University of Southampton

Faculty of Social Science

Southampton Business School

Narrating the New World of Work: Gig Economy, Career Transitions, and Work-Nonwork Boundaries in Content Creation

by

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Abstract

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This thesis explores how digital platform work is theorised in scholarship, how it is experienced and narrated by individuals, and how these processes together reshape both the practice and the meaning of work. Against a backdrop of rapidly expanding platform-mediated labour, it addresses three interlinked levels of analysis: how the gig economy has been theorised in management research, how individuals transition into full-time online content creation, and how lifestyle creators manage their work–nonwork boundaries in everyday practice. Together, these studies illuminate the conceptual foundations, career pathways, and boundary dynamics of platform-based work.

The first study conducts a systematic review of management literature on the gig economy to trace how research and theorising have evolved over time. Drawing on 193 articles published in management and related journals, and using storytelling and script theory as guiding lenses, it identifies three narrative "acts" through which the field has conceptualised gig work and uncovers the theorising "scripts" embedded within each act. This review offers a more comprehensive synthesis of how gig economy research has unfolded in the management field, revealing the temporal, dynamic, and cumulative processes by which scholarly understanding has been constructed. It also provides a meta-level reflection on the craft of theorising itself, showing how storytelling and script theory can illuminate not only what is studied but how it is framed, thereby advancing both substantive knowledge of the gig economy and methodological insights into theory-building.

Building on this foundation, the second study shifts from service-based gig platforms to communication- and entertainment-based online content platforms. Using narrative inquiry and analysing 97 self-recorded YouTube videos from 45 lifestyle-based creators who moved from secure employment to full-time online content creation, the study conceptualises career transitions as layered narratives of authoring, enacting, and performing. It contributes to career and work literature by revealing how individuals narrate reverse transitions from stable to precarious work as meaningful self-reinvention, extending theory on non-linear career pathways.

The third study moves to the micro-level, exploring how lifestyle content creators negotiate the blurred boundaries between work and nonwork in performative, platform-mediated labour. Drawing on boundary theory and Goffman's dramaturgical perspective and using a netnography approach based on 53 vlogs from 43 creators triangulated with six interviews, the study develops two interlinked concepts, namely the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries, to explain how creators actively curate, frame, and withhold aspects of their lives. It extends boundary theory into digital contexts where visibility and self-presentation are central to everyday labour.

Taken together, the three studies provide a multi-level account of how platform work is theorised, entered, and lived. Conceptually, the thesis advances understanding of theorising processes in emerging work contexts; empirically, it illuminates how individuals experience and narrate unconventional career transitions; and theoretically, it redefines boundary management as an ongoing, performative practice. By integrating storytelling as both an analytical framework and a contextual element, the thesis contributes a richer, more dynamic understanding of platform-mediated work and its implications for careers and the future of work.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Qingyang Xu

Title of thesis: Narrating the New World of Work: Gig Economy, Career Transitions, and Work-Nonwork Boundaries in Content Creation

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: Qingyang Xu Date: 29 Sep 2025

Acknowledgements

This PhD has been a journey of exploration in every sense. I began with the aim of studying gig work and platforms, but along the way I discovered much about myself as well. The process of designing and redesigning my research, reading widely, and adapting to change was rarely straightforward. Yet each stage brought new learning: every adjustment not only reflected my efforts to grow as a scholar but also deepened my understanding of my own thoughts, passions, and interests. Doing a PhD has been hard, messy, and at times overwhelming, but it has also been one of the most meaningful and transformative experiences of my life.

I am deeply grateful to my parents for their love, patience, and unwavering belief in me. Their support carried me through the moments of doubt, and this thesis would not have been possible without them. My heartfelt thanks also go to my supervisors, Prof. Mina Beigi and Dr. David Cross, for their guidance, encouragement, and generosity. From you I have learned not only how to conduct research but also how to believe in myself and find the courage to express my ideas. I would also like to thank my friends, Dr. Melika Shirmohammadi, Dr. Huainan Wang, and Yafan Yu, for their constant support, kindness, and help throughout this journey.

Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

This chapter introduces the background of the thesis, which explores non-standard workers' lived experiences in navigating macro-level career transitions and micro-level work-nonwork boundary dynamics. I will further explain the research motivation, outline the methodological approach adopted to unpack these phenomena, and situate the studies within their unique research context. Then I will briefly introduce the core ideas of three studies that comprise the thesis and conclude the chapter with an outline of the overall structure of thesis.

1.1 Research background

1.1.1 The changing world of work

Over the past decade, the proliferation of digital-mediated platforms has enabled new forms of labour that differ markedly from traditional employment arrangements (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017; Cunningham-Parmeter, 2016; Duggan et al., 2019; Friedman, 2014; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). Often described as the "gig economy" (Ashford, 2018; Minter, 2017), these developments have rapidly reshaped labour markets worldwide (Schmidt, 2017), transforming not only how work is organised but also how it is experienced and understood (e.g., Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Laursen et al., 2021; Reid-Musson et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). In the absence of a universal definition, the term "gig economy" has been used interchangeably with terms such as the "sharing economy" (Brinkley, 2016; Schor, 2016), "platform economy" (Farrell & Greig, 2016; Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Schmidt, 2017), "on-demand economy" (Shapiro, 2018), the "1099 economy" (Harris, 2017), or "freelance economy" (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). The gig economy, which initially emerged in sectors such as the music and the creative industries (Abraham et al., 2018; Hook, 2015; Riley, 2017), now encompasses a broad spectrum of work facilitated by digital platforms (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017) that connect workers with employers, clients, or consumers on a temporary, on-demand

basis (Friedman, 2014; Jabagi, 2019; Nunberg, 2016; Torpey & Hogan 2016). This expansion represents more than a technological shift; it reflects a structural transformation in the labour process (e.g., Kellogg et al., 2020), employment relations (e.g., De Stefano, 2015; Harris & Krueger, 2015; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2019), and even the meaning of work (e.g., Nemkova et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

The rise of the gig economy can be understood within wider economic and social changes. Following the 2008 "Great Recession" (Friedman, 2014), declining stability in traditional employment prompted many workers to seek alternative or supplementary income sources, while organisations increasingly embraced gig work as a cost-reduction strategy and a means of accessing flexible talent pools (Alton, 2018; Cunningham-Parmeter, 2016). At the same time, the spread of digital platforms and the growth of platform-based labour were accelerated by rapid technological advancement, particularly in mobile apps, big data, real-time communication, and algorithms (Collier et al., 2017). Companies such as Uber, Deliveroo, and TaskRabbit exemplify this trend. At the core of their operations is algorithmic management which is defined as the practice of using algorithms to assign tasks, optimise processes, and evaluate performance (Lee et al., 2015). It automatically matches labour supply with demand and mediates the interactions between workers and customers (Duggan et al., 2019).

Such forms of work have both advantages and disadvantages. Compared with traditional employment, gig work typically tends to require lower skill and has lower barriers to entry, thus providing more opportunities for marginalised groups, such as new immigrants (Hong, 2015), older workers, home-bound people, or those with criminal records (Prassl, 2018). This work mode also enables workers to engage in markets with a degree of autonomy and flexibility, giving them discretion over where and when to work (Donovan et al., 2016; Jabagi et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2015). However, the same technology that enables these opportunities also makes it easier for companies to hire workers globally, which can lead to

outsourcing to cheaper labour markets and increase extra pressure on local workers' pay and conditions (Healy et al., 2017; Kittur, 2013; Galperin & Greppi, 2019). In addition, workers are increasingly exposed to technological surveillance and platform control, especially in app-based platform work (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Prassl, 2018; Schroeder et al., 2020).

Digital platforms have proliferated across various sectors such as transportation, food delivery, home services, and professional services (Schmidt, 2017; Wood et al., 2019). They have expanded labour markets and redrawn the boundaries of work (Collier et al., 2017). Characterised by heterogeneous forms of labour, non-standard employment arrangements, and the pervasive influence of algorithmic management (Prassl, 2018), the gig economy represents not merely a passing trend but a reconfiguration of how people engage in economic activity, shifting toward forms of work that are more flexible yet often precarious. Its implications extend beyond individual workers and organisations to reshape the understandings of employment, career experiences, and the organisation of everyday life in contemporary societies.

1.1.2 Literature on new forms of work

Within the management and work literature, the rise of the gig economy has been accompanied by a rapidly expanding yet fragmented body of scholarship. Existing reviews have made significant contributions by examining diverse aspects of platform work. For example, scholars have explored the nature of work and organisation in the gig economy (Heeks, 2017; Kaine & Josserand, 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020), mapped the scope and size of the gig workforce (Batmunkh et al., 2022; O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020), and addressed related themes such as work classification, ethics, and the implications of platform labour for different stakeholders. These studies have established the gig economy as a legitimate and important area of inquiry within management research.

However, despite these valuable contributions, much of the existing literature adopts a static perspective that overlooks the dynamic and evolving nature of theorisation in this field. Scholarship has largely concentrated on operational or structural aspects, such as algorithmic management, employment relations, and labour control (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017), rather than examining how the field itself has been theorised and developed over time. As gig economy research enters a more mature stage, there is a growing need to understand not only the substantive findings of this literature but also the theorising craft underpinning its evolution. Such an approach can reveal how concepts have been adapted, extended, or redefined to make sense of this new form of work.

The first study in this thesis addresses this gap by systematically reviewing how gig economy research and theorisation has unfolded within the management field. Drawing on storytelling (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) and script theory (Tomkins, 1978) as guiding analytical lenses, the study traces the narrative "acts" through which the gig economy has been conceptualised and identifies the theorising moves embedded within these accounts. This approach not only maps the development of the field but also highlights opportunities for advancing theory-building on the gig economy and other emerging, non-standard work contexts.

1.1.3 Experiencing new work pathways: career transitions

While the first study maps the intellectual trajectory of gig economy scholarship and reveal its theorising patterns, it also identifies the key gaps in the extant literature. Despite the rapid growth and diversification of platform labour, academic attention has remained concentrated on app-based platforms such as Uber, Lyft, and Deliveroo, leaving other forms of platform-mediated work and individual work experience comparatively underexplored. To address this limitation, the second study of this thesis shifts the focus from services-based

digital platforms to communication- and entertainment-based digital platform workers (Schmidt, 2017), a rapidly expanding but under-researched domain of the platform economy.

Given the heterogeneity of digital platform work, Kenney and Zysman (2016) identified three main forms of labour participation in the platform economy, namely platform owners, transaction platforms, and user-generated content. Of these, user-generated content represents the foundation of the platform economy because of its sheer scale (ibid.). Within this space, online content creation (OCC) has witnessed unprecedented growth, with over 207 million people worldwide identifying as content creators and almost half (46.7%) working full-time (DemandSage, 2024). This trend exemplifies a broader reconfiguration of careers in which pathways are increasingly fluid, idiosyncratic, and precarious (De Vos et al., 2021; Sonpar et al., 2022), challenging long-held assumptions of stability and security. Yet, despite its scale and significance, relatively little is known about how individuals navigate and make sense of careers in this emergent work context (Mussagulova et al., 2023).

Career scholarship has traditionally focused on conventional and linear transitions, such as school-to-work or unemployment-to-work movements (Akkermans et al., 2024), inter- or intra-organisational changes (Mussagulova et al., 2023) or shifts toward opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (de Klerk et al., 2024). While valuable, these models offer limited insight into unconventional, non-linear, and platform-mediated pathways such as OCC, where transitions are frequently downwardly mobile in terms of career security (Mishra et al., 2024). Moreover, the dominant literature has emphasised antecedents and outcomes of transitions (De Vos et al., 2021), devoting comparatively less attention to the lived experiences and meaning-making processes accompanying such shifts. This gap is particularly salient in OCC, where workers navigate hyper-competition, financial uncertainty, and structural precarity (Ashman et al., 2018), often embracing instability rather than seeking security.

The second study of this thesis directly addresses this gap by exploring how individuals construct meaning around their transitions from secure employment to full-time online content creation. Using narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008), the study examines how these creators author, enact, and perform their transition stories in a precarious and public-facing environment. By focusing on these underexplored experiences, the study extends career scholarship to account for platform-mediated and non-traditional trajectories and contributes timely insights into the realities of navigating work in an era defined by precarity, digital platforms, and performative labour.

1.1.4 Living new work: work-nonwork boundaries

In digital-mediated contexts such as online content creation, work and personal life are deeply interwoven (Törhönen et al., 2019), as activities traditionally considered private, such as cooking, socialising, or sharing personal reflections, are increasingly folded into the production of digital content. This results in blurred, shifting boundaries between work and nonwork, complicating traditional understandings of the work–life interface and raising new questions about how these boundaries are negotiated in practice (Ciolfi & Lockley, 2018).

The work–family literature has provided a rich foundation for understanding how individuals manage the relationship between work and nonwork domains, typically framed along a segmentation–integration continuum (Ashforth et al., 2000; Ciolfi & Lockley, 2018; Kossek et al., 2012). Yet these models generally assume relatively stable and clearly delineated boundaries, negotiated between distinct spheres of home and work. Such perspectives are ill-equipped to capture the dynamics of performative labour in digital contexts, where everyday life itself becomes a site of work through processes of visibility, self-presentation, and ongoing audience engagement.

This gap is particularly pronounced for lifestyle content creators, whose professional activities are inseparable from the public performance of their personal experiences. For these

workers, the boundaries between work and nonwork are not simply managed but continuously enacted and re-enacted, contingent on visibility, context, and task. Examining how these boundaries are lived and negotiated is therefore crucial for extending boundary theory and developing a more nuanced understanding of work in performative, platform-mediated environments.

Accordingly, the third study of this thesis investigates how lifestyle content creators negotiate their work–nonwork boundaries in digital platform work by focusing on the self-representation of personal activities. Drawing on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000) and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, this study employs netnography (Kozinets, 2020) to explore these in depth. By doing so, the study contributes to theory-building on boundary dynamics in emerging forms of labour and sheds light on the lived experiences of working at the intersection of personal life, self-presentation, and platform-mediated production.

1.1.5 Forms of Platform Work: From Gig Work to Content Creation

Platform-mediated labour encompasses a diverse range of work arrangements rather than a unified form (Kennedy, 2016; Schmidt, 2017). This heterogeneity makes it important to distinguish between different types of platform work to identify research gaps and better understand workers' experiences. Reflecting this diversity, scholars have differentiated platform work along multiple dimensions, including levels of platform control, compensation structures, work arrangements, modes of work delivery (online or offline), skill requirements, and the nature of outputs (e.g., labour-based services, goods, or digital content) (e.g., De Stefano, 2015; Duggan et al., 2019; Dunn, 2020; Heeks, 2017; Howcroft & Bergvall- Kåreborn, 2019; Jabagi et al., 2019; McDonnell et al., 2021).

One commonly cited distinction (Schmidt, 2017) separates platform work into activities performed in physical environments and those executed entirely online. The former includes

location-based services such as transportation and food delivery, which are coordinated through digital applications yet carried out in local, offline environments. The latter category involves digitally mediated tasks completed remotely, including freelancing and crowd-based microtasks typically performed by geographically distributed workers who are compensated on a task-by-task basis (Schmidt, 2017). Although these forms differ in their levels of algorithmic management, work arrangements, and labour processes, they share several main features. In both cases, platforms mediate transactions between clients and workers, decompose work into discrete units, and reallocate economic risk and employment insecurity to individuals (Prassl, 2018).

In addition to these service- and task-oriented forms of platform work, social media platforms have given rise to another configuration of digital labour centred on content production and audience engagement (Schmidt, 2017). In this context, value is generated not through the completion of assigned tasks, but through the creation and circulation of digital materials such as videos, images, podcasts, and posts (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy, 2019). Although different forms of platform work commonly share features such as income uncertainty and instability, they differ significantly in their degrees of platform control, labour processes, and modes of value generation. Unlike service-based and crowd-based platform work, which are often characterised by algorithmic control, where tasks are allocated and monitored by the platform (Prassl, 2018), online content creation involves self-directed labour shaped by audience engagement and attention-driven visibility. In contrast to service-based gig work, content creators typically own their means of production (e.g., devices, creative resources), are not subject to algorithmic task allocation, and generate income mainly through audience-based monetisation mechanisms such as advertising, sponsorships, and subscriptions (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020).

While gig work has been widely studied, most existing frameworks are derived from service-based platforms featured by algorithmic management. Yet, work experiences vary considerably across different types of platforms, and a one-size-fits-all approach cannot adequately capture the diversity of platform-mediated labour (Schor et al., 2020). In particular, little is known about the lived experiences of content-based platform work. Therefore, study 1 of this thesis examines how service-based gig work has been theorised, highlighting limitations in existing frameworks that predominantly focus on algorithmically managed labour. Building on these insights, studies 2 and 3 shift attention to content creation on communication and entertainment platforms, emphasising the heterogeneous nature of platform-mediated work.

1.1.6 Storytelling as an integrating perspective

Taken together, the three studies in this thesis offer a multi-level perspective on the changing world of work, spanning conceptual theorisation, transitional career experiences, and the micro-dynamics of everyday boundary negotiations. At the conceptual level, the first study traces how management scholarship has theorised the gig economy, identifying the narrative "acts" through which the field has developed and showing how theorisation has evolved over time. Building on this foundation, the second study moves beyond service-based digital platforms in the gig economy to focus on communication- and entertainment-based digital platforms (Schmidt, 2017). The second study explores how online content creators navigate unconventional career transitions into precarious digital work. The third study then zooms further into the micro-level, investigating how lifestyle creators negotiate the blurred boundaries between work and nonwork in the context of performative, platform-mediated labour (Törhönen et al., 2019).

These studies are bound together not only by their shared focus on platform-mediated work but also by a unifying narrative lens (Clandinin, 2006). In the first study, storytelling elements provide a framework (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) for examining how scholars

conceptualise and theorise the gig economy. In the second study, narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) illuminates how individuals interpret and narrate their transitions into online content creation. In the third study, the lived and performed stories of content creators reveal how visibility structures their work–nonwork boundaries and how these boundaries are continually enacted and adjusted. Across the thesis, storytelling functions both as an analytical tool for understanding scholarly theorisation and as a contextual element shaping the lived experiences of entering and enacting precarious and performative digital labour.

By foregrounding storytelling and narratives across these different levels of analysis, the thesis shows how academic theorisation and lived experiences of platform work are communicated, constructed, legitimised, and interpreted through narrative forms. Conceptually, it advances understanding of how theorisation of new forms of work unfolds within management scholarship through the lens of storytelling (Daft, 1985; Daft, 1995; Hoon & Baluch, 2019; Pollock & Bono, 2013). Empirically, it sheds light on how individuals experience and narrate unconventional career transitions (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021) and how they negotiate blurred work and nonwork boundaries in performative digital labour contexts (Törhönen et al., 2019). More broadly, the thesis extends conversations on how digital platforms, visibility, self-representation, and precarity are reshaping the meaning and boundary of work (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000) in the contemporary era.

1.2 Research motivation

The starting point of this thesis is the recognition that both the nature of work and individuals' experiences of it are undergoing profound changes with the rise of digital platforms (Gandini, 2018; Veen et al., 2019; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2019). Digital platforms have not only restructured how labour is organised and managed (Anwar & Graham, 2020) but also reshaped

how academics, organisations, and workers understand work and its meaning (e.g., Bellesia et al., 2019; Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Panteli et al., 2020). This transformation raises a series of unanswered questions across multiple levels of analysis. My motivation in pursuing this research has been to engage with these questions in a way that connects field-level theorisation, individual career transitions, and everyday lived experiences of the work-nonwork interface.

The first motivation lies in addressing how the gig economy has been theorised in management research. Although scholarly attention to the gig economy has expanded rapidly (McDonnell et al., 2021), the literature has become increasingly fragmented. What is missing is a holistic understanding of how academic theorisation of the gig economy has evolved, what dimensions have been most examined, which assumptions have guided this work, and where opportunities for deeper theoretical development remain. Without such a perspective, the field risks producing static, piecemeal insights that do not reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of platform work. Inspired by the idea that storytelling has been increasingly recognised as integral to theorising and that compelling theories are in essence compelling stories (Daft, 1995; Pollock & Bono, 2013; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016), I adopt storytelling as a framework to explore phenomena.

By systematically reviewing the literature through the dual lenses of storytelling and script theory, my research is motivated by the need to clarify the narrative "acts" that have structured scholarly engagement with the gig economy and to illuminate how these narratives shape the trajectory of theorisation. In other words, I wanted to understand not just what we know about the gig economy, but how that knowledge has been constructed and where it might go next.

In conducting the systematic literature review, I found that most studies focus narrowly on app-based platforms such as Uber, Lyft, or Deliveroo, or on online crowdwork platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk (e.g., Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021; Lei, 2021; Tassinari &

Maccarrone, 2020; Veen et al., 2019; Walker, 2021; Wu et al., 2019; Yin et al., 2016). While these platforms are important for understanding algorithmically mediated labour, they represent only one segment of a much broader and more diverse landscape of platform-based work (Schmidt, 2017). In particular, user-generate content constitutes both an enormous size of digital activity and one of the foundational forms of labour in the broad platform economy (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). To address this gap, I shifted my research focus from the broader gig economy that emphasising non-standard employment relations, digital marketplace, and intermediary platforms to a less-examined category of digital labour: online content creation. This type of work involves individuals creating and sharing a range of digital content on online platforms and generate income through mechanisms such as brand collaborations, platform-based advertising, and other monetisation channels (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy, 2019).

Concurrent with this shift in focus, a second motivation emerges from a recognition that career scholarship has not kept pace with the realities of platform-mediated work and online content creation is especially underexplored from a career perspective. Contemporary careers are increasingly fluid, precarious, and non-linear (Chudzikowski, 2012; De Vos et al., 2019; De Vos et al., 2021; Sonpar et al., 2022), yet most career research continues to focus on institutionalised and predictable transitions, such as school-to-work transition, promotions, retirement, or organisational mobility (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023). While this line of research has built on assumptions of stability and upward progress, many workers instead leave secure employment to embrace and navigate the uncertainty of the platform economy. Online content creation is a striking example: individuals walk away from professional security to build careers in spaces defined by financial precarity, algorithmic volatility, and intensive competition (Ashman et al., 2018). Such transitions are not merely occupational shifts; they are profound reorientations of identity, livelihood, and purpose. Yet, scholarship has given little attention to how these transitions are experienced and made sense

of by the individuals themselves. This gap motivates the second part of my research, where I aim to uncover the lived narratives of workers undertaking these unconventional moves, exploring how they frame, legitimise, and emotionally navigate their career transitions.

A third, and closely related, motivation is the need to understand the blurring of work and nonwork boundaries in performative forms of labour. While conducting the second study, the performative elements embedded in online content creation context led me to look beyond how individuals enter these careers to how they manage the interface between their work and nonwork lives. Traditional work–family scholarship has given us useful frameworks, often built around the segmentation–integration continuum (Ciolfi & Lockley, 2018), to understand how individuals manage their roles across domains (Bulger et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2012).

However, these frameworks presuppose that work and nonwork are relatively separate spheres that individuals can choose to integrate or separate. For many platform workers, and especially for online content creators, this assumption no longer holds. Here, personal life itself becomes part of the product: cooking a meal, spending time with friends, or sharing private reflections are not simply leisure activities, but content to be performed, recorded, and monetised. This dynamic creates a fundamentally different type of boundary negotiation — one that is fluid, layered, and contingent on visibility and performance. Yet, we still know little about how workers experience and manage these blurred boundaries on a daily basis (Törhönen et al., 2019). This motivates the third part of my research: to capture the lived complexities of work–nonwork boundaries when personal and professional life are deeply entangled.

Bringing these motivations together, my thesis aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the new world of work from three related points: how it is theorised by scholars, how it is entered through career transitions, and how it is lived through everyday practices of boundary management. Each of these points addresses a critical gap in the existing literature, but taken together, they also contribute to a more integrated and nuanced understanding of

digital platform work. By adopting a narrative lens throughout, my research emphasised the role of stories, both scholarly and personal, in shaping how people understand, enter, and live precarious work.

Finally, my motivation is not only academic but also practical. The insights generated by this research can inform more inclusive theoretical frameworks, but they also speak directly to the challenges faced by workers and organisations. For policymakers and practitioners, understanding how careers and boundaries are experienced in platform work is crucial for designing support systems and labour practices that reflect the work experiences of today's workforce. For workers, recognising the dynamics of transition, precarity, and boundary negotiation may help in navigating the demands of these new work contexts more effectively. Ultimately, my motivation has been to contribute to both scholarship and practice by clarifying how the gig economy and related forms of digital labour are theorised, experienced, and lived.

1.3 Research methodology

1.3.1 Philosophical Positioning

The development of knowledge is influenced by a variety of ontological and epistemological beliefs that shape how we understand the world around us (Crotty, 1998). In the context of the growing gig economy and existing work and career literature, I adopt a constructionist epistemological lens and an interpretivist theoretical perspective. These frameworks allow me to deepen our understanding of the lived experiences of individuals in non-standard employment contexts. This section will first introduce the fundamental philosophical assumptions underlying research, focusing on the relationship between ontology, epistemology, and methodology. It will then position my thesis project within the broader debates concerning the philosophical assumptions of social science.

Philosophical underpinnings play a crucial role in any disciplined study because they reflect how researchers view the world and approach issues within the lived experiences of

individuals. A researcher's philosophical position is shaped by their ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Ontology, in this context, refers to the nature of reality and how people perceive it. Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired, developed, and justified. Methodology refers to the approaches and strategies that govern the methods used to answer research questions. Some scholars also include axiology, which pertains to the values that influence the research process. These core beliefs, collectively referred to as paradigms (Guba, 1990), guide researchers in their inquiry. According to Kuhn (1996), a paradigm represents a set of universally recognized scientific achievements that provide models for problems and solutions within a particular community of practitioners. These philosophical assumptions serve as a foundation for conducting and evaluating research, helping researchers locate themselves in the world and critically assess their work.

Some scholars, such as Patton (2015), argue that epistemology, paradigm, and methodology should be considered at the same level. However, Crotty (1998) proposes that these elements should be viewed hierarchically, with epistemology serving as the foundational base for any research design. Crotty outlines three epistemological stances—objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism—which are embedded in the theoretical perspective and, consequently, influence the choice of methodology. The researcher’s epistemological lens thus guides the selection of research methods and shapes the way in which theory is constructed (Cornelissen et al., 2021). Different scholars value theory in distinct ways, and these values are often consistent with their underlying philosophical assumptions.

This hierarchy informs every stage of the research process. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) emphasise that in the early stages of research, researchers are multicultural agents influenced by their histories, backgrounds, and traditions. The role of the researcher in the inquiry is directly related to the purpose of the research and the methodology adopted. Researchers

approach the world with preconceived beliefs shaped by their individual backgrounds and cultural contexts. These beliefs guide them in posing questions about phenomena in the lived world and determining the appropriate methods to address those questions. Researchers from different disciplines may adopt divergent philosophical assumptions, which reflect their unique belief systems. As such, researchers must be reflective about the influence of previous philosophical works and their own implicit standpoints.

The field of qualitative research has experienced paradigm shifts over time, with scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2013) outlining eight major moments in the development of qualitative research in America. These moments highlight the evolving philosophical perspectives within the discipline. Alvesson and Sandberg (2021) suggest that capturing these historical shifts in qualitative research is a complex task, and the debate between quantitative and qualitative research has been ongoing for many years. This tension often stems from differing philosophical positions, but it is crucial to recognize that qualitative and quantitative research are not inherently opposed; rather, they stem from different concerns and methods (Crotty, 1998). Early qualitative research methods, for example, were often used in positivist traditions (e.g., ethnography in studies of foreign cultures). Grounded theory, another qualitative approach, was initially proposed within the context of realism. More recently, mixed-methods research, driven by pragmatism, has gained traction, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena (Flick, 2014).

Within qualitative research, four primary paradigms structure the field: positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, and critical inquiry, each with its own distinct philosophical beliefs. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and Guba (1990) propose several criteria for distinguishing these paradigms, including accommodation, values, and ethics. Creswell (2013) simplifies and categorizes these philosophical positions under various labels, such as theoretical perspectives

or interpretive frameworks. Despite the differences between scholars, there is a commonality in the underlying assumptions of these paradigms, each of which has a distinct ontology, epistemology, and methodology that informs the research process. Methods are then selected according to the research questions and objectives. However, some of these perspectives contradict one another, as illustrated by Patton's (2015) 16 theoretical approaches, which stand in contrast to Crotty's (1998) hierarchical view of epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology. Researchers must be aware of the implicit biases and philosophical stances of influential scholars, such as Lincoln and Guba, who align themselves with constructivism.

Positivists, for example, operate under the belief that there is an objective reality that can be observed, measured and examined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). They adhere to a realist ontology and objectivism in epistemology, assuming that the meaning of reality exists independently of human consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Researchers, in this case, maintain a detached stance to study this objective reality. In contrast, post-positivists aim to approximate truth rather than seek certainty (Crotty, 1998). Influenced by Popper's (1959) theory of falsification, post-positivists seek to test hypotheses and deduce logical conclusions rather than verify experience. Kuhn's (1996) theory of scientific revolutions significantly altered researchers' understanding of scientific knowledge, shifting the focus from objectivity to the recognition of the human influences on the process of knowledge generation. For post-positivists, knowledge construction is influenced by social, historical, and personal factors, and they advocate for the use of multiple methods to approach research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

In contrast, constructionists reject the pursuit of objective truth, instead emphasizing "useful" or "fulfilling" interpretations (Crotty, 1998). They adopt a relativist ontology, acknowledging that there are multiple accounts of reality that individuals construct through interactions with others and within specific historical and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2013). Social constructionism posits that meaning is not inherent but emerges through dialogue and

social interaction, and it is especially useful for exploring social phenomena within particular contexts. The researcher, as a key instrument in this process, plays an integral role in identifying, interpreting, and reflecting on the data (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2013) proposed the concept of "research-as-bricoleur," emphasising that qualitative researchers must be equipped with the skills to navigate multiple paradigms and employ diverse methods to make sense of complex issues in the world.

In summary, the epistemological and ontological beliefs that inform research are deeply interconnected and guide researchers in the construction of knowledge. Understanding these philosophical assumptions is crucial, as they shape the research process and influence the interpretation of findings. By acknowledging the philosophical traditions underlying different research approaches, scholars can better navigate the complexities of knowledge construction and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the world.

1.3.2 Linking Philosophy to Methodological Design

Building on these philosophical foundations, this thesis adopts a multi-method qualitative research design. Each study employs a distinct methodology—systematic literature review, narrative inquiry, and netnography—aligned to its specific research questions and to the overall interpretivist orientation (Crotty, 1998). The choice of methods reflects my aim to examine the new world of work across conceptual, transitional, and experiential terrains. By combining a systematic literature review, narrative inquiry, and netnography, I was able to explore how digital platform work is theorised in scholarship, how individuals transition into it, and how it is lived and negotiated in daily practice. Each methodology brings unique strengths and together provide a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of the phenomena under study.

The first study employs a systematic literature review, which is particularly well-suited to addressing the question of how the gig economy has been theorised in management research.

Systematic reviews are "a set of scientific methods that explicitly aim to limit systematic error (bias), mainly by attempting to identify, appraise and synthesize all relevant studies" in relation to a given question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 9). Unlike narrative reviews, which may be more selective, systematic reviews emphasize comprehensiveness and transparency, helping to "establish in an explicit and methodical way what is known and not known in relation to a given question" (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 1). This method therefore enabled me to synthesise 193 studies in a rigorous way, to map the evolution of theorisation in the gig economy, and to identify conceptual gaps and opportunities for future scholarship. A systematic review was the best fit here because my aim was not to produce new empirical data, but to critically consolidate and interrogate the scholarly narratives shaping the field.

The second study adopts a narrative inquiry approach, which has been widely recognised in career studies as a powerful method for exploring how individuals construct meaning from their work lives, particularly in fluid and non-linear career contexts (e.g., Bujold, 2004; Chudzikowski et al., 2020; Cochran, 1990; Cohen & Mallon, 2001). Online content creation (OCC) represents precisely such a context: it is precarious, highly visible, and self-managed, requiring workers to articulate and perform their careers not only for themselves but also for an audience. In these settings, storytelling becomes more than a reflective practice; it is constitutive of how careers are built, legitimised, and sustained. Narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) was thus particularly appropriate for uncovering how content creators make sense of their transitions into OCC, how they negotiate uncertainty, and how they construct coherent stories in precarious circumstances. By analysing both the content and performance aspect of participants' narratives, I was able to access the temporal, emotional, and performative dimensions of their career sensemaking in ways that more traditional methods could not.

The third study employs netnography, an adaptation of ethnographic methods to online spaces to explore how online content creators experience their work-nonwork boundaries. As

Kozinets (2020) notes, netnography recognises the fluid, digitally mediated nature of social interaction, attending to the "cultures, experiences, activities, and relationships" that unfold online (Addeo et al., 2019, p. 11). Unlike traditional ethnography, which is rooted in a physical field site, netnography is particularly suited to contexts such as OCC, where work itself is platform-bound and boundaries between work and nonwork are enacted in digital spaces. This method allowed me to observe, interpret, and analyse the practices of content creators within the online environments where their labour takes place. Netnography was therefore the best fit for addressing my research question on how work–nonwork boundaries are negotiated in performative forms of platform work, capturing not only what creators say but also how their practices are embedded in the rhythms and visibility of digital life.

Taken together, these three methodological approaches form a coherent design that aligns with the three levels of my thesis. The systematic review consolidates and advances theorisation at the scholarly level; narrative inquiry uncovers the lived experiences of career transition at the individual level; and netnography examines the micro-dynamics of boundary negotiation at the experiential level. By combining these methods, the thesis offers both breadth and depth, integrating conceptual mapping with rich qualitative insight into the lived realities of digital platform work.

1.4 Research contexts

This thesis is situated within the broader transformation of work brought about by the platform economy. While short-term, task-based work is not new, the gig economy as a contemporary form represents an important shift in how work is organised and experienced (Friedman, 2014). The term "gig" originated in the 1920s to describe short-term engagements by jazz musicians, evoking images of flexibility, autonomy, and creative freedom (Hook, 2015; Nunberg, 2016). Over the decades, however, the term expanded far beyond music to encompass

a growing range of contingent work arrangements (Friedman, 2014; Suddaby, 2010). Following the 2008 financial crisis, widespread unemployment and eroded job security created fertile ground for gig-style work, while digital platforms provided the infrastructure to scale it. This convergence of economic disruption and technological innovation propelled gig work from a niche practice into a defining feature of the contemporary labour market (Sundararajan, 2015).

The platform economy can be broadly defined as economic activities facilitated by digital platforms that coordinate access to goods, services, or content (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Platforms mediate relationships between workers, consumers, and organisations, reshaping the structure of employment. They act simultaneously as marketplaces, management systems, and gatekeepers, introducing new forms of algorithmic control alongside promises of autonomy and flexibility. Amidst this expansion, management and work scholars have produced a rapidly growing but fragmented body of research (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Vallas & Schor, 2020).

Within the platform economy, researchers commonly distinguish between two major types of platform-mediated work (Schmidt, 2017). Location-based app work, such as ride-hailing, food delivery, or household services, involves services performed in physical spaces and is closely associated with well-known platforms like Uber, Deliveroo, or TaskRabbit (Duggan et al., 2019). Cloud-based work, by contrast, occurs entirely online, encompassing remote freelancing and crowdwork where geographically dispersed workers complete microtasks for piece-rate pay (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). These forms differ in skill levels, pay structures, and degrees of algorithmic oversight, but both share core features: the breaking down of work into small units, the reliance on digital intermediation, and the shifting of risk and responsibility onto workers.

A third and increasingly important domain of platform-mediated labour lies on social media platforms, where digital content generates economic value through entertainment, information sharing, and the cultivation of online audiences (Schmidt, 2017). This "creator economy" (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy, 2019) represents a rapidly expanding field in which individuals produce and distribute content (e.g., videos, images, podcasts, blogs) and monetise their output via advertising, sponsorships, subscriptions, and other revenue streams. What was once a hobby or a source of supplementary income has become a full-time occupation, prompting individuals to leave traditional employment in favour of platform-based digital work.

This emerging field diverges sharply from traditional career paths. Conventional employment provides relatively stable structures, clear job roles, and defined boundaries between work and personal life (Kossek, 2016). In contrast, online content creators operate as self-managed, dependent on continuous creativity, self-promotion, and responsiveness to shifting platform dynamics. Their "workplace" spans home, cafés, and digital spaces, and their personal lives often supply the raw material for their content. This performative, public-facing dimension makes content creation an especially rich context for studying work–nonwork boundaries, self-representation, and career construction.

Despite its rapid growth, academic research on the creator economy remains comparatively underdeveloped. Existing studies focus primarily on technology, algorithms, and the nature of creative labour (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Craig, 2019), or on specific subgroups such as motherhood bloggers (Archer, 2019), digital nomads (Arifa et al., 2022), and "sharenting" parents (Jorge et al., 2022). While valuable, these studies leave key questions unanswered about how individuals transition into this form of work and how they manage its distinctive boundary dynamics.

For these reasons, online content creation offers an especially compelling research setting for this thesis. It involves the tensions and possibilities of the future of work, combining the precarity and autonomy characteristic of other gig-economy arrangements with a uniquely public-facing, performative dimension. Content creators have to continuously manage their own labour and income while crafting and curating a visible persona for audiences, making their work an ideal site for examining how people construct and perform their career narratives. Because their personal lives often become the raw material for their output, content creation also offers a natural laboratory for exploring the work–nonwork interface and the negotiation of boundaries between private and public selves. Despite its rapid growth, this sector has been largely overlooked in management research compared with app-based gig work, making it a timely and distinctive site for extending theory and understanding how contemporary labour is lived and made meaningful.

Therefore, the research setting is not simply a backdrop to the thesis but a critical part of its contribution: it makes it possible to integrate and extend scholarship on the gig economy, career transitions, and work–nonwork boundaries in a way that speaks directly to the realities of contemporary work.

1.5 Conducted studies

1.5.1 First paper

Title:

Understanding the Evolution of Gig Economy Theorization Through Storytelling: A Systematic Review in the Management Field and Directions for Future Research

Purpose:

This review brings together the fragmented and dispersed body of gig economy research in management studies to examine how the literature itself has evolved over time. It

also investigates how scholars' theorising practices in this field have developed, addressing the questions of (1) how gig economy literature has unfolded within the management field and (2) how the craft of theorising has evolved alongside it.

Significance:

Digital platforms have become embedded in everyday life and work, from ordering a meal on Deliveroo to booking a ride through Uber. These platforms constitute more than isolated services: they form a socio-technical ecosystem in which supply and demand are algorithmically matched, creating new forms of work characterised by quasi-employment relationships, algorithmic management, and heterogeneous tasks (Gandini, 2019; Idowu & Elbanna, 2021; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019; Schulte et al., 2020). Scholarly discourse has tended to frame these developments in binary terms, emphasising either the bright side of technology-enabled flexibility and efficiency or the dark side of exploitation and precarity (Prassl, 2018).

However, the rapid expansion of research has produced a fragmented yet disconnected body of literature. This review is significant because it moves beyond cataloguing findings to interrogate how the gig economy literature itself has evolved. The exponential growth of publications across management subfields (McDonnell et al., 2021) reflects the field's importance but also its conceptual sprawl: diverse "stories" have been told about the gig economy, but these stories have not been systematically linked to reveal their collective trajectory. Existing reviews, although valuable (e.g., Batmunkh et al., 2022; Heeks, 2017; Kaine & Josserand, 2019; O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020; Tan et al., 2021; Vallas & Schor, 2020; Watson et al., 2021), have largely adopted static perspectives that fail to capture the temporal dynamics of theorisation and the evolving nature of this phenomenon. Without a holistic view of how scholarship in this area has developed, researchers risk building theory on fragmented or outdated assumptions.

Moreover, this review contributes to our understanding of how scholars craft theory about complex, rapidly changing phenomena. The gig economy's heterogeneity and complexity make it an ideal context for reflecting on theorising practices. Much as diverse stories arise from diverse storytelling techniques, diverse studies of the gig economy emerge from different theoretical "crafts." Yet, while the literature on theory-building offers numerous techniques and guidelines, it remains difficult to improve theorising without systematically reflecting on how scholars actually approach and conceptualise a real-world phenomenon over time.

By addressing these gaps, this review makes three critical contributions. First, it provides the most comprehensive synthesis to date of how gig economy research and theorisation have unfolded within the management field. Second, it reveals the temporal, dynamic, and cumulative processes by which scholarly understanding of the gig economy has been constructed, thereby identifying patterns, turning points, and underexplored areas for future research. Third, it offers a meta-level reflection on the craft of theorising itself, demonstrating how storytelling and script theory can be applied to uncover not only what is studied but how it is conceptually framed. In doing so, the review advances both substantive knowledge of the gig economy and methodological insights into the practice of theory-building in management research.

Methods:

To address the review questions, I conducted a systematic literature review, following the six-stage process recommended by Briner and Denyer (2012), Denyer and Tranfield (2009), and Popay et al. (2006). Systematic reviews are widely recognised as a rigorous approach to synthesising existing research. As Petticrew and Roberts (2006, p. 9) define them, they are "a set of scientific methods that explicitly aim to limit systematic error (bias), mainly by attempting to identify, appraise and synthesise all relevant studies" in response to specific

research questions. This method provides a structured and transparent process that "establish[es] in an explicit and methodical way what is known and not known in relation to a given question" (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 1), emphasising "the comprehensiveness of the search and the comparability of the studies located" (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006, p. 216).

In line with these principles, the review proceeded through the following stages. First, I defined the scope and review questions, focusing on (1) how gig economy literature has evolved within the management field and (2) how theorising craft has developed over time. Second, I developed an explicit search strategy to ensure comprehensive coverage of the field. This involved identifying relevant databases, keywords, and inclusion/exclusion criteria to capture all studies addressing gig economy work in management and organisational research. Third, I conducted the search and screened results, systematically applying the criteria to filter out irrelevant or duplicate records. Fourth, I extracted data from the included studies, recording details about their theoretical framing, research design, and findings. Fifth, I synthesised the evidence, comparing and contrasting studies to trace patterns, turning points, and theoretical developments over time. Finally, I interpreted the results, drawing on script theory and storytelling elements (e.g., narrative conflict, characters, settings, and sequences) as analytical lenses to map how theorisation has (co)evolved.

Theoretical framework:

I use storytelling in theorising (Daft, 1985; Daft, 1995; Pollock & Bono, 2013) to provide theoretical insights or explanations of studied phenomena (Hoon & Baluch, 2019). The criteria for theory construction including who, what, why, where, when, and how (Whetten, 1989) could be analogous to elements that constitute a story. For example, Daft (1985) suggested seeing variables as characters in a story as one way of applying storytelling in research endeavours. Building on Shepherd and Suddaby (2016), I use storytelling elements,

including narrative conflict, character, setting, and sequence, as our analytical framework to help us examine the evolvement of gig economy research and theorisation.

Within a storytelling framework, I consider a script theory that might serve as a coalescing and binding lens for helping understand the development of gig economy theorisation. According to the script theory, a script consists of a standard sequence of actions that could be seen as temporally and causally related structures in particular contexts (Gruendel, 1980). This sequence of actions reflects the most common actions that characterised a certain event (Abelson, 1981) with the details changing from instance to instance (Cullingford, 1978). Therefore, I view a script as a skeletal structure with open slots that can be filled in with various instantiated information or modified by research differences.

Overview of the findings:

The first study of this thesis systematically reviewed how management scholarship has theorised and researched the gig economy, revealing that the literature unfolds across three interconnected "acts." The first act focused on defining and mapping the nature of gig work (Abraham et al., 2018; O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020), including efforts to measure its workforce (Hong, 2015; Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018; Torpey & Hogan, 2016), classify its diverse forms (Heeks, 2017; Wood et al. (2019), and interrogate its distinctive features such as algorithmic management (Duggan et al., 2019) and non-standard employment (Healy et al., 2017; Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Wu et al., 2019). The second act shifted to a horizontal view, emphasising the heterogeneity of platforms, workers, and employment arrangements (Bucher et al., 2021; Dunn, 2020; Vaclavik et al., 2021) and unpacking how these differences shape collective organising (Poon, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2017b), HRM practices (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Williams et al., 2021), and individual experiences (Panteli et al., 2020). The third act adopted a vertical perspective, situating gig work within broader social, political, and institutional contexts (Veen et al., 2020), thereby highlighting comparative, relational, and

contextual approaches to understanding platform labour (Cini et al., 2021; Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021; Franke & Pulignano, 2021). Taken together, these acts trace a clear trajectory from description and classification to contextualisation and critical examination, showing how the field has matured over time.

In addition, this study uncovered the embedded "scripts" that shape how scholars frame the gig economy across these acts. These scripts represent recurrent theorising moves: in the first act, applying and adapting existing concepts to a new and relatively undefined phenomenon; in the second, refining and extending constructs while expanding levels of analysis beyond the individual and single-platform lens; and in the third, contextualising and problematising assumptions to open the way for multi-level, comparative, and politically informed theorising. Within each act, the scripts also reflect narrative structures — the conflicts that trigger inquiry, the "characters" (concepts and constructs) chosen to study the phenomenon, the settings (levels of analysis) within which research unfolds, and the temporal framing through which change is theorised. While earlier scripts persist in later acts, they are transformed and layered with new ones, illustrating how theorisation of the gig economy has been cumulative and iterative rather than static. These findings illuminate not only the trajectory of gig economy research in the management field but also the scholarly practices, narrative strategies, and theoretical moves through which this trajectory has been constructed.

1.5.2 Second paper

Title:

Constructing Precarity: Career Transitions Into Online Content Creation

Purpose:

This study aims to address the lack of research on how individuals experience and make sense of unconventional, platform-mediated career transitions, particularly those into online content creation. By focusing on the narratives of full-time content creators, it seeks to uncover

how people interpret and navigate their movement from secure employment to precarious digital work.

Significance:

This study addresses a critical gap in the career and work literature by shifting attention from normative, organisationally bound transitions (Mussagulova et al., 2023) to the underexplored terrain of unconventional and idiosyncratic career pathways (Akkermans et al., 2024; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). While previous research has provided valuable insights into school-to-work, intra-organisational, and upwardly mobile career moves (Mussagulova et al., 2023), far less is known about the experiences of individuals who intentionally leave secure, traditional employment to enter precarious, public-facing forms of work (Mussagulova et al., 2023). As occupational context can fundamentally shape how career transitions unfold (de Klerk et al., 2024), there is a pressing need for in-depth, contextualised understanding of how transitions occur within the evolving landscape of digital platform work. This study directly responds to that need by investigating how online content creators, situated at the intersection of technology, visibility, and precarity, narrate and navigate their entry into this new world of work.

Beyond mapping the factors that influence career moves, this research foregrounds the narrative and meaning-making processes that shape how such transitions are experienced and understood. In a work context where personal life becomes a public performance and occupational boundaries are continually negotiated, storytelling becomes a primary mechanism for constructing coherence, legitimacy, and identity. By examining these processes, the study not only enriches theory on non-linear and platform-mediated career transitions but also illuminates how workers actively make sense of and manage their careers in an era of rapid technological and occupational change. This contribution advances scholarship on careers, digital labour, and narrative inquiry by offering a nuanced, contextualised account of how

people live, interpret, and legitimise unconventional career moves in the contemporary platform economy.

Methods:

To examine how online content creators make sense of their career transitions, I adopted a narrative inquiry approach (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited to the study of unconventional and non-linear career pathways because it emphasises subjective interpretation, inner thoughts, and contextual specificity (Lieblich et al., 1998). It allows researchers to explore not only what participants say but how they organise, structure, and perform their stories within their work contexts (Riessman, 2008). This is especially relevant in the creator economy, where the act of storytelling is itself an integral part of the labour process.

Using a purposive sampling approach (Palinkas et al., 2015), I collected 97 self-narrated YouTube videos produced by 45 lifestyle-based content creators. These creators met three key criteria: (1) they self-identified as full-time online creators, such as YouTubers, TikTokers, Instagrammers, or influencers, posting content on public social media platforms; (2) their content centred on lifestyle-related topics; and (3) they had transitioned from secure, standard employment (e.g., 9–5 or corporate roles) to full-time content creation by choice. The videos averaged about 35 minutes per participant and provided first-person reflections on their moves from traditional jobs into online content creation. These video narratives were selected because they represent naturally occurring, publicly available accounts of participants' lived experiences and because they capture the inherently performative and self-presentational nature of the creator economy. To enrich and triangulate these insights, I conducted six in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants, allowing for greater depth, clarification, and exploration of emergent themes.

Following Riessman's (2008) narrative methodology, I conducted a multi-stage analysis encompassing thematic, structural, and performative dimensions of participants' narratives. This approach enabled us to examine the content of participants' stories (themes and meanings), the organisation of those stories (narrative structure, sequencing, and temporal markers), and the ways they were enacted or performed (tone, audience orientation, and self-presentation strategies). By integrating these analytic levels, I was able to generate a richer understanding of how online content creators interpret and construct meaning around their career transitions in a highly visible, precarious, and performative work context.

Theoretical framework:

This study is situated within the evolving field of career scholarship, which has increasingly moved from organisationally bounded and linear models of career development toward more dynamic and contextualised understandings of work trajectories (Arthur et al., 2005; De Vos et al., 2019; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Drawing on narrative and constructionist perspectives (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), the study treats careers not as fixed pathways but as lived, interpretive processes in which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their working lives. This orientation is especially relevant to the platform economy, where work itself is precarious, self-directed, and often performed publicly. By focusing on online content creators' self-narrated transitions, the study positions itself within a growing body of research that uses narrative approaches to understand non-standard careers (Bujold, 2004; Chudzikowski et al., 2020) but extends it into the underexplored terrain of digital and performative labour. In doing so, it adopts narrative inquiry not simply as a method but as a framework for examining how careers are continually authored, enacted, and negotiated within emerging work contexts, thereby embedding the study firmly within ongoing conversations in contemporary career scholarship.

Overview of the findings:

Drawing on participants' accounts of transitioning from conventional employment to full-time online content creation (OCC), my analysis identified three interrelated themes—enacting, authoring, and performing the transition story. These themes represent overlapping layers of how individuals constructed meaning around their career transitions and reveal the temporally situated, emotionally dynamic, and inherently performative character of work in the creator economy.

Enacting the transition story captures how participants narrated their experiences as unfolding journeys rather than discrete events. They described clear triggers, such as workplace dissatisfaction, technological affordances, or the pull of autonomy, prompted their move toward OCC. These narratives also underscored the tensions and challenges of leaving secure employment for precarious platform work, depicting the transition as a temporal process marked by uncertainty, experimentation, and adaptation.

Authoring the transition story reflects how participants retrospectively shaped their experiences into coherent narrative arcs. Many accounts resembled a "rebirth" plotline (Booker, 2004), in which the protagonist confronts constraint, undergoes transformation, and emerges with a renewed sense of self. Through selective recall and reconstruction, participants framed their transitions not merely as job changes but as stories of personal growth and self-reinvention.

Performing the transition story shows how these narratives were deliberately crafted for public consumption within digital spaces. Participants used linguistic and rhetorical devices, such as tone shifts and direct address to audiences, to make their stories both relatable and credible to viewers. This performative dimension underscores the dual role of narrative in OCC: it functions simultaneously as a personal sensemaking tool and as part of the labour of sustaining an online presence.

Together, these three themes offer a multidimensional perspective on how individuals navigate, communicate, and legitimise non-standard career paths through narrative construction in digital contexts. By enacting, authoring, and performing their transitions, participants manage the personal and public dimensions of their career stories, illustrating how narrative work itself becomes integral to career development in precarious, platform-mediated environments.

This study advances careers and work research in three ways. First, it answers recent calls for a wider lens on non-traditional career paths (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021) by examining "reverse" transitions from secure employment into more precarious forms of work. Whereas much of the literature frames career change around stability and upward security, our findings show how individuals interpret their move into precarity as purposeful, even transformative, thereby broadening understanding of non-linear career trajectories. Second, the study frames career transition as a multi-layered narrative practice, extending existing theories of career sensemaking to the underexplored realm of performative digital labour. Finally, it contributes methodologically by treating self-recorded video narratives as both a rich empirical source and an active site of career construction.

1.5.3 Third paper

Title:

When Breakfast Becomes Work: Unpacking Work–Nonwork Boundaries in Lifestyle Content Creation

Purpose:

The purpose of the third study is to explore and theorise how full-time lifestyle content creators experience and negotiate the interface between work and nonwork. It seeks to uncover how these individuals perform and manage their work and nonwork activities within the highly

visible, performative context of online content creation, and to develop a nuanced understanding of the boundary dynamics that emerge in this new form of platform-mediated labour.

Significance:

This study is significant because it brings boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) into dialogue with the realities of platform-mediated, performative labour. By examining how lifestyle content creators experience and negotiate their work–nonwork interface, the study shows that boundaries are not fixed or uniform but contingent, shaped by the visibility and performativity of each task. It also broadens the concept of "work" in the creator economy to include self-representational labour, where personal life, domestic spaces, and emotions become integral sites of production. In doing so, the study moves beyond traditional segmentation–integration models (Bulger et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2012; Kossek, 2016; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019) to develop a more fluid and platform-mediated understanding of work–nonwork boundaries, offering fresh insights for scholars of careers, work–life dynamics, and digital labour.

Methods:

This study adopted a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2020) to examine how full-time lifestyle content creators experience and negotiate their work–nonwork boundaries. Netnography is particularly suited to this context because it allows researchers to investigate naturally occurring behaviours of a culture-sharing group within their native digital environments (Flick, 2014; Kozinets, 2020). Rather than relying on retrospective interviews, I drew on pre-existing vlogs as non-elicited data, capturing the day-to-day experiences of creators' lives in their own words and images. These vlogs, mainly framed as "day in the life" or "week in the life", documented routines, backstage work, and movements between personal and professional roles, offering a window into how creators themselves frame the boundaries

between life and work. By observing these digital traces, I was able to study how boundaries are enacted, blurred, and renegotiated as part of everyday platform labour.

Participants for this study were selected according to three criteria to ensure relevance and comparability. First, they explicitly identified themselves as full-time content creators active on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram. Second, they regularly posted English-language vlogs portraying “a day” or “a week” in their lives as full-time creators, offering detailed glimpses into both work and nonwork routines. Third, their channels centred on lifestyle topics, such as beauty, fashion, food, or everyday living, rather than primarily instructional or entrepreneurial content like online courses. In total, 53 vlogs from 43 creators were collected and systematically analysed. Each video was catalogued for key attributes, including activities, settings, interactions, and narrative framings. This approach enabled me to observe how work and nonwork were represented and performed across time and space, generating a rich, contextualised understanding of how creators experience and manage their work–nonwork boundaries in digital environments.

Theoretical framework:

This study draws on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000) and Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective on self-presentation to examine how full-time lifestyle content creators experience and manage the interface between work and nonwork domains. Boundary theory provides a useful lens for understanding how individuals construct and manage the physical, temporal, and psychological borders that separate or connect work and nonwork roles (Kossek, 2016). Individuals vary in their preferences and strategies, ranging along a continuum from segmentation, where work and nonwork are kept distinct, to integration, where boundaries are intentionally blurred (Bulger et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2012; Kossek, 2016; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019). Segmentation can help reduce role conflict by insulating one role from the other (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015), whereas integration allows

for more flexibility in when and where roles are enacted and can make it easier to address multiple demands simultaneously (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek et al., 2012). Much of the classic literature, however, conceptualises boundaries as anchored in activities (e.g., emailing vs. cooking), times (work hours vs. leisure time), or spaces (the office vs. the home).

This framing is increasingly challenged by the rise of digital technologies and platform-mediated work, which blur the spatial, temporal, and psychological distinctions on which boundary theory traditionally rests (Kossek, 2021; Törhönen et al., 2019). Mobile devices, algorithmic infrastructures, and persistent connectivity mean that the presence of an audience, the affordances of a platform, and the performance of the self, become central to how boundaries are enacted. Yet little is known about how individuals manage boundaries in such algorithmically mediated, highly visible contexts (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). This study takes up this challenge by situating boundary management within the creator economy, a setting where personal life becomes part of the content of work and where public visibility transforms the nature of the work–nonwork interface itself.

To supplement boundary theory's structural and behavioural focus, I also draw on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective to frame online content creators' self-presentation as a form of work. Goffman conceptualises social interaction as a performance in which individuals present "edited versions" of themselves to shape others' perceptions, drawing on both verbal and nonverbal cues as well as "documentary evidence" to define who and what they are (Goffman, 1959, p.15). In the context of online content creation, these performances are amplified and codified by digital platforms, where creators continually curate their activities, expressions, and spaces for an imagined audience. Self-representation thus becomes not only a personal choice but also a form of labour: a strategic, ongoing process of managing impressions, producing content, and sustaining an audience.

Bringing together boundary theory and Goffman's dramaturgical perspective enables this study to move beyond viewing boundaries as merely structural barriers or conduits between domains. Instead, it conceptualises boundaries as performative, dynamic, and context-dependent, actively shaped by the visibility, temporality, and self-presentational demands of platform work. This combined framework allows us to theorise how online creators navigate, enact, and perform their work–nonwork boundaries in ways that differ from those observed in traditional employment settings, providing a richer understanding of the intersection between boundary management, self-presentation, and digital labour.

Overview of the findings:

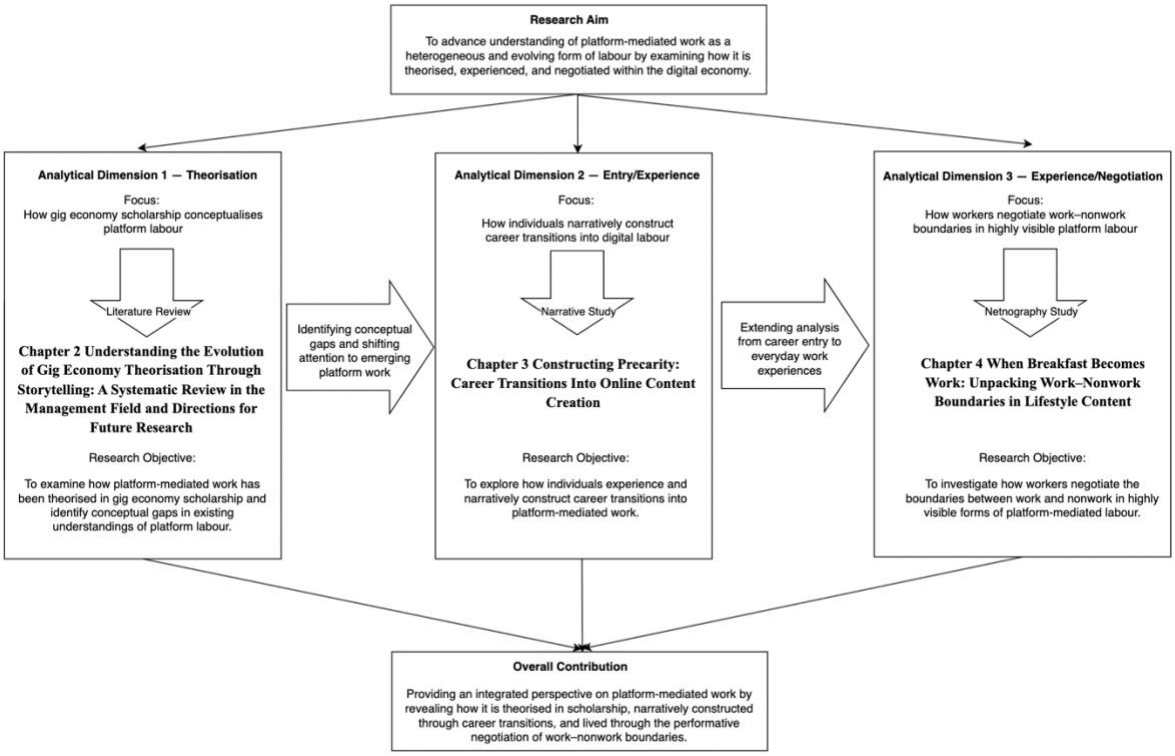
The third study of this thesis explored how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators experience and negotiate their work–nonwork boundaries within the context of digital platform labour. While boundary theory has traditionally conceptualised the work–nonwork interface as a line to be crossed or managed between distinct domains, this study revealed that in performative labour contexts such as online content creation, boundaries are neither fixed nor binary. Instead, they are continuously enacted through processes of visibility, self-presentation, and ongoing audience engagement. Drawing on qualitative netnography (Kozinets, 2020), including the analysis of self-published vlogs and interviews, this study identified two interconnected analytical concepts, the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries, which together capture how the work–nonwork interface operates in this unique setting.

The visibility-oriented labour filter refers to the process by which everyday activities, spaces, and interactions are transformed into self-representational labour through the act of recording or even anticipating audience perception. This filter expands the scope of what counts as "work," bringing into its domain personal routines, relationships, and domestic spaces traditionally considered private. Yet, visibility does not flow without limit. Participants

engaged in deliberate acts of selection, framing, and withholding, practices I term presented boundaries, to determine which aspects of their lives passed through the filter and which remained off-stage. Presented boundaries thus function as both a protective mechanism and a form of labour in their own right, allowing creators to calibrate intimacy, gate the visibility filter, and actively manage their audience relationships.

Together, the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries reveal a dynamic, dialectical process in which the boundaries between work and nonwork are continually expanded, contained, and remade. Rather than simply segmenting or integrating their roles, lifestyle content creators enact boundaries as ongoing representational practices, strategically shaping what is visible to the audience and what is preserved as private. This reconceptualisation extends boundary theory by showing that, in platform-mediated and performative work, boundaries are not static lines, but fluid and contingent processes tied to visibility, self-representation, and audience expectations. By theorising the work–nonwork interface in this way, the study provides a nuanced model of boundary dynamics that moves beyond the segmentation–integration binary and highlights how digital platform workers actively construct, negotiate, and perform their boundaries as part of their everyday labour.

Figure 1. Overview of the Thesis Research Framework and the Relationships Between the Three Studies



1.6 Thesis outline

This thesis is organised into five chapters, each building on the previous one to develop a comprehensive understanding of digital platform work, career transitions, and work–nonwork boundaries.

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis by outlining the research background, motivations, and theoretical framing. It situates the study within the broader transformation of platform work, identifies gaps in the existing literature, and presents the research questions guiding the three empirical studies.

Chapter 2 presents the first empirical study, a systematic literature review of 193 papers on the gig economy within the management field. Drawing on storytelling and script theory, this chapter traces how the theorisation of gig work has evolved over time and identifies three

major “acts” structuring this scholarship. It also offers directions for future research on non-standard forms of work.

Chapter 3 details the second empirical study, which explores how individuals navigate career transitions from secure employment to full-time online content creation. Using narrative inquiry, this chapter examines how participants enact, author, and perform their transition stories, revealing the temporally situated and performative nature of career sensemaking in precarious, platform-mediated contexts.

Chapter 4 outlines the third empirical study, which investigates how full-time online content creators experience and manage their work–nonwork boundaries. Drawing on netnography, this chapter theorises the interface between personal and professional life in digital content creation, showing how visibility and self-representational labour shape boundary dynamics.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by integrating findings across the three studies. It summarises the key contributions to theory and methodology, discusses practical implications for understanding and supporting workers in platform-mediated contexts, and suggests avenues for future research on careers and work in the digital age.

Together, these chapters provide a cohesive narrative that moves from the macro-level theorisation of platform work, through the meso-level analysis of career transitions, to the micro-level examination of everyday boundary practices, offering a multi-layered understanding of contemporary work and careers.

Chapter 2 Understanding the Evolution of Gig Economy Theorisation Through Storytelling: A Systematic Review in the Management Field and Directions for Future Research

Abstract: Research on the gig economy is reaching a relatively mature stage whereby exploration has given way to more developed theorisation. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how the theorisation of this dynamic phenomenon has evolved in the contemporary management field and what future research should prioritise to extend and enrich such theorisation. In this review study, I seek to understand how the gig economy research and theorisation has evolved in the management field. To do so, I conduct a two-step systematic literature review adopting script theory and storytelling lenses. Synthesizing193 papers, I identify three predominant acts in the gig economy literature: (1) the nature of the gig economy, (2) the heterogeneity, collective organising and impacts of work, and (3) a vertical view of the gig economy within a broad social context. Also, I delve into each act and use storytelling elements (i.e., narrative conflict, characters, settings, and sequences) to unpack how their theorisation has (co)evolved. My findings feed conversations among management scholars and suggest theoretical opportunities to advance the gig economy scholarship as well as other non-standard work research.

Keywords: gig economy, theorisation, storytelling, systematic review

2.1 Introduction

Digital platforms have become embedded in everyday life, mediating how people work, consume, and interact. From ordering food on Deliveroo to booking a ride through Uber, platforms create ecosystems that match supply with demand in exchange for compensation (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). This ecosystem—commonly referred to as the gig economy—is characterised by quasi-employee relationships, algorithmic management, and a heterogeneous mix of work arrangements (Idowu & Elbanna, 2021). Scholarly discourse on the gig economy reflects this duality: on the one hand, it highlights the potential benefits of technology-enabled efficiency and flexibility; on the other, it underscores the risks of precarity, exploitation, and erosion of worker protections (Prassl, 2018).

Over the past decade, research on the gig economy has proliferated across management subfields (McDonnell et al., 2021), producing a diverse but fragmented body of knowledge. This rapid expansion reflects the gig economy's evolving theoretical foundations as an emerging phenomenon (Hoon & Baluch, 2019). Existing reviews have made valuable contributions—for example, mapping the nature of gig work (Heeks, 2017; Kaine & Josserand, 2019; Vallas & Schor, 2020), its definitions (Watson et al., 2021), ethical debates (Tan et al., 2021), and bibliometric patterns (Batmunkh et al., 2022; O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020). Yet these reviews tend to adopt static perspectives, obscuring the dynamics of knowledge development and the temporal trajectories of theorisation. Consequently, there still lacks an integrated understanding of how scholarship on the gig economy has evolved within the management field, and how future research might extend and enrich its theoretical foundations.

This gap is particularly significant given the diverse ways scholars approach and theorise the gig economy. As diverse stories stem from diverse storytelling techniques, so too

do diverse studies emerge from diverse theorising practices. The theory-building literature has identified a range of techniques for crafting and facilitating theorisation, yet the craft of theorising itself remains implicit. Without reflecting on how scholars approach the gig economy as a theoretical object, it is difficult to improve or innovate theory-building practices. The gig economy, with its heterogeneity, complexity, and ongoing evolution, offers an ideal context for this reflection because it accommodates multiple, sometimes competing, explanations of management phenomena.

This review addresses two central questions: (1) How has the gig economy literature evolved in the management field? (2) How has the theorising craft in gig economy research evolved? To answer these questions, I adopt an integrative and generative approach (Post et al., 2019) combining systematic review methods with interpretive analysis. First, I conducted a systematic review of 193 papers to trace the predominant "acts" or phases in the storyline of gig economy research. Second, I applied a dual lens of storytelling and script theory to uncover the evolving theorising practices embedded in this literature. Storytelling theory (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) provided an organising framework for identifying narrative conflict, characters, settings, and sequences in the reviewed papers. Script theory (Tomkins, 1978) then enabled me to synthesise these elements and identify the recurrent "moves" through which theorising has unfolded over time. Together, these lenses make visible both the content and the craft of theorising gig economy phenomena.

This review contributes to the gig economy and theory-building literature in three ways. First, it represents the first systematic effort to trace the chronological development of gig economy scholarship, bridging fragmented and disjointed studies into a coherent account of knowledge advancement. Second, it reveals the research triggers, construct choices, levels of analysis, and temporal dynamics underpinning theorising efforts, making explicit the otherwise hidden craft of theory-building in this domain. Third, it identifies standardised "theorising

moves" that, taken together, form a script for understanding how gig economy scholarship has evolved and how future research might advance the field. By integrating storytelling and script theory, this review not only enriches our understanding of the gig economy but also offers a model for studying theorising practices in other non-standard or emerging work contexts.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. I begin by outlining the theoretical framework, introducing storytelling as an analytical technique for unpacking theorising craft and script theory as a coalescing lens for understanding its evolution. I then describe the systematic review methodology, detailing how studies were identified, selected, and analysed. The findings are presented in three "acts," each representing a distinct stage in the evolution of gig-economy research, together with the corresponding "scripts" that capture the theorising moves embedded in each act. This integrated presentation of acts and scripts offers a dynamic view of how gig-economy scholarship and theorising craft have developed over time. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings for advancing research on the gig economy and improving theory-building practices, before concluding with recommendations for future inquiry.

2.2 Theoretical background

2.2.1 Storytelling as analytical technique for unpacking theorising craft

Scholars have long drawn parallels between the processes of theorising and storytelling (Pentland, 1999; Shaw, 2017). Writing an academic paper has often been likened to telling a story (Ragins, 2012), where explanation, the core of theory, can be understood as a story that outlines the process or sequence of events connecting cause and effect (Pentland, 1999). Theorising involves explaining the relationships reflected in data and articulating them as a logical and compelling narrative (Daft, 1985). It encompasses the conceiving and constructing

activities of theory building, through which scholars generate insights or explanations about observed phenomena (Hoon & Baluch, 2019).

As Shepherd and Suddaby (2016, p. 2) assert, "compelling theories are at their core compelling stories," which has encouraged scholars to adopt storytelling techniques in theorising (Daft, 1995; Pollock & Bono, 2013). The canonical criteria of theory building—who, what, why, where, when, and how (Whetten, 1989)—can be viewed as analogous to the elements of a story. For example, Daft (1985) suggests that variables may be seen as characters, a perspective that highlights how a storytelling approach can overcome the often dry or fragmented presentation of research. Building on Shepherd and Suddaby (2016), I draw specifically on four storytelling elements (i.e., narrative conflict, character, setting, and sequence) as a framework for examining theorising in the gig economy.

Narrative conflict marks the starting point of most stories and, in theory building, reflects tensions in the empirical world, inconsistencies within scholarly literature, or contradictions between practice and theory (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016). Triggers such as paradoxes, empirical surprises, problematisations, practice logics, everyday observations, or engaged scholarship often stimulate theorising efforts. In this review, I examine how such triggers have led scholars to theorise gig economy phenomena at different stages of its development. Characters in stories correspond to focal constructs in theory, as the central task of theory building is to conceptualise constructs and reveal their relationships in explaining a phenomenon (George & Jones, 2000). Accordingly, I review the central constructs used in gig economy research, treating them as the "main characters" through which scholars have framed and explained the field. Narrative setting, in this framework, parallels the level of analysis at which constructs are situated (Klein et al., 1999; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016). Finally, sequence captures the temporal dimension of stories and plays an equally important role in theory

building, as the ordering of constructs or mechanisms can shape theoretical explanations (George & Jones, 2000).

Stories, moreover, are tightly linked to scripts, which may be understood as their underlying backbone. By tracing the evolution of storytelling components in gig economy research, I use script theory to reveal recurring patterns and to demonstrate how scholars have crafted their theorisation of this phenomenon over time.

2.2.2 Script theory as a coalescing and binding lens for understanding the evolving theorising craft

Script theory offers a particularly appropriate framework for explaining this pattern for three reasons. First, although scholarship on the gig economy has generated diverse theorising outputs over time, the processes by which scholars themselves have theorised the gig economy to advance the field remain largely implicit. Script theory views a script as a structured and familiar sequence of actions that outlines a recognised situation, emphasising how these scripts supply the implicit or assumed details that are not explicitly stated in a narrative (Tomkins, 1978). Applying script theory therefore enables the explication of the implicit theorising practices embedded within gig economy research.

Second, a retrospective examination of the literature reveals that disparate studies on the gig economy frequently follow recurrent, stereotyped sequences of action. Script theory views these sequences as temporally and causally related structures that constitute events in particular contexts (Gruendel, 1980), thereby forming the backbone of a script. Crucially, "the details of the script backbone change from instance to instance" (Cullingford, 1978, p. 35). Even when the order of actions is less rigid, such configurations may still constitute a weak script (Abelson, 1981). As Abelson (1981, p. 723) observes, "in learning a script, one presumably learns variations in addition to constancies." Accordingly, scripts can be

understood as skeletal structures with open slots that may be populated with diverse instantiations or modified according to research differences.

Third, script theory departs from categorical frameworks by adopting a schematic structure. As Mandler (1984, p. 14) notes, "a schematic hierarchy consists of part–whole relations, and hence is a type of collection, not a class-inclusion structure." This orientation makes script theory particularly well suited to capturing the evolving, relational, and processual nature of theorisation in gig economy research, rather than imposing rigid or static classifications. This dual focus on storytelling and scripts directly informs the two review questions at the heart of this study—how gig economy literature has evolved in the management field and how scholars' theorising craft itself has developed—providing a systematic framework for interpreting the field's trajectory.

2.3 Method

In conducting this systematic review, I followed the six-stage process outlined by Briner and Denyer (2012), Denyer and Tranfield (2009), and Popay et al. (2006). A systematic review is defined as "a set of scientific methods that explicitly aim to limit systematic error (bias), mainly by attempting to identify, appraise and synthesise all relevant studies" to address specific research questions (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 9). Such an approach "establish[es] in an explicit and methodical way what is known and not known in relation to a given question" (Briner & Denyer, 2012, p. 1) and emphasises "the comprehensiveness of the search and the comparability of the studies located" (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006, p. 216). In what follows, I set out in detail the steps undertaken to implement this review and explain the rationale for the methodological decisions made at each stage.

2.3.1 Data searching and screening

A scoping search was first conducted to gain an initial impression of the gig economy literature. It helped to evaluate the relevance and size of materials and ensure the effectiveness of search strategies (Briner & Denyer, 2012; Tranfield et al., 2003). In the formal searching process, Scopus and Web of Science were searched for the terms "Gig-Economy" OR "gig economy" in the title, abstract, or keywords. The search process was filtered by including only business and management categories and the English language. The search results were not time restricted.

Considering the possibility of indexing errors in the databases, journals were also hand-searched as complementary sources (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Two journals (New Technology, Work and Employment and Journal of Industrial Relations) were chosen based on a previous literature review conducted by Kaine and Josserand (2019). Duplicate articles (n=164) were removed. As a result, 367 articles were identified in the search process and exported to an excel sheet.

To ensure that the included articles have a central focus on the gig economy in the management field, I rated each paper on a 1-5 scale based on the degree of relevance of each article: 1). The gig economy is the main context for studying management-related concepts, including the gig economy phenomenon per se (e.g., size). 2). Although the term gig economy is not stressed, the paper focuses on a specific type/subgroup/platform organisation in the gig economy, which is commonly considered as the exemplars of the gig economy (e.g., food delivery platforms, ride-hailing platforms, or crowd-work). 3). Focuses on special occupations which be considered by the authors of that paper as a form of work in the gig economy field. 4). Mainly focuses on financial, economic, logistic, marketing, law, education, and information system areas in the gig economy context. 5). Mentions the term peripherally or as a synonym

of other similar terms (e.g., sharing economy, precarious work, platform economy, digital labour, or digital nomadism). I only included articles that scored 3 or more.

A two-stage screening process was then applied to the 367 articles (Xiao & Watson, 2019). First, based on titles and abstracts each article was classified as In, Out, or Maybe based on relevance. The "Maybe" articles (i.e., not enough information to confirm it meets inclusion criteria) were moved to the next stage for the full-text screen (Briner & Denyer, 2012). After, articles with full-text availability I conducted a second full-text screen. Articles were classified as In or Out based on our selection criteria with the "Out" articles were excluded for clearly documented reasons. For example, some papers that focus on accounting or tax aspects of the gig economy were beyond the interest of the review. Each "Out" article was screened again to double-check and ensure appropriate decisions.

In addition to the computerised and manual searching, "forward-searching" was used to help identify more relevant articles that were not captured by the keyword sieve. This refers to snowball searching that identifies relevant articles from the reference lists of included materials (Heeks, 2017). It was particularly useful when reviewing the gig economy literature because some scholars focused on a specific platform (e.g., Uber or AMTurk) as an exemplar of the gig economy phenomenon, which may not directly contain the search keywords. As Siddaway et al. (2019) suggested, compared with specificity, more attention needs to be paid to sensitivity at this stage so that important articles are not missed. However, considering the limitation of the range of this review and to avoid being overwhelmed, stopping rules were used to terminate the search process (Simsek et al., 2021), such as when less than three potentially relevant papers could be identified in the reference list. As a result, 28 articles were obtained using forward-searching.

The final sample for this review is 193 articles (marked with an asterisk in the reference list). Figure 1 shows the PRISMA flow diagram to report the searching and screening

procedures. However, as Siddaway et al. (2019) state, literature sifting is an iterative process, including the possibility of modifying and revising inclusion and exclusion criteria. The process is less linear than the flow diagram implies (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). To ensure comprehensiveness, forthcoming studies were kept track of and notified by subscribing to alerting service of databases (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Figure 2 The searching and screening processes adapted from Page et al. (2021)

(Source from: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: http://www.prisma-statement.org/)

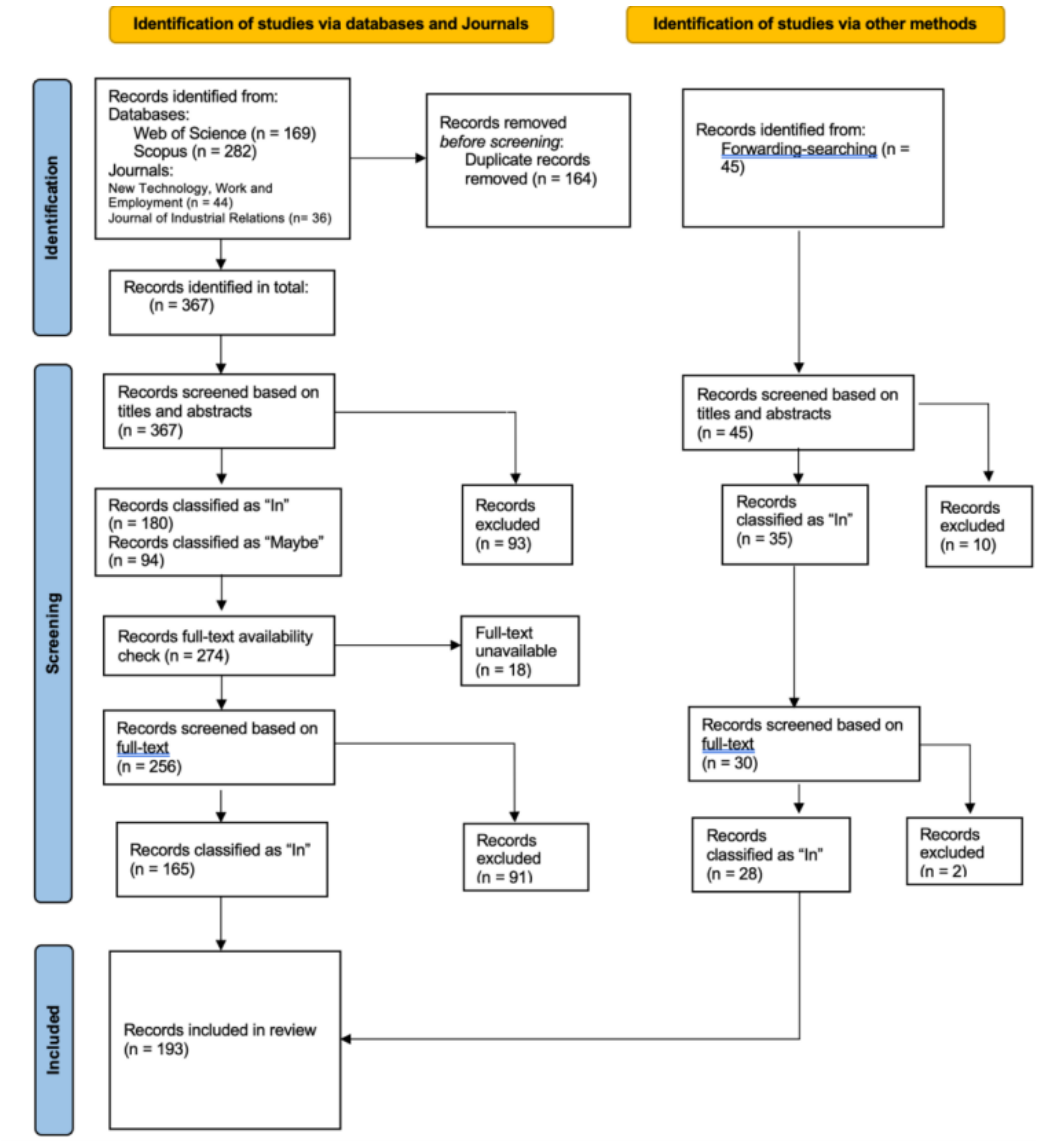


Figure 2. The searching and screening processes adapted from Page et al. (2021)

2.3.2 Data extraction

To systematically organise and synthesise the material, I developed a structured data extraction form to create summary tables and facilitate cross-study comparison (Tranfield et al., 2003). The form captured a comprehensive set of information for each article, including author(s), title, keywords, year and journal of publication, article type (empirical or conceptual), empirical research design (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), stated research questions, theoretical perspectives (if specified), and sample characteristics (where available). It also recorded descriptive details such as study location, populations examined, and platforms studied, along with the article's definition of the gig economy, focal themes, key findings, and principal contributions. In addition, the form incorporated notes on emergent themes and a quality appraisal of each study, providing a consistent framework for analysing and synthesising the literature.

2.3.3 Data analysis and synthesis

Adopting the logic of dialectical interrogation in review studies (Hoon & Baluch, 2019), I theorise from the similarities by iteratively moving from the gig economy literature and theories in the extant literature to find a different view. Continuously reflected on the evolving gig economy literature, I noticed a predominant patterns in theorising gig economy phenomena. I seek commonalities and shared perspectives across diverse areas in the fragmented field to identify whether there are common patterns in how the gig economy is theorised (Hoon & Baluch, 2019).

As current review adopts a two-step data analysis, I first interpretively synthesise articles using reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). According to Dixon-Woods et al. (2004), interpretive synthesis focuses on developing concepts and theorising those integrative concepts. I take three analytic moves to answer the question of how has gig

economy literature evolved. First, I locate articles in the year of publication and the relevance of the core of articles that have compatible underlying assumptions. Second, I analyse and code the main angles of studied gig economy phenomenon of articles in the map and mark the relationships. For example, I initially coded studies as "although there are some possibilities for gig workers' collective organising (e.g., employing online communities), it is a hard environment". These codes are developed into sub-themes. Integrated with other related sub-themes, I use the main theme to include these sub-themes. I found that the research angles in the gig economy literature show differences that could be divided into three stages with respective themes. To avoid the limitations of labelling a more inclusive theme in the process of theme identification (Bazeley, 2009), I moved back and forth between each article and codes to make it consistent.

During coding, I noticed a roughly pattern that reflects a series of common theoretical moves in theorising gig economy phenomena. Such theoretical moves share the way to frame the constructs, the level to analyse the studied constructs, and the techniques to use temporal elements underlying the evolving literature. This pattern promotes the other deeper question: How have the theorising efforts in gig economy research evolved? It reoriented us to the theory building literature and reshaped our data analysis. Therefore, I used storytelling to help discompose the theorising effort underlying the gig economy literature and re-integrate it in a narrative framework to show the common theoretical moves.

Table 1 Main steps in data analysis process

	Research question	data analysis foci point (surprise)	Categorising process
Initial reviewing GE paper	How has GE literature evolved?	Focusing on main research streams and topics in GE in the evolving process	Read all abstracts of included paper and categorised them based on research main idea. For example, labour resist, platform control, meaning of gig work, and statistics of gig labour size.
			Merging topics into three research streams: Nature of platform work, labour relationship, and HRM/OB
		Focusing on relationship in the evolving process	Mapping and sequencing all paper based on research streams in chronological order
			Identifying the connection, contradiction, key pieces, interruption and re-orientation in inter- and intra-research streams. For example, in studying gig work's control and resist, literature moves from analysing collective actions in exemplar platforms, to introduce labour process theory, and to shift attention from collective organising to individual resistance.
evolving process shows a pattern. Does it mean there is a script of how scholars make knowledge progress? Therefore, I need to go deeper to review concrete storytelling elements of GE paper. I introduce story and storytelling as means to help present and re-analyse			
Re-analyse	How has GE stories evolved?	Focusing on the stories unfolding through different acts	Dividing the evolving process of all research streams to three different proceeding acts based on the shift focus of stories
			Relabelling three research streams as stories themes in different acts
	How have scholars make progress?	Focusing on the deconstruct each story with story elements	Identifying the trigger, character, and setting of each story in three acts
			Categorising the trigger, character, and setting in each act and forming a script

2.4 Findings—The story of gig economy then, to now

Across the full body of studies reviewed, my analysis reveals that research on the gig economy has moved through three interconnected stages of development, which I conceptualise as Acts 1, 2, and 3. Early work (Act 1) focused on mapping the phenomenon, defining its boundaries, and identifying its distinctive features, such as algorithmic management, atypical employment contracts, and the heterogeneity of platform work. This was followed by a horizontal expansion of research (Act 2), which emphasised differences across occupations, platforms, and stakeholder groups. In this phase, scholars refined key constructs, developed typologies of workers and platforms, and examined collective organising, HRM practices, and worker experiences across multiple contexts. More recent work (Act 3) has taken a vertical, contextualised perspective, situating gig work within broader socio-economic, regulatory, and political environments, challenging Western-centric assumptions, and exploring how global and local contexts shape platform labour. Together, these three acts mark a shift from descriptive mapping to relational analysis to contextual theorising.

Embedded within these three acts are three corresponding "scripts" that reveal how theorising craft in gig economy research has evolved over time. In Act 1, the script is phenomenon-driven, drawing on existing constructs to make sense of a novel and underexplored form of work. In Act 2, the script becomes relational and refining, extending constructs across occupations, stakeholders, and multi-level settings. In Act 3, the script turns to contextualisation and problematisation, embedding gig work in political-economic systems and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions. These linked scripts show a clear trajectory of theorising practice: from identifying and naming, to connecting and refining, to embedding and problematising. Taken together, the findings demonstrate how gig economy research has matured from fragmented accounts into a more integrated, multi-level body of knowledge that reflects the complexity and dynamism of platform-mediated work.

In the following sections, I present the findings act by act to show both the substantive development of gig economy research, and the theorising scripts embedded within each stage. Although some elements of the story and script carry over from one act to the next, each act highlights the new and distinctive features that emerged as the field evolved. Consistent with this approach, I treat each act as a self-contained but connected chapter in the broader narrative. Within each act, I first outline the dominant themes in the literature and then draw out the underlying "script" (i.e., the patterned theorising moves) that structure and connect those themes. The actions of each script are italicised to make them visible to the reader. This structure allows for a clear and systematic demonstration of how gig economy scholarship and theorising craft unfold over time, moving from Act 1 through Act 3.

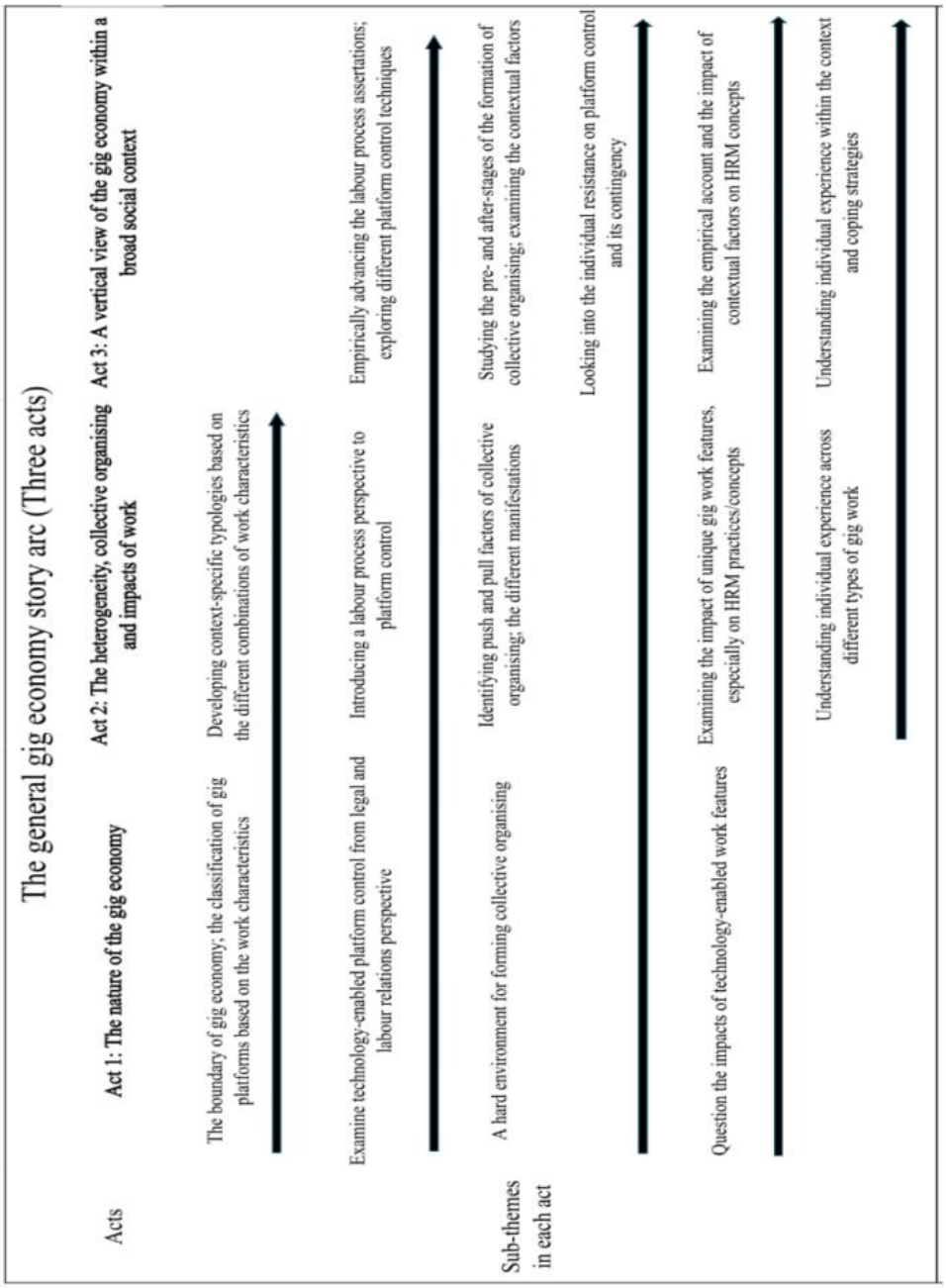


Figure 3. The general gig economy story arc (Three acts)

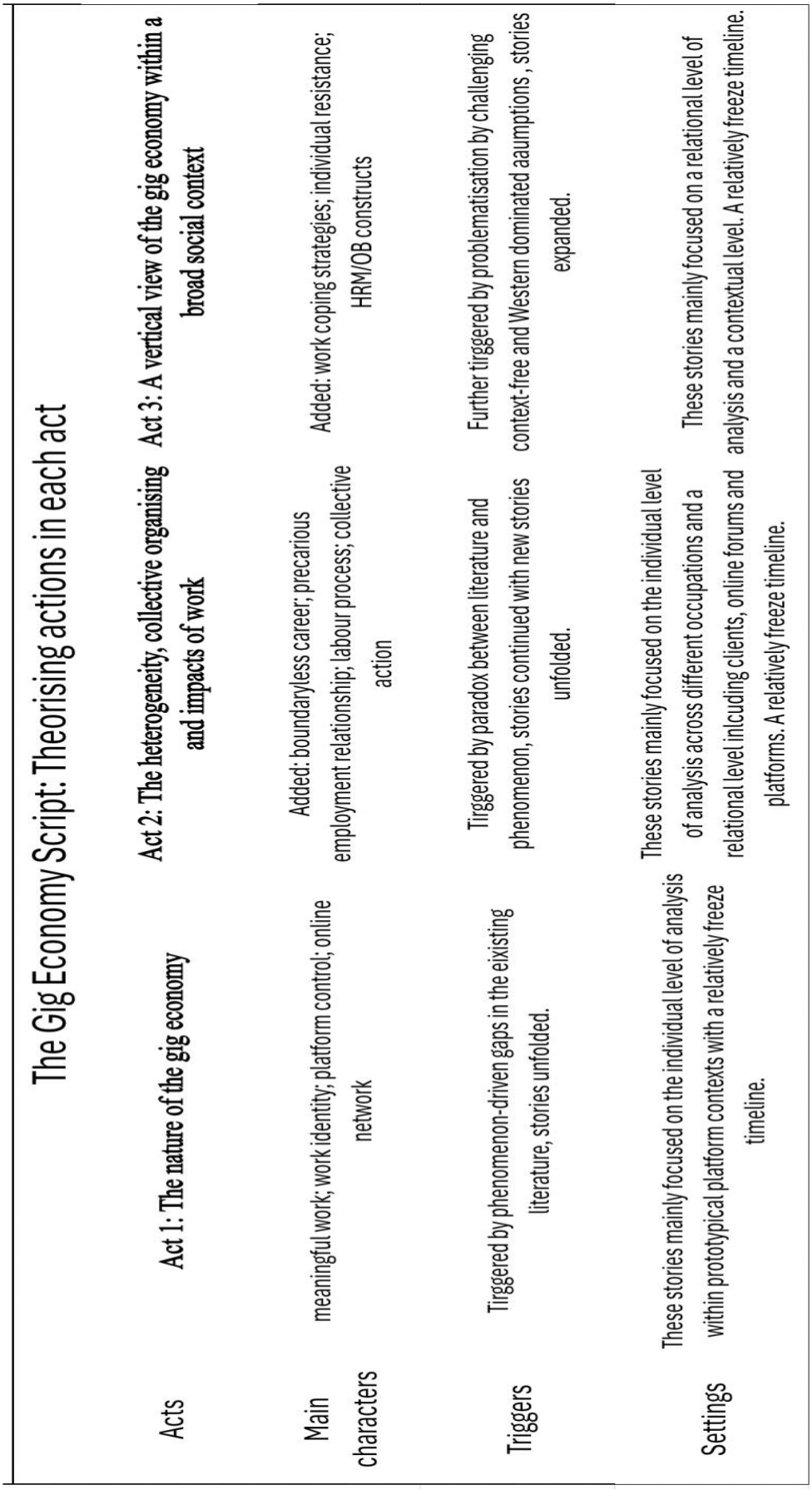


Figure 4. The general gig economy storytelling

Act 1: The nature of work in the gig economy

The first act captures how scholarship initially approached the gig economy as a novel and emergent phenomenon. Early studies focused on establishing the basic contours of this new world of work by mapping and measuring the gig workforce, classifying different forms of gig work, and identifying the distinctive features of platform-mediated labour. Much of this research sought to define and delimit the field, interrogating the implications of platform design, algorithmic management, and quasi-employment relationships for both workers and organisations. Together, these early contributions framed the gig economy primarily in terms of its structural and operational characteristics, laying the groundwork for subsequent theorising about its broader social, economic, and organisational significance.

The boundary of gig economy-- Mapping the scope of gig workforce with non-traditional statistics

A central challenge in early gig economy research concerned defining and measuring the scope of the workforce. Scholars have repeatedly highlighted how the absence of a clear, consensus definition makes the boundaries of the gig economy difficult to pin down (O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020). The heterogeneity of gig work (Abraham et al., 2018) and the non-standard nature of employment contracts (Huws et al., 2018) render it ill-suited to traditional labour market classifications and measurement systems. For instance, conventional household surveys such as the Current Population Survey are unable to fully capture the size and characteristics of the gig workforce (Bracha & Burke, 2021). This challenge is even more pronounced for online gig work, where transactions occur globally, often mediated by non-traditional payment systems and cross-border arrangements (Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018).

In response, researchers have developed innovative, non-traditional methods to estimate the scale and growth of gig work (e.g., Hong, 2015; Torpey & Hogan, 2016). Early studies using such approaches suggested that gig work as a primary source of income represented only a small segment of the overall labour market (Katz & Krueger, 2016; Huws

& Joyce, 2016). However, these estimates were often based on samples drawn from online commercial panels, which tend to over-represent online gig workers and therefore introduce bias (Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018). To address this limitation, Kässi and Lehdonvirta (2018) developed the Online Labour Index, which tracks task vacancies across major digital platforms to generate real-time, occupation-specific and country-specific indicators. This approach provided one of the first dynamic measures of online labour supply and demand, illustrating both the geographic spread and occupational diversity of platform work overtime.

Classifying gig platform work based on work characteristics.

As the gig workforce has expanded, scholars have increasingly recognised the need for inclusive and nuanced classifications of gig work. Early typologies tended to focus on the distinctive operations and arrangements of platform-mediated labour. For instance, drawing on work content (e.g., microwork versus traditional service work) and work modality (online versus offline), De Stefano (2015) distinguished between "crowd work" and "work on demand via apps." Similarly, Schmidt (2017) divided gig platforms into web-based and location-based labour-selling platforms, further differentiating them by whether tasks were performed for individuals or for crowds. Building on this framework, Heeks (2017) proposed a high-level distinction between digital (online) and physical (location-based) platform work. Focusing specifically on online labour, Wood et al. (2019), informed by Kässi and Lehdonvirta (2018), developed an occupational classification of remote gig work that spans professional services, creative work, and clerical tasks. These studies collectively emphasise that digital labour exists on a continuum rather than within clear, discrete boundaries.

As understanding of platform dynamics has deepened, scholars have moved beyond surface characteristics toward more refined classifications that foreground the role of algorithmic management. Adapted from Cappelli and Keller (2013), Duggan et al. (2019) proposed three variants of gig work, identifying "app-work" as a distinctive form characterised

by algorithmic control. This approach highlights how platforms' use of algorithms to allocate, monitor, and evaluate work constitutes not just a technical feature but a defining axis along which gig work can be classified. In doing so, it underscores the centrality of algorithmic management as both a differentiating mechanism and a focal point for ongoing scholarly inquiry.

Identifying technology-enabled platform control and a hard environment for workers' collective organising

Work control has traditionally been regarded as a central determinant of employment relationships (De Stefano, 2015; Prassl & Risak, 2015). In the gig economy, however, digital platforms execute many of the functions of managerial control while simultaneously evading employers' conventional duties and obligations. This shift has attracted significant attention from labour and legal scholars, who have examined how platform-mediated work disrupts established notions of employment status, regulation, and working conditions (Harris & Krueger, 2015; Healy et al., 2017; Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Wu et al., 2019).

Building on these debates, a growing body of empirical research has investigated the mechanisms of algorithmic management — the use of algorithms to allocate, evaluate, and discipline work — and its implications for worker experience. Lee et al. (2015), studying ride-sharing platforms, demonstrated how the design of algorithmic work assignments and the transparency of information presentation shape workers' cooperation and decision-making. Similarly, Rosenblat and Stark (2016) showed that Uber exerts indirect control over drivers' behaviour by manipulating information flows and creating asymmetries between the platform and the worker. Shapiro (2018) reinforced this view, highlighting how information selection and asymmetry are central to platforms' ability to govern and discipline labour.

Such tight algorithmic control often generates worker grievances, which have fuelled the intense media scrutiny and public debate surrounding the gig economy. Scholars have noted

how the individualisation and spatial dispersion of gig work (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020) undermine traditional forms of worker solidarity and collective action. Although online communities offer some potential for coordination and mutual support (Ford & Honan, 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Lehdonvirta, 2016), collective organising in the gig economy remains fragmented and difficult to sustain.

Questioning the impacts of technology-enabled work features and individual working experience

Beyond algorithmic forms of control, other technology-enabled work features have also become a significant focus of gig economy research. Responding to calls to examine the quality of gig work (Aguinis & Lawal, 2013), Wood et al. (2019) evaluated online crowd workers' job quality by centring on the effects of platform control mechanisms. Similarly, Carr et al. (2017) investigated how the presentation of information on digital platforms shapes employers' perceptions of worker–job fit and, consequently, workers' employability in online microwork contexts.

These distinctive technology-mediated work features raise important questions about their implications for human resource management (HRM) practices and for individual work experiences. Scholars have asked how HRM functions in contexts where employment relationships are diffuse or absent and how technology itself reshapes HRM processes (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). In the absence of traditional organisational structures and support, workers must develop their own strategies for navigating precarious and individualised forms of work. Addressing this issue, Petriglieri et al. (2019) examined high-skilled independent workers and introduced the concept of a "personal holding environment" to capture how workers manage the emotional tensions generated by precarious and highly personalised work identities. They show that workers cultivate such holding environments through connections to routines, places, people, and purposes, thereby providing themselves with a stabilising framework amid uncertainty (Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Therefore, the research in Act 1 illustrates how early scholarship on the gig economy concentrated on mapping its contours, defining its boundaries, and identifying the distinctive features of platform-mediated work. Scholars first sought to measure the size and composition of the gig workforce, developing novel approaches to capture work that falls outside conventional labour statistics. They then moved toward classifying gig work, distinguishing between digital and location-based labour and highlighting the role of algorithmic management as a defining feature of platform work. Alongside these efforts, studies examined how technology-enabled systems—particularly platform algorithms—reshape employment relationships, work quality, and workers' identity formation in the absence of traditional organisational structures. Collectively, this body of research established the foundational understanding of the gig economy as heterogeneous, technology-mediated, and precarious, setting the stage for subsequent scholarship on its broader social and theoretical implications.

The Gig Economy Script— *Theorising Actions Underlying Act 1*

The first act of gig economy scholarship reflects a classic phenomenon-driven theorising process, where researchers were motivated by the novelty and underexplored nature of platform-mediated work. Because the gig economy was still emerging as a legitimate area of inquiry within the management field, scholars highlighted gaps that existing frameworks could not explain. For instance, Petriglieri et al. (2018, p. 125) noted that "independent work poses different challenges from those presented by the contexts in which identity work typically has been researched," while Kost et al. (2018, p. 101) observed that "the understanding of how organizations and task providers motivate microworkers is still largely limited." Such statements underscored the limited understanding of this new work context, which served as the trigger for researchers to begin telling the "gig economy story."

In response to these phenomenon-driven gaps, scholars began importing and testing concepts from adjacent literatures—including work control, collective action, meaningful

work, work identity, and job quality—to make sense of the gig economy. This theorising was conducted predominantly at the individual level of analysis, often focusing on prototypical platforms such as ride-hailing services (e.g., Lee et al., 2015; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Vaclavik & Pithan, 2018) or online microwork platforms (e.g., AMTurk; Irani, 2015; Lehdonvirta, 2016; Silberman & Irani, 2016). These studies framed platforms as unique sites for observing how digital infrastructures mediate work and employment relationships.

Finally, time was treated as relatively static in this early phase of theorising. Rather than tracing longitudinal developments or dynamic shifts, these studies "froze" the gig economy in its emergent state, analysing it as a novel but bounded phenomenon. This combination of triggers (the novelty of the context), actors (individual-level focus), settings (platform-based work), and a relatively fixed temporal lens constitutes the script embedded in Act 1—a skeletal structure of theorising moves that guided the foundational stage of gig economy research.

Act 2: A horizontal view of the heterogeneous gig economy

As research on the gig economy progressed, scholars shifted from defining the phenomenon to examining its heterogeneity. This act captures how studies moved beyond a single model of platform work to explore variations across platforms, occupations, and worker groups. Three focal areas emerged: the enablers and constraints of collective organising, the implications of gig work features for HRM practices, and the diverse individual experiences across different types of gig work. Together, these strands represent a horizontal turn in gig economy research, highlighting how platform work differs in structure, management, and lived experience.

Developing context-specific typologies based on the different combinations of work characteristics.

To capture the heterogeneity of gig work revealed in Act 1, scholars have progressively developed research-specific typologies that combine individual- and work-related variables.

These typologies aim to move beyond one-size-fits-all classifications and instead reveal how different types of work, platforms, and workers intersect. For example, Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019) created a typology of crowdwork based on the combinations of remuneration type and the initiating actor of work. Although crowdwork differs somewhat from gig work, it is often included in discussions of the platform economy. Similarly, Jabagi et al. (2019) produced a taxonomy of digital labour platforms based on the skill level required by services (high- vs. low-skill) and the service provision mode (virtual vs. physical). Among these focal variables, skill level and the degree of platform dependence consistently emerge as key dimensions for understanding the diversity of gig work.

Other scholars have focused on typologies of gig workers themselves. Dunn (2020) proposed a five-fold classification, namely "searchers," "lifers," "short-timers," "long-rangers," and "dabblers", to capture heterogeneity in work motivation, job intentions, hours worked, number of platforms used, and platform types. In a similar vein, Vaclavik et al. (2021) developed a typology of app-based drivers in Brazil based on the combination of work permanency and educational level, revealing different career paths within the same occupation. Building on Duggan et al.'s (2019, 2021b) work, McDonnell et al. (2021) summarised the key characteristics of different types of gig work from the perspectives of workers, clients, and platforms. Bucher et al. (2021) further classified digital work platforms into knowledge-based freelance work, microwork, and localised service platforms, distinguishing these categories by contract type, task scope, and materiality.

Taken together, these typologies reflect a shift from viewing the gig economy as a single, homogenous category toward recognising it as a plural, stratified landscape. By mapping these differences, scholars not only illuminate the variety of gig work but also highlight how skill level, platform control, and individual orientation shape experiences and outcomes across contexts. This work lays the foundation for exploring more nuanced questions

about how heterogeneity affects HRM practices, collective organising, and individual working experiences in platform-mediated environments.

Introducing a labour process perspective to platform control and identifying push and pull factors of collective organising.

Building on the empirical research outlined in Act 1 (e.g., Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Silberman & Irani, 2016; Graham et al., 2017), Gandini (2018) introduced labour process theory (LPT) to theorise how platform control operates within the gig economy. This approach responds to Thompson and Smith's (2009) call to extend LPT beyond standard workplaces and examine new, non-traditional employment contexts. Drawing on Marxian ideas about the organisation of production, Gandini (2018, p.1039) focused on the "point of production," emotional labour, and mechanisms of control, seeking to identify commonalities across different platform-mediated labour processes.

While the gig economy is often portrayed as a difficult terrain for collective organising (as highlighted in Act 1), scholars have nonetheless documented forms of mobilisation and worker resistance (Poon, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2017b). Much of this research examines the enablers and constraints of collective action. Online communities have emerged as a distinctive infrastructure for enabling solidarity and shared identity among dispersed workers. For instance, Yin et al. (2016) identified substantial communication networks on microwork platforms facilitated by online forums, which helped workers exchange information and develop a sense of collective belonging. Lehdonvirta (2016) similarly observed that online communities provide an important basis for collective identity formation, while Wood et al. (2018b) found that social media groups played a comparable role for high-skilled online freelancers. Consistent with these findings, Anwar and Graham (2021) demonstrated the importance of online communities for remote workers in five African countries, showing how digital spaces facilitate forms of organisation that would otherwise be difficult in

geographically dispersed settings. Gegenhuber et al. (2021) extended this line of inquiry by examining voice mechanisms in crowd-work platforms in Germany, finding that while workers are equipped with "microphones" to provide workflow feedback, they lack the "megaphones" to influence platform-level decisions (p.1473). Complementary studies in app-based gig work show similar patterns: Walker (2021), for example, documented how online forums in Australia generate mutual aid and collective action among ride-share drivers.

Beyond online spaces, scholars have also explored the conditions under which logistical connectivity enables mobilisation in app-based work (Leonardi et al., 2019). At the same time, they identify a range of structural and technological constraints, including disguised employment relationships (Sharma, 2020), asymmetric power relations (Pastuh & Geppert, 2020), and algorithmic control (Walker et al., 2021), which collectively limit the scope of worker organisation. This research has evolved to examine not only whether collective organising occurs but also how different forms of mobilisation emerge across varied contexts. For example, Norbäck (2021) explored resistance strategies among freelance journalists, while Cini et al. (2021) analysed grassroots unions in Indonesia as a new form of industrial relations in the gig economy. Comparative studies by Cini et al. (2021) further illustrate how collective organising takes different shapes in Italy and the UK, unpacking the dynamics of mobilisation and highlighting the capabilities of grassroots unions to achieve stronger participation compared with traditional forms (Ford & Honan, 2019).

Together, this body of work reflects a shift from viewing gig workers as isolated and atomised to recognising the diverse and innovative ways they mobilise for collective interests. It highlights how online communities, logistical infrastructures, and grassroots initiatives are reshaping the possibilities for labour voice and collective action in platform-mediated work, even as significant structural constraints persist.

Examining the impact of unique gig work features, especially on HRM practices/functions

Evidence of HRM-like activities in platform work challenges the longstanding assumption that human resource management does not exist in the gig economy due to the absence of formal employment relationships (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017, Act 1). This paradoxical nature of HRM in platform settings (McDonnell et al., 2021) has prompted scholars to ask how traditional HRM roles evolve and adapt to new work arrangements mediated by digital platforms (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017; Williams et al., 2021). Focusing on algorithmic management as a key enabler of platform behaviour, Duggan et al. (2019) analysed several HRM functions in app-based platforms, while Meijerink and Keegan (2019) extended this work by adopting an ecosystem perspective to reconceptualise HRM as a governing mechanism managing multi-party relationships. McDonnell et al. (2021) further examined digitally mediated HRM practices across diverse gig platforms. Applying the lens of boundaryless career theory, Kost et al. (2020) showed that although gig work promotes boundaryless careers, it simultaneously constrains the development of career competencies, with both intra- and inter-organisational boundaries impeding skill development and career mobility.

In response to calls for more worker-centred accounts of job quality (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016, Act 1), Goods et al. (2019) conducted an empirical case study of the Australian food-delivery sector, sparking further research into job quality across multiple platforms in the United States (Dunn, 2020). Addressing Kuhn and Maleki's (2017, Act 1) call to explore the motivational role of technology, Jabagi et al. (2019) drew on self-determination and job-characteristics theories to identify two key social media tools — social networking and badging — used to motivate gig workers. Gamification, including social badging, has since been highlighted as a central feature of technology-enabled gig work, serving to shape and induce worker behaviour (Chai & Scully, 2019; Lehdonvirta, 2018; Norlander et al., 2021; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

Research has also deepened understanding of work identity construction in the gig economy. Building on Petriglieri et al.'s (2019, Act 1) foundational work, Bellesia et al. (2019) examined how technological constraints facilitate identity construction among high-skilled freelancers, producing an "entrepreneurial orientation" (p. 246). Sutherland et al. (2020) broadened this perspective by incorporating the views of freelancers, clients, and platforms to reconceptualise the "personal holding environment," finding that freelancers develop "gig literacies" as a strategy to cope with the challenges of knowledge-intensive gig work (p. 457), a result echoed by Waldkirch et al. (2021) in their analysis of skill set development.

Finally, a number of studies have explored specific technology-enabled features shaping work processes in platform labour. Examples include investigations of surge pricing and its impact on worker movement (Guda & Subramaniana, 2019), rating systems and their effect on employer reputation (Benson et al., 2020), and technological supervision as a mechanism of performance management (Norlander et al., 2021). Fest et al. (2021) conducted field experiments on Amazon Mechanical Turk to examine how financial incentives and "soft" leadership tactics influence worker motivation. Together, these studies extend our understanding of how digital platforms embed HRM-like practices into their infrastructures, reshaping work quality, motivation, and identity formation in the gig economy.

Understanding individual experience across different types of work in a precarious work context

The heterogeneity of the gig workforce produces markedly different work experiences across occupations and platform types, prompting scholars to investigate how meaning, identity, and relationships are constructed in diverse settings. For example, unlike the meanings found in app-based work (Vaclavik & Pithan, 2018, Act 1) or micro-work (Kost et al., 2018, Act 1), creative freelancers often derive latent meanings such as authenticity and creativity from their work (Nemkova et al., 2019). Taking a work-game perspective, Cameron (2022) showed that ride-hailing drivers in North American cities make sense of their jobs by engaging

in “workplace games” through key “touchpoints” such as customers and apps. Similarly, while identity construction in independent work contexts has been examined in earlier studies (Petriglieri et al., 2018, Act 1), Josserand and Kaine (2019) explored how ride-sharing drivers in Australia interpret their occupational identities and ambiguous legal classifications in low-qualified service work. Using an attachment lens, Panteli et al. (2020) analysed employment relationships in online micro-work on Amazon Mechanical Turk, revealing how workers form multiple bonds with platforms, clients, and online communities as a way to find meaning in their work and to further shape their occupational identities.

Therefore, Act 2 shifts from examining the foundational features of gig work to a broader, horizontal view of its heterogeneity, exploring how differences in platform types, occupations, skill levels, and worker motivations shape experiences across the gig economy. Scholars developed increasingly nuanced typologies of gig work and workers to capture this variability, while also extending theoretical lenses such as labour process theory to interrogate platform control and its implications. This phase of research highlights how collective organising, HRM functions, and identity construction unfold differently across contexts, revealing both the potentials and constraints of digital platforms in shaping worker agency. Studies also document how workers in varied settings—from micro-taskers to creative freelancers and ride-hailing drivers—construct meaning, form attachments, and negotiate identities in ways that reflect their unique configurations of autonomy, precarity, and visibility. Together, these studies move beyond a monolithic view of the gig economy, instead portraying it as a diverse and multi-layered field where working conditions, opportunities for collective action, and experiences of work meaning, and identity are highly contingent on platform design, occupational niche, and worker strategies.

The Gig Economy Script— *Theorising Actions Underlying Act 2*

In Act 2, the theorising craft shifted from describing the gig economy as a singular phenomenon to grappling with paradoxes and heterogeneity across platforms, occupations, and stakeholder relationships. This phase of research was driven by tensions such as the coexistence of exploitative working conditions and rising participation rates (Dunn, 2020), or the absence of formal employment relationships alongside the presence of HRM-like practices (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). These paradoxes acted as narrative conflicts that prompted scholars to refine and redefine core constructs—such as autonomy, job quality, and the personal holding environment—to better fit the realities of diverse gig contexts (Pichault & McKeown, 2019; Sutherland et al., 2020).

Moving beyond the predominantly individual-level focus of Act 1, scholars began to examine the gig economy across intra-occupational, inter-occupational, and relational levels of analysis. Studies compared job quality across platforms (Goods et al., 2019), explored collective organising across occupations (Ford & Honan, 2019), and analysed the dynamic relationships between workers, clients, and platform organisations (Nemkova et al., 2019; Panteli et al., 2020). By widening the scope to include stakeholders and cross-platform dynamics, researchers "unfroze" gig economy stories, revealing the fluid and systemic interactions that underpin platform work.

In this act's script, I see three distinct theorising moves: identifying paradoxes as triggers for new inquiry, refining and reconfiguring constructs to address heterogeneity, and shifting the level of analysis to illuminate the relationships and systems that shape gig work. Together these moves portray a field in transition—moving from static and siloed analyses toward a richer, more relational understanding of the gig economy's complexity.

Act 3: A vertical view of the gig economy within a broad social context

Building on the growing understanding of gig work's nature and variability, scholars began to adopt a more vertical perspective—one that situates gig work within wider social,

institutional, and temporal contexts. Rather than focusing solely on horizontal-level factors such as platform types or worker characteristics, this phase of research investigates how collective organising emerges and evolves over time, tracing the stages of its formation and development. Similarly, studies examining the effects of gig work on HRM practices and individual experiences increasingly incorporate the broader social conditions—such as labour regulations, cultural norms, and macroeconomic trends—that shape and constrain platform work.

Empirically advancing the labour process assertations and exploring different platform control techniques.

Scholars have extended and empirically validated Gandini's (Act 2) application of labour process theory (LPT) by embedding platform work within broader political–economic contexts. For instance, Veen et al. (2020) examined food-delivery platforms through a political–economic lens, while Tassinari and Maccarrone (2020) conducted international comparative research, and Wu et al. (2019) analysed platform work in non-Western settings. Building on this foundation, Kellogg et al. (2020) demonstrated how algorithmic control reshapes employment relationships, and Chai and Scully (2019) explored other LPT dimensions in gig work, such as capital accumulation. Collectively, these studies show how LPT has become a vibrant and evolving approach to theorising the gig economy (e.g., Huang, 2022; Lei, 2021).

Building on analyses of platform control in the labour process (Act 2), scholars have also investigated algorithm-driven management techniques across different platforms and from multiple stakeholder perspectives. In France, Galière (2020) examined how algorithmic management promotes worker compliance and found, through a Foucauldian lens, that such systems exercise both rational and normative control, reinforcing a "hyper-meritocratic ideal of justice" (p. 358) to secure consent. In India, Parth and Bathini (2021) showed how ride-hailing platforms combine algorithmic management with behavioural nudges to micro-target

driver segments. Franke and Pulignano (2021) studied food-delivery work in Belgium from the perspectives of platforms, clients, workers, and restaurants, while Maffie (2022) investigated how platforms empower customers to control workers through rating systems—revealing how customer empowerment can escalate into abusive behaviour toward platform workers. Together, these studies illustrate how the analysis of algorithmic control has moved from a narrow focus on managerial oversight to a more multi-layered understanding of how power circulates among platforms, workers, and third parties.

Studying the pre- and after-stages of formation of collective organising and bringing the contextual factors into account.

Some scholars have approached collective organising in the gig economy by stepping back to examine its formative stages—particularly the emergence of "active solidarity" or preparedness to act (Atzeni, 2010). This stage often manifests as early forms of collective action rooted in shared grievances. As Tassinari and Maccarrone (2020, p. 39) argue, such mobilisation is "rooted in the inherent contradictions of the capitalist labour process." Extending this perspective to the Global South, Parth et al. (2021) explored solidarity among workers with low digital literacy, showing how "phygital spaces" —the interplay of physical meeting points and online social media networks—enable workers to build ties and organise collectively. Follow-up studies have complemented these insights by identifying other solidaristic practices, such as mutual support networks and informal peer-to-peer assistance (Ford & Honan, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020).

Moving beyond the emergence of solidarity, researchers have examined how platforms respond to and regulate collective organising. For example, Ilsøe and Larsen (2021) investigated platform reactions to worker resistance, while Lei (2021) analysed how and when labour control in food-delivery platforms in China leads to collective resistance, highlighting factors such as platform ownership in shaping organisational responses. Broader contextual

influences have also been incorporated, including the role of socio-political environments in shaping mobilisation strategies (Cini et al., 2021; Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on worker reactions and organising efforts (Allegretti et al., 2021). Together, this stream of research demonstrates a growing recognition of collective organising not as a static phenomenon but as a dynamic process shaped by digital infrastructures, platform strategies, and broader socio-political contexts.

Looking into the manifestation of individual resistance and its contingency

Building on insights about collective organising (Act 2), scholars have increasingly examined how resistance to platform control also manifests at the individual level. In app-based platform work, for example, Reid-Musson et al. (2020) investigated ride-hail drivers' misbehaviour in Canada, showing that drivers may strategically limit their effort despite the risk of penalties. Similarly, Van Doorn (2020, p. 136) documented how food-delivery riders in Berlin contested the pricing algorithm by "building their own makeshift calculative equipment," while Anwar and Graham (2021) identified a variety of everyday resilient practices through which remote gig workers cope with algorithmic control. Other studies extend this view, such as Rahman (2021), who found that online freelancers use multiple strategies to manage algorithm-driven evaluation systems, whereas Bucher et al. (2021) revealed that some freelancers instead over-comply by performing extra work to appease the algorithm.

A growing body of research highlights factors shaping these individual resistance strategies. Wu et al. (2019), for instance, examined Uber in China and identified different control mechanisms—economic incentives, customer evaluation systems, and consent-based processes—and showed how worker responses varied depending on whether gig work was their sole or supplemental income. Veen et al. (2020) compared two food-delivery platforms in Australia and demonstrated that, in contrast to the U.S. or U.K., resistance there tended to

manifest at the individual rather than collective level. Using mobilisation theory, Wood et al. (2021) further revealed that worker anger, platform dependence, and perceived injustice influence whether individuals choose collective organising or individualised forms of action.

More recent studies have added temporal and spatial dimensions to the analysis of individual resistance. Wang et al. (2021), drawing on a mobility perspective, showed how food-delivery riders in China exercised limited freedoms within the constraints of platform control. Heiland (2021) connected platform control strategies with spatial dynamics, illustrating how app workers contest control through their movement across space, while Newlands (2021) demonstrated that spatial power relations actively shape labour relations in food-delivery work. Temporally, Laursen et al. (2021) traced workers' reactions before, during, and after tasks, finding that although workers enjoy flexibility in when and where they work, they still "lack control in deciding critical aspects of work" (p. 77). Together, this research paints a nuanced picture of individual resistance as not merely reactive but spatially, temporally, and strategically embedded in platform-mediated labour processes.

Providing the empirical account on HRM functions and identifying the contextual factors.

Building on Kost et al. (2020, Act 2), Duggan et al. (2021b) empirically examined how algorithmic management constrains the development of career competencies by comparing two job types across different national contexts. Their findings echo earlier research but also reveal that job satisfaction and engagement vary considerably between workers, with some not expecting career development opportunities at all within gig work (Duggan et al., 2021b). Responding to repeated calls for more empirical research on this issue (Duggan et al., 2019; Kuhn & Maleki, 2017, Acts 1 and 2), Waldkirch et al. (2021) provided one of the first worker-centred accounts of these dynamics, introducing the notion of crowd-created HRM practices to capture how workers themselves co-produce human resource practices in platform settings.

Acknowledging the importance of contextual factors, scholars have also begun to conceptualise and measure job quality as a multidimensional construct in developing economies (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Myhill et al., 2021; Wei & Thomas, 2021). For instance, Wei and Thomas (2021) identified additional determinants of job quality specific to the Chinese context, underscoring that job quality cannot be understood through a universal lens. Moving beyond the polarised framing of gig work as either "good" or "bad," recent studies have examined both subjective and objective aspects of work, showing how job quality varies according to contextual factors and individual characteristics (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Dunn, 2020; Myhill et al., 2021). In this vein, Vaclavik et al. (2021) demonstrated that adaptability and educational level significantly shape the career paths of app-based platform drivers in Brazil, further illustrating how local conditions and worker attributes mediate the experience of gig work.

Understanding individual experience within the context and coping strategies

Building on earlier research into workers' experiences across different types of gig work (Acts 1 and 2), scholars have increasingly examined these experiences within broader social and contextual frameworks. For instance, several studies have explored the impact of COVID-19 on app-based workers, highlighting how the pandemic reshaped work conditions, risks, and coping mechanisms (Rahman, 2021; Allegretti et al., 2021; Cano et al., 2021). Taking a non-Western perspective, Idowu and Elbanna (2021) investigated work identity construction among Nigerian online crowdworkers. Their findings challenge the assumption that platform labour is context-free, revealing how local social environments and cultural expectations shape the formation of work identities.

As this understanding of work experience has deepened, researchers have also turned their attention to the strategies workers deploy to cope with precarity and platform control. For example, Sivarajan et al. (2021) adopted a dynamic lens to trace the evolution of psychological

contract breaches among Indian ride-hailing drivers, showing how workers adapt their responses over time. Similarly, drawing on psychological contract theory and Lukes' theory of power, Shanahan and Smith (2021) demonstrated how platform power shapes workers' perceptions of fairness and their chosen coping strategies in food-delivery platforms. Together, these studies illuminate how contextual factors and power dynamics intersect to influence workers' lived experiences and adaptive responses within the gig economy.

A new line of research on gender inequality in the gig economy

This stream of research has primarily examined whether gig work exacerbates or mitigates gender inequalities. Warren (2021) highlights the negative implications of gig work for gender equity, pointing to blurred temporal boundaries and heightened financial insecurity as key challenges for women workers. Similarly, Greenwood et al. (2022) demonstrate that gender bias persists in customer review systems on ridesharing platforms, reinforcing unequal treatment and evaluation. Extending this focus to remote crowdwork, Gerber (2022) uses a large-scale quantitative survey across Germany and the United States to analyse gender disparities at different skill levels. The study finds that women face heightened risks of precarity due to caregiving responsibilities, though employment form (e.g., full-time versus part-time) may indirectly mediate these effects.

Taken together, the studies in Act 3 show how scholarship on the gig economy has moved beyond platform- or occupation-specific analyses to engage with the broader social, political, and institutional contexts in which platform labour unfolds. By incorporating comparative and non-Western perspectives, scholars have highlighted how structural conditions, such as national regulation, socio-political environments, and crises like COVID-19, shape workers' experiences, opportunities for collective action, and patterns of inequality. This vertical perspective enriches earlier research by situating gig work within wider systems of power and resources, revealing how platform labour both reflects and amplifies existing

social hierarchies. In doing so, it advances a more contextualised and critical understanding of the gig economy as embedded within larger societal processes rather than existing as an isolated or purely technological phenomenon.

The Gig Economy Script— *Theorising Actions Underlying Act 3*

In Act 3, the theorising craft shifts from treating the gig economy as a context-free phenomenon to problematising its Western-centric assumptions and revealing its embeddedness in broader social systems. This shift is triggered by scholars' recognition that earlier research has often overlooked how national regulation, socio-political conditions, and local cultures shape platform labour (e.g., Anwar & Graham, 2021; Idowu & Elbanna, 2021; Wei & Thomas, 2021). In response, researchers extend and adapt existing constructs, such as work engagement, social affirmation, and fair work, to explore how meaning-making, identity construction, and job quality are contingent on these wider contexts.

The "characters" in this script expand beyond individual workers and platforms to include governments, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural environments, allowing a relational and contextual level of analysis to emerge. "Settings" become explicitly multi-scalar: from individual workers' daily routines to institutional regimes in low- and middle-income countries, cross-national comparisons, and global crises such as COVID-19. Time also plays a stronger role, as scholars trace how shocks, regulations, or historical conditions influence the evolution of collective action, job quality, and worker identity over time.

Together these theorising moves create a script in which the gig economy is no longer portrayed as a uniform, isolated phenomenon but as a dynamic system embedded in political, economic, and cultural structures. This script binds disparate studies into a vertical narrative that situates gig work within broader societal processes, highlighting the contingencies, inequalities, and evolving power relations that shape platform-mediated labour worldwide.

In sum, the three acts and their corresponding scripts chart the evolution of gig economy scholarship and theorising craft as it has unfolded across management research. Act 1 captured the field's initial focus on describing and delimiting the phenomenon — measuring the size of the workforce, classifying types of work, identifying platform-control mechanisms, and questioning their effects on workers. The script embedded in this act reflects a phenomenon-driven, exploratory approach: scholars identified gaps stemming from the novelty of the gig economy, borrowed existing constructs (e.g., work control, identity, job quality), and applied them at the individual level within prototypical platforms. This early script was skeletal and largely static, mirroring the field's orientation toward mapping and describing a new terrain.

Act 2 revealed a shift toward a more horizontal view of the gig economy, where researchers explored its heterogeneity and the interactions between different stakeholders, occupations, and forms of organising. Here, the script evolved into a refinement and relational approach: scholars refined and redefined constructs such as autonomy or personal holding environment, incorporated multi-level analyses, and began to situate their work across occupations and platforms. This script was more dynamic than in Act 1, showing how theory-building moved beyond the prototypical gig platform toward a more system-wide, relational, and comparative lens.

Act 3 demonstrated the field's growing attention to the vertical dimension of gig work, embedding studies in broader political, regulatory, and socio-economic contexts. The script embedded here reflects a contextualisation and problematisation approach: scholars challenged context-free and Western-centric assumptions, incorporated non-Western perspectives, addressed regulatory frameworks, and connected micro-level experiences to macro-level structures. This third script shows the culmination of the field's shift from describing a phenomenon toward theorising it as deeply embedded in political, cultural, and institutional environments.

Across these three acts, the scripts are linked by a trajectory from mapping to refining to contextualising. In Act 1, the script focused on identifying and naming; in Act 2, it moved to comparing and connecting; and in Act 3, it problematised and embedded the phenomenon within wider social structures. This progression reflects an increasingly sophisticated theorising craft — from adopting existing concepts, to tailoring and extending them, to re-situating them within new contexts. Together, these scripts reveal how gig economy scholarship has matured from isolated descriptions of platform work to an integrated, multi-level understanding of its processes, actors, and contexts.

Our finding not only illuminates the evolution of gig economy research but also underscores the importance of explicitly reflecting on theorising practices. By tracing these three scripts, this review demonstrates how scholars collectively move a field forward — not simply by accumulating studies but by shifting how we conceptualise and connect phenomena over time. This trajectory offers a roadmap for future research on non-standard work, showing how emergent contexts can be theorised in ways that are exploratory, relational, and ultimately contextualised within broader socio-economic systems.

2.5 Discussion

This discussion builds on the three-act analysis and corresponding scripts presented in the findings. By tracing how gig economy scholarship has evolved, from early efforts to define and measure its nature (Abraham et al., 2018; O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020), to recognising its heterogeneity (Bucher et al., 2021; Dunn, 2020; Vaclavik et al., 2021), and finally to situating it within wider social and political contexts (Cini et al., 2021; Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021; Franke & Pulignano, 2021; Veen et al., 2020), this review illuminates both the substantive and theoretical trajectories of the field. Following, I connect these findings back to the original research questions and theoretical motivations, outline the contributions of this review to the

gig economy and theory-building scholarship, and identify avenues for future research and practice.

This review set out to answer two research questions: (1) How has gig economy literature evolved in the management field? and (2) How has the theorising craft in gig economy research evolved? By examining 193 papers and analysing their storytelling elements and embedded scripts, the review uncovers how the field has moved from describing the nature of gig work (Act 1), to recognising its horizontal heterogeneity (Act 2), and finally to adopting a vertical, contextualised view (Act 3). Across these acts, I identified three corresponding scripts: (1) early phenomenon-driven theorising, (2) construct refinement and problematisation, and (3) contextualisation and multi-level analysis, which reveal how scholars have collectively theorised the gig economy over time. This dynamic account addresses the theoretical motivation of moving beyond static reviews to a framework that captures theorising as an evolving craft.

Putting the understanding of gig economy literature "in motion" is critical for making sense of its evolving trajectory. Previous reviews, although providing valuable insights, have mapped themes of the gig economy but treated them as fixed categories (e.g., Kaine & Josserand, 2019). By analysing gig economy scholarship as a three-act narrative, this study shows how focal issues have shifted, diversified, and deepened over time, from early questions about measurement and classification (e.g., De Stefano, 2015; Heeks, 2017; Hong, 2015; Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018; Schmidt, 2017; Torpey & Hogan, 2016), to the emergence of HRM and collective organising debates (e.g., Duggan et al., 2019; Kost et al., 2020; McDonnell et al., 2021; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019) to more contextualised and political-economic perspectives (e.g., Allegretti et al., 2021; Anwar & Graham, 2021; Cini et al., 2021; Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021; Myhill et al., 2021; Wei & Thomas, 2021). This approach demonstrates that the gig economy

is not a single phenomenon but an evolving ecosystem, and that theorising about it also evolves accordingly.

A second contribution lies in making the theorising process itself explicit. By identifying the scripts underlying each act, the review moves beyond cataloguing findings to reveal the patterned "moves" scholars have used to advance theory, such as redefining constructs (e.g., Kost et al., 2020; Schroeder et al., 2021; Wei & Thomas, 2021), shifting levels of analysis (e.g., Dunn, 2020; Goods et al., 2019; Jabagi et al., 2019; Meijerink & Keegan, 2019), or integrating contextual factors (e.g., Sivarajan et al., 2021; Vaclavik et al., 2021). Conceptualising theorising as a script clarifies how incremental contributions accumulate to push the field forward. It also reflects blind spots, such as the relative neglect of non-Western settings in early theorising or the limited temporal sensitivity in many studies. In this way, the review contributes not only to gig economy research but to theory-building scholarship more broadly by showing how storytelling and script analysis can be used to reflect on theorising practices.

This review also has limitations. The scope of the gig economy is contested and fluid (O'Farrell & Montagnier, 2020), and our inclusion criteria necessarily reflected particular definitional boundaries and search terms. While the storytelling and script lenses helped address heterogeneity, they cannot fully capture all contextual nuances. Future reviews could intentionally broaden the scope by expanding search terms or incorporating non-English publications. Such expanded approach could allow for a more comprehensive and inclusive map of how gig economy research has evolved across disciplines, contexts, and regions.

Beyond extending the coverage of reviews, future scholarship could also deepen theory-building by engaging with more dynamic and contextual elements of platform work. For example, incorporating temporal dimensions, such as how workers' strategies and practices change over time (e.g., Cameron & Rahman, 2022; Laursen et al., 2021), could help capture

the evolving and complex nature of gig work (Prassl, 2018). Similarly, examining how the same theoretical frameworks operate across multiple levels of analysis, from individuals to family systems, organisational arrangements, and broader industry or institutional contexts (e.g., Franke & Pulignano, 2021; Galière, 2020; Goods et al., 2019), could reveal how worker experiences are shaped by nested environments. In addition, moving beyond the dominant focus on app-based gig platforms to explore other forms of platform work (Schmidt, 2017) would provide valuable insight into sectors that share features such as precarity (Ashman et al., 2018) but also contain distinct dynamics that deserve closer examination.

Finally, the findings offer practical implications for organisations, policymakers, and workers navigating the future of work. Understanding how scholars have theorised gig work overtime can inform better design of platform governance, HRM practices, and worker protections. For policymakers, the review emphasises the need to account for heterogeneity and contextual factors when developing regulations. For workers and labour advocates, the study underscores the evolving opportunities for collective organising, identity formation, and career development within platform-mediated labour. By making the dynamics of theorising visible, this review helps bridge the gap between academic discourse and the lived realities of the gig economy.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine how gig economy scholarship and its theorising craft have unfolded within the management field. Through a systematic review of the literature, guided by storytelling and script theory as complementary analytical lenses, the chapter provided a comprehensive, process-oriented account of how management scholars have approached, interpreted, and theorised platform-mediated work. Rather than treating the gig economy as a static or singular phenomenon, this chapter has shown how academic inquiry has

moved through distinct stages. Each with its key priorities, assumptions, and theoretical moves and how these stages collectively reveal an evolving scholarly conversation.

Three interlinked "acts" structured the analysis. Act 1 captured the field's early efforts to map and classify the gig economy by measuring its workforce, identifying its distinctive features, and adapting familiar theoretical concepts to a novel phenomenon. Act 2 reflected a broadening horizontal lens, where scholars moved beyond individual-level studies to consider heterogeneity among platforms, workers, and employment arrangements, highlighting issues such as collective organising, HRM practices, and diverse work experiences. Act 3 marked a further turn, situating gig economy research within its broader social, political, and institutional contexts, and foregrounding the value of comparative and relational approaches for understanding platform labour. Together, these acts depict the gig economy literature not as a loose collection of studies but as an evolving narrative whose themes and concepts have become more layered and contextualised over time.

In parallel with the three acts, the chapter identified three embedded "scripts" that reveal the theorising craft underpinning gig economy research. The first script centred on applying and adapting existing constructs to an emerging and underexplored phenomenon. The second script involved refining, extending, and sometimes redefining key constructs, while expanding the level of analysis beyond the individual and single-platform lens. The third script moved toward contextualisation and problematisation, emphasising multi-level, comparative, and politically informed approaches that challenge Western-centric and context-free assumptions. Taken together, these scripts illustrate how theorising in the gig economy has shifted from description and classification to integration and contextualisation, reflecting an iterative and cumulative development of ideas rather than a linear progression.

By making this trajectory visible, this chapter contributes to both gig economy scholarship and theory-building research more broadly. It clarifies how the management field's

understanding of the gig economy has matured over time and identifies key areas where future research can extend and enrich this body of work. It also demonstrates the value of using storytelling and script theory to make theorising craft explicit, a move that helps scholars see how theories are constructed, how they travel across contexts, and how they evolve in response to new empirical realities.

Therefore, this chapter positions the gig economy not only as a site of empirical interest but also as a fertile ground for reflecting on how management scholars conceptualise, theorise, and build knowledge about non-standard work. By revealing the embedded scripts within the literature, it offers a roadmap for future theorising and underscores the need for approaches that are integrative, multi-level, and sensitive to the heterogeneity and embeddedness of contemporary work. This review thus provides the foundation for the thesis's subsequent chapters, which move from analysing the field's theoretical development to empirically exploring how individuals experience, narrate, and negotiate their lives within the creator economy.

Chapter 3 Constructing Precarity: Career Transitions Into Online Content Creation

Abstract: Career transitions have been widely studied in work and career literature given their critical impact on individuals, their families, and organizations. However, existing research has predominantly focused on one-off, normative transitions, offering limited insight into more idiosyncratic and unconventional career transitions. Online content creation, a growing form of platform work characterized by precarity and insecurity, serves as a timely and underexplored context for understanding such transitions. This paper adopts a narrative inquiry approach to explore how full-time online content creators make sense of their transition from secure employment to precarious digital work. Drawing on 97 self-recorded video narratives by 45 lifestyle content creators and six in-depth interviews, we conceptualize the transition through three overlapping layers: enacting, authoring, and performing the transition story. These narratives reveal how individuals construct meaning, negotiate uncertainty, and publicly legitimize their career paths. Our findings contribute to career scholarship by advancing understanding of unconventional transitions and offering implications for supporting workers navigating transitions.

Keywords: Career transition; online content creator; narrative inquiry

3.1 Introduction

Imagine a well-paid consultant leaving her corporate job to post daily video logs about skincare from her bedroom, or an HR manager walking away from corporate stability to film café visits and apartment tours for digital audiences. These scenarios exemplify a growing trend in which individuals voluntarily leave stable employment to pursue full-time online content creation (OCC). This shift has been facilitated by advances in technology and the proliferation of user-generated content-sharing platforms (Kenney & Zysman, 2016), which enable individuals to produce and monetize content via social media (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). Recent estimates show that over 207 million individuals worldwide identify as content creators, with nearly half (46.7%) working full-time (DemandSage, 2024). More than half of social media users (54%) report that they would consider quitting their jobs to become influencers (New York Post, 2024).

While contemporary careers are increasingly characterized by fluid, idiosyncratic, and non-linear career transitions (De Vos et al., 2019; Chudzikowski, 2012; De Vos et al., 2021; Sonpar et al., 2022), extant research has remained largely focused on conventional transitions, such as normative, one-off movements (e.g., school-to-work or unemployment-to-work) (Akkermans et al., 2024), inter- and intra-organizational changes (Mussagulova et al., 2023), or shifts toward opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (de Klerk et al., 2024). In contrast, transitions into OCC are non-linear, platform-mediated, and downwardly mobile in terms of career security, which falls outside of those conventional trajectories and remains underexplored (Mishra et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023).

In addition, existing literature has emphasized the antecedents and outcomes of transitions (De Vos et al., 2021), offering limited insight into the lived experience and meaning-

making processes that accompany such shifts. This gap is salient in the context of OCC, where individuals navigate transitions into a form of work characterized by hyper-competition, financial uncertainty, and structural precarity (Ashman et al., 2018). These transitions do not reflect a search for career stability, as assumed in dominant career narratives, but an intentional move towards uncertainty. While research on conventional career transitions shows that narratives are key tools for constructing and communicating coherent identities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), we still know little about how narratives are used to make sense of unconventional, precarious transitions. Therefore, we seek to understand how full-time online content creators interpret their transitions from secure employment to precarious platform work.

Drawing on narrative inquiry, which helps us understand individuals' inner worlds and meaning-making processes (Lieblich et al., 1998), we analysed 97 YouTube videos produced by 45 lifestyle-based content creators reflecting on their own transitions and triangulated them with six in-depth interviews. Conducting a multi-stage narrative analysis (i.e., thematic, structural, and performative; Riessman, 2008), we explored not only what was said, but how stories were structured and performed within digital spaces. Based on our analysis, we conceptualized participants' transitions as three overlapping and interconnected layers, namely, enacting the story through two temporal stages, authoring the story as a rebirth tale, and performing the story through linguistic strategies. These layered narratives suggest the temporally situated, emotionally dynamic, and inherently performative ways participants construct meaning around their unconventional transitions in a highly public and precarious work context.

This research makes three contributions to the careers and work literature. First, it responds to recent calls for broader conceptualisations of unconventional career pathways (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021) by providing a

complementary account of reverse transitions from stable to precarious work. While dominant transition narratives emphasize stability and security, this study reveals how individuals narrate movement into precarity as meaningful and self-reinvention, which enriches theory on non-linear career pathways. Second, it conceptualizes career transitions as layered narrative constructions, extending our understanding of career sensemaking into the under-explored context of performative digital labour, where narrative performance is integral to the career construction process. Third, it offers a methodological contribution by positioning self-recorded video narratives not only as analytically rich data sources, but also as sites where career meaning is actively performed, thereby opening new avenues for interpretive research on the intersection of narrative, work and digital labour.

3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Current understanding of career transitions

Careers have long been understood as evolving sequences of work-related experiences across an individual's lifespan (Arthur et al., 1989). Within this view, scholars have conceptualized career transitions in various ways. From a role perspective, Louis (1980a, p. 330) defines transitions as "the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on different objective roles) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering a subjective state)." Others have framed transitions as boundary-crossing activities involving movements between occupational and/or organizational roles (Gunz et al., 2007). A more recent process-based definition frames career transitions as "a process during which an individual typically prepares for, undergoes, and adjusts to a significant change in work-related content and context" (Akkermans et al., 2024, p. 148). Broadly, it is defined as moving from one position to another throughout an individual's life (De Vos et al., 2021; Steindorsdottir et al., 2023).

Without a universal definition, career transitions have been conceptualized across multiple dimensions (Mussagulova et al., 2023), including the direction of movements (e.g., vertical, horizontal, or organizational; Nicholson & West, 1988), changes in employment types and continuity (De Vos et al., 2019), characteristics of transitions (e.g., (in)voluntary, (non) planned), and changes in roles (i.e., interrole and intrarole; Louis, 1980a). Although conceptually diverse, existing research has remained focused on one-off, normative transitions (Akkermans et al., 2024), such as school-to-work, promotion, resignation, or retirement (Bruce & Scott, 1994). These transitions are typically associated with predictable life stages and are studied within organizational boundaries.

Moreover, career transitions have largely been approached through a linear, cause-and-effect lens, focusing on antecedents and outcomes. Research in this line has explored a range of factors that contribute to career transition decisions, such as interpersonal relationship, cultural differences, social policy, and a "new" career era (Chudzikowski et al., 2009; Chudzikowski, 2012; Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Higgins, 2001). Other studies have examined the factors that facilitate transitions, including capability, adaptability and the role of independent stakeholders (e.g., Castro et al., 2020; Fouad & Bynner, 2008), as well as those that support adjustment during transitions (e.g., Latack, 1984). Transition outcomes have also been widely studied, including career success, satisfaction, strain level, identity change, and employability (De Vos et al., 2021; Rigotti et al., 2014; Sonpar et al., 2022; Steindórsdóttir et al. 2023). Although this body of work has provided valuable insights, the extant literature is dominated by quantitative approaches and tends to oversample individuals in conventional, standard employment (Mussagulova et al., 2023). As such, it offers limited understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of how career transitions unfold in non-standard work contexts. In addition, scholars have showed the liminal nature of career transitions, in which individuals feel suspended between past and future selves, navigating uncertainty and ambiguity as they

cross role boundaries (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). This in-between state complicates linear models of transitions by revealing the emotional and psychological complexity of such change.

A smaller body of qualitative research has studied more unconventional transitions, with most studies focused on understanding the reasons behind individuals' transition decisions. For example, Cohen and Mallon (1999) narratively studied transitions from organizational employment to portfolio work, arguing that personal and organizational factors are "inextricably linked" and "mutually reinforcing" in shaping decisions. In a related study, Mallon and Cohen (2001) explored women's accounts of moving from organizational roles to self-employment and identified two key triggers: being "entrepreneurs-in-waiting" and experiencing negative feelings in organizational life. These findings align with the traditional push-pull model, in which push factors include economic necessity, unemployment, or blocked advancement opportunities, and pull factors include desires for independence, autonomy, or self-direction (Bögenhold & Staber, 1991). However, Cohen and Mallon (1999) argued that this binary framework oversimplifies the lived complexity of unconventional transitions, particularly the interplay of personal, structural, and discursive motives. There is a need to move beyond motivational explanations toward more nuanced, context-sensitive understandings of those transitions.

While these studies offer valuable insights, existing research has predominantly focused on normative, organizationally bound transitions, leaving unconventional career paths underexplored. As occupational context can shape the nature of career transitions (de Klerk et al., 2024), there is a lack of in-depth, contextualized understanding of how individuals navigate and understand idiosyncratic transitions occurring outside traditional employment, especially within the evolving landscape shaped by the rise of digital platform work (Prassl, 2018).

3.2.2 Online content creation: a unique context for career transition

Amidst a wider growth in alternative working arrangements that have challenged our understanding (Spreitzer et al., 2017), the growth in the platform economy has stimulated a boom in academic study of this diverse context (Vallas & Schor, 2020). The platform economy is defined as economic activities facilitated by digital platforms that coordinate access to goods, services, or context (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Vallas & Schor, 2020).

There are different types of platform-mediated work (Schmidt, 2017). Location-based app work involves services that require physical presence, such as ride-hailing, delivery, or cleaning, and is often associated with well-known platforms like Uber or Deliveroo (Duggan et al., 2019). In contrast, cloud-based work includes online freelancing, where professionals and creative workers offer remote services, and crowdwork, where workers complete small online tasks for piece-rate pay (Howcroft & Bergvall- Kåreborn, 2019). In addition to these familiar forms, an important type of digital labor is found on social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, which generate economic value through entertainment and information sharing (Schmidt, 2017). Within this landscape, a growing trend is the "creator economy," in which individuals produce and distribute content (e.g., video, audio, photo, text) through digital platforms and monetize their output via brand partnerships, platform advertising, and other revenue streams (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy, 2019). Many creators now pursue this work full-time, often leaving traditional employment to do so. Terms such as "digital micro-entrepreneurs" (Mishra et al., 2024) and "digital autopreneurship" (Ashman et al., 2018; Yeh et al., 2020) have been used to capture the hybrid and novel nature of this labor. Although there are variations in terminology, these creators represent a form of unconventional entrepreneurship (Ashman et al., 2018) sharing a common feature: they are consumers who are passionate about personal leisure or hobbies (Milanesi, 2018) and engage in public-facing, highly individualized content production, mediated by platform management.

This emerging form of work diverges from traditional career paths and has drawn increasing scholarly attention, focusing mainly on the role of technology and platform algorithms (e.g., Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020), the nature of creative labor (e.g., Craig, 2019), and the work experiences of diverse groups of workers (e.g., motherhood blogging, Archer, 2019; digital nomads, Arifa et al., 2022; online sharenting, Jorge et al., 2022). For example, Ashman et al. (2018) found that while platform technologies empower creators, they also face hyper-competition, precarity, creativity exhaustion, and the illusory promise of success. More recently, Mishra et al. (2024) identified paradoxes in the interplay between individual agency (i.e., autonomy, creativity, and psychological capital) and contextual factors (i.e., engagement, monetisation, and non-work demands), all of which impact the career sustainability of digital micro-entrepreneurs.

However, there remains a gap in understanding how individuals transition from secure and traditional employment into this precarious, uncertain, and public-facing form of work. We know little about how such transitions are experienced, interpreted, and navigated in a new world of work where new technology and new career eras intersect. Exploring transitions in this context should include not only the influencing factors at play, but also the narrative and meaning-making processes that shape how such transitions are understood.

3.2.3 A narrative perspective in career studies

Narrative approaches have been adopted in psychology (Sarbin, 1986) and sociology to explore how individuals make sense of transitions across their lifespan, including transitions related to work and career (Lieblich et al., 1998). Rather than seeking causal explanations, narrative research aims to understand how individuals interpret and construct meaning from their lived experiences within specific social and temporal contexts. Central to this approach is the assumption that individuals are “storytellers by nature” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7), who live “storied lives on storied landscapes” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 24). Through

storytelling, individuals attempt to narrate and organize their fragmented experiences into coherent accounts that help them make sense of change and purpose, placing emphasis on meaning-making rather than linear causality (McAdams, 1993).

In career studies, narrative inquiry has been recognized as a powerful lens for exploring how individuals construct personal meaning from their evolving work lives, especially as careers become more fluid, non-linear and self-directed (e.g., Bujold, 2004; Chudzikowski et al., 2020; Cochran, 1990; Cohen & Mallon, 2001). It emphasizes the subjective and contextualized nature of career sensemaking and is well-suited for unpacking unconventional transitions, such as those into OCC. In this context, individuals are not only navigating new forms of work, but also continuously articulating and performing their careers in public and digital spaces. The precarity, visibility, and self-managed nature of content creation complicate the construction of coherent career narratives. Here, storytelling functions not only as a tool for personal reflection but also as a constitutive element of their meaning construction embedded in platform work. Understanding how people construct, tell, and perform their career stories in these settings offers valuable insights into the nuanced processes of meaning-making in digital platform work.

To sum up, these three strands of literature point to an important gap at their intersection. While career transition research has offered valuable insights, it remains largely centered on normative, linear, and organizationally bound paths. Concurrently, studies on platform work and the creator economy have emphasized the work conditions and algorithmic management but offer limited understanding of how individuals experience and interpret their transitions into this precarious and public-facing work. Narrative approaches provide an interpretive lens to bridge this divide by focusing on how people construct and make sense of their career transitions through storytelling.

3.3 Methodology

Grounded in a constructionist perspective, we assume that career narratives are socially constructed through individuals' interactions with specific contexts (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Cohen et al., 2004; Coupland, 2004). As individuals play a central role in shaping their work and career trajectories (De Vos et al., 2019), their narrative accounts serve as a medium for accessing the meanings they assign to their experiences. Therefore, we adopted a narrative approach to explore how online content creators make sense of career transitions. Guided by Riessman's (2008) narrative methodology, we collected contextually meaningful data (i.e., creators' self-narrated accounts) and conducted multi-stage narrative analysis to investigate how participants interpret and construct meaning from their transition experiences.

3.3.1 Data collection

We focused on creators working in lifestyle-based niches, including beauty, fashion, daily routines, and self-care, as these individuals are more likely to document, reflect on and share their work and life experiences. Their content is more self-narrative in nature, which offers rich narrative material for exploring how creators make sense of their career transitions. As Clandinin (2006, p. 120) states, personal narrative is "itself a fundamental form of narrative inquiry" and examining it helps bridge the gap between science and art, allowing for a more integrated and human-centered vision for exploring the human realm. Accordingly, we selected videos as our primary data source, because they offer naturally occurring non-elicited narratives shared within creators' natural work and life settings. These narratives provided context-rich insights (Neumayer et al., 2021) into how individuals interpret and make sense of their career transitions.

YouTube dominates the digital environment as a leading platform for participatory, user-generated video platform (Burgess et al., 2009), offering a rich repository of self-narrated accounts (Neumayer et al., 2021). We searched the platform using keywords such as "Why I quit 9-5 to be a full-time content creator / YouTuber/ Instagramer" to locate relevant narratives.

We adopted a purposeful sampling strategy (Palinkas et al., 2015) and collected publicly available videos from creators who met three criteria: 1) self-identified as full-time content creators, YouTubers, TikTokers, Instagramers, or Influencers who post content on public social media platforms; 2) focus on lifestyle-related niches; and 3) had previously worked in a 9-5, corporate, or other standard employment before intentionally pursuing content creation full-time.

We documented participant information in a spreadsheet, including gender, follower count, video upload date, and video length. All videos were downloaded and transcribed verbatim using transcription software, then manually cross-checked for accuracy. In total, we collected 97 YouTube videos from 45 online content creators between October 2023 and April 2024. The average video length per participant was approximately 35 minutes.

3.3.2 Data analysis

To fully explore how participants construct and make sense of their career transitions, we conducted a multi-stage narrative analysis informed by Riessman (2008). Each stage captured a different dimension of the meaning-making process. Thematic analysis identified the key episodes and events across participants' transitions. Structural analysis examined how participants organized these experiences into coherent storylines that conveyed purpose and continuity. Finally, performative analysis explored how these narratives were linguistically performed for imagined audiences. Each stage involved distinct analytical foci, interpretive moves, and coding strategies (Saldaña, 2021), allowing us to move from descriptive content toward a layered understanding of career transition narratives.

We started analysing data concurrently with its collection, focusing primarily on what participants said in their narratives (Riessman, 2008). Using in-vivo and descriptive coding strategies (Saldaña, 2021), we coded the accounts of their career transitions in the NVivo software package, including events, emotions, and incidents. For example, we generated codes

such as “time conflict between day job and OCC” and “burnout from day job” to capture triggers of transition. Through comparison and clustering, we identified three core themes, including “a combinational reason to leave a traditional job,” “in the making,” and “challenges and gains of full-time content creation.” These themes reflected a topic-centerd narrative that depicted the transition process as unfolding over time.

Although the thematic analysis allowed us to identify key events and emotional experiences, it provided limited insights into how participants made sense of these experiences through narrative structuring. We noticed that participants not only described events, but also organized them into purposeful sequences. This suggested that narrative structure played an important role in how they made sense of their transitions, which led us to shift our focus from the content of participants’ experiences (i.e., “the told”) to the form of their narrative itself (i.e., “the telling”) (Mishler, 1995). Therefore, we drew on Riessman’s (2008) structural analysis to code key elements of narrative structure in each narrative, including the abstract, background orientation, critical actions, and evaluations. As part of the structural stage, we created individual narrative portraits to capture each participant’s wider life context and situate their transition stories within it. Our analysis revealed a recurring narrative structured around a progressive self-transcending tale. This stage allowed us to explore how participants composed overarching storylines to convey the purpose and coherence of their transitions (Riessman, 2008).

Given that our participants are content creators who craft public-facing narratives, we found performative dimensions essential in participants’ stories, which was necessary to examine how stories were performed. Inspired by Goffman’s (1959) lens of self-presentation and Riessman’s (2008) performative analysis, we analysed linguistic choices, such as sentence emphasis, rhetorical framing, and specific linguistic features in engaging imagined audiences.

For example, some participants shifted between first person ("I"), second person ("you"), and collective ("we") pronouns, suggesting a dialogic construction of their stories within OCC.

3.3.3 Data Triangulation

Our analysis reflects an iterative and abductive process, in which we constantly compared, split, merged, and sequenced data to identify patterns in participants' transition narratives. To strengthen our analysis, we triangulated our findings with six semi-structured interviews conducted with content creators. These interviews provided deeper insight into individuals' lived experiences, motivations, and reflections that might not have been fully captured or diverged from their public video narratives. The interview data offered additional context to help interpret the nuances of their storytelling and clarify ambiguities in the videos.

To further enrich our understanding of participants' individual contexts and contextualize our interpretations, we also analysed supplementary materials from participants' channels, including personal updates, work routines during their side-hustle phase, and "about me" videos. At the same time, we engaged with the career transition literature to situate our findings within broader academic conversations, identifying alignment with established transition story arcs and divergence in participants' lived experiences. This combination of video content, supplementary channel material, and semi-structured interviews allowed us to build a richer and more credible account of how participants narrate and make sense of their transitions into OCC.

3.3.4 Research rigour and trustworthiness

We ensured alignment between our philosophical assumptions, research questions, and methodological choices to enhance the credibility of our qualitative research design (Patton, 1999). Acknowledging the impacts of researchers' subjectivity on interpretation and reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013), we adopted consensual validation as a standard for narrative

research, which involves sharing interpretations with both academic researchers and informed individuals (Lieblich et al., 1998). We sought feedback on preliminary findings from academic researchers. To further support transparency and analytic rigor, we documented our key analytic decisions and moves (Grodal et al., 2021; see Table 3.1).

As the context and phenomenon are mutually constituted (Meier & Dopson, 2021), the creating-for-sharing nature of online content creation and the "perceived interconnectedness" between creators and their digital audience (Abidin, 2015) may shape how content sharing itself becomes integral to participants' work and influences the way they narrate and interpret their experiences. We acknowledged our participants' intentional stances and the curated nature of their narratives within this performative context. In line with Lieblich et al. (1998, p. 8), we approached their stories not as objective truths, but as meaning-making practices "constructed around a core of facts or life events," with freedom for individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these remembered facts. Therefore, our goal was not to verify the factual accuracy of participants' stories, but to understand how they constructed and interpreted their career transitions (Mallon & Cohen, 2001). This orientation supports a shift from procedural rigor toward interpretative rigor, enhancing the trustworthiness of our research (Mees-Buss et al., 2022).

Table 2 Analytic moves in different coding stages

Data analysis stages	Research questions	Focused puzzle	Coding and developing	Merging, spliting and dropping	Relating and sequencing
Initial analysis-- thematic narrative analysis	How do online content creators *understand and make meaning out of* their career transition from organisation employment to full-time online content creation?	Individual focused: How do individual creators descirbe their career transition experience?	Watched videos to familiarise data. Selected the excerpts related to career transition experience and coding them by in-vivo and descriptive strategies. e.g., 'toxic working environment'	Through comparing and clustering codes, developed three main categories in participant's transition experience: "a combinational reason to leave 9-5 job", "in the making", and "challenges and gains of being full-time content creators". e.g., split the reasons of quitting into three aspects: organisational factors, individual psychological factors and cirumstantial factors	connecting categories in a processual order(different transition stages) and identifing the connections among different categories in each stage. e.g., three aspects of triggers were not seperated but interacted in different ways in different participant's story. Instead of coding what are the factors in these three aspects, we recoded the different situations onto the interaction
Re-analysis-- structural analysis		Contexual focused: Do they have hidden meaning back to their narratives? (i.e., the way participants framed their career transition experience within their contexts.)	We watched videos to write indvidual profiles of participants and tired to form an overall picture of each participant's lived experience. We elementally coded the abstract, background orientation, critical actions, and evaluations in their transition stories to identify the recurrent narrative structure	Merged the codes based on the structure of their stories. For example, (1)recalling past work expeirence, life history and personality; (2) descirbing specific career struggles and evaluation on this events; (3) thoughts changing and taking actions to get out of the situation; (4) showing positive outcomes	Merged the codes into three story elements (tention building, the climax, and the triumph), corresponding to a "rebirth" tale in seven basic plots.
Further analysis-- add dimension of performativity		Linguistic focused: Considering a dialogic nature of content creation work, how do they 'talk' to the audience?	Watched videos and read the texts to focus on linguistic aspects of their narratives, including sentence emphasis, certain expression, linguistic features.	Divided the codes into three aspects: multiple temporal stages, pronuns shifts and affection employs.	The performativity elements were also shown in how they described their transition experience and how they framed their stories. It was a fundamential layer in their stories and special to this context.
the colour indicates the different emphasising in different coding stages.					

3.4 Findings

Drawing on our participants' accounts of transitioning from conventional employment to full-time OCC, this section presents our key findings. We identified three themes— (1) enacting, (2) authoring, and (3) performing the transition story—which represent distinct but interconnected layers of how participants constructed meaning from their career transitions. Enacting the transition story reflects how participants narrated their transition experiences as temporally situated journeys involving triggers, tensions, and challenges. Authoring extends this meaning-making process by showing how participants retrospectively structured those experiences into coherent narrative arcs. Across many accounts, this narrative work resembled the structure of a "Rebirth" plot (Booker, 2004), in which the protagonist confronts constraint, undergoes transformation, and emerges with a renewed sense of self. Through selective recall, revision, and reconstruction, participants cast their transitions not merely as job changes, but as stories of personal transformation and self-reinvention. Performing reveals how participants strategically tailored their narratives for imagined audiences, using linguistic and rhetorical

devices to align with the expectations of digital content platforms. Together, these layers offer a multidimensional understanding of how individuals navigate, communicate, and legitimize non-standard career paths through narrative construction in a digital context. Throughout the following, we describe the core characteristics and subthemes of each theme, supported by representative data excerpts. Participants are referred to by their YouTube channel names as they appeared at the time of data collection.

Enacting the Transition Story: Two Temporal Stages

Participants' accounts of their transitions reveal two temporal stages. The first stage centers on three types of triggering interplays that prompted participants to leave conventional employment and pursue content creation as a full-time career. The second reflects how they navigated the challenges and adjustments of establishing themselves as content creators.

Triggers: Three Types of Interplays

In participants' narratives, multiple factors came together to shape their transition decisions, including their early life experiences, creative interests, dissatisfaction with previous work, proximal influences, socio-cultural expectations, and chance events. To capture the complexity and interaction among these factors, we identified three key interplays that served as triggers for transition: (a) reorienting to content creation, (b) natural succession from dissatisfied work, and (c) seeing the potential of OCC through chance events. These interplays are not presented as exclusive typologies, but as explanatory categories that emphasize the main situations that participants narrated as their motivation to pursue a new career.

Reorienting to Content Creation. For many participants, their transition to content creation did not happen all at once; it unfolded gradually through a subtle and accumulative reorientation embedded in everyday life. This interplay captures how individuals were pulled

away from unfulfilling day jobs and drawn toward longstanding creative interests. Some expressed a desire to externalize their thoughts or to explore visual media through videography and editing. For example, Sereniky explained: “I wanted to create them myself... I always... love the art of videography. How you can portray certain things and a certain way to show people what they're supposed to feel” (p49-3).

This reorientation involves a push-pull dynamic, in which participants were pushed by the monotony or misalignment of organizational life and pulled by creative interests in content creation. For example, Yanyi had a well-paid corporate job but described feeling creatively stifled:

> I felt like my corporate job, having that routine like that nine to five and just being boxed… made me a less creative person... … my soul was calling to do something else. Something else is YouTube, but it's more than just YouTube. It’s just creating. I'm a creator. (p41-1)

For many participants, what began as a hobby or side-hustle slowly gained meaning, structure, and emotional weight through consistent engagement on content creation. Grace, for example, began by writing reviews of local coffee shops, but increasingly devoted time and emotional energy to blogging apart from her marketing job:

> I realized that I needed to focus my energy on something that I could excel at… I was averaging 5 hours of sleep per day, even on the weekends, working on my side hustles for about an hour of my commute to and from work, and working the hour throughout lunch. Hence why I never ate with my team. (p21-1)

As participants became more committed to their content, they encountered growing tensions between their creative pursuits and full-time employment. These tensions were driven by the increasing time and cognitive demands of content creation, including filming, editing, posting regularly, and negotiating brand collaborations. Over time, these accumulating

pressures affected their attitude towards their conventional jobs. Sanjna described feeling emotionally disengaged from her day job as her energy and focus shifted toward her side hustles:

> The problem came when my 9 to 5 became a little bit more demanding, but my YouTube side hustle was also becoming a little bit more demanding, [with] more emails, more admin. I was all a one-man show… Every day that went by, that just became harder and harder for me. I started… hating, and that's a very strong word. But I was… struggling to focus on my 9-5 job. I was always… thinking about my side hustle. (p18-4/1)

In sum, this interplay illustrates how some participants' energy and emotional commitment gradually tipped the balance away from their conventional work and toward content creation. Rather than a sudden break, it was an accumulative reorientation that ultimately catalysed their decision to purse content creation as a full-time career.

Natural Succession from Dissatisfied Work. Different from participants who gradually reoriented toward content creation as passion-pursing, some had dissatisfaction with their previous work and content creation became a natural successor to their careers. For example, Lou left a job at a gas station because of mistreatment and transitioned into full-time OCC:

> I just wanted to take a little break off working… and then go back to work but it just never happened because I honestly did start getting busier into doing YouTube and I was getting more orders… so I really didn't see the point of… going back to work. (p14-1)

Ky experienced a breaking point after a relentless workload and insensitivity from management during a period of personal loss. Although Ky initially engaged in the Twitch platform as a hobby, it soon became a space of emotional connection and affirmation that lacked in her organizational work:

> [In this online community] We do a variety of things. We bake, we talk, we cry, we play lots of games. The community is really amazing… I was able to get connection from a whole bunch of different people throughout this world from in front of a camera on my computer… Twitch made me realize that I'm enough… There are people in this world that will be interested in you for you… You don't have to question their motives. (p38-1)

This narrative suggests a transition across two relational spaces: from physical space of the workplace to the virtual space of content platforms, and from externally imposed roles to internally constructed identities. The platforms offered not only alternative forms of work, but also spaces for emotional restoration and identity construction.

In sum, this interplay reveals how dissatisfaction with organizational work created an opening that prompted participants to seek alternatives. As they disengaged from conventional work, the content creation offered not only a substitute, but a compelling space to regain purpose, confidence, and control over their lives.

Seeing the Potential Through Chance Events. For some participants, transitions into content creation were not primarily driven by long-term passion or accumulated dissatisfaction but were sparked by chance events. These chance events acted as catalysts, reigniting their entrepreneurial ambitions that had been sidelined earlier in their careers. As Cakedbybabyk explained: "I've always known in the back of my mind for a very, very long time that I've always wanted to work for myself" (p36-1). For Christelle, the trigger came in the form of a letter asking whether her dormant business was still active, a moment that prompted her to reflect on her career direction:

> What really like triggered me it's like I got like a letter from…business office, and they were like… is this still an active business?... Why do you need to dissolve your

> business? I was like… [they are] contacting me about my inactive business while I'm out here at this job… just a reality check. (p29-1)

In other cases, chance events were tied to broader social trends, such as the rise of the platform economy and the visibility of successful creators, which helped legitimize content creation as a viable career path. For example, Jalyn described how industry trends gave her the confidence to pursue an interest in beauty content:

> I always thought that I would just be working in corporate America until my 60s when I retire… although I knew I wanted to work for myself at some point... content creating wasn't as much of a career path back then, but I feel like nowadays, like when you see the statistics on how much creators make… it gives like me hope… make real money from this. And I think people are starting to see it as a real career path. (p26-I)

Therefore, these three interplays, reorienting toward creative passion, moving away from unfulfilling work, and responding to chance events, reveal the complex and overlapping forces that shaped participants' transitions. They reflect how personal interests, work experiences, chance events, and social contexts intertwined in many participants' stories to make sense of why and how the transition occurred.

Adaptation to Online Content Creator Career

After leaving conventional employment, many participants described a period of adjustment as they navigated full-time content creation. One of the most salient challenges was the uncertainty inherent in this new form of work, including inconsistent income, fluctuating audience interest, and doubts about creativity longevity and sustainability of the industry. For instance, Tia described the unpredictability of working with brands:

> I don't really ever know when the next paycheck is coming in, and especially with brand deals because they have net 30, they have net 60. I'm still waiting on a paycheck from a brand deal that I did like two months ago. (p27-3)

This financial unpredictability generated emotional stress and led many to reconsider how they measured success. Without the organizational metrics of traditional employment, creators relied on platform-driven or self-defined indicators of success. As Ky explained: “How well you do is based on a whole bunch of numbers and it's really hard to not diminish yourself to just a bunch of numbers when that is how you're making your income” (p38-1).

These may lead to constant comparison with others. For instance, Christelle described how she was defeated in social media:

> There was a point where I had to get off and stop consuming because there was this girl I followed. I love her content and it's just like everything she posted and went viral… I was like, what am I doing wrong? (p29-1)

While participants valued the freedom to choose when and where to work, some described this flexibility as paradoxical. With a blurred boundary between work and leisure, the demands of staying relevant and creative became constant. Jalyn expressed this feeling of being “always on”:

> We have to stay on top of what's going on within our niche and our industry…I have to scroll a little bit on TikTok and Instagram… You might see something be like, oh, this would be a cool content idea, but then is that work at that point? Like, are you back to working? (p26-I)

Although having these challenges, some participants developed adaptive strategies. Some drew on previous side-hustle experience; others diversified income sources or adjusted content routines to manage burnout and financial instability. Several participants described adopting a learning mindset. For example, Aneesha reframed audience engagement as an opportunity for growth rather than validation: “I don't have an expectation on exactly how many likes or how much engagement. If I connect with somebody, if I get ten likes, I'm happy… I learn something from creating… It's like practice” (p39-1).

Overall, participants narrated their career transitions as a process that unfolded from initial triggers to adaptive responses. These accounts show how individuals understood transition not as a one-time decision, but as evolving experiences shaped by constraints and opportunities in their contexts. While participants narrated the events central to their transitions, many engaged in deeper sensemaking by structuring their stories to communicate purpose and meaning.

Authoring the Transition Story: Accomplishing a Rebirth Tale

In addition to describing the events of their transitions, participants authored their stories in ways that gave shape and significance to their experiences. Across narratives, we observed a recurring structure that aligned with the "Rebirth" tale in Booker's (The Seven Basic Plots, 2004): the protagonist faces internal constraint, reaches a turning point, and emerges with a renewed sense of self. We use this concept to interpret how participants selected, sequenced, and framed their stories. It allows participants to portray their career transitions not only as a change in work, but as journeys of personal reinvention.

Tension-building: Confronting Inner Constraints

Many participants began their stories by describing personal and contextual constraints that made their transitions difficult. These tensions were mainly introduced through reflective moments (as triggers identified in theme 1, enacting), creating narrative friction that helped drive their stories forward. For example, Iris, reflected on the emotional and psychological barriers that held her back from pursuing YouTube earlier: "It [YouTube] has been something that I've always wanted to do, but I felt super self-conscious. I thought people would make fun of me… I'm always thinking about how I'm perceived by other people…try to avoid hard situations" (p31-1/3).

Others emphasized the difficulty of departing from traditional career expectations. Christelle recalled a moment when a family acquaintance dismissed content creation: “She's like… what are you going to get a real job?… people don't respect content creation… They're like, anybody can do that… it's not a real job” (p29-1).

These reflections show that their stories were shaped not only by personal doubts but also by broader societal narratives about what constitutes a “real” career. Their transitions were situated at the intersection of the traditional one-career-one-life career model and new emerging career contexts. These tension-building elements added narrative depth and functioned as a key storytelling device that set the stage for a moment of breakthrough.

Climax: Breaking Through Constraints

The turning point in many narratives was not just external action, but framed as an internal shift, emphasizing self-authorship, empowerment, and freedom from other’s expectations. These were structured as breakthroughs in which participants overcame constraints. As Christelle expressed a new sense of self-worth: “I realized I'm not going to wait for things to happen before I start reaching for my goals because I'm worthy of them now” (p29-1). This mindset shift often involved rejecting socially imposed definitions of success. For example, Austen expressed a shift in attitude towards external material and social expectations: “I realized that I needed to stop seeking this path of becoming a boring adult and start dreaming again, to not let money, opportunity and security scare me away from doing what I want” (p40-1).

Others, like Cakedbybabyk, framed a growing sense of confidence in their abilities: “I'm in a good place where I believe in myself more and I'm confident in my abilities… Some people might think that I was stupid to do that… But I know that this is the right path for me” (p36-1).

Some participants described moments of clarity that freed them from external expectations, which suggests a personal assertion of agency. For example, after long self-debate, Tia framed her leap as trusting herself: “I put my limiting beliefs aside. I put my fears of what other people would think aside, and I just did what my heart was telling me to do” (p27-3).

These expressions of agency represented the emotional and narrative climax of the transition stories. Participants portrayed themselves not only as individuals responding to external pressures, but as protagonists actively rewriting their life course.

Triumph: Self-transcendence After Transition

In the aftermath of transition, many participants described their current selves in ways that suggested growth and confidence. By contrasting their past and present selves, they framed their transitions as a journey of self-transcendence, moving beyond prior limitations and societal expectations to embrace a more authentic sense of self. As Tia described:

> Previous Tia was the type of person that would put her feelings behind other people's feelings, even when it came to a job that I hate it… like I want to quit, but they probably need me… that was younger me. And I'm not feeling that way right now… I'm doing this for me. (p27-1)

Thandi similarly expressed freeing herself from the mold of social norms:

> I realized I had to stop letting society dictate how I live my life and to stop giving everything a deadline according to society’s standards...I had been brainwashed by society into believing I wanted to fit in with the masses. (p8-2)

Jordan explicitly framed transition as an act of identity reinvention: “Once I took the leap of faith on myself… I had to transcend the old me. I had to let go of the life that he was living because I can't be the new me living my old life” (p17-1).

These stories of self-transcendence allowed participants to make sense of their transitions not as practical choices, but as transformative journeys. By positioning themselves as protagonists who overcame internal and external barriers, they authored a narrative that resonated with the arc of a rebirth tale. Accomplishing this tale helped participants reconcile the "out of ordinary" and "scary" of their transition stories and cast their transitions as meaningful.

Performing the Story: Linguistic Strategies

In crafting a rebirth narrative, participants' stories were not only for themselves, but also strategically performed for imagined audiences, reflecting the dialogic nature of OCC. As Yanyi explained: "It's not just about the beauty, the fashion, the lifestyle… I want to share as much of my life and my story and my pains and my gains with you. I hope… I can help somebody find that courage" (p41-1).

We identified several core linguistic strategies participants used to engage their audience and build the persuasiveness of their stories. Some participants constructed their transitions across time, linking early life experiences with current choices and future goals. This multi-directional temporality strengthened the perceived inevitability and rightness of their career shift. For example, Jordan recalled visualizing his future as a YouTuber while working a retail job:

> I truly programmed my subconscious mind to believe that I was a full-time Youtuber… I remember one day...I was at work at the register… I grabbed one of the sticky notes and I wrote down my routine as a full time YouTuber. What a day in the life would look like for me as a full-time YouTuber.... it got my mind working in that direction. (p17-1)

Similarly, Abigail used long-term reflection to question her current career path:

> Looking at my other managers and directors' job and thinking about the long term right, like what I want to do or who I want to be in five- or ten-years' time. I got her a job and I told myself do I really want to have their job? (p46-1)

Another performative technique involved pronoun shifts, moving between "I," "you," and "we" at key junctures of their narrative to universalize their stories and invite the audience in. As Yanyi put it: "I'm a creator and I love to be artistic, and you want to pursue something in your life, you just have to do it…we just need to really evaluate ourselves and… ask ourselves like what are we doing" (p41-1).

This linguistic strategy allowed participants to frame their transitions as shared human experience. Some participants also disclosed emotions, such as fear, doubt, and hope. These moments of vulnerability helped bridge the emotional distance between themselves and their audiences. By opening up, they positioned their transition as not just a practice decision and personal growth, but as "felt" journey.

Therefore, while participants enacted and authored their transition stories, they also performed them using linguistic strategies to connect, persuade and inspire. The rebirth arc, in this sense, was not only a personal narrative structure, but also a public performance. These stories were to some degrees shaped by the relational, curated, and audience-aware nature of content creation work. Through this performative layer, participants affirmed their choices, managed the vulnerability of career change, and transformed uncertainty into influence.

These three themes reveal layered dimensions of how participants constructed their career transition stories within the digital platform context. The first theme, enacting, captured the lived experience central to their transitions, including the triggers and subsequent adaptations. The second theme, authoring, unpacked retrospective narrative work through which participants authored their stories into coherent narrative arcs, drawing on a rebirth structure that cast their departure from conventional work as personal reinvention. The third

theme, performing, showed that linguistic strategies, such as pronoun shifts, emotional appeals, and temporal framing, were embedded in their narrative construction. These layers demonstrate how individuals navigate, interpret, and publicly legitimize non-conventional career change through storytelling in the digital sphere.

3.5 Discussion

This study set out to understand how individuals interpret and construct meaning around transitions from secure employment into OCC through a narrative perspective. In contrast to conventional transitions, which are mainly framed as upward or lateral moves toward stability and legitimated through coherent narratives, our findings reveal how individuals make sense of stable-to-precarious transitions through a layered narrative process that unfolds across time, context, and performance. Our findings contribute to contemporary career, and especially career transition scholarship, by offering new insights into how individuals experience and narrate unconventional career transitions within the fast-evolving landscape of digital and platform-mediated work. In the following, we outline three key contributions.

Firstly, our study contributes to emerging conversations on unconventional career transitions (Mishra et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023) by shedding light on the lived experience of moving from secure employment to full-time OCC— a form of work featured by precarity and uncertainty (Ashman et al., 2018). Echoing work conceptualizing career transitions as temporally unfolding processes (Akkermans et al., 2024), our participants described their transitions not as discrete events, but as emotionally charged, multifaceted journeys shaped by evolving motivations, constraints, and adaptive responses.

While prior research has primarily examined transitions within organizational settings or toward traditional forms of entrepreneurship (de Klerk et al., 2024), we show that transitions

into platform-based work are qualitatively distinct. Specifically, we observe an entanglement of inter-role transitions (from employee to creator) with intra-role shifts (from hobbyist to professional). These dual dynamics complicate conventional push-and-pull models (e.g., Lee, 2021; Tran et al., 2019) by illustrating how prior working experiences, personal creative interests, and chance events intersect in distinctive ways. Rather than being driven solely by dissatisfaction or passion, their transitions reflect complex interplays between individual agency and shifting social contexts, aligning with earlier calls for more nuanced understandings of non-conventional career transitions (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Mallon & Cohen, 2001).

Our participants also described challenges in adjusting to full-time OCC, particularly in managing the work-nonwork interface. Many reported difficulties in setting schedules without the organizational scaffolding of traditional employments, alongside the emotional strain of feeling "always on." While prior studies have noted the paradoxical flexibility of platform work, where autonomy is shadowed by self-surveillance (e.g. Lehdonvirta, 2018), our study suggests that the work-nonwork boundary is even more complex for content creators. These creators operate in spaces where personal life is professional product, which may not be fully captured by the frameworks of integration and segmentation used in existing literature (Ashforth et al., 2000). For example, filming and monetizing everyday activities like lunch preparation simultaneously occupies personal and professional domains. This dual positioning challenges conventional understandings of boundary management and calls for a re-conceptualisation of the work-nonwork interface in digitally mediated and self-managed work contexts.

Secondly, this study advances career scholarship by conceptualizing career transitions as layered narrative constructions, involving the temporal unfolding of events, the retrospective authoring of meaning, and the performative storytelling in digital public spaces. Participants did not merely recount what happened to them; they authored their transitions through

structured story arcs that reframed uncertainty and precarity as meaningful and purposeful. A dominant pattern across these narratives was the rebirth framing, in which creators portrayed their move away from traditional employment as a path to self-discovery, growth, and realignment with personal values. In this way, narrative became a resource for reclaiming agency in the face of the unpredictability and insecurity of platform work.

Beyond this authoring of meaning, participants also performed their narratives using linguistic and rhetorical strategies. These were not merely expressive but instrumental in their meaning-making processes. This performative dimension suggests that narrative in this context serves not only as a vehicle for personal reflection, but also as a form of public positioning. Building on work that emphasizes the contextual embeddedness of career changes (Chudzikowski et al. 2009; Chudzikowski, 2012), this study indicates that the norms and affordances of content-sharing platforms shaped not only the stories participants told, but also how they were crafted and what meanings were assigned. These layers, therefore, underline the multidimensional nature of career storytelling in the OCC context. By showing how individuals construct meaning around their unconventional career transitions, this study extends narrative career theory into the underexplored realm of platform-mediated, public-facing work.

Thirdly, this study offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating the analytical and theoretical value of self-recorded video narratives in career research. While narrative inquiry has long used interviews to examine career experiences (Cohen & Mallon, 2001), the use of publicly shared videos extends this tradition by capturing how individuals narrate, structure, and perform their career transitions in real time and within their naturalistic and digital workspaces. This approach enables a richer and more nuanced understanding of how career meaning is simultaneously constructed and communicated. Compared to traditional data sources, self-recorded video narratives capture affective expressions, pauses and visual cues

that offer insights into the emotional and physical dimensions of career storytelling. These narratives unfold in public, shaped by platform norms, imagined audiences, and algorithmic pressures, offering a window into how individuals navigate visibility (Neumayer et al., 2021), authenticity, and self-presentation in precarious digital labor contexts.

Methodologically, this study shows the potential of digital artefacts as generative data sources for interpretive career research, especially in contexts where work and identity are inseparable from online self-presentation. It invites future research to attend to the performative dimensions of career narration and to explore how digital storytelling practices reshape individuals' understandings of their work, selves, and life paths.

These contributions together advance current understanding of how the meaning of career transitions is constructed through layered storytelling in the digital age. By examining the lived experiences of individuals transitioning into OCC, this study offers insight into an emerging form of career transition that challenges conventional narratives of moving towards stability and security. This study calls for career scholarship to more fully engage with the dynamic interplay between work and narrative in platform-mediated and precarious career landscapes.

Future Directions and Limitations

While this study offers novel insights into the meaning-making processes of individuals transitioning into OCC, it has some limitations that open up avenues for future research. Although the analysis of self-recorded video narratives was triangulated with six semi-structured interviews to enrich the interpretation and validate themes, the main dataset comprises publicly performed narratives. These may reflect curated or idealized versions of participants' experiences shaped by self-presentation motives. However, my interest lies not in uncovering what is "real", but in how individuals interpret and narrate their transitions. From this perspective, the curated nature of these narratives is itself part of the digital work context

they inhabit and a meaningful aspect of their storytelling. Future research could further explore less visible or marginalized creator experiences using diverse data sources and methodologies. Additionally, my focus on lifestyle-based creators limits our understanding of other genres or niches. Comparative studies across different creator types or cultural contexts could provide a more comprehensive view of how narrative meaning is shaped. Finally, as platform work evolves, longitudinal approaches could track how creators' self-narratives change over time, particularly for those who leave platform-based careers.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the lived experiences of full-time online content creators as they transition from secure, traditional employment into precarious and highly visible platform-based work. Drawing on a narrative inquiry approach, the chapter addressed a significant gap in the career literature by focusing on an unconventional and underexplored form of career transition. By analysing self-recorded video narratives and in-depth interviews, we were able to access the subjective worlds of creators and uncover the meaning-making processes that underpin their movements into the creator economy.

The analysis revealed three interrelated layers of career construction—enacting, authoring, and performing the transition story. Enacting captured the temporal and experiential dimensions of transition, showing how creators experienced uncertainty, tension, and experimentation as they moved away from stable employment. Authoring highlighted the ways in which participants retrospectively organised and reframed these experiences into coherent narrative arcs, often drawing on a "rebirth" plot that framed their move as self-renewal and transformation. Performing revealed how these narratives were not only personal reflections, but also public-facing products shaped for audiences within platform ecosystems. Together,

these layers provide a multidimensional account of how online content creators make sense of and legitimise their unconventional career paths.

This chapter makes three main contributions to the broader thesis. First, it extends career scholarship by demonstrating how career transitions in platform-mediated contexts differ from the linear, organisationally bound pathways that dominate existing research. Second, it brings visibility and performativity to the centre of career construction, showing that in the creator economy, work and identity are simultaneously enacted and displayed. Third, it highlights how the rising of platform-enabled work opportunities interacts with individual agency to shape career trajectories, individual narratives, and meaning-making processes. These findings deepen our understanding of the creator economy as a distinctive and increasingly important site for theorising non-standard careers.

More broadly, this chapter reinforces the thesis's overarching argument that studying platform work requires moving beyond static notions of employment to examine careers as dynamic, narrative, and contextually embedded processes. The findings also help bridge this chapter to the next, which will investigate how the same type of creators navigate the boundaries between work and nonwork in their daily practices. By linking career transitions to boundary dynamics, the next chapter builds on the insights developed here and further situates the experiences of online content creators within wider debates about the future of work and digital labour.

Chapter 4 When Breakfast Becomes Work: Unpacking Work–Nonwork Boundaries in Lifestyle Content Creation

Abstract: This study examines how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators experience and manage the boundaries between their work and nonwork lives. Drawing on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, it explores how creators negotiate the visibility and performativity inherent in platform-mediated labour, where personal activities become integral to professional output. Using a qualitative netnography approach, the study analyses 53 videos from 43 lifestyle-based content creators and six in-depth interviews with full-time creators. The findings reveal two interlinked concepts: (a) a visibility-oriented labour filter, which captures how activities traditionally viewed as private are transformed into self-representational labour through audience anticipation and platform affordances, and (b) presented boundaries, which reflect deliberate acts of selection, framing, and withholding to control what crosses into public view. Together, these concepts illustrate how work–nonwork boundaries in online content creation are neither simply segmented nor fully integrated but continuously enacted as representational practices.

This study makes three contributions. First, it extends boundary theory by demonstrating how spatial, temporal, emotional, and cognitive boundaries are contingent upon visibility and performativity rather than fixed domains. Second, it broadens the concept of work in the creator economy to include ongoing self-representational labour, where everyday life, domestic spaces, and emotions become active sites of production. Third, it offers a nuanced mechanism of work–nonwork boundaries in lifestyle content creation, moving beyond the segmentation–integration binary toward a framework of fluid, layered, and platform-mediated boundaries.

Keywords: Work-nonwork boundary; online content creator; self-representation

4.1 Introduction

Activities such as having breakfast, walking the dog, or catching up with friends are usually seen as quintessentially "nonwork" — the routines that structure personal life apart from occupational responsibilities. Yet when these everyday practices become incorporated into one's work, as they often do in the creator economy, fundamental questions arise about how individuals construct and manage the boundary between work and nonwork. This question has long been central to research in management and organisational studies. Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) posits that individuals create and maintain boundaries between their work and nonwork domains, and the work–family literature has provided extensive evidence on how individuals experience, navigate, and negotiate the demands of multiple roles across different domains (e.g., Adisa et al., 2019; Trefalt, 2013).

However, the assumptions underpinning traditional boundary and role theories are challenged in non-traditional work settings where personal life is not merely adjacent to work but becomes its raw material. With advances in technology and the rise of digital platforms, everyday life has become more visible, commodified, and monetised (Jorge et al., 2022; Kossek, 2016). In online content creation, activities once considered "private", such as eating breakfast, decorating a home, or going for a walk, are often filmed, edited, and uploaded as professional outputs. This context erodes the traditional dichotomy between work and nonwork and challenges the core premise of boundary theory that people occupy discrete roles and negotiate temporal, spatial, and psychological boundaries to manage them (Kossek, 2016). When a creator films lunch preparation in their kitchen for a vlog, the act simultaneously occupies both work and nonwork domains in the same physical and temporal space. Such

entanglement exceeds the activity-based, time-based, or space-based dimensions (Kossek, 2016) that have dominated prior scholarship.

Existing studies of work–family boundaries have not fully addressed how individuals experience and negotiate boundaries within emerging, performative work contexts where self-presentation is not incidental but constitutive of the job itself. We know little about how workers manage the blurred interface of work and nonwork in occupations where the private sphere doubles as a productive site and the self becomes a professional asset. This chapter address this gap by examining how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators experience their work and nonwork interface. To do so, I focus on two questions: (1) How do lifestyle creators perform their work and nonwork activities? and (2) How do they handle the line between work and nonwork life in their vlogs?

To investigate these questions, we conduct a qualitative netnographic study of full-time lifestyle-based online content creators. Drawing on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective on self-presentation, I theorise the work–nonwork interface in the context of online content creation. My analysis highlights how creators enact, negotiate, and perform boundaries in ways that both extend and challenge existing theoretical frameworks. We show that boundaries are not fixed or singular but contingent, shaped by the visibility and performativity of each task. We also extend the concept of "work" in the creator economy to include self-representational labour, whereby everyday life, domestic space, and personal emotions become active sites of production. This moves beyond the segmentation–integration binary that dominates boundary research and towards a model of fluid, layered, and platform-mediated boundaries.

This work makes three main contributions. First, it extends boundary theory by illuminating how online creators produce and regulate boundaries in an environment where personal and professional life are deeply intertwined. Second, it introduces the notion of a

visibility-oriented labour filter: a process through which ordinary activities are transformed into self-representational labour, as well as the concept of presented boundaries, defined as deliberate acts of selecting and withholding content to maintain privacy and manage audience expectations. Third, it situates these practices within the broader context of platform-mediated work, offering a nuanced model of work–nonwork boundaries in lifestyle content creation. Together, these contributions invite a reconceptualisation of boundaries not as static lines but as fluid, representational processes responsive to the dynamics of platform-based and digital performative labour. It also offers practical implications for helping creators develop strategies to better navigate and manage the complex boundaries between their personal and professional lives, fostering healthier and more sustainable practices in the broader platform economy.

4.2 Literature review

This literature review is organised into three interconnected strands. First, it reviews the evolution of work–nonwork boundary theory, highlighting its central concepts, strengths, and limitations in relation to contemporary forms of digital work. Second, it examines research on the platform economy and online content creation, identifying how this new domain differs from service-oriented platform work and how it has been conceptualised to date. Third, it introduces Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework and the concept of self-presentation as a lens for understanding the performative and audience-oriented nature of boundary work in lifestyle content creation. Together, these three strands provide the conceptual grounding for this study, clarify the gap in existing research, and justify the study's focus on the work–nonwork interface within online content creation.

4.2.1 Work-Nonwork boundary

Boundary theory provides a foundational lens for understanding how individuals manage the interface between their work and nonwork domains. It assumes that boundaries are

socially constructed through interactions between individuals and their contexts (Ashforth et al., 2000) and are typically distinguished across physical, temporal, and psychological dimensions (Clark, 2000). Individuals employ a range of strategies to manage these boundaries (Kossek et al., 2012), which lie on a continuum from segmentation to integration (Bulger et al., 2007; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019). Segmentation involves maintaining strict distinctions between work and nonwork, which can help minimise role conflict by keeping competing demands separate (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Integration, by contrast, allows for overlap between domains, enabling flexibility in when, where, and how roles are enacted (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek et al., 2012). For example, an individual working from home may blend roles by preparing a meal while monitoring emails or taking a personal phone call during office hours.

Over the past several decades, research grounded in boundary theory has significantly advanced our understanding of work–nonwork interfaces across diverse occupational contexts. Yet much of this work continues to conceptualise boundaries primarily in terms of the nature of activities (e.g., emailing versus cooking), time (work hours versus leisure time), or spaces (the office versus the home). This framing is increasingly challenged by the rise of digital technologies, which erode the traditional spatio-temporal distinctions between work and nonwork domains. Scholars have drawn attention to the impact of technology on boundary management, showing, for instance, that mobile devices can heighten the blending of work and life domains (Adisa et al., 2017; Kossek, 2021).

Despite these advances, less is known about how individuals enact work–nonwork boundaries in algorithmically mediated, highly visible spaces where the self becomes a key part of the labour process. In such contexts, exemplified by online content creation, the presence of audiences, platform infrastructures, and self-presentation imperatives fundamentally reshape how boundaries are negotiated and performed (Sullivan & Al Ariss,

2021). This gap invites a revisiting of boundary theory to account for new forms of work in which personal life and professional production are increasingly intertwined.

4.4.2 Lifestyle-Based Online Content Creation

The rise of the platform economy has drawn significant attention across policy, academia, and the public sphere (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Broadly defined as a system in which digital platforms mediate exchanges between service providers and clients, the platform economy is characterised by non-standard employment relationships, algorithmic management, and heightened precarity (Vallas & Schor, 2020). Much of the existing literature has focused on app-based platforms such as Uber, Deliveroo, and TaskRabbit, emphasising working conditions, the implications of algorithmic management, and the classification of workers (Dorschel, 2022). This body of research has yielded important insights into the nature of gig work but has paid comparatively less attention to other sectors of the platform economy, particularly content-sharing platforms such as YouTube, Twitch, and TikTok.

These content-sharing platforms occupy a distinctive space within the broader platform economy. As Schmidt (2017) observes, platforms such as YouTube and Facebook function as digital labour markets that generate economic value through user-generated entertainment and information. This labour is unlike conventional gig work: instead of offering discrete services, individuals produce and monetise content, such as video, audio, images, or text , through diverse revenue streams such as advertising, sponsorships, merchandise, or fan-based support (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy, 2019). This “creator economy” reflects a broader structural shift in the digital labour market, where personal interests, experiences, and expertise can be transformed into full-time occupations. The proliferation of these platforms has enabled content creators to reach global audiences and, in some cases, achieve considerable economic and cultural influence.

Within the creator economy, lifestyle-based online content creators constitute a particularly revealing group. These creators produce content focused on lifestyle topics, such as beauty, fashion, food, fitness, and everyday routines, and distribute it through digital platforms. Unlike other platform workers who may deliver services or perform tasks that are clearly separated from their personal lives, lifestyle creators frequently integrate their private routines into their professional outputs. As a result, the boundary between work and nonwork is more fluid and complex.

Although content creation is often celebrated for its creative autonomy and flexibility, such narratives frequently obscure the precarity, uncertainty, and constant self-management that characterise this form of labour (Ashman et al., 2018). Lifestyle-based creators in particular face unique pressures: their everyday lives double as both personal experience and professional product. This blurring of domains challenges the assumptions of traditional boundary theory, which typically distinguishes between work and nonwork activities on the basis of temporal, spatial, and psychological separation (Ashforth et al., 2000; Ciolfi & Lockley, 2018).

As Schor et al. (2020) argue, workers' experiences within the platform economy vary considerably depending on the type of platform, the level of influence they hold, and their position within the broader digital labour market. The working life of a lifestyle YouTuber dependent on audience engagement and brand partnerships differs markedly from that of a crowdworker on Amazon Mechanical Turk. Such differences highlight the need for context-specific research to capture the diversity of platform labour experiences.

Although research on online content creators has addressed platform infrastructures, affordances, and working conditions (Archer, 2019; Arifa et al., 2022; Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Jorge et al., 2022), relatively little is known about how these workers negotiate the intersection of their work and nonwork lives. Digital platform labour frequently operates

without the traditional physical or temporal boundaries of work, such as offices, fixed schedules, or clear role demarcations, and is instead shaped by flexible arrangements and algorithmic oversight (Warren, 2021). Understanding how lifestyle-based content creators experience and manage their work–nonwork interface is therefore essential for developing a more comprehensive picture of digital labour, one that accounts not only for technological affordances and precarity but also for the deeply personal and performative dimensions of this work.

4.4.3 Goffman's (1959) Self-Presentation as a Framework

Goffman's seminal work The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) provides a powerful lens for understanding how individuals manage their identities in public contexts. According to Goffman, individuals engage in self-presentation by offering an "edited version of themselves," selectively managing how they are perceived by others. He further notes that "individuals can rely on what they say about themselves or on documentary evidence they provide to define who and what they are" (p. 15). This dramaturgical perspective highlights that identity is not merely an internal state, but an ongoing performance shaped by audience expectations, situational cues, and available social scripts.

This perspective is particularly relevant to online content creation, where the presence of a visible and measurable audience is intrinsic to the work itself. Lifestyle-based creators actively construct and maintain a self-image designed to elicit specific responses from their followers. This involves curating actions, expressions, and settings into an audience-ready form—transforming everyday routines into performative outputs. In this sense, self-presentation becomes not only a personal choice but also a form of labour, integral to sustaining engagement and monetisation in the platform economy.

Goffman further observes that "information about the individual helps define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may

expect of him" (1959, p. 15). Applied to the creator economy, this suggests that the way creators present themselves shapes audience expectations and the interactions that follow. This perspective extends traditional boundary theory, which assumes relatively stable distinctions between domains. By foregrounding performance, audience, and situational framing, Goffman's framework helps to illuminate how content creators actively manage the interplay between their professional and personal lives, offering a richer understanding of boundary dynamics in highly performative digital labour contexts.

Taken together, the three strands of literature outlined above converge to provide a strong foundation for examining work–nonwork boundaries in the context of online content creation. While extant research on work-nonwork boundaries has deepened our understanding of how people manage their roles, it largely remains anchored in assumptions about time, space, and activity that rooted in traditional employment. Online content creation, as a form of digital platform labour, challenges these assumptions by turning personal life itself into the production process. In such algorithmically mediated and highly visible spaces, the presence of audiences can reshape how boundaries are negotiated, calling for boundary theory that accounts for more fluid, performative forms of work. Drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical lens, online content creators may continually curate their lives for an audience, making self-presentation a boundary-making practice. This integrated perspective positions the present study to investigate how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators experience and negotiate their work–nonwork boundaries, illuminating a form of labour that sits at the intersection of personal life, professional identity, and digital visibility.

4.3 Methodology

As Braun and Clarke (2020b, p. 38) argue, there is no single "best" methodology for qualitative research; what matters is the alignment between method and research purpose. To

understand how online content creators experience and interpret the interface between their work and nonwork lives, this study adopts a qualitative netnography approach (Kozinets, 2020), grounded in a constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). This approach allows for the exploration of lived experiences and meaning-making processes in naturalistic, digitally mediated settings.

Netnography, as a non-media-centric approach (Pink et al., 2016), attends to the "cultures, experiences, activities, and relationships" formed through social media (Addeo et al., 2019, p. 11). This makes it particularly well suited to studying online content creators, whose work is platform-bound and whose boundaries between work and nonwork unfold in online spaces. Unlike traditional ethnography rooted in a physical field site, netnography recognises the fluid, techno-enabled nature of digital environments (Kozinets, 2020). Online traces such as self-published vlogs offer naturally occurring accounts of creators' daily lives, revealing the ongoing negotiation of personal and professional boundaries in ways that retrospective interviews alone cannot capture.

4.3.1 Data collection

Given this study's focus on how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators experience and navigate their work–nonwork boundaries, it was essential to select a methodology that could capture both naturally occurring practices and participants' own reflections. Netnography provides such an approach by enabling the analysis of digital traces produced in everyday life alongside interactive engagement with participants themselves (Kozinets, 2020). Accordingly, data collection proceeded in two stages: (1) the collection and analysis of self-published video blogs ("vlogs") and (2) follow-up semi-structured interviews with a subset of creators. Together these sources offered complementary insights into the public performance and private interpretation of work–nonwork boundaries.

The first stage involved systematically sampling pre-existing vlogs published on major platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. These vlogs represent "naturally occurring" data, created independently of the research and therefore less influenced by researcher prompting or social desirability biases. Vlogs are particularly valuable because they often chronicle routine daily life, capturing moments when personal and professional spheres intersect. In addition, because these videos remain accessible over time, they function as a kind of longitudinal archive of creators' work practices, enabling a richer understanding of how boundary management unfolds. Those videos could include "first-person expression of detailed expositions and even confessions" (Kozinets, 2020, p.248).

Participants were selected on the basis that they self-identified as full-time content creators on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram, ensuring that online content creation constituted their primary occupation rather than a side activity. To capture everyday routines and the interplay between work and nonwork domains, only creators who had published English-language vlogs explicitly documenting "day in the life" or "week in the life" experiences were included. In addition, the sample focused on lifestyle-oriented niches—such as beauty, fashion, food, home routines, or general lifestyle—rather than instructional or entrepreneurial content such as online courses or coaching services. This focus reflected the study's interest in creators whose personal lives form a core part of their professional output, providing a rich context for examining the work–nonwork interface.

In total, 53 vlogs from 43 creators were sampled and analysed. Each vlog was systematically catalogued to capture key attributes, including types of activities performed, physical and digital settings, interactions with others, temporal structure, and narrative framings. Detailed analytic memos were generated to capture emerging patterns and reflections on how work–nonwork boundaries were portrayed.

To supplement the observational material, six semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015) were conducted with selected creators. These interviews were designed to probe more deeply into participants' interpretations, motivations, and reflections, providing insight into the private reasoning and emotions that might not be visible in the public-facing vlogs. Interviewees were purposively sampled (Palinkas et al., 2015) from the vlog dataset to ensure variation in niche, audience size, and career stage. Interviews were conducted via video call and were recorded and transcribed with participants' consent.

The two-stage process (i.e., integrating observational data with interactive interviews) allowed the study to balance breadth and depth. Vlogs illuminated the visible, curated practices of boundary management, while interviews provided access to the underlying sensemaking processes. Together, these data sources offered a more holistic and nuanced understanding of how work–nonwork boundaries are enacted and negotiated in the creator economy.

4.3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis process followed an iterative, comparative approach informed by Charmaz's (2014) grounded, constructivist methods. This approach enabled us to explore how participants enacted and narrated their work–nonwork boundaries across digital platforms. All vlog data were first transcribed verbatim, translated where necessary, and manually checked for accuracy. Each video was then viewed repeatedly alongside its transcript to ensure familiarity with the material and to capture its temporal, spatial, and narrative dynamics. Scene-by-scene descriptions were documented in an Excel spreadsheet, detailing activities, settings, and interactions. At this initial stage, I distinguished between overtly work-related activities (such as filming, editing, emailing brands) and those typically framed as nonwork (such as cooking or spending time with family). These descriptive codes helped us immerse ourselves in the rhythms of participants' daily lives and provided a foundation for deeper analytic interpretation.

I then moved beyond surface descriptions to focus on how participants framed and performed the work–nonwork interface. Coding emphasised what participants were doing, how they were doing it, and how they narrated those actions. Particular attention was given to moments where activities blurred the line between personal and professional (for example, cooking a meal while narrating to camera), how participants positioned themselves (emphasising authenticity or professionalism), the spaces they used to film, and the techniques deployed to manage self-presentation (camera angles, staging, editing choices). I also noted decisions about what participants showed versus what they deliberately withheld.

Through constant comparison across participants, initial codes were iteratively refined: some clustered into broader patterns, others were split or dropped as new insights emerged. For instance, "adjusting appearance for filming," "tidying spaces," and "checking outfits" were combined under the category of self-representational labour, while "refusing to film family events" and "keeping off-camera time private" were grouped under withholding content. These categories illuminated how boundaries between work and nonwork were not simply blurred but actively curated and negotiated.

Memo-writing (Charmaz, 2014) played a central role throughout the analysis, allowing us to record reflections, emerging interpretations, and analytic questions. These memos became crucial for theorising the data. For example, early notes such as "cooking looks like leisure but requires representational effort" developed into the concept of a visibility-oriented labour filter. Similarly, repeated observations that creators kept some events off-camera crystallised into the concept of presented boundaries. I also documented the recurrent importance of temporal and spatial aspects, observing how homes, kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms repeatedly doubled as both personal and professional spaces. These notes later evolved into the theorisation of domestic space as a performance stage and informed my understanding of how visibility reorganises the work–nonwork boundary.

This iterative process of coding, constant comparison, and memo-writing ultimately generated two interconnected analytical concepts: the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries. Together, these concepts reveal how boundaries are constructed, blurred, and remade in online content creation. By combining vlog analysis with in-depth interviews, I was able to triangulate (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2021) the findings, enhance the credibility of my interpretations, and ground my work's contributions in extant scholarship on boundary practices in the digital world.

4.3.3 Research creditability

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 1999) of this research, I adopted a reflexive approach to both data and method, recognising the distinctive strengths and inherent limitations of netnography. Public-facing vlogs are not neutral or unmediated records of everyday life but deliberately edited, curated artefacts designed for audience consumption. Rather than treating these staged elements as distortions, I approached them as meaningful data, contextual traces that reveal how content creators actively perform and negotiate the boundaries between work and nonwork. This interpretive stance aligns with the constructionist orientation (Crotty, 1998) of the study and reflects a commitment to understanding not only what creators do but also how they present their activities to their audiences.

Credibility (Patton, 1999) was further enhanced through methodological triangulation. By combining detailed video analysis with semi-structured interviews, I was able to cross-check and enrich my interpretations. Whereas vlogs offered observable, curated practices, interviews provided a complementary window into participants' reflections, intentions, and justifications, enabling me to probe beneath surface representations. This triangulation strengthened the depth and robustness of the findings, allowing for a more nuanced account of the participants' work–nonwork interface.

Following Patton's (1999) argument that research credibility hinges on the alignment between methodological choices and empirical questions, this study ensured consistency between epistemology, methodology, and methods at every stage of the research process. Transparency was maintained through detailed documentation of sampling, coding, memo-writing, and analytic decisions, enabling the study to demonstrate both rigour and interpretive coherence.

4.4 Findings

Drawing on the analysis of participants' daily vlogs as full-time online content creators, I found that the boundary between work and nonwork is not merely blurred but actively constituted through practices of visibility. Central to this process is what I conceptualise as a visibility-oriented labour filter: the act of recording, or even anticipating audience perception, transforms everyday practices into forms of self-representational labour. Activities that might otherwise be considered routine or personal, such as cooking, tidying, or relaxing, become professionalised and staged as content, collapsing the distinction between private and public spheres.

The findings also reveal that visibility is a selective and negotiated process rather than an automatic condition. Participants enact what I term presented boundaries: deliberate acts of selecting, framing, and withholding that determine which aspects of life pass through the filter and which remain off-stage. These boundaries do not mark a fixed line between work and nonwork domains; rather, they reflect a curated and ongoing negotiation shaped by creators' attempts to balance privacy protection with audience expectations and platform demands. Taken together, the visibility filter and presented boundaries form a dialectical process: while the filter extends the scope of what can become labour, boundary practices contain and curate that expansion, establishing a dynamic equilibrium between exposure and concealment.

In the sections that follow, I unpack these dynamics in detail. I begin by showing how the presence of an audience activates labour and structures participants' experiences of productivity and time. I then examine how the visibility filter extends to personal activities and domestic spaces, transforming routines, relationships, and inner thoughts into production sites. Next, I trace how the filter reframes traditionally backstage work, such as editing, planning, and coordination, as representational performances and content. I also identify a "labour-adjacent" zone where activities that appear recreational, such as consuming others' content, remain entangled with platform labour. Finally, I describe how creators enact presented boundaries to gate the filter, perform boundary work as labour, and calibrate intimacy with audiences. Weaving these threads together, I show that boundaries in online content creation are neither simply segmented nor seamlessly integrated but are continually enacted as a representational practice shaped by the visibility orientation of platform work.

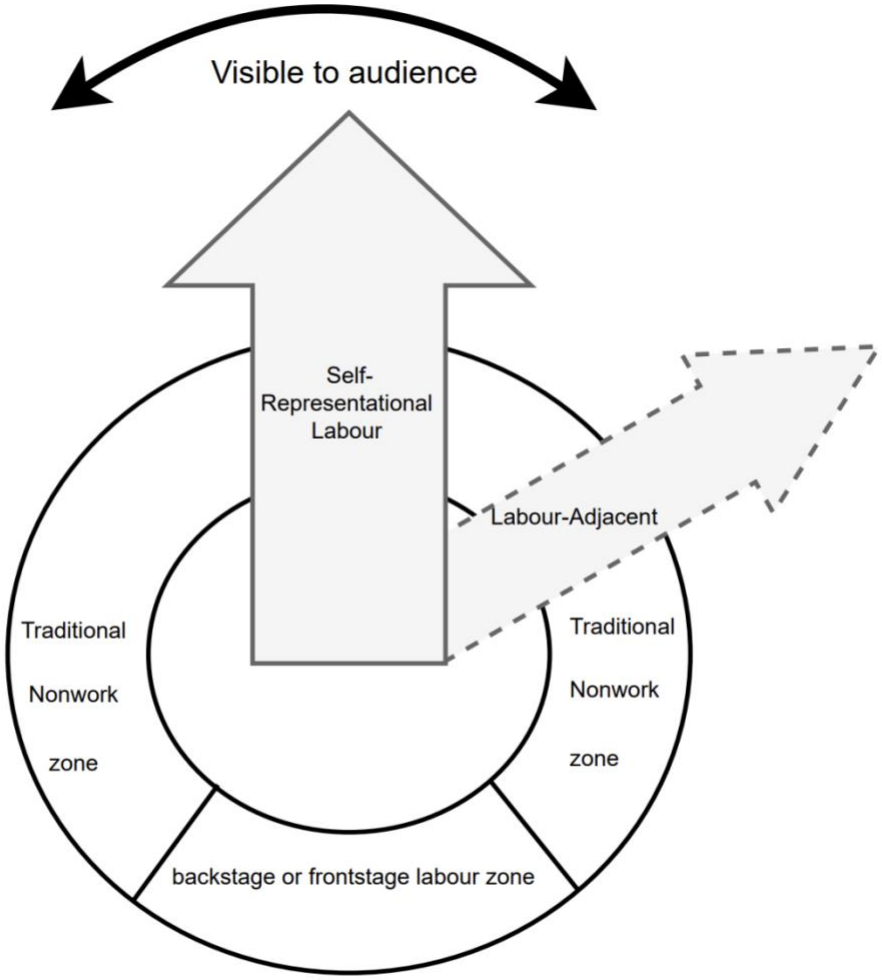


Figure 5. Work-nonwork Boundary Dynamics in Online Content Creation

Visibility-oriented labour filter

In full-time online content creation, turning on the camera functions as a critical threshold between work and nonwork life. This moment does not merely record what is happening; it redefines the activity itself through the lens of audience perception. As one participant put it:

> When I'm talking to the camera, like I'm very aware that I am talking to you guys, like there's no part of me that ever feels like I'm talking to myself… you guys can't respond to me. I can't hear your voice. I know that you're listening. I mean, I know that you guys will listen… this is just how I am and how I talk and interact.

I conceptualise this as a visibility-oriented labour filter: a mechanism that transforms any activity into self-representational labour when it is performed or even anticipated with an audience in mind. There is a process that creators are working in anticipation of being seen. In this context, labour emerges not at a fixed boundary, but through a shifting filter that activates when creators orient themselves toward potential audience view. I define self-representational labour as the ongoing work of curating, presenting, and sharing the self (and one's activities) for an audience. Through this filter, everyday practices, such as getting dressed, cooking meals, or tidying a bedroom are reframed as potential content and acquire a dual status: they remain personal activities yet are simultaneously reframed as professional labour because of their representational potential.

In participants' vlogs, this transformation was evident across different stages of production. Before filming, creators planned their appearance, lighting, and tone, changing clothes or makeup to enhance on-screen presentation and adjust camera angles or backgrounds for aesthetic effect. After filming, they reviewed footage, edited scenes, and restructured narratives to optimise audience reception. In this way, self-representational labour extended both before and after the camera was switched on.

Taken together, these practices reveal that visibility itself reorganises the boundaries of labour. For my participants, activities once understood as private or nonwork were absorbed into professional practice through their orientation toward an audience. This filter revealed that creators continually navigate between what to reveal and what to withhold, reflecting blurred and dynamic boundaries between work and nonwork in digital content creation. The act of drawing these lines, what I later call presented boundaries, shows that boundaries are not erased, but actively reworked through visibility.

Audience as the activating presence

The visibility-oriented labour filter is sustained by the real-and-imagined presence of audience, including those who remain silent on digital platforms. As Lynette Adkins explained: “Even if you don’t ever comment or engage, just you even viewing my videos, like you guys are literally the reason why I’m here." (p6-v2) This statement reflects two dynamics central to the visibility-oriented labour filter. First, it shows constitutive audience awareness. The audience is not only a recipient at the end of production but an imagined presence that shapes decisions about what is filmed, how it is framed, and when it is shared. Even passive viewers (i.e., just viewing) provide validation and orienting force, prompting creators to prepare and perform everyday life as if it were being watched. Second, it shows the internalised gaze and anticipatory labour. Under this orientation, participants engage in practices such as aesthetic adjustments, mood regulation, and spatial staging not for themselves alone but in anticipation of how these scenes will be received by the audience.

Through this dynamic, activities acquire a double status: they remain part of everyday life while simultaneously being curated for professional outcomes. Therefore, the filter reshapes both experience (how an activity is lived) and meaning (what the activity counts as), redrawing the work-nonwork boundary not simply along spatial or temporal lines but at the level of representational intent.

In sum, the visibility-oriented labour filter operates because an audience – felt, anticipated, and often unseen – activates labour across work and nonwork spectrum. It renders mundane practices as content, pulls preparatory and reflexive work into the ambit of labour, and makes boundary management a continuous practice of deciding what to stage, how to stage it, and what to keep off-stage. These decisions not only sustain self-representational labour but also emphasises that boundaries are never erases, only redrawn, which is a selective curation of visibility that becomes salient in the ‘presented boundaries’ I analyse later.

Transforming Personal Activities into Self-Representational Labour

I identified four recurring aspects of personal life that many participants filmed and shared in their vlogs, namely daily routines, appearances and surroundings, personal relationships, inner thoughts and reflections, and incidental events. When creators bring these elements of their personal lives into their content, the visibility-oriented labour filter is activated, transforming them into self-representational labour. This involves not only moments of sharing, but deliberate acts of performing and constructing an edited version of the self for an imagined audience. Creators engage in reflexive storytelling, using conversational tones to invite audiences into their inner world, while consciously shaping how that world is seen.

Routines, on-camera appearances and surroundings featured prominently. Everyday practices, such as skincare routines, outfit selection, personal grooming, feeding pets, watering plants, doing laundry, or exercising, were reframed as scenes worth filming. For example, Jaz Turner apologised to the camera while walking outside: “So sorry, I'm trying to look presentable (p19-2).” Breana Cooney narrated her appearance after a massage: “My makeup is also, like, all smeared off my face because my face was like, pushed up in the little massage chair thing (p5-1).” These moments reveal the constant negotiation between authenticity and presentation. For some, makeup itself became a threshold condition for visibility. As Devon and Willo explained: “Once I have makeup on, I feel like I can be myself with the camera (p1-1).” Filming schedules were sometimes determined by whether they were wearing makeup, suggesting that feeling aesthetically ready can reorganise the temporal rhythms of personal life.

Personal relationships were another aspect often incorporated into content. Participants often filmed interactions with their partners, family members, or friends, capturing both intentional conversations and incidental background presence. For example, Shamar Shantel filmed a grocery shopping with her partner, who gave nutritional advice directly to the audience:

> [Partner]: “She would rather the flavour of things compared to what... she actually needs to achieve her game.” [Participant]: “Okay, tell them what to look for when you're buying stuff... so when you're buying protein, right? You want to look for something that the calories... match the protein.” (p7-1)

Such interpersonal exchanges, while grounded in ordinary couple life, were reframed as co-performances for an audience. The intimate dialogue was transformed into consumable performance. In addition, many participants also shared their inner thoughts and reflections, including emotion, mood, or commentary. For example, Breana Cooney described the feeling of an early start: “It's incredible just how amazing it feels to be up so early. Feels so good and so accomplished (p5-1).” Similarly, personal events and incidental moments, even those seemingly minor, were often folded into content. For example, Love Reesie gave a casual updated on her home: “Quick update on the kitchen. I added some plants, some more plants to make it… more colourful in here, so it looks really good. Some of these are real. Some of these are fake (p2-1).” Shamar Shantel voiced frustration while unpacking new clothes at home: “no, say you're lying. Whoa, why? Just open the sock and it's only one pair of white, it's literally only one sock for the white sock. Where's the rest?” (p7-1). While these moments often appeared conversational, they were mediated by an awareness of audience perception, which indicates that the anticipatory presence of the audience shaping even the minor incidental events.

Participants’ reflections revealed that the visibility-oriented labour filter not only transformed discrete activities into content but also reshaped their temporal experience of work. In online content creator context, labour was described as intangible and dispersed across the day, with its nature of labour hard to define. As Devon and Willo explained:

> I think we've all kind of been raised to be that way, and so when you feel like you're not checking enough things off your to-do list in one day, or you're not spending enough time, quote, unquote, working, you start to feel like you're not doing enough. (p1-1)

Here, productivity is judged against traditional norms of visible outcome and quantifiable task completion. Yet much of creators' labour, such as filming a vlog of their daily life and engaging in social media to monitor the trends, occurs in moments that may look like those leisure activities and give a sense of 'not working'. Work was experienced as a dispersed, intangible activity tied to visibility. Labour no longer looked like task completion at a desk, but unfolded across the day in fragments that might, or might not, become content.

For others, the effect of visibility was to collapse the traditional distinction between leisure and labour, redefining social and personal activities as integral to professional product:

> I'm gonna now go and get my nails done with my friend…then I might be getting dinner with someone a little bit later, and I'm probably gonna vlog that… my life is not me sitting behind a desk making content all day. My Content is me. So therefore, my life, my work, is me being out and enjoying life, which is a huge, huge again shift for me in terms of how I've seen work in the past. (p6-1)

This redefinition indicates a fundamental shift in the work-nonwork interface: activities are not only shared with an audience but are approached with audience perception in mind as they happen. The visibility-oriented filter transforms moments of leisure into commercialised, performative events, blurring the boundary between personal and professional domains. Similarly, some participants reflected on how their perception of 'legitimate work' shifted as they adapted to full-time online content creation. For them, social media that are culturally considered as leisure, becomes recategorized as central to professional activity. As Breana Cooney recognises a 'fine line' between personal and professional engagement on these

platforms, a line continually redrawn by the act of making these activities visible and purposeful for an audience:

> I remember the first day that I was like really working for myself… And I was like on social media all day long, and I was just like… what did I do today… you posted so much, and you created so much, and you answered so many emails... that now qualify as your work... so many people look at social media as personally just personal whereas like I look at it as my job... it can feel like a fine line (p5-v1)

In addition to transforming personal activities, the visibility-oriented labour filter also reshaped domestic spaces. When it landed on participants' everyday lives, it not only reframed routines, relationships, and reflections as content, but also transformed the home itself into a content stage. Bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms were no longer only private spaces of rest and domesticity; they also functioned as professional production sites and performance backdrops. These spaces were filmed, aestheticized, and curated for audience, turning the home into a diffused, public workplace. For example, the kitchen became simultaneously a site of cooking and a set for food-related content; the bedroom doubled as a place of rest and a visually crafted scene for filming; even casual corners of the living room became backdrops for storytelling or product placement. In this way, the home was not simply a physical location but a performative and commercial space, continually reshaped through self-representational labour.

These examples demonstrate how creators' identities, routines, relationships, and emotional lives are continually folded into their content, turning self-presentation into a form of labour. In terms of our model (Figure 3), the visibility-oriented labour filter lands on the personal domain, reframing it as a self-representational labour. This filter redraws the line between private and professional life. These boundaries remain fluid and dynamic, shifting with each decision to share, curate, or withhold moments from the audience.

Transforming backstage work into representational work

The visibility-oriented labour filter also reshapes traditionally work-related tasks by layering them with performativity. Content production requires a wide range of backstage activities, such as filming, editing, scripting, email management, brand coordination, and audience engagement through comments, which are essential to maintaining creators' online presence but are usually carried out off-camera. While much of this labour remains invisible in the final product, participants' vlogs occasionally offer glimpses of this backstage labour including brief references or visual cues. For example, Shamar Shantel narrated the work of setting up her filming environment:

> I basically cleared out my area over there. I set up my light, and I just have the area for my try on haul. I move my desk over in the room. I have stuff everywhere, but it's clean… my issue is I don't feel like this is enough light, but I don't have any other sources of light...I'm probably gonna find a way to, like, hook them up to create like, so like a bounce off up here on me. (p7-1)

Such moments illustrate how content-production tasks become doubled as representational work: the creator is both doing the task and performing the doing of it. Rather than remaining behind the scenes, activities such as setting up equipment, brainstorming, or editing are selectively staged and narrated, transforming functional labour into content for the audience.

Across the vlogs, I observed participants deliberately re-positioning cameras to capture 'working' moments, adjusting lighting and angles to produce 'productive vibes', and aestheticizing their work environments. These practices reveal an important layer of invisible labour involved in constructing the appearance of work: curating the scene, organising the environment, and preparing for filming. This dual orientation, toward both task completion and audience perception, means that backstage labour is reconstituted as frontstage performance.

Sponsorship negotiations, brand collaborations, and editing process, when made visible, are carefully scripted, aestheticized, and integrated into content to convey both professionalism and authenticity. This work often adopts an informal and personal time, masking its labour nature while still signalling that the creator is 'at work'. In this way, the visibility-oriented labour filter produces a distinctive form of labour in which tasks become recognisable as labour to the audience because they are framed and performed as such.

Several participants described fluid transitions across this filter, moving between backstage and frontstage as part of a single workflow. One explained how she generated ideas off-camera (backstage), then switched on the camera to share her creative process with audience (frontstage), before returning backstage to edit the footage (backstage). It shows that content-related labour can be doubled with performative elements that fold backstage practices into the representational domain.

Labour-Adjacent Zone

In addition to activities directly transformed by visibility, I observed what can be described as a labour-adjacent zone: moments that are not actively performed for the audience but remain tethered to content creation. These practices are neither fully 'nonwork' nor explicitly self-representational labour, but they exist in close proximity to it, sustaining and feeding the visibility-oriented labour filter.

Lynette Adkins reflected on the blurred relationship between daily life and work:

> The biggest shift for me lately has been in realizing that my life is my content so that I can focus my life on me... instead of forming my life around making content... I might be getting dinner with someone a little bit later and I'm probably gonna Vlog that... my life is not me sitting behind a desk making content all day. My content is me (p6-v1).

This statement reveals that for some creators, content creation is no longer a task or work added onto life but interwoven with it. Life itself becomes the foundation of labour, where even off-camera experiences may hold future value as potential content.

Other participants described habits fall within this adjacent space, such as watching others' content while eating or catching up with favourite YouTubers in the morning. For example, "I'm gonna try to turn on a YouTube video, and just watch a little something and then enjoy my dinner" (p5-v2); "I now spend the first few minutes of the morning or the first 10–15 minutes of the morning catching up on my favourite Youtubers" (p18-v5). While these moments appeared recreational, they reveal a deeper entanglement with content creation. Consuming others' content provides inspiration, shapes creators' own aesthetic choices and keeps them attuned to audience trends and expectations.

I interpret this labour-adjacent zone as part of the ecology of self-representational labour. Unlike activities captured directly by the visibility-oriented labour filter, these moments occur outside the audience's gaze. Yet they remain influenced by it, oriented toward the possibility of becoming content or shaping future representational labour. This zone shows that creators' work is not limited to what is staged or performed. Rather, it diffuses into the rhythms of everyday life, where even private, unseen practices are entangled with the demands of future content production.

Presented Boundaries: Curating Visibility

While the visibility-oriented labour filter explains how everyday activities can be transformed into self-representational labour, my analysis also shows that participants actively limit its reach. They exercise continual judgement over what passes through this filter, establishing what I term a presented boundary which refers to the way creators consciously craft and navigate the boundary itself through decisions about what to share, how to share it, and when to withhold. I identified three functions of presented boundary in online content

creation content, namely gate the filter, reframe the boundary as labour, and calibrate intimacy. These three functions together show how participants enact performed lines between work and nonwork in digital performative labour context.

Gate the filter

Presented boundaries function as gates that regulate what enters visibility and what remains off-stage. Rather than a fixed divide, they are shifting thresholds that determine which personal moments can be transformed into content. For creators, the decisions such as choosing whether to film or post are central to their lived experience. It mediates tensions between authenticity and privacy, while also shaping the meaning of 'personal' in their work. For audiences, the presented boundary sets the terms of intimacy: they are invited into selected aspects of a creator's life while being excluded from others. Thus, the presented boundary shows that visibility is selective, negotiated and actively performed, emphasising the fact that the work-nonwork boundary in online content creation is not only blurred, but curated as part of the labour process itself. For example, Kaya reflected this process in a seemingly mundane moments of decision-making, asking her partner before showing her notes to the camera: "It's just show them my list. It's all scribbled, and Darren made a list that is ineligible. Is that the word ineligible... [ask her partner] Is there anything private on there? (p9-1). This small interaction demonstrates how even routine content decisions are filtered through ongoing judgements about what can be made visible and what remain private.

Reframe the boundary as labour

Presented boundaries are not only gates; they are labour practices themselves. The act of choosing, explaining, and editing boundaries requires time, energy, and strategic consideration. Withholding is also a sort of labour that indicates moments may be filmed, edited

and ultimately discarded in the editing process. In this way, boundary-drawing itself is folded into the ecology of labour.

Calibrate intimacy

Presented boundaries operate as a calibration tool by controlling the degree of intimacy offered to audience. Some limits are drawn to protect family members' or partners' preferences not to appear on cameras. For example, Shamar Shantel made this explicit when ending a vlog before a family visit: "I'm gonna wrap up the vlog here, because tomorrow we're going to spend time with Pico's grandparents, and I'm not gonna vlog that (p7-1)." In this instance, the participant articulates the boundary that was drawn to protect family privacy, even though the activity itself could have been staged for content. This public meta-communication of the boundary both reassures the audience of continued authenticity and signals where intimacy stops.

However, while boundaries offer creators control, they also expose them to new vulnerabilities. One participant reflected on how sharing personal life reshaped dating experiences: "Dating gets weird when someone can watch snippets of your life online... one Google search on my name leads to opportunists, clout chasers" (p16-v1). This illustrates how the constant presence of content online can expose creators to unwanted attention, making it challenging to maintain personal boundaries and privacy. What was once a private moment, such as a date or a personal interaction, can now be shared and potentially consumed by an audience. This shift in the work-nonwork boundary creates emotional and psychological challenges as creators balance their desire for personal privacy with the demands of public sharing.

Therefore, presented boundaries reveal that in platform work, boundaries are not simply blurred or crossed; they are presented. Visibility itself becomes a boundary dimension, and boundary management is accomplished through representational choices, including staging,

narration, and withhold, rather than only through time, place, or role separation alone. Presented boundaries act as the containing counterforce to the visibility-oriented labour filter: while the filter expands what could become labour; presented boundaries curate what will become labour.

4.5 Discussion

This study set out to examine how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators manage and experience the interface between work and nonwork, with the aim of extending boundary theory into a new, platform-mediated context. By analysing vlogs and interviews through a netnographic approach, I identified two interrelated mechanisms (i.e., the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries) that together illuminate how creators navigate, enact, and curate their work–nonwork boundaries. These findings enrich the theoretical landscape introduced in the literature review by challenging and extending the assumptions underpinning both boundary theory and research on platform work.

First, this study advance boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Kossek et al., 2012) by showing that, in digital platform contexts, boundaries are not only spatial, temporal, emotional, and cognitive but also representational. Much of the boundary literature, even when it accounts for technology's role (Adisa et al., 2017; Kossek, 2021), continues to view work and nonwork as domains that can be segmented or integrated depending on individual preferences and strategies. By contrast, lifestyle-based online content creators must transform personal routines into public content, meaning that the boundary itself becomes a site of labour. The visibility-oriented labour filter I identify explains how audience presence, whether actual or anticipated, extends the reach of work into domestic and private spaces. In doing so, this study moves the literature beyond the segmentation–integration continuum toward a more dynamic, performative model of boundary work.

Second, this work complements and extends existing research on platform work (Schmidt, 2017; Vallas & Schor, 2020; Warren, 2021). Whereas prior scholarship has focused on app-based gig work such as ride-hailing or food delivery (Dorschel, 2022; Adisa et al., 2017), the findings show that online content creation represents a distinctive form of platform labour in which personal life becomes a professional product. This resonates with recent calls to examine how platform-mediated work erodes traditional spatio-temporal boundaries (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021) but goes further by demonstrating how these blurred boundaries are actively curated. In this sense, lifestyle creators are not simply passive recipients of algorithmic control; they are also active boundary workers who construct, gate, and manage what aspects of their lives pass through the visibility filter.

This insight also connects with research on emotional labour. Emotional labour scholarship shows how workers regulate feelings and expressions when interacting with others (Hochschild, 2002). In such context, managing emotions or appearance usually along with the performance of a job rather than defining the job itself. By contrast, in lifestyle-based online content creation, the management of visibility becomes the labour process itself. The creation, selection, and presentation of personal experiences for an audience form the core mechanism through which value is produced.

Third, the findings offer a way to integrate Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective with boundary theory. Goffman highlights how individuals offer an "edited version" of themselves in social interactions, curating impressions for their audience. In the context of online content creation, this self-presentation becomes both the medium and the product of work. The concept of presented boundaries captures this duality: creators perform boundary work not only to manage their private lives but also to maintain an audience-ready persona. This extends Goffman's insights to digital platform labour, showing that impression

management is not just an interpersonal activity, but a form of ongoing economic production embedded in algorithmic systems.

Finally, the presented findings speak to the diversity within the platform economy emphasised by scholars such as Schor et al. (2020) and Schmidt (2017). The everyday practices I observed illustrate how workers in this sector manage their own hybrid forms of labour differently from workers in more transactional platform work. By foregrounding lifestyle-based creators, I demonstrate that the future of platform labour research must attend to the specific occupational contexts and cultures shaping how boundaries are lived, negotiated, and performed. This study thus answers recent calls to situate boundary research in underexplored work settings (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021) and to expand understandings of the creator economy as a distinctive and theoretically generative domain of digital work (Jorge et al., 2022; Warren, 2021).

Together, these contributions position the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries as new conceptual tools for understanding how boundaries are enacted in nonstandard work. They also invite scholars to rethink assumptions about where work ends and personal life begins, especially in contexts where self-representation, audience management, and algorithmic visibility are core aspects of production.

Building on these findings, future research could further explore how visibility, audience interaction, and algorithmic infrastructures reshape the work–nonwork interface across different types of platform labour. While this study focused on lifestyle-based creators, other niches, such as instructional content, live streaming, or high-skill freelancing, may involve different configurations of the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries. Comparative studies across platforms and occupational niches (as called for by Schor et al., 2020; Schmidt, 2017) could clarify how boundary dynamics vary by business model, algorithmic governance, or monetisation strategies. Longitudinal research could also

examine how these boundaries evolve over time as creators' careers mature or as platforms change their rules, echoing calls to address the temporal dimension of boundary work (Kossek, 2021). Finally, future work might extend Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective by examining not only how creators present themselves but also how audiences interpret and respond to those presentations, thereby adding a relational dimension to our understanding of boundary work in digital spaces. Taken together, these avenues would advance scholarship on boundary theory, platform labour, and the creator economy, while offering a richer and more dynamic account of how work and nonwork boundaries are continually reshaped in the contemporary digital world.

4.6 Limitations and practical implications

This study has its limitations that shape the scope of its findings. First, the focus on English-speaking, lifestyle-based online content creators limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other niches, platforms, or cultural contexts. Content creators in gaming, education or non-English settings may experience and manage work-nonwork boundaries differently. Future research could compare across genres, geographic regions, or cultural contexts to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how boundary work varies across the broader creator economy.

Second, the primary dataset of this study consists of publicly performed and curated vlogs, supplemented by a small number of interviews. These data capture how creators choose to represent their work-nonwork interface rather than providing direct access to their private experiences. However, this curated nature of the data is itself analytically meaningful, as self-presentation is a central mechanism of platform-based work. Future research could integrate additional data sources to explore less-visible practices and track how boundary work evolves over time.

Despite these limitations, the study offers several practical implications for individual creators, platform designers, and organisations supporting digital labour. For creators, recognising the mechanisms of the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries can help them more intentionally navigate the demands of platform work. This awareness may empower creators to set clearer limits, manage self-presentation strategically, and develop practices that protect their privacy, wellbeing, and creative autonomy. For platforms, the findings highlight the importance of providing features or affordances that enable creators to manage visibility such as tools to separate public and private content. For support organisations, agencies, or policymakers, the study underscores the need for resources and training on digital boundary management, mental health support, and sustainable work practices.

More broadly, this research suggests that boundaries in platform-mediated work should be understood not only as constraints but also as skills: boundary work is itself a form of labour that creators must perform to remain viable and healthy in the creator economy. By identifying and theorising these processes, this study offers a framework that can inform interventions designed to help online content creators and other digital workers maintain more sustainable careers in increasingly blurred work–nonwork environments.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate how full-time lifestyle-based online content creators experience and negotiate the interface between work and nonwork. Building on boundary theory and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, it examined how boundaries are enacted in a platform-mediated, highly visible form of work where personal life itself becomes part of the professional product. Using a qualitative netnography of vlogs and interviews, I

explored the everyday practices and narrative strategies through which creators organise, manage, and perform their work and nonwork lives.

The findings reveal that the work–nonwork interface for lifestyle creators is not a static line to be crossed but a dynamic and continually negotiated process. I conceptualised this process through two interrelated mechanisms: the visibility-oriented labour filter, which extends the scope of what counts as work by transforming everyday activities into self-representational labour; and presented boundaries, deliberate acts of selection, framing, and withholding that moderate the reach of this filter. Together, these mechanisms show how creators balance the demands of visibility, platform algorithms, and audience expectations with their own needs for privacy, autonomy, and authenticity.

This chapter advances scholarship on work–nonwork boundaries by moving beyond the segmentation–integration binary and highlighting visibility and performativity as central dynamics of boundary construction in digital labour. It also extends boundary theory by demonstrating that in platform-mediated contexts, the boundary itself becomes a form of labour, enacted not only in time and space but also in self-representation and audience management. By integrating boundary theory with Goffman's notion of self-presentation, the chapter offers a nuanced framework for understanding how individuals navigate and curate their working lives when their personal lives are simultaneously their professional content.

Taken together, the insights presented in this chapter enrich our understanding of career and boundary dynamics in the creator economy and, more broadly, in other emerging forms of platform-mediated work. In the next chapter, the focus shifts to discussing the implications of these findings for career scholarship, boundary theory, and platform work research, outlining how this study contributes to theorising the future of work and identifying key directions for future inquiry.

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Thesis summary

This thesis set out to investigate how work and careers are being reshaped in the context of digital platforms, examining the theoretical, transitional, and experiential dimensions of platform-mediated labour. As digital technologies have enabled the continued growth of platform-based work (McDonnell et al., 2021), emerging forms such as service-based gig work and other types of platform labour (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Schmidt, 2017) are increasingly challenging long-standing assumptions about stability (Huws et al., 2018; Sharma, 2020), boundaries (Kost et al., 2020; Warren, 2021), and identity in work and careers (Bellesia et al., 2019; Josserand & Kaine, 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2018; Idowu & Elbanna, 2021). Whereas traditional career models emphasise linear progression (Akkermans et al., 2024), stable employment, and separations between work and personal life, platform-based labour often operates with fluid schedules (Laursen et al., 2021), public visibility, and precarious income streams (Prassl, 2018). These shifts call for a deeper understanding of how work is theorised, entered, and lived in digitally enabled contexts. Against this backdrop, the thesis brings together three interrelated studies to explore the conceptual foundations, lived experiences, and everyday practices of individuals engaged in platform work.

In this chapter, I will bring the three studies of the thesis together into a integrated narrative by synthesising them to show how they offer a multi-level account of how platform work is theorised, entered, and lived. This chapter also shows the overarching contributions to theory, method, and practice by reflecting on how these studies collectively advance understanding of digital platform labour, career paths, and boundary dynamics.

The first contribution of this thesis lies in its integrative multi-level approach. By combining a systematic literature review (Briner & Denyer, 2012), narrative inquiry

(Riessman, 2008), and netnography (Kozinets, 2020), the research moves across three levels of analysis: the level of scholarship itself, the level of individual career transitions, and the level of day-to-day boundary practices. This approach allows the thesis to examine how platform-mediated work is both conceptualised in theory and experienced in practice. By linking broader theoretical understanding to personal narratives and everyday routines, it demonstrates how digital platform enabled work are reflected, reshaped, and sometimes contested in workers' own stories. Rather than treating theory, career, and daily practice as separate domains, the thesis treats them as interconnected layers of a broader ecosystem of digital platform work.

The systematic review at the conceptual level traces how management scholarship has approached the gig economy over time, identifying key patterns, narratives, and assumptions that shape the field. The narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) at the transitional level examines how individuals navigate unconventional pathways into platform work, focusing on the self-narratives they construct to make sense of their moves from traditional jobs to online content creation. Finally, the netnography (Kozinets, 2020) of the experiential level investigates how lifestyle content creators manage their work–nonwork boundaries on a daily basis, theorising mechanisms such as the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries. Each study builds on the previous one, creating a cumulative picture of how digital platforms influence not only employment arrangement but also meaning and boundary-making.

Taken together, this thesis examines two distinct forms of platform-mediated work: gig work and online content creation. Study 1 reviews how gig work has been theorised in existing literature, which has predominantly focused on forms of labour characterised by algorithmic management and limited worker discretion. In contrast, Studies 2 and 3 investigate the lived experiences of individuals engaged in online content creation, a form of platform work centred on production and circulation of digital content and shaped by audience engagement and

visibility. While both forms of work share core features of platform mediation and economic uncertainty, they differ in important ways. Gig work typically involves algorithmic intervention and task-based compensation, whereas content creation involves greater autonomy, self-directed labour, and revenue models based on audience monetisation such as advertising, sponsorships, and subscriptions (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). By examining both the theorisation of gig work and the lived experiences of content creators, this thesis advances understanding of platform-mediated labour as a heterogeneous phenomenon, emphasising how different forms of platform work generate distinct career trajectories and work-nonwork experiences.

These studies also build a more comprehensive picture of how platform work unsettles established career models (Akkermans et al., 2024) and boundary frameworks (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000). They show that digital labour cannot be understood solely through static categories or binary distinctions such as work versus nonwork or online versus offline. Instead, platform work is dynamic, performative, and relational, shaped by audiences, algorithms, and workers' own acts of curation and storytelling. By weaving together theoretical analysis, career narratives, and lived practices, the thesis offers new insights into the dynamics of work and life in the digital age. It underscores the need to view platform-mediated labour not simply as a new type of job but as a transformative context where the career experiences, boundaries of work, and everyday life are constantly negotiated.

5.1.1 Summary of the first study

The first study addressed the level of scholarship itself, systematically reviewing management literature on the gig economy to trace how research and theorising have evolved over time. Guided by storytelling (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) and script theory (Tomkins, 1978) as analytical lenses, the study identified three interrelated "acts" in the development of

gig economy research. Act 1 captured the early period of scholarship, in which studies concentrated on mapping the nature of gig work—measuring the size of its workforce (Hong, 2015; Torpey & Hogan, 2016; Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018), classifying its diverse forms (Abraham et al., 2018; Heeks, 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2017), and interrogating the distinctive features of platform-mediated labour (Harris & Krueger, 2015; Healy et al., 2017; Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Wu et al., 2019). This initial act reflected a descriptive phase, where scholars sought to understand the contours of a rapidly emerging labour market phenomenon.

Act 2 revealed a shift toward a more horizontal perspective, highlighting the heterogeneity of platforms, workers, and employment arrangements (Bucher et al., 2021; Dunn, 2020; Jabagi et al., 2019; McDonnell et al., 2021). This act moved beyond treating the gig economy as a monolith and instead unpacked how these differences shape collective organising (Gandini, 2018; Poon, 2019; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2017b), HRM practices (Duggan et al., 2019; Kost et al., 2020; McDonnell et al., 2021), and individual work experiences (Cameron, 2022; Josserand & Kaine, 2019). By doing so, the literature began to address diversity within platform work itself, drawing attention to how varying forms of gig work create distinct challenges and opportunities for both workers and organisations.

Act 3 moved vertically to situate gig economy research within broader social, political, and institutional contexts (Veen et al., 2020; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). This act demonstrated how comparative, relational, and contextual approaches deepen our understanding of platform labour. Rather than focusing solely on individual workers or platforms, this phase emphasised the importance of analysing structural conditions, regulatory environments (Cini et al., 2021; Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021), and cultural differences that shape the development and impact of the gig economy (Anwar & Graham, 2021; Myhill et al., 2021; Wei & Thomas, 2021). In this way, Act 3 expanded the theoretical lens to encompass the wider forces influencing platform-mediated work.

Across these three acts, the study also identified embedded "scripts" that reveal how theorising has shifted from description and classification toward refinement, integration, and contextualisation. In Act 1, the script centred on applying and adapting existing concepts to a new phenomenon. In Act 2, it shifted toward refining and extending constructs while expanding levels of analysis beyond the individual and single-platform lens. In Act 3, the script evolved into contextualising and problematising assumptions, opening the way for multi-level, comparative, and politically informed theorising. Taken together, these findings demonstrate how management scholarship on the gig economy has matured and diversified over time.

This first study therefore not only maps the intellectual terrain of gig economy research but also reveals the evolving theorising craft underpinning it. It provides a meta-level reflection on the craft of theorising itself and offer a roadmap for scholars studying non-standard or emerging forms of work, demonstrating how storytelling and script theory can be used to unpack the evolution of academic fields.

5.1.2 Summary of the second study

The second study shifted from the level of scholarship to the level of individual experience, exploring how workers themselves navigate unconventional transitions into platform labour. Focusing on the underexplored phenomenon of full-time online content creation (OCC), this study examined how individuals move from secure, traditional employment into precarious and public-facing platform work. Rather than viewing this as a simple occupational change, the study treated these shifts as complex processes occurring at the intersection of personal narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998), contemporary new career era (Chudzikowski, 2012), and structural precarity of platform work (Ashman et al., 2018). In doing so, it shed light on a form of digital labour that is still emerging yet increasingly central to the platform economy (Schmidt, 2017).

Using a narrative inquiry approach (Riessman, 2008), the study conceptualised participants' career transitions as layered narratives involving the enacting, authoring, and performing of their transition stories. This perspective allowed the analysis to move beyond static accounts of career change and instead capture the evolving, performative quality of how individuals narrate and live their transitions. By foregrounding narrative performance, the study was able to show how participants framed their move into OCC not merely as a job change but as a meaningful process of self-reinvention and transformation.

By focusing on lived experience and meaning-making processes, the study extends career scholarship beyond conventional and linear models of career development (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). It highlights how platform work transitions challenge long-standing assumptions of stability, linearity, and security that have traditionally shaped career theory. Participants actively constructed contextualised narratives to legitimise their unconventional moves, blending elements of aspiration, risk, and creativity. This finding provides a timely contribution to the literature on non-standard careers by illustrating how workers narrate their own agency within structural precarity, making sense of uncertainty and building coherence around their professional identities.

Finally, the study also offers methodological insights by positioning self-recorded video narratives not only as rich data sources (Neumayer et al., 2021)) but as sites of active meaning-making and performance. In doing so, it demonstrates how publicly performed narratives offer valuable windows into how individuals craft, rehearse, and communicate their career transitions in practice. This approach shows that narratives are not simply retrospective accounts but ongoing practices of meaning-making process, thereby broadening the methodological toolkit for studying non-standard work and digital labour transitions.

5.1.3 Summary of the third study

The third study turned to the micro-dynamics of everyday life, investigating how lifestyle content creators negotiate their work–nonwork boundaries in digital platform work that incorporates self-representation of personal activities. Using a qualitative netnography design (Kozinets, 2020) and triangulating (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2021) vlogs with semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2015), the study examined not only what creators do but how they stage, narrate, and withhold aspects of their routines. This approach revealed the deep entanglement of personal life and professional production in online content creation, where even mundane activities such as cooking, grooming, or spending time at home become potential content. By focusing on these everyday practices, the study provided a close-up view of boundary-making at the level of individual lived experience.

Through using comparative approach (Charmaz, 2014), I identify two interlinked analytical concepts emerged: the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries. The visibility-oriented labour filter captures how ordinary actions and domestic spaces are transformed into self-representational labour under the gaze of an audience. Presented boundaries, in turn, explain how creators deliberately select, frame, and withhold aspects of their lives to manage online presentation, privacy, and audience expectations. Together these concepts demonstrate that the boundary between work and nonwork is not merely blurred but actively performed through visibility. This performance involves constant decisions about what to show, how to show it, and where to draw the line.

The study further shows how visibility (Neumayer et al., 2021) reorganises domestic spaces, personal routines, and backstage tasks into performative labour. Kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms become both private and professional spaces; routines once considered leisure or self-care now double as content creation opportunities. This process highlights how visibility reaches beyond on-camera moments to encompass preparation, staging, and emotional

regulation, turning the home into a diffuse workplace. In this way, creators engage in ongoing boundary work to calibrate intimacy, protect personal identity, and balance authenticity with the demands of platform visibility.

By theorising boundaries as a representational practice rather than a static line, the third study extends boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) to better account for performative, platform-mediated forms of labour. It highlights how lifestyle content creators' work is constituted through visibility and self-presentation, and how the dynamics of audience perception shape the organisation of daily life. This study therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of boundary practices in the digital economy (Kossek, 2016), demonstrating how the everyday activities of platform workers that traditionally considered private or nonwork become integral to professional production. In doing so, it reframes the work–nonwork interface as an ongoing, negotiated, and highly contextual process that moves beyond the traditional segmentation–integration binary.

5.1.4 Integrating the Three Studies

Taken together, these three studies provide a comprehensive and multi-layered account of platform-mediated work. At the conceptual level, the thesis traces how management scholarship has theorised the gig economy over time, identifying the narrative "acts" and "scripts" through which the field has evolved. By doing so, it maps the development of gig economy research and uncovers the evolving theorising craft that underpins this body of work, which advances understanding of the work in the new world of work.

At the transitional level, the thesis examines how individuals navigate unconventional career pathways into the creator economy. It explores the lived experiences of moving from more stable, traditional employment into platform-mediated work (stable-to-precarious; Mussagulova et al., 2023), revealing how people interpret uncertainty, negotiate the transition, and reconstruct their sense of career security. This focus on transition provides a close-up view

of how workers make sense of and manage the risks and opportunities of digital platform labour, adding depth to existing understandings of career transition in an era of technological disruption.

At the experiential level, the thesis investigates how work and nonwork boundaries are enacted and performed in the everyday practices of online content creators. It theorises new mechanisms such as the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries to capture how personal life becomes part of professional production. By documenting the ways creators stage, curate, and withhold aspects of their lives, the thesis extends boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) into a representational dimension, showing how visibility itself becomes a form of labour. This approach illuminates not only the blurring of work and nonwork but also the ongoing, active boundary work required to sustain a public-facing career.

By bringing these three strands together, the thesis shows how platform labour is theorised, entered, and lived, offering a coherent account of the ways in which digital technologies, narratives, visibility, and self-representation are reshaping the meaning of work and careers in the contemporary era. Across all three studies, storytelling functions both as an analytical framework and as a contextual element, allowing to reveal how gig economy scholarship, career transitions, and boundary negotiations are communicated, constructed, legitimised, and interpreted through narrative forms. In doing so, the thesis provides a robust foundation for advancing theory-building on non-standard work and invites researchers to engage with platform-mediated labour as a dynamic, heterogeneous, and contextual embedded phenomenon.

5.2 Thesis theoretical contributions

This thesis makes several interrelated theoretical contributions to the fields of work, careers, and boundary studies by situating platform labour within a broader conceptual and

empirical frame. Across its three studies, the thesis advances understanding at three levels: how gig economy scholarship is theorised, how individuals experience and narrate unconventional career transitions, and how boundaries between work and nonwork are experienced in performative digital contexts. Together, these studies broaden the conceptual understanding of platform economy and carry established theories into new empirical settings.

At the level of management scholarship, the first study contributes by tracing how theorising about the gig economy has unfolded over time. Rather than offering another thematic synthesis of operational features, it places the field's intellectual development into motion, identifying three narrative "acts" (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) and their embedded "scripts" (Tomkins, 1978) through which scholars have progressively mapped, refined, and contextualised platform work. This focus on theorising craft makes explicit the processes by which constructs are introduced (e.g., job quality; Wood et al., 2018a), redefined (e.g., job quality; Goods et al., 2019), and problematised (e.g., Anwar & Graham, 2021), providing a roadmap for future research on non-standard work. By adopting storytelling and script theory as analytical lenses, the study also contributes methodologically, showing how narrative approaches can illuminate the evolution of scholarship itself.

At the level of career scholarship, the second study contributes by extending existing models of career transitions into non-traditional and precarious domains (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). It demonstrates how individuals moving from secure employment to online content creation enact, author, and perform their career transitions as layered narratives. This finding challenges normative, linear models of career development, which have historically focused on institutional or organisational transitions (Akkermans et al., 2024; Mussagulova et al., 2023). By foregrounding the meaning-making and narrative construction of these transitions (Lieblich et al., 1998), the study emphasises how workers in precarious, platform-mediated contexts (Ashman et al., 2018)

actively reconstruct purpose and legitimacy, thereby expanding our understanding of contemporary career pathways.

At the level of boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), the third study makes an important contribution by theorising the work–nonwork interface in lifestyle content creation. Building on and moving beyond traditional segmentation–integration frameworks (Bulger et al., 2007; Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2019), it introduces two interrelated concepts, namely the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries, to explain how boundaries are not merely blurred but actively performed. While boundary theory has traditionally conceptualised work-nonwork boundaries along spatial, temporal, and psychological dimensions, the findings suggest that platform-mediated labour introduces an additional representational dimension of boundary work.

This insight builds on prior research on emotional labour and self-presentation. Emotional labour research shows how workers regulate feelings and expressions as part of service work (Hochschild, 2002), while Goffman's dramaturgical framework conceptualises social interaction as the management of impressions before an audience (Goffman, 1959). However, the findings of this study suggest that in platform-mediated labour, the management of visibility itself becomes a central form of labour. In this context, individuals manage boundaries not only through the separation or integration of time, space, and roles, but also through decisions about what aspects of their personal lives are made visible to audiences. Through processes of selection, framing, and withholding enabled by the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries, creators actively manage how personal experiences are transformed into publicly visible content. In doing so, the study extends boundary theory by showing how digital platforms create a representational dimension of boundary work that operates alongside spatial, temporal, and psychological dimensions under conditions of hyper-visibility and precarity.

Together, these theoretical contributions establish a multi-level perspective on the evolving nature of work. They demonstrate that theorising platform labour requires attention not only to the structural and operational features of work but also to the narrative and performative processes through which it is conceptualised, entered, and lived. By making the theorising craft explicit, revealing how individuals experience unconventional career transitions, and reframing the work–nonwork interface as a representational practice, the thesis enriches ongoing debates about how technology, visibility, and precarity are reshaping the meaning of work and careers in contemporary world.

5.3 Thesis methodological implications

Alongside its theoretical contributions, this thesis also makes several methodological contributions to the study of work, careers, and boundaries in the platform economy. Across its three studies, the thesis deploys complementary qualitative methods: systematic literature review (Briner & Denyer, 2012; Denyer &Tranfield, 2009; Popay et al., 2006), narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008), and netnography (Kozinets, 2020). Each aligned to its respective research questions and grounded in a constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). Taken together, these approaches demonstrate how methodological pluralism can illuminate the conceptual, transitional, and experiential dimensions of platform-mediated labour.

The first study makes a methodological contribution by applying storytelling (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2016) and script theory (Tomkins, 1978) to a systematic literature review. By analysing articles not only for their topics but for their storyline “acts” and theorising moves, the study offers an innovative template for how reviews can trace the intellectual development of a domain. While systematic reviews in management research typically synthesise empirical findings or conceptual categories, this study demonstrates how narrative approaches can reveal the embedded theorising “scripts” of a research field. This approach can be helpful for

reviewing other fields of management research to reflect on the processes of theorising that shape emerging fields.

The second study extends the use of narrative inquiry to a novel empirical context. By analysing how individuals moving from stable employment to online content creation narrate their career transitions, the study shows the value of multi-stage narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), encompassing thematic, structural, and performative dimensions, to capture narrative construction and meaning-making processes. In doing so, it demonstrates how researchers can use publicly available, self-produced narratives to study sensitive and non-traditional career phenomena, reducing reliance on retrospective accounts and enhancing contextual richness.

The third study advances methodological practice through its application of qualitative netnography (Kozinets, 2020) to lifestyle content creators. Netnography allows for the analysis of naturally occurring online behaviours, enabling the researcher to observe how work–nonwork boundaries are lived and performed in real time (Kozinets, 2020). By combining pre-existing vlogs with semi-structured interviews, the study triangulates multiple data sources to produce a richer and more credible account of participants' experiences. This blended approach illustrates how researchers can access both the curated, public-facing performances of digital workers and their private reflections, thereby overcoming some of the limitations inherent in studying highly mediated environments.

Taken together, these methodological choices demonstrate the value of using complementary qualitative strategies to study platform-mediated labour at different levels of analysis. They show how researchers can innovate within established methods (i.e., systematic literature review, narrative inquiry, and ethnography) to address new empirical settings and theoretical questions. By foregrounding storytelling and narratives across its methods, the thesis also models how researchers can align their epistemological assumptions with their methodological designs to generate richer and more nuanced insights.

5.4 Thesis practical implications

Beyond its theoretical and methodological advances, this thesis offers several practical contributions for individuals, organisations, and platform actors navigating the changing nature of work. By examining the platform work at three interconnected levels, namely conceptual theorisation, career transitions, and everyday boundary negotiations, the thesis provides insights that can inform how workers, managers, career support providers, and platform intermediaries support more sustainable platform-based careers.

First, the findings of the systematic review highlight the fragmented and evolving nature of gig economy scholarship and show how different strands of theorising emphasise different risks, controls, and opportunities. For organisations, industry bodies, and career support providers, this emphasises the importance of avoiding 'one-size-fits-all' assumptions about platform work and instead tailoring support to different forms of platform labour. Practically, this could inform clearer guidance materials for workers entering platform work, more targeted training initiatives, and more nuanced organisational approaches to engaging platform workers across different contexts.

Second, the narrative inquiry into online content creators' career transitions provides lessons for individuals navigating unconventional and precarious career paths. By showing how creators enact, author, and perform their transitions, the study highlights the importance of narrative coherence and self-presentation as tools for making sense of uncertainty and legitimising a nonstandard career move. These insights can be valuable to career counsellors, educators, and organisations that support freelancers or digital entrepreneurs in developing sustainable careers within complex environments.

Third, the netnographic study of work–nonwork boundaries in lifestyle content creation provides practical guidance for managing the increasingly blurred lines between personal and professional life. By introducing the concepts of the visibility-oriented labour filter and

presented boundaries, the study offers a deep understanding of boundary dynamics that workers can use to manage privacy, protect well-being, and calibrate audience intimacy. These can be translated into concrete strategies for creators, such as intentionally setting 'shareable' versus 'non-shareable' zones, developing routines for content planning that protect recovery time, and calibrating audience intimacy to reduce the feeling of being 'always on'. For platforms, agencies, and organisations that support creators, the findings also point to the value of tools and practices that enable privacy management and sustainable work rhythms.

Taken together, these practical contributions help illuminate how individuals and organisations can respond to the challenges and opportunities of platform-mediated work. They show that success and well-being in this environment depend not only on technical skills or market positioning but also on managing narrative, visibility, and boundary dynamics. In doing so, the thesis provides a foundation for practical interventions through training initiatives, platform design, and support programmes that help workers navigate digital labour markets more sustainably.

5.5 Thesis limitations and Future Directions

While this thesis advances understanding of platform-mediated work across theorisation, career transitions, and boundary practices, it is not without limitations. Recognising these limitations is essential for situating the findings and identifying fruitful avenues for future research.

First, the scope of the systematic review in Study 1 was delimited by search terms, databases, and inclusion criteria. Although the review drew on a wide range of management journals and used an integrative and generative approach (Post et al., 2019), some relevant studies may have been excluded, particularly those outside mainstream management literature or in adjacent disciplines such as sociology, media studies, labour law, or labour studies (e.g.,

Stewart & Stanford, 2017). This scope inevitably shapes the narrative acts and theorising scripts identified. Future review could expand the search parameters, include non-English studies, or examine other theoretical traditions to develop an even more comprehensive map of how gig economy scholarship evolves.

Beyond widening the scope of reviews, future research could advance theory by incorporating more dynamic and contextual elements into the study of platform work. For instance, taking into accounts temporal factors such as worker strategies evolve over time (e.g., Cameron & Rahman, 2022; Laursen et al., 2021) could help capture the dynamic and complex nature of gig work (Prassl, 2018). Scholars could also examine how the same theoretical frameworks operate across different levels of analysis in the gig economy, ranging from individual gig workers to family systems, organisational arrangements, and industry-level environments (e.g., Franke & Pulignano, 2021; Galière, 2020; Goods et al., 2019). A multi-level approach could reveal how workers' experiences are shaped not only by individual but also by broader social, organisational and institutional contexts. In addition, future research could move beyond app-based platforms to examine other forms of platform work (Schmidt, 2017) that, while sharing certain features with gig workers (e.g., precarity; Ashman et al., 2018), also possess distinct features that warrant closer investigation.

Second, Study 2 relied on narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) with a purposive sample (Palinkas et al., 2015) of full-time online content creators. While this study enabled a deep exploration of meaning-making processes of individuals transitioning into online content creation, and narrative construction during career transitions, it also carries limitations that open important avenues for future research. Although the analysis of self-recorded video narratives was triangulated (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2021) with six semi-structured interviews to enrich interpretation, the primary dataset consists of publicly performed narratives. These narratives may reflect curated accounts shaped by self-presentation motives. However, the aim

of this study was not to uncover a singular "truth" but to examine how individuals interpret and narrate their transitions (Lieblich et al., 1998). From this perspective, the curated nature of these narratives is itself an important feature of the digital work context and a meaningful part of the storytelling practices. Future research could extend this work by exploring specific group of creators' experiences, drawing on more diverse data sources or methodologies to capture perspectives beyond publicly performed narratives.

Apart from it, this study focused on English-speaking lifestyle-based creators, which limits the ability to draw conclusions about other types of content creators or those in non-English contexts. Comparative studies across creator types, cultural contexts, or geographic regions could provide a more comprehensive view of how narrative meaning are shaped. Finally, as platform work evolves, longitudinal designs could track how creators' self-narratives change over time, especially for those who leave or transition out of platform-based careers.

Third, Study 3 employed a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2020), analysing publicly available vlogs supplemented by a small number of interviews. This approach provided rich, naturally occurring data but also reflected the edited and curated nature of online self-presentation. While this curation was treated as an important contextual element, future research could complement netnography with longitudinal ethnography or diary studies to capture the backstage processes that remain hidden. Further studies could also explore how boundaries evolve over time as platform affordances and cultural norms shift.

Finally, across all three studies, the thesis focused primarily on workers' experiences and scholarly theorisation. Future research could extend this analysis to other stakeholders in the platform economy, such as clients (e.g., Sutherland et al., 2020), audiences, or platform organisations (e.g., Ilsøe & Larsen, 2021), to build a more relational and multi-sided understanding of platform-mediated work. Researchers could also further develop the concept

of theorising scripts, examining its applicability beyond the gig economy to other emerging work contexts such as the AI-mediated workplace, or hybrid work arrangements.

By acknowledging these limitations and suggesting directions for future inquiry, this thesis aims to stimulate ongoing scholarly reflection and empirical research on platform-mediated labour. Doing so will help deepen and broaden our collective understanding of how work, careers, and boundaries are reshaped in an increasingly digital and performative economy.

5.6 Concluding remark

This thesis has looked at how digital platforms are changing the meaning and experience of work. Bringing together three connected studies, it has moved across conceptualisation, career changes, and everyday experiences to study the gig and creator economies as examples of bigger shifts in today's working world. Across these studies, one key focus has been on stories: how researchers approach and analyse new forms of work, how individuals make sense of their moves into uncertain digital jobs, and how boundaries between work and personal life are presented in daily practice. In doing so, the thesis sits within but also goes beyond current research on work–life boundaries, careers, and platform labour, showing how these fields change when people transition into a precarious work context and their private lives and homes become part of their work.

Taken together, the findings show that platform-based work cannot be fully understood through simple categories or either/or splits such as work versus nonwork, traditional versus non-traditional jobs, or theory versus lived experience. Instead, this thesis shows that both research and practice develop as ongoing processes. The three "acts" and their "scripts" in Study 1 show how conceptualisation of the gig economy have grown from basic description to richer, more context-based perspectives. This first study gives the big picture: how the field of

gig work research has changed over time, and how scholars' ideas and focus points have shifted in response to changes in technology, the economy, and culture.

The second study then moved from ideas to the level of people's lives, looking at how workers handle unusual moves into an underexplored form of platform work (i.e., online content creation). Focusing on full-time online content creation, it showed how people leave secure, traditional jobs for uncertain, public-facing platform work. Using a narrative approach, the study treated these career movements as layered stories where people both live and tell their moves. This analysis showed that moving into online content creation was not just a job switch but a process of self-change and transformation. It also revealed how people use stories to explain their choices and connect personal accounts with the broad social context. In this way, Study 2 links back to Study 1 by showing how an underexplored platform work are lived and narrated in everyday life.

The third study then zoomed in even closer to everyday routines, asking how lifestyle content creators manage their work–life boundaries in digital platform work that includes self-presentation of personal activities. Using a qualitative netnography design and mixing vlogs with interviews, the study found two linked terms: the visibility-oriented labour filter and presented boundaries. These ideas show how the line between work and nonwork is not just blurred but actively created through visibility, and how creators pick, frame, and hold back parts of their lives to manage online image, privacy, and audience expectations. The study also showed how visibility reshapes homes, routines, and behind-the-scenes tasks into performances, and how creators do constant boundary work to balance closeness with followers while protecting their own privacy. In doing so, it stretched boundary theory beyond the usual "segmentation versus integration" thinking, showing that representation itself is a new way of managing boundaries in platform work.

Across these three studies, a clear pattern appears: stories are central to understanding work on digital platforms. In research, stories help explain the questions asked and the methods used. In careers, stories help people explain and legitimise their moves into new and precarious work. In daily practice, stories are the windows of observing how boundaries between work and personal life are made, adjusted, and sometimes resisted. This multi-level approach shows that platform work is both made and made sense of through stories and self-presentation and that these processes directly affect their experiences and interpretation.

Overall, this thesis highlights the value of putting stories at the centre of management and career studies. By showing how theories are built, how lives are lived, and how boundaries are drawn in platform labour, it gives a roadmap for future research on non-standard, uncertain, and digitally mediated work. It also speaks to a wider question in society about how technology and new forms of work are changing what it means to work, live, and build a career. As standard jobs become less common, the findings push scholars and practitioners to take seriously the emotional and performative sides of work as much as its technical and economic sides.

As digital platforms continue to grow and change, researchers, managers, and policymakers will need to face the new types of labour appearing in these settings. This thesis offers a starting point for that work, showing that the world of theories and the world of work are connected through stories, visibility, performance, and ongoing negotiation. It closes by underlining the main point: understanding the future of work is not only about looking at new types of jobs, but also about recognising the stories that people use to make sense of work in a changing world. By combining a focus on concepts, career transitions, and everyday practices, the thesis gives a richer and more grounded picture of how platform work is studied, entered, and lived today, and how technology, labour, and visibility are becoming more deeply linked.

Appendix A Interview Protocol for Online Content Creators

1. Tell me the story about how you left organisational work to be a full-time content creator (including key events leading to the transition, a significant episode or a memory from this career transition.)

2. What challenges did you confront in navigating this change? And what was helpful to overcome these challenges?

3. How has your life changed after becoming a full-time online content creator?

4. What content does your work involve? Please provide as many details as you wish.

5. Would you please describe a typical day in your life from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep? Please provide as much details as you wish.

6. How do you schedule your daily work and life activities? Please give specific examples.

7. How do you separate work and life activities? Can you give me examples?

8. When you check social media, will you perceive it as work or life activity?

9. When you film content about personal activities (e.g., skincare, eating, traveling, or hanging out with friends in vlogs), will you perceive them as work or life stuff?

10. Please describe how being a full-time content creator affects your daily life. Can you give me examples?

11. Please describe how your personal life has affected your content creation life. Can you give me examples?

12. How would you describe the relationship between your current work and personal life?

13. Is there anything about your work–life interface that I did not ask about and that you would like to add?

Appendix B Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Career Transition Study

No.	Creators	Gender	Primary Content Type / Niche	Titles of videos included in the analysis	Filming Date(s)
1	Jade Beason	female	Personal Development	3. WATCH THIS BEFORE YOU QUIT YOUR JOB! | HOW TO QUIT YOUR JOB AND MAKE MONEY | GREAT RESIGNATION TRUTH	01/09/2021
				8. HOW I BECAME A FULL TIME CONTENT CREATOR IN 12 MONTHS | Tips for content creators |Make money online	17/11/2021
2	Devon and Willo	female	Everyday Life	3 Things I Did Before Quitting My Job | Financial Tips to Becoming a Full Time Content Creator	03/06/2022
3	Natalya Alisia	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. I QUIT MY 9 5 TO FOLLOW MY DREAMS | I'm A Full Time Content Creator!	10/06/2022
4	Breana Cooney	female	Personal Development	4. STORY TIME: God spoke to me in a dream…	30/05/2021
				3. i QUIT my 9-5 job… life update + what's next?	24/04/2022
				1. how i've successfully become a full time content creator! (working for myself, finances, & advice)	22/05/2022
5	Lynette Adkins	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life	2. i quit my job (and filmed everything)	30/06/2021
				7. life after quitting! | july vlog	11/07/2021
				6. life after quitting my job (1 month update) | august vlog	08/08/2021
				3. becoming a full-time influencer is an ADJUSTMENT | productive day in the life of an influencer	10/09/2021
				5. things i wish i knew before quitting my job	09/11/2021

				4. i quit my job 1 year ago to be a content creator - here's everything i learned (& wish i knew)	23/06/2022
6	Shamar Shantel	female	Everyday Life	1. I Quit my 9-5 To Be A Full Time Content Creator | Whats Next ?	23/04/2023
				3. My New Life as a Full Time Content Creator (it's not as easy as I thought!)	08/05/2023
				4. LIFE AFTER QUITTING MY JOB | 6am Hot Yoga, Dentist Appointment, Target Runs + More ft. Try Treats	13/05/2023
7	Thandi Gama	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	2. I QUIT MY JOB TO CHASE A DREAM!	26/04/2021
				3. STEPS I took before quitting my 9 to 5 job to become a full time CONTENT CREATOR	03/09/2021
8	André Sampson	male	Personal Development	1. I Quit My $110,000 Job To Be A Full Time Content Creator	25/08/2022
9	Love Reesie	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. How To Become A Full Time Content Creator | Life Update | Reesie Diaries	25/01/2021
				2. How To Be A Successful Content Creator | Life Update - Mental Health, Going Viral + MORE | #Dossier	26/07/2021
				3. How To Become A Successful Content Creator | Q & A - Motivation, Brand Strategy, UGC Creator	06/07/2022
10	Lou xoxo	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. HOW I QUIT MY 9-5 JOB TO BECOME A FULL TIME ENTREPRENEUR?! | MY 5 SOURCE OF INCOME | Lou xoxo	04/04/2020
				2. Entrepreneur Life: I Quit My 9-5 for YouTube! | Lou xoxo	30/10/2020
11	Asia x BJ	female	Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	2. I QUIT MY CORPORATE JOB FOR YOUTUBE!! | I STILL CANT BELIEVE IT…	01/07/2021
12	Kelly Stamps	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Fashion & Style	1. I quit my job for YouTube and this is how it's been. (Two year update)	05/10/2021
				2. my day as a full-time youtuber: editing, thoughts on quitting and returning to college..	09/09/2022

				3. storytime: how I quit my first job lol	21/11/2022
13	Jordan Green	male	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I Quit My Job to Become a FULL TIME YOUTUBER (Law of Attraction Success Story)	28/11/2021
				3. Quit Your Job Before It's TOO LATE...	13/07/2022
14	Success By Sanjna	female	Personal Development	6. WHY I QUIT BIG 4 RISK CONSULTING?! | HONEST TRUTH | KPMG | LEFT FOR A BANK MANAGER ROLE | EXPERIENCE	12/11/2020
				1. I QUIT MY 9-5 CORPORATE JOB! | WHAT'S NEXT? | $100K BANK RISK MANAGER | KPMG | BIG 4 | ESCAPE	16/05/2021
				2. Going Back To Work? Regrets Quitting My Job? | 9-5 Update | Raw Chats With successbysanjna	01/08/2021
				3. Update: 6 Months Since I Quit My 9-5 Job... | What's Next?	03/10/2021
				4. Why I Quit My Business | 1 Year Anniversary Post 9-5 Job	13/03/2022
15	Grace Kim	female	Everyday Life	1. i just quit my job. and here's why...	06/11/2019
				2. i almost quit.	07/06/2021
				3. GRWM going back to a 9-5 job from full time content creator... yup, the reverse	27/12/2022
16	Vanessa Lau	female	Personal Development; Wellness; Everyday Life	1. WHY I QUIT MY CORPORATE JOB (FOR MILLENNIALS)	16/08/2018
				2. What It's Like To Quit Your Job COLD TURKEY To Start Your Own Business (STORY TIME FOR MILLENNIALS)	28/01/2019
				3. It's been 2 years since I quit my corporate job. Here's what I learned.	29/11/2020
				4. Thinking of quitting Youtube…	05/06/2022

17	Diamond Alicia	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. I Quit my 9-5 to be a Full Time Content Creator: My Story, Tips, + Thoughts	10/01/2022
				How to Stay Motivated as a Low Energy Content Creator | My Tips & Confessions!	22/08/2022
18	Jalyn Baiden	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. How I quit my 9-5 and became a full time content creator	04/06/2023
19	Tia Tamara	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 TO BECOME A FULL-TIME INFLUENCER	24/04/2023
				2. I quit my job to pursue my dreams & this is how the 1st day went.. (chatty vlog, DIML)	02/05/2023
				3. I quit my job to chase my dreams as a full-time content creator | 2 week update, how it's going	07/05/2023
20	That Girl Christelle	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 for content creation & influencing. REGRETS??	16/07/2023
				2. chitchat grwm: quitting content? reinventing yourself, your 20s, failure | girl dinner in atlanta	24/08/2023
21	Maddy Outdoors	female	Personal Development	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 TO BECOME A CONTENT CREATOR	17/05/2023
22	iris wellen	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	b. my 6AM morning routine (on a workday)	10/04/2022
				a. my everyday life, get to know me (Q&A)	28/08/2022
				1. i quit my job.	07/05/2023
				2. my first day being self-employed | how to create new routines & habits	24/07/2023
				3. life updates. finally telling you everything	10/09/2023
23	Sarah Haruna	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	1. Why I quit my 9-5 to focus on content creation full time ‖The content Creators Safe space Episode 3	22/02/2023

24	piaiscool	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. HOW I QUIT MY 9-5 TO WORKING ON SOCIAL MEDIA (STORYTIME)	01/01/2022
				a. How I Built a Full-Time Income from Social Media!	19/01/2021
25	AmberSharnieceTV	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. I quit my job to become a fulltime content creator. Have I lost my mind?	30/04/2023
				2. The ONE thing I wish I knew BEFORE quitting my 9-5	19/06/2023
26	cakedbybabyk	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	1. I quit my 9-5 to be a content creator | cakedbybabyk	23/02/2022
27	Paige West	female	Personal Development; Wellness; Everyday Life	1. The FINAL straw that made me QUIT my 9-5 job (& red flags)	19/02/2022
				3. I QUIT my Engineering job to do Gig Work, here's what I learned	13/03/2022
				2. My life changed after I quit my job.. here's what happened	25/08/2022
				4. I quit my 9-5 job and my life didn't change.	11/07/2023
28	Ky In Real Life	female	Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I Quit My Job for Content Creation & Entrepreneurship!	16/06/2021
29	Aneesha | Locs And The City	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. I Quit My Corporate Analyst Job | Focusing on Content Creation & Finding Me	07/07/2023
30	Austin Williams	male	Personal Development	1. I quit my job, and it was the best decision of my life	27/03/2023
				2. I Quit My Job With No Backup Plan And Here's What I Learned	07/07/2023
31	MISS YANYI	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I QUIT MY $80K JOB FOR YOUTUBE | Life Update & New Hair!	12/05/2016
				3. Why I Quit YouTube	08/11/2019

				2. why I failed at being a fulltime youtuber // What happened after I quit my $80k job for YouTube	17/08/2020
32	Austen Tosone	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. Why I Quit My Job To Be a Full-Time Influencer	18/04/2021
				2. How I Left My Job To Work For Myself (Action Plan)	04/05/2021
				a. What I've Learned in 3 Years as a Full-Time Content Creator	09/04/2024
33	Emotionally Online Podcast	female	Personal Development	1. career cast: self-employment, content creation, and quitting your 9-5 | emotionally online ep. #15	26/10/2022
34	Tori Nishino	female	Fashion & Style	1. How I left my Corporate 9-5 and became a Full-Time Content Creator | High Vibe Podcast Interview	18/09/2023
35	Abigail Chin	female	Everyday Life	1. I quit my dream job as a corporate designer to become an entrepreneur/content creator | Q&A + Tips	19/03/2022
				a. Answering all your juicy questions about me | Q&A	05/06/2022
36	Celine	female	Everyday Life; Wellness; Personal Development	1. I quit my dream job to find my dream life	17/09/2023
				2. day in the life after quitting my 9-5 job | finding routine, content creation, cute café	04/10/2023
				3. day in the life after quitting | reality of content creation, finding discipline, honest chats	12/10/2023
37	Yolz Channel	female	Personal Development; Wellness	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 for YouTube | Yolz Channel	01/04/2018
				3. 9 to 5 VS Full-time Influencer - reflecting 1 year later | Yolz Channel	05/04/2019
				2. I Quit my job for YouTube (Life) UPDATE - My Regrets | STORYTIME	29/03/2021
38	sereniky	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	I quit my 9-5 job to become an Influencer	27/09/2023

				i quit my job to be a youtuber & i failed.	11/02/2024
39	Morgan Green	female	Everyday Life; Wellness	1. I QUIT MY 9-5 JOB With No Backup Plan & Here's Why	06/08/2021
				2. Quitting my 9 to 5 Job One Year Later: How It Has Been & Do I Regret It?	06/09/2022
40	Alison Thazin	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	I Quit My 9 to 5 Office Job | Navigating 20s, Burnout, Being Jobless in the U.S.	14/09/2023
41	judine saintG	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. i went ALL IN on my full-time content creator dreams and today…	25/05/2023
42	Chelsea Callahan	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	I quit my 9-5 job to be a *full-time YouTuber*. My experience from the first 3 months...	16/02/2024
43	Explorcation	male	Personal Development	I Quit My Job | HONEST Thoughts & Regrets 2 Years Later	01/04/2023
44	Cadence Stringer	female	Fashion & Style; Personal Development	I quit my corporate job // everything I learned	23/01/2024
45	Mutombo	female	Everyday Life; Wellness	I QUIT my engineering job! My thought process & everything I did to prepare for this.	07/07/2023
				I quit my corporate job 6 months ago. Here's what I've learned - *my honest advice*	31/08/2023

Appendix C Demographic Characteristics of Content Creators Included in the Netnography Study

No.	Creators	Gender	Primary Content Type / Niche of Lifestyle-Based Content Creation	Titles of videos included in the analysis	Filming Date(s)
1	Devon and Willo	female	Everyday Life	1. Day In The Life of a Full Time Content Creator | Struggling to feel Productivity & Planning Content	19/08/2022
2	Love Reesie	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. Day In The Life Of A Content Creator, MLK Weekend | Reesie Diaries	02/02/2021
3	JazaéNicole	female	Personal Development; Wellness	2. Day In The Life as A CONTENT CREATOR | Bts of what you don't see, this is a lot of work!!	18/04/2021
				1.a *Realistic* day in my life as a full-time content creator & influencer	09/08/2022
4	Natalya Alisia	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. WEEK IN MY LIFE as a full time CONTENT CREATOR | botox + filler appt, Lorna Jane haul, + more!	24/06/2022
5	Breana Cooney	female	Personal Development	1. day in my life as a content creator: 5:30 am workout, a photoshoot, my first massage, & a God story!	12/06/2022
6	Lynette Adkins	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life	1. day in my life as a content creator | working less, creative advice, taking & editing pics	06/07/2022
7	Shamar Shantel	female	Everyday Life	1. Weekly Vlog - Day In The Life of Full Time Creator || Workout Routine || Grocery Haul And More	18/04/2023
8	Thandi Gama	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life	1. A week in the life of a full time content creator [Video Diary]	27/03/2023
9	Creating with Kaya	female	Personal Development	3. Week In the Life of a Full Time Influencer | Creator Events, Shooting Content, Facebook Hacking…	18/04/2023
10	Helen Liao	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. day in my life as a full-time content creator/"influencer" (ft. octoly) | korea quarantine 2021 vlog	17/03/2021
11	Lou xoxo	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. A “REAL” Day in a Life of an Influencer/Entrepreneur | Recording Content + Shipping Orders + More	24/06/2021

12	Asia x BJ	female	Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. A Day In The Life of a Youtuber... And This Happens!! Im Just Asia	23/12/2021
13	Kelly Stamps	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Fashion & Style	3. my day as a fulltime youtuber: taxes, writing, editing	11/08/2020
				2. my day as a full-time youtuber: editing, thoughts on quitting and returning to college..	09/09/2022
				1. A day in my life as a content creator!!	20/07/2024
14	Jordan Green	male	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Wellness	1. A Day in My Life as a FULL-TIME YOUTUBER	11/03/2022
15	Success By Sanjna	female	Personal Development	1. Work Day In The Life | Full Time Content Creator | Come To An NFT Exhibition With Me In Sydney	16/03/2022
16	Samantha Nicole	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. DAYS IN MY LIFE AS A CONTENT CREATOR *bts taking IG pics by myself & how I edit my pictures!*	11/03/2022
				2. VLOG: work day as a content creator *BTS of taking content* ft. Loving Tan	02/09/2022
17	lindseyrem	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1.VLOG: my typical work day as a ~content creator~	21/03/2021
				2. week in my life weeknight meals, volunteering, health update	08/05/2023
18	linh truong	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	1. a day in my work life as a full-time youtuber	14/06/2021
				2. another 7am productive day in my life ~ finding work-life balance, time management, & notion tour	19/08/2022
19	Jaz Turner	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	2. a day in my life | hitting 400k on tiktok, I was on a podcast, going out, new pilates studio	06/08/2023
				1. A WEEK IN MY LIFE | finding my motivation, home decor, going out	05/09/2022
20	Makeup By Alissia	female	Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style	1. day in the life of a full time content creator | errands, GRWM, opening PR boxes + more!	21/10/2021

21	Sarah Hawkinson	female	Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	1. a day in my life as a full time ~content creator~	28/04/2021
22	Elyse Myers	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. spend the day with me (a full-time content creator)	15/07/2022
				2. Behind the Scenes: Spend the day with a full-time content creator	18/04/2023
23	Celine	female	Everyday Life; Wellness; Personal Development	1. day in the life after quitting my 9-5 job | finding routine, content creation, cute café	04/10/2023
				2. day in the life after quitting | reality of content creation, finding discipline, honest chats	12/10/2023
24	Chelsea Callahan	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Beauty & Personal Care	2.. Regular days in my life in my 30's (running, trying new things, NYC vlog)	04/10/2024
				1. My *unfiltered* life alone in New York City (in your 30's). A vlog.	13/09/2024
25	Austen Tosone	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. 🏡 VLOG - content creation day, poshmark process, errands + more	24/10/2023
26	Aneesha | Locs And The City	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. Not working a 9-5, slowing down, fear of expectations, i just wanna be ok | Realistic Day In My Life	20/12/2023
27	tapiocapress	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. a day in my life without a job | quitting corporate, how much I saved, dealing w/ self doubt	17/08/2023
28	Courtney Sarracino	female	Wellness; Everyday Life; Personal Development	1. DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FULL-TIME CONTENT CREATOR	21/07/2023
29	Lucy Raine	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. DAY IN MY LIFE as a full time content creator 🎧 realistic WFH day, brand deals, editing, + shopping!	30/08/2024
30	Hannah Elise	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. an average WFH day in my life as a full-time content creator	25/06/2023
31	Basically Britt	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. 24 Hours as a Full-Time Illustrator & Bookish Content Creator day in the life	08/11/2024
32	SavWay	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. a Day In My Life as a CONTENT CREATOR	18/07/2022

33	Nitraa B	female	Beauty & Personal Care; Fashion & Style; Everyday Life	1. Day In The Life of a FULL TIME Content Creator Batch Creating! | NitraaB	24/07/2023
34	Becca and The Books	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. A Day In The Life Of A Full-Time YouTuber (Content Creation, Reading, Cooking & Work Outs) 2023	01/10/2023
35	Simone Nicole	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. A VERY productive day in my life as a full time Content Creator	29/11/2023
36	basicallyreese	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	1. day in my life as a content creator (what you don't see behind the scenes)	17/03/2021
37	kaeli mae	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	DAY IN MY LIFE VLOG as a content creator | appts | filming | cleaning | planning |	19/06/2023
38	Carrie Dayton Vlogs	female	Fashion & Style; Everyday Life; Personal Development	a work day in my life (as a full time content creator in my 30s) & TTPD thoughts!!!	26/04/2024
39	Kaiti Yoo	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	a truthful day in the life as a full-time youtuber. (what we REALLY do behind closed doors.)	16/06/2021
40	Darling Desi	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Fashion & Style	My First Day as a Full-time Youtuber | making cottagecore & romanticizing life videos	13/06/2021
41	Hannah Ashton	female	Personal Development; Everyday Life; Fashion & Style	a WFH day in my life as a full-time content creator + tips for creating	21/11/2023
42	Caitlin's Corner	female	Wellness; Everyday Life; Personal Development	WORK WEEK IN MY LIFE | reality of being a full-time content creator	13/10/2023
43	alia zaita	female	Everyday Life; Personal Development; Wellness	2. Productive Days In My Life In NYC | as a full time content creator	17/03/2024

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