moving from the ordinary form of management of the labour process to the adoption of scientific management. Scientific management is based on the adoption of science in the job design and performance of work and avoids rule of the thumb. Braverman (1974) responded to Taylor's thesis and argued that his thesis on scientific management was based on pseudo-science. He argued that it was based on degrading the work undertaken by workers and made labour power a commodity and subject of the market. He argued that Taylor (1911) thesis is focused on deskilling shopfloor workers through separating the conceptualisation of their work tasks to the control of management. Furthermore, central to his thesis, is the understanding of the nature and transformation of labour power under capitalism. As such, the classic labour process theory has been used to analyse micro level tensions between workers and their management (control) as well as execution of their work (autonomy). For Thompson (1989) the tension created by management control and worker autonomy are primarily derived from the use of value and the imperative capital accumulation strategy which coerce workers to consistently revolutionize the labour process to extract productive use values. Critics dismissed Braverman for ignoring the subject at work (Knight, 1990), as he focuses on the objective conditions without explaining the role agency and subjectivity plays in the work process.

The second generation of theorists such as Burawoy (1985) demonstrated how workers consent to mechanisms operationalized at the point of production. Burawoy's (1979) theory places workers subjectivity at the centre of his analysis of the question "why workers work as hard as they do?" since Braverman's (1974) work does not explain worker subjectivity and resistance. He focused on consent rather than coercion as a means of control. His central argument was on the 'negotiated outcome' rather than direct control which shapes the social relations at work

therefore locking the workers in the capitalist mode of production. Burawoy's analysis shows us workers reproduce the relations of power through a "game of making out", where workers themselves exercise their agency to benefit from control mechanisms in the performance reward scheme of management. The culture of the workplace thus became orientated around "the work game" and new workers were drawn into the distinctive activities, language and meaning system that is making out (Burawoy, 1979). Furthermore, Burawoy (1979) argued that basing labour process analysis on conflictual foundations could not account for the prevalence of cooperation in most workplaces much of the time. The significant point of Burawoy's (1979) discussion is that it is through this game playing that the worker's consent to the capitalist relations of exploitation is manufactured. The limitations of Burawoy's (1979) theory concern the failure to theorise, rather than simply use, the concept of social identity when accounting for the reproduction of capitalist social relations (Knights &Willmott, 1989).

The third and fourth generation of the labour process theorists such as Knights and Willmott (1989) draw from the post-existential and anti-phenomenological ideas and concepts. They are informed by the ideas of Michel Foucault (1977) or what we can view as a Foucauldian labour process. This generation of scholars criticized the classical labour process theorist for not acknowledging worker subjectivity in their analysis. They argued that ignoring the presence and significance of subjectivity complicates the analysis of how relations of capital and labour are practically accomplished and challenged at the point of production (Knights, 1990). This school of thought acknowledges the issue and that the question of subjectivity opens for inspection the "complex-media" of capital-labour relations, that difficult space where work organization gets produced and reproduced in the everyday accomplishments of agency and social interaction.

For Michel Foucault (1977) within the realm of the community of a workplace, workers are subjects in relation to other subjects. However, becoming a subject at work requires other

subjects to co-construct occupational identity. Becoming a subject in a community also means becoming an active agent, and this is based on the subject's reflective awareness of her/his identity position in the community (Foucault, 1977). Foucault (1997) view the labour process as tied to the techniques of governmentality which is a way of viewing and interacting in a particular way which focuses on economic logic defined by self and individual interest. It is based on transposing the economic grid into the social realm. In other ways it is based on that our social life and how we behave and make sense of ourselves, and others, ideas and value is informed by economic logic. Governmentality thus edits our desires, habits, aspirations, and benefits informed by disciplinary structures which regulate our behaviour in response to power. A series of these theories within the Labour process theory framework informed this study.

The study aimed at addressing the question on how the work for food delivery gig workers is organised and the effect this has on worker agency. It explored the factors that inform how food delivery gig workers exercise control in how they conduct their work and the value they tie to worker agency drawing from a South African context. The study is based on a qualitative research design to draw a deeper understanding of the worker's ability to exercise agency shaping the new work structure presented by gig work. This study provides an in-depth understanding of food delivery gig worker agency in Rustenburg at a specific moment in time and drawing from their day-to-day work experience. I interacted with food delivery gig workers through a series of interviews and observations and discussions to gain in-depth insights. I also explored various social media networks that a used by food delivery workers; the Facebook, and the different WhatsApp groups to understand how they can exercise agency in the context of digital technology. Furthermore, I have also made use of food delivery gig service to understand the labour process; the regimes of control and how workers respond and deploy their agency.

I argue that food delivery gig workers deploy agency to exercise control over the labour process through selective participation. I draw the conclusion that food delivery gig work represents a fundamental disruption and reorganisation of the labour process beyond mere rearrangement of tasks between human and algorithms. Workers rely on their tacit knowledge on the geography of the city and its rhythm to make decision on which spaces to work from, working times, and day of the week to enhance their income and avoid idling and overworking. The selective participation by food delivery gig workers on one hand helps them to navigate the labour process and at the same time is critical for the platforms as it enhances their productivity and profit.

The study further argues that food delivery gig workers do not willingly surrender to the dictates of the platform. They instead are assertive and able to collectively organise themselves and challenge the platform through various forms of collective and individual resistance for example through the use of social media groups. The study shows how the food delivery gig workers adapts the Facebook page as a space for forging collective solidarity and resistance. The Facebook platform gives them space to subvert the surveillance and gaze of the platforms. They attain this by adopting pseudonyms which makes them invisible. The adoption of pseudonyms on the Facebook page allows the food delivery workers to reclaim their freedom away from the gaze and surveillance of digital platforms. Food delivery gig workers adopts pseudonyms when interacting on the Facebook page to reclaim their freedom without risking deactivation by the platforms. The Facebook page also serves as a critical space to address the problem of alienation and individualisation which is associated with food delivery gig work. I argue that food delivery gig workers appropriate the Facebook page as a space for expressing and reclaiming their freedom and to talk back to management. Platforms harness technology to their advantage to undermine worker solidarity and effective collective organisation. This study highlights how the food delivery gig workers appropriate digital technology to forge a

common identity and subjectivity. This creates an ideal space for them to forge collective resistance. Social media presents a critical space for food delivery gig workers to organise. Their participation in a WhatsApp group that includes some of their managers presents a space for talking back to management and at the same time opportunity to challenge algorithm management's dehumanising logic. The WhatsApp group is used by delivery gig workers to highlight the limits of digital technology. It presents an opportunity to amplify the importance of a labour process that is humanely sensitive. This in a way highlights the deployment of worker agency to subvert the algorithm management de-humanising effect.

Furthermore, I argue that worker agency for food delivery gig workers is not only directed at improving their working conditions in relation to the platforms. Food delivery gig workers also direct their agency to the clients through for example, soliciting of tips through deploying emotional labour. In response, the food delivery platforms in the South Africa have institutionalised the handling of tips which I argue is a ploy to take off the pressure of ensuring that delivery gig workers are earning a decent income. The result in this instance is that workers income expectations and enhancement is now directed to both the platforms and the clients. This also informs how the workers deploy their agency. The client's benevolence in this case serves as a new space for platforms to maximise extraction of surplus value.

In exploring the networks of agency and resistance by food delivery workers, this study unpacks the role of informal networks and alliances between gig workers expressed through various WhatsApp groups and other social media. Social media represents a critical space for the delivery gig workers. They deploy it to enhance their social relations of production. I argue that the personal networks such as the WhatsApp group between gig workers where they share operational and logistical information is a strategy designed to enhance social relations of production. Personal networks between gig workers and management on which they share operational and logistical information such as the Rustenburg team WhatsApp group is at times

appropriated by the workers to talk back to management challenging the dehumanisation presented by algorithm management. The study shows how the participation by delivery gig workers in a WhatsApp group present an opportunity for them to speak back to management and at the same time challenge the dehumanisation that is presented by algorithm management. In the call of duty and when there is gap that cannot be covered by digital technology, the delivery gig workers use the WhatsApp group to talk back to management and show that algorithm management cannot completely displace human management. For example, when they arrive at the point of delivery and the client is not present; they would take a picture and share it on the WhatsApp group as evidence that the delay in delivery was to their account. This represents an excise of agency by the delivery gig workers.

The study further argues that the ways that gig workers exercise agency is not new but adapted from past practices and does not only benefit the delivery gig workers, but also benefits the employer's labour process as it enhances productivity. The deployment of agency is thus paradoxical in a way that on one hand it benefits the workers by allowing them to exercise control on how they do their work while on the other hand, it also enhances productivity. Typical examples highlighted in this study includes the renting of profiles, motorbikes, selling of work tool, the use of fake drivers' licences and working without valid work permits. All these strategies reflect delivery workers agency and at the same time benefits the platforms.

The study highlights the importance of worker tacit knowledge about the physical and virtual space and the rhythm of the city in particular how it is critical in configuring worker agency. Delivery gig workers knowledge about the rhythm and geography of the city is critical in how they exercise control on how they work. It is critical in determining the how they are accommodated within the system or forge room for resistance.

The study highlights how the delivery gig work has disrupted the conventional labour process and way of understanding the relationship between labour and capital. The position of capital and how it relates to the workers is in this case obscured by digital technology. This form of re-organising production reconfigures workers consciousness and subjectivity. This in turn has effect in how the workers exercise control in how they work and their expectations. The study highlights how delivery gig workers exercise control in the way they work through various means including the trading of apps, renting of motorbikes and other equipment and the deployment of emotional labour to solicit tips from clients. I deploy Foucault (1977) and advance the argument that this in many ways affirms the logic of governmentality. The response of the workers as highlighted in this study represents a form of worker agency which at the same time is driven by economic logic and worker individual self-interest. The delivery gig workers- are driven by the economic logic and techniques of governmentality to make sense of themselves and how they act when for example they interact with clients. The deployment of emotional labour for example to solicit tips from clients represents an act of disciplinary mechanism regulating worker behaviour in response to power. I further argue that this technique of governmentality has effect on workers subjectivity and how they relate to capital. I argue that this may be helpful in explaining why workers have expectations and demands for the improvement of their welfare directed at both capital and their clients. This in a way takes off the pressure from the platforms and perhaps accounts for why overt forms of resistance in the sector are lethargic. To conclude, this study has shown how delivery gig work presents a challenge to the conversional understanding work based on the traditional labour process theory. It puts to the fore the need to view this relationship and worker subjectivity differently in the context of neoliberal digital capitalism.

Lastly, future studies focusing on this subject may explore the occupational culture and identities of minorities in the sector such as women gig workers who may be having unique

experiences. A further, theme future studies may focus is on the experiences and perspectives of consumers involved in the platform food delivery ecosystem reflecting on the power dynamics in the food delivery labour process.

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: Worker agency in the gig-economy: Case of Food delivery gig workers in Rustenburg, South Africa

(To be read to participant :)

Hello, my name is **Kagiso Moroane** I am a postgraduate student at Sol Plaatje University. I am conducting a study for the fulfilment of Master of Arts degree in Sociology. I am kindly requesting your participation in this study. The requirements for participating in this study are that you should be over 18 years of age and willingly volunteer. The information outlined in this sheet explains the research study and why you are invited to participate. You should feel free to ask any questions if you need some clarification on what is stated below. Reading this document does not mean that you agree to be part of this research. You are free to take time to decide on whether or not to take part in this research. Each interview is expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes.

Purpose of the study

We hereby invite you to participate in this research study. In this study I am trying to gain an understanding of work within the gig-economy by looking at how food delivery gig-workers exercise agency in their work environment. The aim of this study is to understand how food delivery workers in Rustenburg, South Africa, experience work within the Food delivery

environment. This study will provide insights on the labour process of the new ways of organising work and capital.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in this study as an independent food delivery worker in Rustenburg, South Africa. This participation will involve an interview of between thirty and forty-five minutes. In this interview you will be asked questions regarding your workday and experiences working for food delivery.

Potential Risks & Discomfort

Participating in this research study does not bring you any anticipated risks. If you do not want to answer a question you are free to ask to skip the question. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time should you feel discomfort.

Potential Benefits & Compensation

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. You will not receive any compensation or payment for participating in this study. Your contribution will be invaluable in shedding light in understanding this new form of work.

Confidentiality

All information obtained from this study will be confidential. Your name will not be identified or disclosed to any person. All information will be recorded using pseudonyms or codes.

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me, Kagiso Moroane, on 083 987 1485 or at thalithakagiso@gmail.com.

You may also contact my supervisor. Details listed below:

Dr Crispen Chinguno
Sol Plaatje University
Tel: 053 491 0298
Email: crispen.chinguno@spu.ac.za

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Worker agency in the gig-economy: A case study of Food delivery workers in Rustenburg, South Africa

- I agree to take part in the research project specified above. I understand that this research is conducted for academic purposes.
- I understand that agreeing to take part means that:
    - I agree to be interviewed by the researcher ◯ Yes ◯ No
    - I agree to allow the interview to be recorded ◯ Yes ◯ No
    - I agree to make myself available for a further interview if required ◯ Yes ◯ No
- I understand that my participation is voluntary; that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project.

- The research will be conducted in accordance with the research policies and procedures for postgraduate students at the Sol Plaatje University. The research will be used for academic purposes and the results may be used at academic conferences.

Participant's name _____

Signature _____

Date_____

If you have any questions or want further information about the study, please contact:

Contact details of Researcher:
Kagiso Moroane
Sol Plaatje University
Tel: 083 987145

Contact details of Supervisor
Dr Crispen Chinguno
Sol Plaatje University
Tel: 053 491 0298

Email. thalithakagiso@gmail.com Email. Crispen.chinguno@spu.ac.za

INTERIVIEW GUIDE – Platform food delivery Workers

Part 1: ***Signing up for Food delivery service***

1. When and why did you first sign up for Food delivery service?
2. Why Rustenburg Food delivery service?

Part 2: ***Working as a gig worker***

3. How many platforms do you use to find work?
4. How do you manage to work for more than one platform? (If they are more than one)
5. Explain to me a typical working day for you?
6. What work decisions do you make?
7. What are the things that you cannot decide or change about your work?
8. How do you adapt to this?
9. How is your work different to other forms of work?

Part 3: ***Working hours***

10. How long do you work on a normal day?
11. How does this change in a week and month?
12. Why do you work these hours in a day?
13. Have you ever had to change working hours? Explain why?
14. What are your views on working a minimum number of hours per week?
15. What informs your decision on working time?

Part 4: ***Working Location -space***

16. Why did you decide to work in Rustenburg as a food delivery worker?
17. How do you pick which areas or restaurant to deliver food from?
18. Why did you select to work here?
19. What will make you shift your work point?
20. How many times have you changed your workstation?
21. What other factors informs your decision on work location?
22. What are factors about work location that you may not change?
23. How do you adjust?

Part 5: ***Work Performance***

24. How do you present yourself at home? (For example in terms of your language and dressing)
25. How do you present yourself at work?
26. How do you present yourself, dress or speak when you deliver food to customers?
27. How does this change in these different contexts?
28. What are the main factors that inform how you perform your work?
29. Which of these factors can you change?
30. Which of these factors that you cannot change?
31. How do you adapt to this?

Part 6: ***Rating system***

32. What is your current platform rating?
33. What does rating mean to you and the customers?
34. How does your rating affect you and your work?
35. What do you think customers consider when rating you?
36. What do you consider when rating your customer?
37. How would you rate yourself?
38. What do you think about being rated by the customer?
39. How does the rating system affect you and your work?
40. What changes would you suggest be made to the rating system?

Part 7: ***Food delivery workers Community***

41. How do you interact with other food delivery workers?
42. Where do you interact with other food delivery workers?
43. What informs your decision?
44. What experiences have you shared with other food delivery workers? And why?
45. What informs your discussion and interaction with other food delivery workers?
46. What are the forms in which food delivery workers organise collectively?
47. How do you participate in this form of organisation?
48. How do food delivery workers relate with the general public and community?
49. What is the community view on food delivery workers?
50. How does this affect your work and how you are organised?
51. How does this compare in other urban areas?
52. We have come to the end of our interview. Is there any other thing that you would like to add or ask that you feel I did not mention which might be helpful to my research?

NB: *This is just a guide, and the number and sequence of the questions will not follow this particular order. The order and number of questions will be determined by the interview flow and other context specific factors.*