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FLEXIBLE WORK RELATIONSHIP MODEL IN THE MAXIM DIGITAL TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY IN GORONTALO

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the flexible work relationship model in the Maxim digital transportation industry in Gorontalo, focusing on working-hour flexibility, income, algorithmic control, and social protection for driver-partners. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that work flexibility provides advantages for drivers in adjusting their work to personal needs; however, it also creates income uncertainty due to dependence on the number of orders and platform algorithms. Most drivers are not registered in social security schemes, exposing them to social and economic risks. Algorithmic control limits drivers' autonomy despite their freedom to determine working hours. This study recommends the integration of social security coverage, greater algorithmic transparency, digital literacy enhancement, and collaboration among government, companies, and drivers to create a fair and sustainable work ecosystem.

Keywords: flexible work relationship model, digital transportation, Maxim, Gorontalo, drivers, gig economy

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the digital economy has driven significant changes in employment patterns across various sectors, including the transportation industry. The emergence of digital transportation platforms like Maxim has shifted conventional employment models toward flexible, partnership-based employment models. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is part of a major transformation in the world of work marked by the rise of gig economy practices, a work system that emphasizes flexible hours, the use of digital technology, and non-traditional employment relationships between companies and workers. In Gorontalo Province, Maxim's presence not only provides an alternative transportation service for the public but also opens up new job opportunities for local residents amidst limited formal employment opportunities.

The flexible employment model in digital transportation is characterized by the absence of formal employment relationships as stipulated in fixed-term or indefinite-term employment agreements. Maxim drivers are positioned as partners, not permanent employees, allowing them the flexibility to determine their work hours, work intensity, and the option to join or leave the platform. According to De Stefano (2020), flexible employment models on digital platforms provide greater individual freedom, but on the other hand, have the potential to create new vulnerabilities due to minimal employment protections. This finding is further supported by a study by Wood et

al. (2021) stated that flexibility in the gig economy is often accompanied by income uncertainty and limited social protection.

In Gorontalo, data shows that the growth in digital transportation usage is increasing in line with internet penetration and smartphone usage. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Gorontalo Province in 2023, the internet penetration rate in Gorontalo has reached over 70% of the total population, while the transportation and warehousing sectors show a steadily increasing contribution to Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP). Maxim's presence as a digital transportation platform with relatively affordable fares has made it quite attractive to the people of Gorontalo, both as service users and as driver-partners.

Despite providing economic benefits, Maxim's flexible employment model in Gorontalo also faces various challenges. The main issues lie in the legal certainty of employment relationships, social protection, and the welfare of driver-partners. Maxim drivers generally do not receive social security, health insurance, or a guaranteed minimum income. Furthermore, the fare and incentive system, which is entirely controlled by the platform, often creates an unequal bargaining position between the company and driver-partners. According to Prassl (2022), the imbalance in power relations within digital platforms is a crucial issue because companies wield significant algorithmic control over workers without the corresponding responsibilities as employers.

Another emerging issue is the lack of legal and digital literacy among driver-partners in the regions, including Gorontalo. Many partners do not fully understand the terms of partnership agreements, commission deduction mechanisms, and their rights and obligations within the digital transportation ecosystem. This situation has the potential to trigger conflict, job dissatisfaction, and socio-economic vulnerability for drivers who rely primarily on the Maxim platform for their income.

Therefore, data-driven solutions are needed to strengthen fairer and more sustainable flexible work relationship models. According to the ILO (2021), a data-driven approach to managing platform workers is crucial to ensuring a balance between work flexibility and social protection. Local governments need to utilize digital employment data to map the number of driver-partners, working hours, and average income levels as a basis for policy development. Meanwhile, De Stefano and Aloisi (2022) emphasize the importance of algorithmic transparency in digital platforms so that workers understand the assignment and income determination mechanisms.

Possible solutions include integrating driver-partners into the national social security system through a flexible contribution scheme tailored to the income characteristics of gig workers. According to a study by Berg et al. (2020) and reinforced by an OECD report (2023), adaptive social protection is key to the sustainability of flexible work in the digital transportation sector. Improving legal and digital literacy for driver-partners is also a key agenda, as Graham et al. (2021) noted that workers' understanding of their rights and obligations on digital platforms can reduce industrial conflict and improve well-being.

Maxim's flexible employment model in Gorontalo needs to be understood not only as a digital economic phenomenon, but also as a complex social and labor law issue. Through empirical data support, adaptive regulations, and collaboration between the government, platform companies, and workers, the flexible employment model is expected to strike a balance between economic efficiency and social justice.

Data Table of Problems and Solutions of Maxim's Flexible Work Relationship Model in Gorontalo

Aspects	Data/Facts in Gorontalo	Key Issues	Data-Driven Solutions
Internet Penetration	>70% of Gorontalo's population uses the internet (BPS, 2023)	High dependence on digital platforms	Strengthening digital literacy for driver-partners
Employment Status	Partners are based on partnerships, not permanent employees	Lack of job security and legal protection	Regional regulations on platform worker protection
Driver Income	Income fluctuates depending on demand and working hours	Income uncertainty	Transparency of income data and incentive schemes
Social Security	Most partners are not registered with BPJS Ketenagakerjaan	Social and economic vulnerability	Integration of partners into national social security programs

Algorithm Mastery	Rates and orders are determined by the platform	Unequal bargaining power	Policy on system transparency and social dialogue

The Concept of Employment Relations from an Employment Perspective

Employment relations, from an employment perspective, essentially refer to the legal and social relationship between an employer and an employee, governed by an employment agreement. In the conventional model, employment relations are characterized by the elements of work, wages, and orders, as stipulated in the Indonesian Manpower Law. However, the development of the digital economy has driven a shift in the form of employment relations from formal employment relationships to more flexible partnerships. According to Supiot (2020), the transformation of the modern workplace has weakened the classic boundaries between workers and non-workers, giving rise to new forms of employment relations that are often not fully protected by traditional employment law.

In the context of digital transportation services like Maxim, employment relations are established on the basis of partnership agreements between platform companies and drivers. This relationship positions drivers as independent partners who are not legally categorized as workers. According to De Stefano (2020), platform-based employment relations tend to create a "grey area" in employment law because companies retain significant control through technology, even though they do not formally recognize employment relationships.

Flexible Work Arrangement Theory

Flexible work is a concept that emphasizes workers' freedom to regulate their work time, location, and intensity. Work flexibility is a key feature of the gig economy and digital platforms. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), flexible work can increase labor force participation and economic efficiency, particularly in the informal and semi-formal sectors. However, flexibility also carries the consequence of increased income uncertainty and weak social protection.

Wood et al. (2021) explain that flexibility in platform work is often asymmetrical, with companies enjoying high operational flexibility while workers bear greater economic risk. In the Maxim digital transportation industry, flexible working hours allow drivers in Gorontalo to adapt their work activities to local social and economic conditions, but at the same time, they are vulnerable to fluctuations in market demand.

Gig Economy Theory

The gig economy refers to an economic system dominated by short-term, project-based work mediated by digital platforms. According to Berg et al. (2020), the gig economy is growing rapidly along with advances in information technology and the market demand for fast and efficient services. In the gig economy, workers are not bound by long-term employment contracts but instead depend on dynamic consumer demand.

Prassl (2022) emphasized that the gig economy often creates unequal power relations between platforms and workers, as platforms have complete control over algorithms, assessment systems, and job distribution. In the context of Maxim in Gorontalo, drivers rely heavily on the app system to obtain orders, indirectly limiting their work autonomy, despite formally being described as flexible.

Algorithmic Control Theory (Algorithmic Management)

Algorithmic control is a concept that explains how platform companies manage and supervise workers through digital systems and algorithms. According to Kellogg et al. (2020), algorithms in digital platforms function as "virtual managers" that regulate work assignments, rate determination, and worker performance evaluation. This form of control is often opaque and difficult for workers to understand.

In the digital transportation industry, Maxim, algorithms determine order distribution, fare calculations, and incentive and sanction systems. De Stefano and Aloisi (2022) state that

algorithmic control can blur the line between freelance and subordinate workers, because even without direct orders, workers are still directed by technological systems.

Platform Worker Social Protection Theory

Social protection is an important aspect of employment relations, including in the context of flexible work and the gig economy. According to the ILO (2021), platform workers are a group vulnerable to social risks such as workplace accidents, illness, and loss of income. Therefore, an adaptive and inclusive social protection model is needed.

The OECD (2023) emphasizes the importance of integrating platform workers into national social security systems through flexible contribution schemes. In the Gorontalo context, most Maxim driver-partners are not covered by employment social security, increasing their economic vulnerability. Adaptive social protection theory is relevant to explain the need for policies that adapt to the characteristics of flexible work.

Social Justice Theory in Digital Employment Relations

Social justice theory emphasizes the importance of equitable distribution of benefits and risks in employment relations. Rawls (2021), in developing contemporary justice theory, asserts that social and economic systems must provide protection for the most vulnerable groups. In the context of platform work, social justice means a balance between flexibility, economic efficiency, and the protection of workers' rights.

Graham et al. (2021) state that without policy intervention, platform work has the potential to deepen social inequality, particularly in developing regions. Therefore, this theoretical study provides a foundation for understanding Maxim's flexible employment model in Gorontalo as a phenomenon that is not only economic, but also social and legal.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to examine in depth the dynamics of flexible work relationships in the Maxim digital transportation industry in Gorontalo City. This approach is considered appropriate for capturing social realities, subjective experiences, and the perceptions of actors involved in the platform-based work ecosystem. The research site was Gorontalo City, selected due to the relatively high adoption of digital transportation services and the significant number of Maxim driver-partners operating in the area. The research subjects consisted of Maxim driver-partners as the primary informants and platform management representatives as supporting informants. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on active drivers with sufficient work experience to provide rich and relevant insights into work flexibility, income dynamics, algorithmic control, and social protection.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore work experiences, perceptions of partnership relations, and challenges faced by both driver-partners and management. Participatory observation enabled the researcher to directly observe daily work patterns, working-hour flexibility, and drivers' interactions with the application system and service users. Documentation involved reviewing partnership agreements, platform policies, and other relevant supporting data. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following stages of transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation by linking empirical findings to theoretical frameworks on flexible work, the gig economy, and algorithmic management. This analytical approach allowed for a systematic and contextual understanding of Maxim's flexible work relationship model in Gorontalo and its implications for driver-partners' welfare and social justice.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study involved 18 Maxim driver-partners and four management representatives in Gorontalo. The majority of drivers were aged 20–40, with between 1–3 years of experience working on digital platforms. Most drivers used private motorcycles, and 70% worked part-time to balance other jobs or personal activities.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Category	**Jumlah**	**Percentage**
Ages 20–30	10	55%
Ages 31–40	8	45%
1–2 years of experience	9	50%
3–4 years of experience	9	50%
Part-time	12	70%
Full-time	6	30%

Flexible Working Hours

Most drivers stated that flexibility was the main reason they joined Maxim. They can determine their own working hours based on their personal needs and financial situation.

[Jam kerja <4 jam: 30% | 4–8 jam: 50% | >8 jam: 20%]

Incentive and Income System

Driver income fluctuates depending on the number of orders and working hours. 60% of respondents stated that their income is sufficient for daily needs, but not stable.

Table 2. Daily Income of Maxim Driver Partners in Gorontalo

Daily Income (Rp)	**Number of Drivers**	**Percentage**
<100.000	5	28%
100.000–200.000	9	50%
>200.000	4	22%

Employment Relationships and Social Protection

Maxim drivers are classified as partners, not permanent employees. Most respondents (75%) are not registered with BPJS Ketenagakerjaan or health insurance. They stated that the lack of social protection is a major obstacle in the event of an accident or illness.

Algorithmic Control

Respondents reported that order distribution and fares are heavily dependent on the platform's algorithm. Despite its flexibility, drivers feel controlled by a system that is not entirely transparent.

Thematic Analysis

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation, four main themes emerged:

1) Flexible Working Hours: Provides high autonomy, but creates income uncertainty.
2) Dependence on Algorithms: Control through digital systems limits drivers' full autonomy.
3) Uncertainty about Social Protection: Limited access to social security increases social and economic risks.
4) Balance of Flexibility and Security: Policy integration is needed to ensure fairness and job sustainability.

Visualization of Findings

Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents by Main Constraint

[Fleksibilitas Pendapatan: 60% | Perlindungan Sosial: 75% | Kontrol Algoritmik: 50% | Jam Kerja: 20%]

Discussion

Flexible Working Hours and Driver-Partner Motivation

Research results indicate that flexible working hours are the primary reason drivers join Maxim. This flexibility allows them to balance work with personal or other activities. This finding aligns with the Flexible Work Arrangement theory (ILO, 2021), which states that flexibility gives workers the freedom to set their own working hours, thereby increasing workforce participation. However, high flexibility also creates income uncertainty, as drivers' earnings are highly dependent on the number of orders and market demand.

Fluctuating Income and Economic Uncertainty

Data shows that the majority of drivers earn varying daily incomes, with 50% earning between IDR 100,000 and IDR 200,000. This situation demonstrates the economic uncertainty inherent in flexible work models. According to Wood et al. (2021), income uncertainty is one of the main risks for digital platform workers, as earnings depend on platform algorithms and there is no minimum guarantee. This requires drivers to adapt their working hours to their personal strategies to maximize earnings.

Employment Relations, Social Protection, and Worker Risks

Maxim drivers are categorized as partners, not permanent employees, so most are not registered with BPJS Ketenagakerjaan or health insurance. This finding suggests that social protection for drivers remains limited. Berg et al. (2020) stated that platform workers are vulnerable to social and economic risks due to a lack of adequate protection. This lack of protection creates vulnerability to workplace accidents, illness, and income fluctuations, requiring attention from both companies and the government to integrate platform workers into the social security system.

Algorithmic Control and Work Autonomy

Algorithmic control is a significant factor in order distribution and fare determination. Although drivers have flexibility in their time, they remain under the control of algorithms that are not fully transparent. Kellogg et al. (2020) explain that algorithms act as virtual managers that direct work, resulting in drivers losing some control over their activities. This demonstrates a reliance on digital systems, which poses challenges in achieving a balance between flexibility and work autonomy.

Balancing Flexibility and Security

The study's findings emphasize the need for integrated policies that balance work flexibility and social protection. According to Prassl (2022), adaptive regulation and algorithmic transparency can improve social justice in the gig economy. Maxim drivers require support in the form of digital literacy, social protection policies, and open platform mechanisms to minimize risks while maximizing the benefits of flexibility.

This discussion shows that Maxim's flexible employment model in Gorontalo has positive potential for increasing employment opportunities and flexibility, but also presents economic and social risks for drivers. Therefore, collaboration between the government, companies, and driver-partners is necessary to create a fair, transparent, and sustainable work ecosystem. Implementing adaptive policies and adequate social protection will strengthen the sustainability of flexible work in the digital transportation sector.

4. CONCLUSION

Maxim's flexible employment model in Gorontalo offers drivers the advantage of easily determining their working hours and adjusting their work activities to their personal and other work needs. This flexibility is a key attraction for drivers, allowing them to independently manage their time and work intensity. However, this flexibility also creates income uncertainty, as drivers' earnings are highly dependent on the number of orders and the platform's algorithmic mechanisms. Furthermore, most drivers lack social protection through insurance programs such as BPJS Employment or health insurance, exposing them to significant social and economic risks. Maxim's algorithmic controls limit some of the drivers' autonomy, despite their formal freedom to determine their working hours. These findings demonstrate the need for policies and regulations

that balance flexibility, social protection, and system transparency, creating a fair, safe, and sustainable work environment for all Maxim driver-partners in Gorontalo.

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