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# From micro-resistance to movement: How gig workers are fighting back against platform power

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## Abstract

The gig economy, marked by algorithmic control, precarious conditions, and opaque managerial structures, often appears to stifle collective action. Yet, as Michel Foucault famously asserted, "where there is power, there is resistance." This paper examines how gig workers, particularly in food delivery services, reclaim agency and resist platform power through creative, disruptive, and politically meaningful tactics. We first trace the evolution of dissent within the gig economy, situating these protests within broader academic debates. We explore how worker resistance oscillates between traditional strike actions and more spontaneous, riot-like disruptions.

Drawing on James C. Scott's concept of micro-resistance (1985), we argue that these seemingly fragmented acts of defiance, ranging from subversive workarounds and clandestine alliances to platform-specific hacks, create fertile ground for more structured and politically mature social movements. This study combines empirical insights from our fieldwork with a critical review of existing literature.

Our research employs a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Marcus, 1995), conducted between July 2020 and August 2021 across multiple urban centres in Italy (Livorno, Florence, Milan, Naples, Messina), Spain (Valencia, Barcelona, Bilbao), India (Delhi, Gwalior, Mumbai, Pune, Lucknow, Chhattisgarh, Gurugram, Patna), China (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Weifang, Dongguan), and Mexico (Querétaro, Mexico City). The study draws on 68 semi-structured interviews with online food delivery couriers (7 in Mexico, 32 in India, 12 in China, 12 in Italy, 5 in Spain). These interviews were complemented by participant observation of their work shifts and a digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2015) of dozens of private online chat groups (WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, WeChat) used by couriers.

By illustrating the pervasiveness of resistance within algorithmically controlled workspaces, we shed light on how gig workers' struggles are forging new forms of solidarity and collective action, contesting the asymmetries of platform capitalism. This paper contributes to ongoing discussions on labour activism in the digital age, highlighting the intersections of algorithmic governance, worker agency, and grassroots resistance.

**Keywords:** food delivery, micro, resistance, algorithmic resistance

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