

MAPPING POLICY-ORIENTED GIG-ECONOMY RESEARCH: BIBLIOMETRIC EVIDENCE

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Abstract

The gig economy has triggered policy concerns because gig jobs do not fit into conventional employment categories. This, along with challenges in identifying policy discussions in gig-economy research, are the study's motivation. This bibliometric study addresses the question on how policy-oriented gig-economy research has evolved. We analyse 1,728 Scopus-indexed journal articles using performance analysis. The publication trajectory shows that Social Sciences is the leading subject area in terms of research output productivity, reinforcing the labour-governance orientation of policy engagement in gig-economy research. We also find evidence of asymmetric patterns in knowledge production and influence, concentrated in universities from a handful of developed countries. This paper contributes by taking into consideration policy dimensions debated in gig-economy research. This departs from typical bibliometric studies on gig economy, which tend to be general overviews with no specific focus.

Keywords: gig economy, policy, bibliometric

INTRODUCTION & SELECTED LITERATURE

Digital labour platforms have become a realm where workers and clients are matched, and work is organised in contemporary labour markets. It spans online jobs (e.g., freelancing and crowdwork) and location-based services (e.g., ride-hailing and delivery). A relatively recent ILO report documents that there were at least 777 active digital labour platforms worldwide in January 2021, underscoring the scale and institutional visibility of platform-mediated work (ILO 2021, p. 6). The research base has proliferated across diverse disciplines, transcending labour economics, industrial relations, law, public policy, information systems, and sociology. This makes it increasingly difficult to identify where policy-relevant evidence concentrates and where gaps remain. This challenge is compounded by the difficulty in consistently capturing digital platform employment using conventional statistical tools (OECD 2023, p.7).

Many workers are not treated as employees with standard protection; they cannot be defined as self-employed workers who get to set their own terms and wages. In gig economy, work outcomes are determined through algorithmic rules and incentive systems, such as wages, bonuses, commissions, and performance metrics. This makes the design of platform-based work directly relevant to regulation and labour standards. This study's primary objective is to address the visibility and organisation of policy content in the gig economy literature. Our main research question is: How has policy-oriented gig-economy research evolved in terms of productivity and influence?

Policy debates in gig-economy research has evolved from documenting the rise of alternative work arrangements to analysing how the gig economy and platform-based work reshape the labour market. Early economics evidence documented that alternative work arrangements, including gig work, were expanding, raising concerns on how existing labour market institutions cover such work

arrangements (Katz & Krueger, 2017). Evidence on the rise of alternative work arrangements provides the measurement baseline (Katz & Krueger, 2019), while subsequent work uses experimental variation in compensation to estimate how it affects worker choices and welfare (Angrist et al. 2021). The gig economy is associated with changes in earnings and work contracts that are beyond conventional wage systems, thus making employment status a pivotal concern of regulation and protection (Abraham et al., 2024).

Currently, existing bibliometric literature on the gig economy is a collectively general documentation of the rapid growth, interdisciplinary nature, and thematic diversification of gig-economy research since the mid-2010s (Srihita et al. 2025; Zaman et al. 2025; Afzal et al. 2024; Goel et al. 2024; Taneja 2024; Vadavi & Sharmiladevi 2024; Klarin & Suseno 2021). For instance, Srihita et al. (2025) analysed the evolving nature of non-traditional online-platform gig employment. Zaman et al. (2025) highlighted labour regulation and algorithmic management as prominent themes, but their work did not specifically examine policy dimensions in gig-economy research. Another bibliometric study examined the interconnection of platform enterprises and SMEs (Afzal et al. 2024), while another looked at the research landscape of platform-based digital labour (Goel et al. 2024). Two other bibliometric studies focused on the research trends of gig workers' welfare and well-being (Vadavi & Sharmiladevi 2024; Taneja 2024). In a much broader bibliometric study by Klarin and Suseno (2021), they looked at the research evolution of the sharing economy as new business models. Despite the volume and breadth of existing bibliometric studies, a clear gap remains in the systematic treatment of policy-oriented gig-economy research.

RESEARCH METHODS

For a rigorous bibliometric study, first is to obtain a dataset relevant to the topic at hand. Next is to clean, standardise, and harmonise the dataset. Dataset cleaning ensures data accuracy; it includes checking for duplicates, removing irrelevant documents, and handling missing author names and/or affiliations. Only after these steps can a dataset be analysed, using bibliometric analysis tools such as Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), among others.

To identify policy-oriented gig-economy research outputs, we searched through Scopus database using the 'TITLE-ABS-KEY' search field. This will capture publications where relevant keywords appear in the title, abstract, or author keywords. Figure 1 documents our search strategy and keywords used in the query design. We aim to capture publications which intersect at the juncture of policies and gig economy. That is, we purposively intend to exclude for example, gig economy works related to only gig workers' well-being with no policy discussions. To ensure comparability and publication quality, the search results were restricted to only journal articles. Conference papers, book chapters, reviews, editorials, and other non-article outputs were excluded.

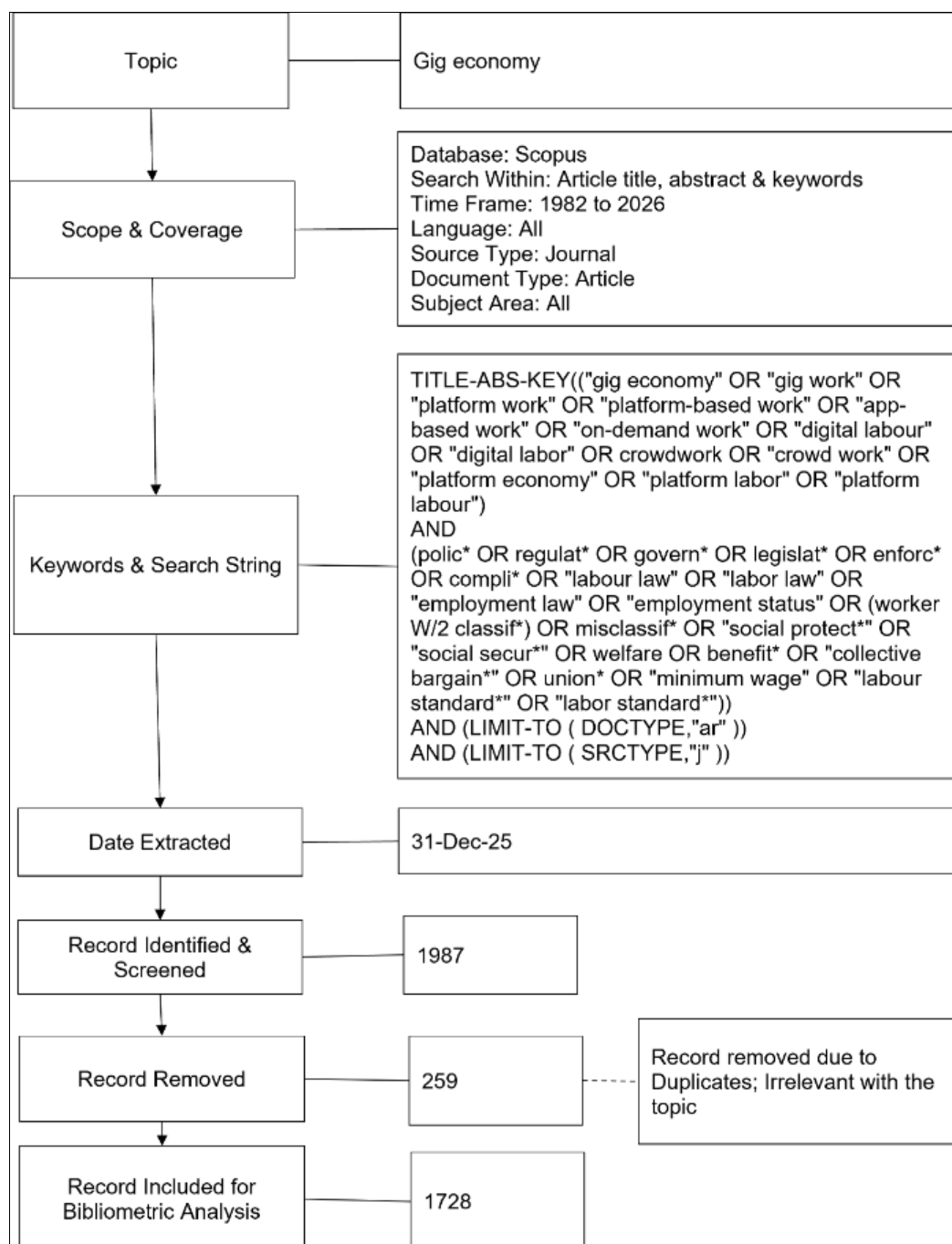


Figure 1. Search strategy

Following our search query as documented in Figure 1, we extracted 1,987 documents from the Scopus database. We then screened through the titles and abstracts for duplicates and relevancy (i.e. if the documents are in fact relevant to policy-oriented gig-economy research). We removed 259 duplicates and irrelevant documents, leaving us with 1,728 documents which we subsequently downloaded from Scopus. We then cleaned the downloaded dataset for author keywords using OpenRefine. After that, we used biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2024) to standardise and harmonise author names, affiliations, and countries. Following this workflow, we had prepared the cleaned dataset ready for bibliometric analyses on author names, affiliations, countries, and author keywords.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussions section here presents findings obtained from performance analysis, which is a type of bibliometric analysis. Performance analysis investigates the productivity and impact of the field, e.g. growth in publication output, citation impact, and influential sources. The body of work pertaining to policy-oriented gig economy comprises 1,728 Scopus-indexed journal articles, published between 1982 and 2026. It includes 4,143 unique authors or 2.4 authors per document, indicating that policy-oriented gig-economy research is produced primarily through smaller teams of authors much unlike larger-team authorship typical in hard sciences. Citation indicators show substantial accumulated influence (31,720 citations in total; 18.36 citations per document; 19.37 citations per cited document). The corpus-level h-index (81), g-index (138), and m-index (1.8) indicates a sizeable core of highly cited work, rather than influence concentrated in a small number of publications.

Across subject areas, the corpus is anchored in Social Sciences (68.0%), with strong representation from Business/Management (29.8%) and Economics/Econometrics/Finance (18.6%), reinforcing the labour-governance orientation of policy engagement. A non-trivial Computer Science share (14.6%) indicates interdisciplinary work between governance issues and socio-technical platforms. In gig economy nomenclature, socio-technical platforms refer to systems in which technical design (e.g., algorithms, app interfaces) directly shapes social and economic outcomes (e.g., algorithmic matching determines which couriers receive which delivery tasks). The total publications across subject areas do not add up to the total 1,728 or sums up to 100% because the subject area categories are not mutually exclusive. In the Scopus database, an article can be indexed under multiple subject areas. With 92% of the corpus published in English, our results primarily reflect the internationally visible, English-language scholarly debate.

Table 1. Basic information of corpus profile

Corpus profile	Data
Publication Years	1982 - 2026
Total Publications	1728
Citable Year	45
Number of Contributing Authors	4143
Number of Cited Papers	1638
Total Citations	31,720
Citation per Paper	18.36
Citation per Cited Paper	19.37
Citation per Year	720.91
Citation per Author	7.66
Author per Paper	2.40
Citation sum within h-Core	23,049
h-index	81
g-index	138
m-index	1.8
Subject area: Social Sciences	1175 (68.0%)
Subject area: Management & Accounting	514 (29.8%)
Subject area: Economics, Econometrics & Finance	321 (18.6%)
Subject area: Computer Science	252 (14.6%)
Language: English	1589 (92.0%)

In Figure 2, total publications (green bars) exhibits a transition from a low-volume period to rapid expansion by the late 2010s, where it surges from 119 publications in 2019 to a total of 394

in 2025. Total citations (orange curve) peak earlier than publication volumes (around 2019–2020), which is consistent with lag effects in citation accumulation. The evolution of publication volumes indicates that policy debates in gig-economy research have become a sustained scholarly agenda since mid-2010s and accelerated by late-2010s. Figure 2 shows that policy-oriented gig-economy research has transitioned from a peripheral topic to one that has gained considerable traction. Due to lag effects in citations, it remains to be seen if the current themes can reach an even higher peak of policy engagements in gig-economy research.

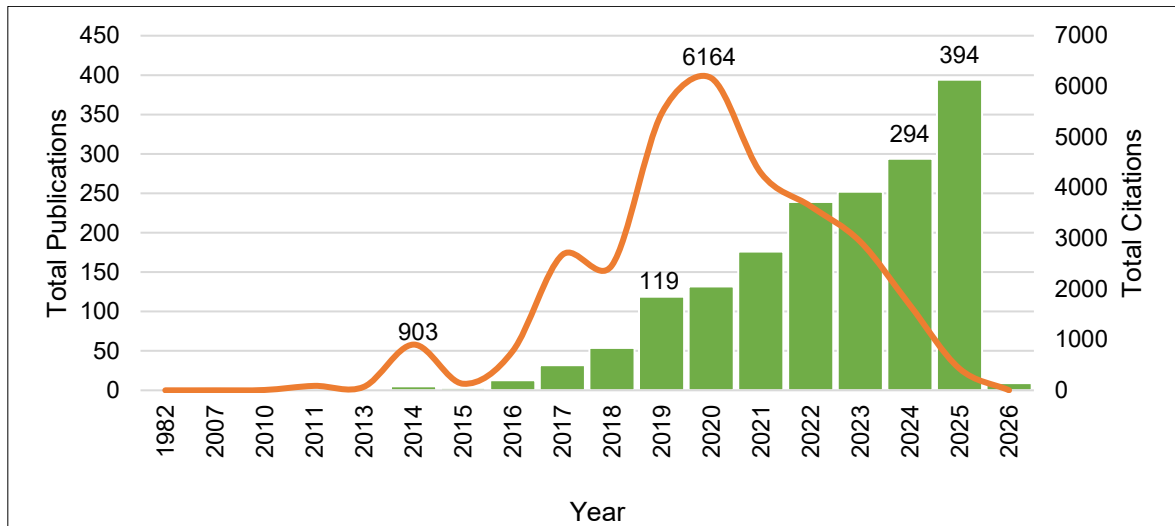


Figure 2. Total publications and total citations by year

Authorship patterns suggest that the policy-oriented gig-economy field is mostly collaborative, i.e. only about 34% of the 1,728 articles are sole-authored. About 58% of the articles are co-written in teams of between 2 and 4 authors. Figure 3 shows that authorship collaboration intensifies from 2019 onwards, culminating in 2025 with 302 co-authored publications. These authorship collaboration dynamics shows that the evolution of the policy-oriented gig-economy corpus is accompanied by a shift towards collaborative knowledge production.

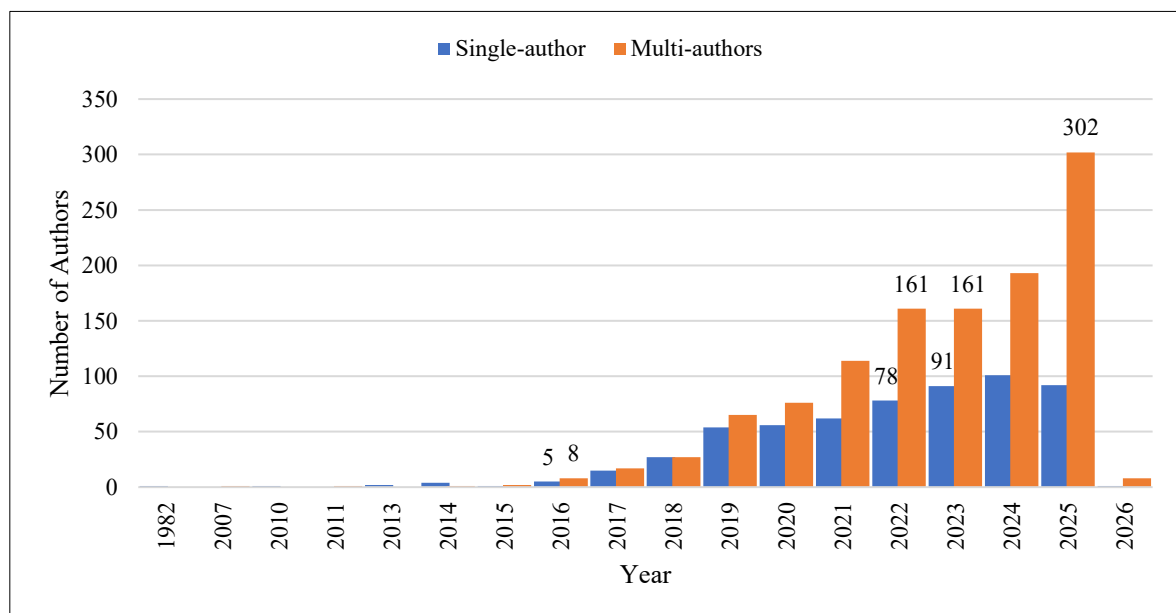


Figure 3. Single-author versus multi-authors

Table 2 compares the distribution of authors' actual productivity to what Lotka's law predicts. In the accompanying Figure 4, Lotka's Law clearly indicates a long-tailed or right-skewed distribution (orange dashed line), i.e. 3,160 authors or 89.16% of authors publish only a single paper in the topic. The distribution of authors' actual productivity (blue line) is consistent with Lotka's law, where most authors contribute only one publication, and only a small portion contributes multiple publications.

Table 2. Lotka's Law and contribution of authors

# Document Written	# Authors	%	Lotka's Law prediction
1	3160	89.16%	60.00%
2	281	7.93%	15.00%
3	53	1.50%	6.67%
4	28	0.79%	3.75%
5	9	0.25%	2.40%
6	3	0.08%	1.67%
7	2	0.06%	1.22%
8	4	0.11%	0.94%
9	1	0.03%	0.74%
12	1	0.03%	0.42%
17	1	0.03%	0.21%
Grand Total	3543	99.97%	93.01%

The skewed distribution predicted by Lotka's law is consistent with our interdisciplinary topic of policy-oriented gig-economy research, where it combines policy discussions (e.g. areas such as labour law/relations/compensation, collective bargaining, dispute resolution, social security, regulatory design, occupational safety, data protection, antitrust, statutory minimum wages), and the gig economy (e.g. areas such as labour supply/demand, platform economics, job precarity/welfare, human resource management, self-employment, ride-hailing market, algorithmic management).

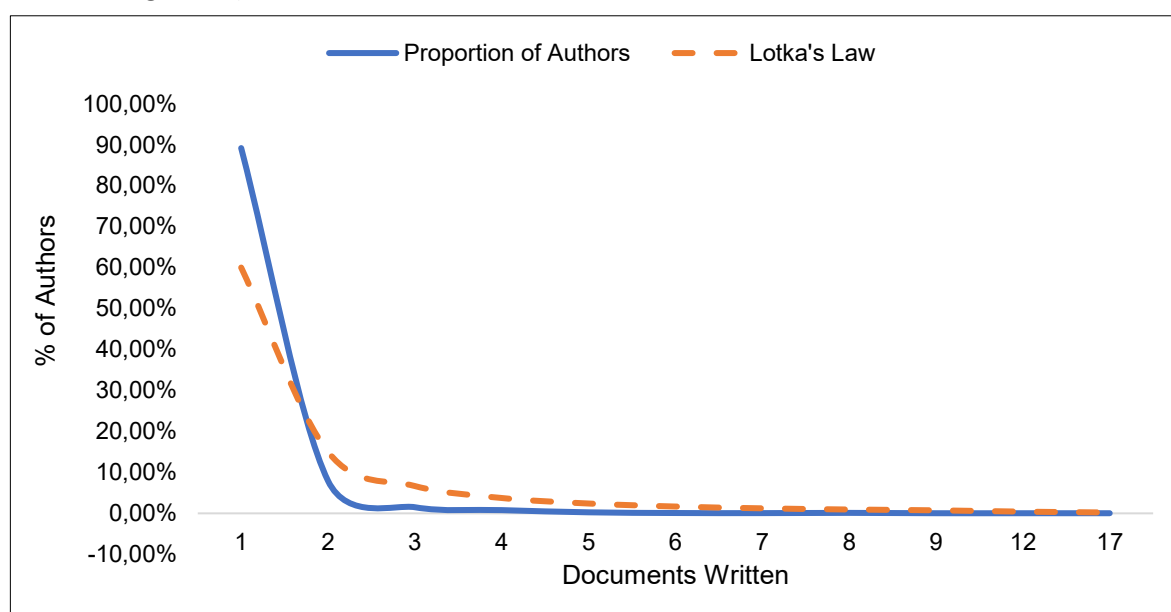


Figure 4. Lotka's Law and proportion of authors

Source productivity identifies the journals where policy-oriented gig-economy research are published and disseminated. The most productive journals include those in labour law, industrial relations, work/employment, and socio-technical, as shown in Figure 5. The high number of publications in these journals indicates that policy discourse is actively discussed through legal-institutional, labour-process, and socio-technical lenses. The results in Figure 5 support our research question by identifying where policy-oriented gig-economy works are curated in.

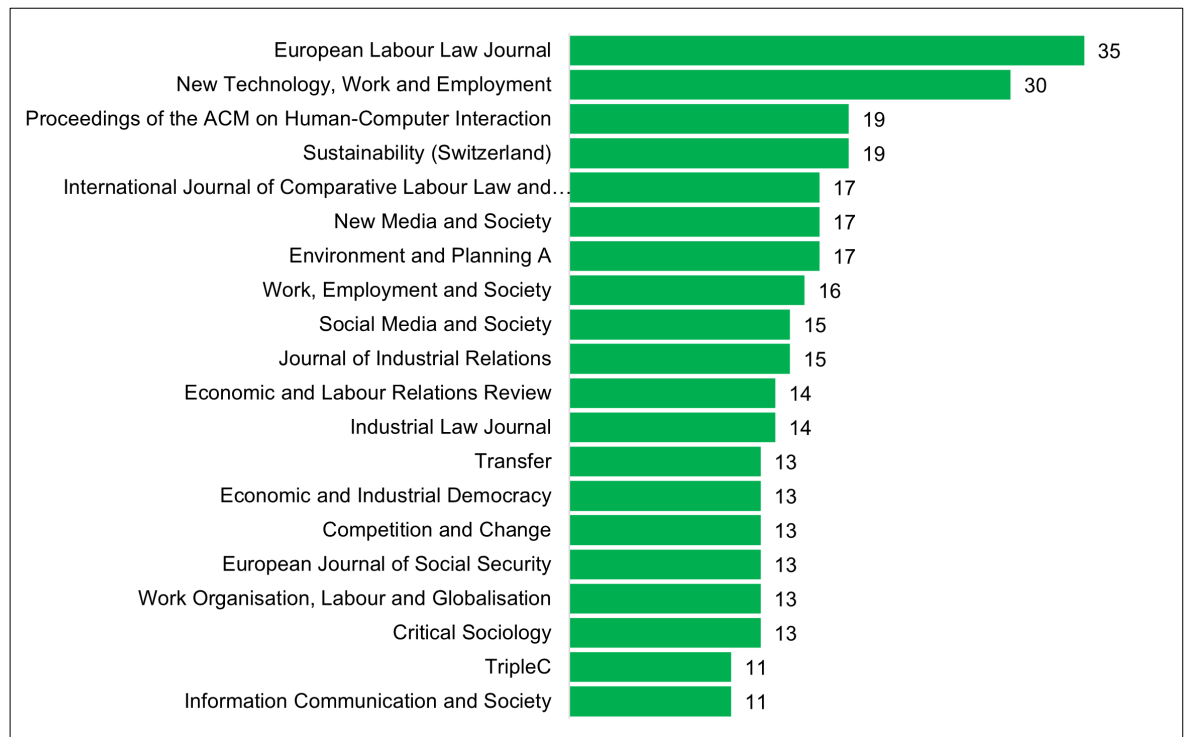


Figure 5. Top 20 Most Productive Source Title (by total publications)

As shown in Table 3, institutional productivity, influence, and impact are mostly concentrated in a small set of universities in the developed countries. It indicates that these universities and countries are the ones driving the agenda in policy-oriented gig-economy research. There are only 3 universities from developing countries that make the list, and all 3 are from China. Figure 6 shows the most productive countries in terms of total publications, i.e. with the US leading the pack (294 publications), UK (239), China (205), Germany (115), Australia (108), and Spain (106). A caveat to bear in mind here is that Scopus database defines countries as the country of an author's affiliated university/institution; therefore, any results pertaining to countries capture the country of knowledge production and not necessarily the country where research is conducted. Our results here indicates asymmetric patterns of knowledge production and influence, tilting heavily towards universities in a handful of developed countries.

Table 3. Top 20 Most Productive Institutions by Total Publications

Institution Name	Country	TP	NCA	NCP	TC	<i>h</i>
University of Oxford	United Kingdom	51	108	48	3822	26
University of Sydney	Australia	26	34	24	1089	13
University of Toronto	Canada	22	28	19	763	13
University of Melbourne	Australia	21	31	20	651	11
KU Leuven	Belgium	20	28	19	250	8
University of Manchester	United Kingdom	20	26	17	844	10
Universiteit van Amsterdam	Netherlands	18	21	18	743	9

Renmin University of China	China	15	21	12	82	4
University of Cambridge	United Kingdom	14	17	13	263	9
University of California Berkeley	United States	14	18	13	294	7
University of London	United Kingdom	14	14	13	477	9
University of Bristol	United Kingdom	14	17	13	357	9
Peking University	China	13	16	11	74	4
Utrecht University	Netherlands	13	23	11	452	8
Cornell University	United States	13	19	9	376	7
York University	Canada	12	13	9	70	5
Tsinghua University	China	12	19	8	59	4
LSE	United Kingdom	11	11	7	218	4
Erasmus University Rotterdam	Netherlands	11	22	10	182	6
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	Netherlands	11	13	10	166	5

Notes: TP = total publications, NCA = Number of contributing authors, NCP = Number of cited publications, TC = total citations, h = h-index

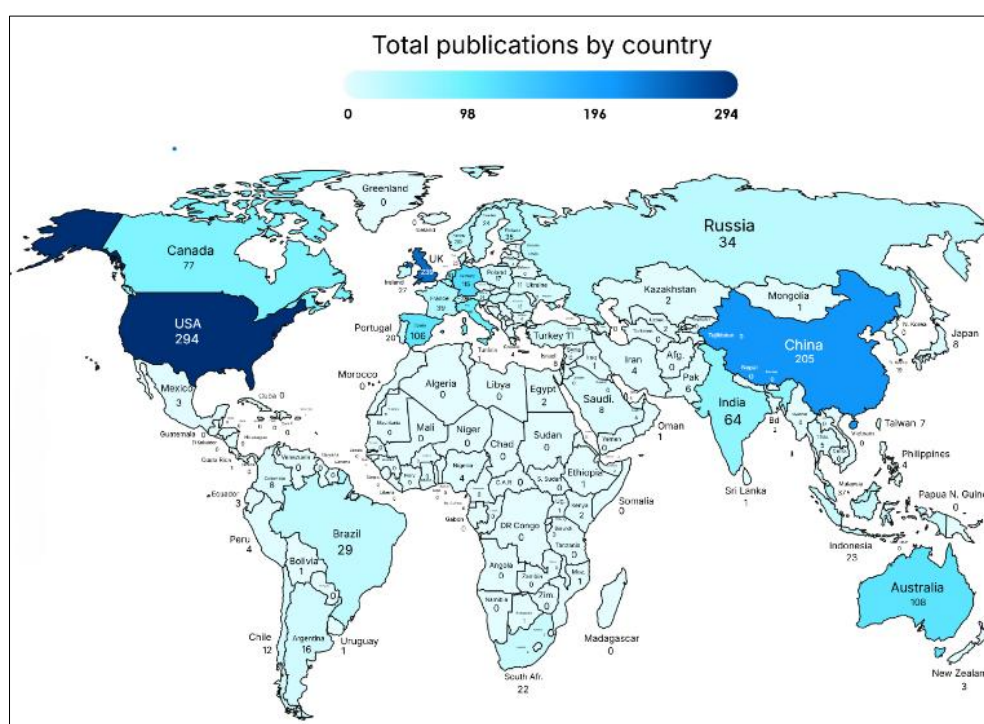


Figure 6. Total publications by country

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric study analyses 1,728 Scopus-indexed journal articles on policy-oriented gig-economy research using performance analysis to address how the field has grown and where influence is concentrated. The publication trajectory shows that Social Sciences is the leading subject area in terms of research output productivity, reinforcing the labour-governance orientation of policy engagement in gig-economy research. Within Social Sciences, there are strong representations from the Management and Economics subject areas, and a non-trivial contribution from Computer Science. This is consistent with discourses that increasingly relate socio-technical platform governance to policies. We also find evidence of asymmetric patterns in knowledge production and influence, concentrated in universities from a handful of developed countries.

Our paper contributes primary by providing bibliometric evidence of policy-oriented gig-economy research. It is a significant contribution as we take into account the policy dimensions debated in gig-economy research. This is our departure point from typical past bibliometric studies on gig economy, which tend to be general overviews with no specific focus. A limitation of this paper is that its analysis relies solely on a single bibliographic database. Therefore, readers should bear this caveat in mind as there might be bias in results due to database coverage.

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