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Authors	Dasgupta, Prakriti;McDonnell, Anthony;Carbery, Ronan;Jooss, Stefan
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A Systematic Review on Worker Voice in the Platform Economy: The Constitution of a Grassroots Voice Mechanism

Prakriti Dasgupta[1] | Anthony McDonnell[1] | Ronan Carbery[1] | Stefan Jooss[2]

[1]Cork University Business School, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland | [2]School of Business, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

Correspondence: Prakriti Dasgupta (pdasgupta@ucc.ie)

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review investigates why and how platform workers express voice in a context where institutional and organisational voice mechanisms and representation structures are lacking or absent. Platform workers have been restricted in their ability to formally unionise or collectively bargain, and the presence of a digital intermediary in the form of a platform organisation limits the scope of worker voice. In this paper, we identify and synthesise the motives for voice use by platform workers—namely mutual aid, organising, visibility, and confrontation, and unpack how these are realised through bottom-up and independent voice channels that may potentially influence multiple stakeholders. The paper's core contribution lies in highlighting how the blurred employment boundaries of platform work structurally render labour power even more indeterminate, informing our conceptualisation of a 'grassroots voice mechanism', wherein the social relations of platform work and digital technologies convey worker voice beyond traditional organisational boundaries. We conclude with an agenda to guide future research centred heavily around the dynamics of platform work, the use of novel voice channels, and worker attitudes towards them.

1 | Introduction

Technological advancements and rapid digitalisation have transformed the interface of employment relationships comprising three key entities—the worker, the workplace, and the work—to accommodate and introduce new working arrangements (Cross and Swart 2022; Wilkinson et al. 2021). This has led to the proliferation of platform work where digital labour platforms (DLPs) act as technological intermediaries to connect customers with service-providing, independent freelancers in an on-demand manner to carry out short-term tasks (Duggan et al. 2020). These developments have ignited debates around how such digitally mediated work arrangements may derail and/or undermine worker voice (e.g., Bogg 2022; Keegan and Meijerink 2022; Stewart and Standford 2022; Wilkinson et al. 2021).

Hirschman's (1970) seminal work viewed voice as a political process wherein customers expressed their dissatisfaction and discontent in response to organisational decline (Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020). Since then, employees have increasingly been included in the voice discourse (Freeman and Medoff 1984; Kaufman 2020). This has seen multi-disciplinary perspectives emerge in human resource management (HRM), industrial relations (IR), and organisational behaviour (OB) (Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse 2015; Wilkinson and Fay 2011; Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020). These perspectives have brought significant variations in the definitions, manifestations,

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Summary

- What is currently known?
  - The different dimensions (agenda, form, influence) of voice in employment relationships.
  - The individual, organisational, and environmental determinants of worker voice in traditional and non-traditional employment relationships.
- What this paper adds?
  - This paper identifies and synthesises platform workers' voice where institutional and organisational voice mechanisms and representation structures are either lacking or absent.
  - It delineates four motives for voice use: mutual aid, organising, visibility, and confrontation; these are supported through a set of bottom-up and independent channels of voice.
  - It provides an integrative framework conceptualising the constitution of a 'grassroots voice mechanism'. This demonstrates that worker voice may be socially reproduced, and community driven, where the social relations of platform work and digital technologies convey worker voice beyond traditional boundaries.
- Implications for practitioners
  - As technology is rapidly changing the employment landscape, organisations should proactively engage with these novel channels of voice, including alternate worker representation structures.
  - Trade unions could explore partnerships with these worker-led channels to enhance and adapt their organising strategies.

and agendas of voice (Barry and Wilkinson 2022; Kaufman 2014; Klaas, Olson-Buchanan, and Ward 2012; Morrison 2011; Wilkinson et al. 2018). Differences are most pronounced and apparent in OB and IR, where this journal has highlighted how the former has marginalised the influence of the latter on HRM and, more broadly, on the study of work and employment relations (Barry and Wilkinson 2022; Godard 2014), leading to a 'psychologised conception of voice' dominating the HRM discourse (cf. Farndale et al. 2020).

While these perspectives have contrasting views on what voice means and its associated agenda (e.g., shared vs. contested), they generally agree that facilitating employee voice in traditional employment relationships is necessary. The IR perspective emphasises formal institutional mechanisms or representative structures such as unions and collective bargaining; the HRM view prioritises engagement and participation (e.g., via organisational schemes, and surveys); while the OB view has progressively shifted from perceiving voice as a response to employee dissatisfaction towards it being an individual-level behavioural act of speaking up, underscoring the importance of supportive organisational settings that enable such interactions (Barry and Wilkinson 2022; Nyfoudi, Kwon, and Wilkinson 2024; Wilkinson and Fay 2011; Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020).

We observe that the dominant disciplinary adaptions of voice have moderated and sidelined the more revolutionary potential of voice envisioned by Hirschman (1970). This is recognised within a strand of IR studies, those influenced by labour process traditions and their proposition on the 'indeterminacy of labour' (Dundon and Wilkinson 2024; Nechanska, Hughes, and Dundon 2020; Smith 2006). However, we note the consolidation of a more radical view on voice—one that emerges from structured antagonism, power asymmetry, and the indeterminacy of the effort bargain contract within capitalist employment relationships (Behrend 1957; Dobbins, Hughes, and Dundon 2021; Edwards and Hodder 2022), has been missing as part of critical HRM (Omidi, Dal Zotto, and Gandini 2023). Analytically, we contend that adopting such an orientation is warranted for critical dialogue, considering regulatory gaps and failures to adequately address emerging employment arrangements, working conditions, and new forms of management structures (Legge 1995). Beyond that, the focus has been on 'employee' voice (Wilkinson et al. 2022), with workers outside of traditional employment relationships only now gaining recognition, as their potentially varying agendas, forms, and influence of voice are being acknowledged (see Oyetunde et al. 2022, 2023).

Oyetunde, Prouska, and McKearney (2022, 2023) propose an integrative framework capturing the individual, organisational, and environmental determinants of voice in non-traditional employment relationships. However, the diversity of new forms of employment (e.g., multi-party, algorithm-mediated platform work arrangements), where the boundaries of the employment relationship often become blurred, and the roles of employer and employee lose institutional visibility (Dieuaide and Azaïs 2020), presents significant implications for worker voice and merits closer examination. For instance, this setting could influence (a) the provision and workers' access to a voice mechanism (Willman, Bryson, and Gomez 2006), (b) the purpose of voice and its beneficiaries, that is, whether voice is used as a means of challenging management, extending democracy at work and worker rights, or contributing towards enhancing organisational performance (Barry and Wilkinson 2016); and (c) potentially expand the opportunity for voice to emerge through new channels (Cini and Goldmann 2021; Ford and Honan 2019; Grohmann, Mendonça, and Woodcock 2023). To date, research on worker voice in the platform economy has largely focussed on (a) workers' limited access to institutional voice and representation structures, (b) workers' success in devising novel voice channels to counter DLPs' silencing through algorithmic management; and (c) the emergence of collective voice expressed through worker resistance and mobilisation efforts (see Cameron and Rahman 2022; Cini, Maccarrone, and Tassinari 2022; Kougiannou and Mendonça 2021; Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020; Walker 2021; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2021).

There is evidence of platform workers finding new ways to express voice in line with their non-traditional work structures (cf. Heiland 2020; Kougiannou and Mendonça 2021; Schreyer 2021; Walker 2021). An integral feature of all platform work arrangements includes the spatially or geographically dispersed organisation of work, which is no longer confined to a shop floor—a traditional spatial setting noted for its role in facilitating bottom-up voice (see Gunawardana 2014). This leads us to question; *why and how do workers in the platform economy*

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use their voice? We address this through a systematic review, synthesising this corpus of knowledge to identify the motives for voice use and channels adopted by platform workers. This review is timely given the significant and expanding segment of platform workers as part of the global labour force and it provides a valuable opportunity to explore new voice mechanisms where digitalisation has defined working dynamics and relationships (Wilkinson et al. 2021).

The emanating contributions are two-fold. First, a synthesis of the literature provides nuanced insights into *why* (the motives) and *how* (the channels) voice is used by platform workers. We unpack both location-based work and online, web-based work arrangements and emphasise varying levels of worker participation and reliance on voice, depending on the perceived value of the channels. Notably, we conceptualise how these motives for voice use may not cater to organisational interests, bearing in mind the opaque employment boundaries, and the transactional nature of algorithmically mediated, multi-party working dynamics that prevail within these arrangements. These motives are realised through several bottom-up channels of voice which we suggest have been shaped through social relations and digital communication technologies, and which results in a grassroots form of voice that is socially reproduced, and community driven, possessing the potential to influence a range of stakeholders beyond the organisational realm. From this, we conceptualise the constitution of a 'grassroots voice mechanism', by platform workers. In essence, when a DLP fails to facilitate voice, workers possess the capability to engineer their own voice channels, reflecting the idea of labour indeterminacy (Dundon and Wilkinson 2024; Omidi, Dal Zotto, and Gandini 2023). This also highlights the need for organisations to incorporate the voices of 'independent' workers when developing HRM practices (see Cross and Swart 2022), to accommodate the growing variety and flexibility within modern employment structures (Wilkinson et al. 2021).

Our second contribution centres on advancing previous conceptually formative works and reviews on voice. Adopting a miners' approach of 'problematising' the current scope of the voice literature (Breslin and Gatrell 2023), we extend dominant conceptualisations in the voice scholarship which have principally focussed on institutionally recognised union representation, non-union mechanisms, and/or organisationally supported channels as main avenues for 'employees' in traditional employment relationships (Barry and Wilkinson 2022; Atzeni 2021). We develop an integrative framework based on the platform workers' constitution of a grassroots voice mechanism, where we theoretically update and expand understanding around the dimensions of voice (Kaufman 2014, 2015). Our framework recognises how workers have identified and repurposed voice channels to influence public opinion and call attention to legislative bodies/authorities regarding the need for state regulations and statutory protections. Ultimately, this demonstrates how a grassroots voice mechanism has the potential to convey worker voice beyond traditional organisational boundaries, impacting not only actions of platform companies but also influence policy and societal viewpoints, informing our proposal for future research.

2 | Worker Voice and Platform Work

The emergence of the academic literature on voice can be traced back to Hirschman's (1970, 30) work, where he defined it as '*any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilise public opinion*'. Since then, the definition and use of voice has diversified which makes it useful to commence with a brief reconstruction of its treatment across disciplinary divides.

Within the OB literature, contemporary studies adopt unitary assumptions, presuming that the interests of workers and employers are fully congruent (Barry and Wilkinson 2022). Therefore, OB scholars define voice as 'informal and discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems, or opinions about work-related issues, with the intent to bring about improvement or change' (Morrison 2023, 80). Voice is seen as a form of individual extra-role behaviour that benefits the organisation, co-workers, customers, or other external stakeholders (LePine and Van Dyne 2001; Van Dyne and LePine 1998). There is an underlying positive connotation associated with voice, which assumes that it is always constructive in its intent; it adopts a prosocial orientation, as opposed to workers using their voice to express dissatisfaction, vent, or complain (Barry and Wilkinson 2022).

Conversely, the concept of 'frames of reference' is widely employed to navigate the debate on worker voice amongst IR scholars (Heery 2015). This is characterised by sharp divisions held by unitary, pluralist, and critical schools of thought, who interpret the functions of voice in competing ways and consequently advocate for different forms. For example, the mainstream IR scholarship has been fundamentally pluralist in recognising that while conflict is integral to the employment relationship (Heery 2024), this can be bridged through negotiation between both parties. Voice is understood as the 'expression of worker interests that are separate and distinct from those of the firm, and as a vehicle for employee self-determination' (Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020, 1). The pluralist perspective emphasises representation and adopts an institutional orientation, where it promotes mechanisms of voice such as unions, collective bargaining, and regulatory frameworks to safeguard different interests. The critical school in contrast, interprets the divergent interests between the employer and worker as irreconcilable. This position holds capitalist work relations as inherently exploitative and endorses the need for worker resistance (Heery 2015). There is scepticism about methods of participation devised by employers, as well as the state's ability to positively impact labour relations and resolve underlying issues between employers and workers (ibid.). Finally, while unitary assumptions have been relatively marginal within the overarching IR scholarship, the emergence of HRM has led to greater cross-fertilisation between the two fields.

The field of HRM has incorporated both unitary and pluralist assumptions in viewing voice as 'the ways and means through

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which employees attempt to have a say and potentially influence organisational affairs about issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners' (Wilkinson et al. 2014, 5; Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020). HRM's 'soft' and 'hard' organisational orientation tends to steer its focus towards issues around employee engagement, open communication, and performance management (Edgar and Geare 2005). Being on the cusp of the IR-OB continuum, it recognises representative forms of voice (e.g., unions and works councils), but places greater emphasis on providing a combination of different organisation-based voice channels (e.g., speak-up programmes, open door policies, suggestion schemes, employee surveys, intranet, grievance processes) that workers can choose from based on the issue or comfort level (Barry and Wilkinson 2022; Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse 2015).

In summary, we observe a broad consensus regarding the provision of voice mechanisms from both institutional and organisational standpoints. These mechanisms are typically seen as being offered to minimise conflict and maintain industrial harmony. This is best illustrated by HRM's prescriptive approach to worker voice, but which notably neglects its earlier, radical learnings informed by critical IR, sociology of work, and labour process traditions (Dundon and Wilkinson 2024; Omidi, Dal Zotto, and Gandini 2023). The latter emphasises that due to the indeterminacy of labour power and the potential for antagonistic interests, voice can also manifest as both individual and collective forms of worker resistance (Nechanska, Hughes, and Dundon 2020); a view that we strongly subscribe to, and which informs our critical pluralist framing of this review. Therefore, we propose a more inclusive definition of voice *as encompassing expressions and/or actions undertaken by workers to influence* key *stakeholders in order to advance their interests and defend their rights within a working relationship*. Importantly, our definition does not presume that a mechanism or structure (Oyetunde, Prouska, and McKearney 2022 2023) for expressing voice will always be made available to workers, as such a provision heavily depends upon the terms and conditions of employment within a particular regulatory setting. For instance, the widespread neoliberal principles governing platform work arrangements, and the platform business model, do not recognise a traditional employment relationship between the platform and the worker, nor do they assume a long-term partnership between the participating actors. Instead, this business model advocates all parties to pursue their individual self-interests in economic terms, which undermines any positive net benefits of a voice regime in the first place (Willman, Bryson, and Gomez 2007).

Platform work can be broadly categorised into *location-based*, involving locally fulfiled tasks that include on-demand services like ride-hailing, courier and delivery, domestic, beauty, and care work; and *online web-based*, where tasks are executed remotely, encompassing digital/data work such as micro-tasks, transcription, translation, app development, web design, and programing (ILO 2021, 40). Platform work is said to offer the service provider (i.e., the worker) with alternative avenues for income generation, alongside greater scope for self-determination and increased flexibility in choosing when and where they work, free from the constraints of hierarchical power structures (Jabagi et al. 2019; Kuhn 2016). The reality appears often different and varies across workers (cf. Rani and Furrer 2021; Woodcock 2020). In platform work, digitisation replaces the employment contract of a traditional employment relationship with a multi-party 'worker–DLP–customer' relationship (Dieuaide and Azaïs 2020). In this setup, the boundaries of the employment relationship become unclear, and regulations designed for traditional employment models often fail to adequately address the nuances of platform work (ibid.). Workers are frequently classified as self-employed independent contractors, rather than employees,[1] due to their ability to provide services for multiple platforms simultaneously. By not recognising a traditional employment relationship, the DLP is exempted from identifying as an employer, which minimises all labour costs and associated liabilities such as providing benefits and protections (e.g., health insurance, minimum wage, overtime pay) (ILO 2021).

Further, platform workers are often excluded from formally accessing institutional IR structures and voice mechanisms, due to their employment classification. As the entire workflow (e.g., onboarding, task allocation, performance evaluation, reward management, and exit) is mediated through a digital interface, additional restrictive limits are imposed on the workers' scope to interact with the DLP (Duggan et al. 2020). Grievance addressal or feedback channels in platform work tend to be functionally rudimentary and are commonly maintained by algorithmically programed interactions and chatbots (Gegenhuber, Ellmer, and Schüßler 2021; Keegan and Meijerink 2022; Lei 2021). Kougiannou and Mendonça (2021) perceive this as an organisational tactic to simultaneously distance and silence worker voice. We, however, argue that the marked absence of voice structures stems from the core premise that DLPs, despite acting as a central architect of such work arrangements, identify as a technological intermediary rather than an employer. Consequently, they do not acknowledge an employer-employee relationship with the workers. If they were to provide voice mechanisms, it would contradict this position, which implies that the provision of voice is contingent upon the recognition of a traditional employment relationship (Johnstone and Ackers 2015; Budd 2004).

Despite this, *why* and *how* platform workers have overcome these constraints to express their voice justifies attention (Cini, Maccarrone, and Tassinari 2022; Kougiannou and Mendonça 2021; Però and Downey 2024; Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020; Walker 2021; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2021); particularly when it appears that there is limited desire for such voice from the DLP. This allows us to explore new motives for and channels of voice among platform workers, who represent a significant portion of the global workforce engaging in non-traditional employment arrangements (ILO 2021). Worker voice in such contingent forms of employment may have long been neglected and missing from the discourse due to the scholarly focus on 'employees' in traditional employment relationships (Wilkinson et al. 2022; Wilkinson and Barry 2016). However, as these new employment arrangements become more pervasive with greater adoption of technology and digitisation (Wilkinson et al. 2021), they can permeate and alter longstanding objectives of an employment relationship; one of them being voice (Budd 2004). To keep up with these advancements, attention must be paid to understanding both voice and voice mechanisms, that may not be organisationally or

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institutionally recognised, yet still have emerged in the platform work context.

3 | Review Methodology

Our approach to undertaking a systematic review was to follow the process set out by Hiebl (2023) whereby it is (a) structured, that is, conducted in an ordered or methodical fashion, (b) comprehensive in its synthesis of the reviewed research topic, and (c) transparent in its sample selection process. To meet these qualifying attributes, our review design and sample selection process consisted of three steps: identification, screening, and disclosure of the review sample (ibid.). The identification step encompassed the search for research items that were potentially relevant to our research question. Therefore, a literature search was conducted in October 2023 to identify conceptual and empirical research related to worker voice in the platform economy, utilising Scopus and Web of Science—two widely acknowledged bibliometric databases for management research (Paul et al. 2021). We developed a search string consisting of two parts (see Table 1). The first included terms associated with 'voice' (e.g., 'worker voice', 'employee voice', 'collective', 'union', 'bargaining') which were drawn from seminal conceptual and review papers (cf. Barry and Wilkinson 2022; Dibben et al. 2023; Kaufman 2015; Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse 2015; Nechanska, Hughes, and Dundon 2020; Oyetunde, Prouska, and McKearney 2022; Wilkinson et al. 2021). These keywords incorporated 'direct' and 'indirect' (Budd, Gollan, and Wilkinson 2010) 'formal' and 'informal' voice channels and mechanisms (Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse 2015). We also included terms like 'employee participation', 'employee involvement', and 'employee communication', due to their use by the pluralist school (Dundon, Wilkinson, and Ackers 2023) and to avoid missing out on papers that used those terms interchangeably (e.g., Oyetunde, Prouska, and McKearney 2022). Aligned with our critical pluralist frame and our definition, we include voice expressed due to dissatisfaction (Barry and Wilkinson 2022), and resulting from the indeterminacy of labour power (Nechanska, Hughes, and Dundon 2020). This included terms such as 'protest', 'activism', 'mobilisation', and 'resistance'. The second part of the search string involved a combination of keywords such as 'platform economy' and 'platform work', and the different classifications of platform work (e.g., 'app work', 'crowdwork') (cf. Duggan et al. 2020; Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn 2019; Watson et al. 2021).

The identification phase also involved the application of a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria which were defined as part of our search protocol. Specifically, articles had to be: (a) published in peer-reviewed journals, (b) written in English, and (c) included at least one of the identified search terms in the title, abstract, or keywords (Briner and Denyer 2012). Therefore, conference papers, reports, editorials, books, book chapters, and any other form of grey literature were excluded from the sample. While omitted, we acknowledge that they can prove to be a valuable resource for studying an emerging field, and hence cite relevant grey literature (e.g., Bogg 2022; Heiland 2020; Keegan and Meijerink 2022; Stewart and Standford 2022) for framing the need for this review. The search resulted in a total of 553 articles.

The screening phase involved omitting duplicate search results from the two databases which resulted in 390 unique articles. The next step involved reading all abstracts for relevance, based on which we classified them as either A (highly relevant), B (potentially relevant), or C (minimal/no relevance). This saw the exclusion of 281 articles, due to their scope of inquiry, as they did not directly address the issue of worker voice or perspectives on voice in the platform economy. In line with other reviews (see Hiebl 2023; Paul et al. 2021), we applied a quality threshold (articles published in Q1 and Q2 in the SCImago journal ranking list) to the remaining 109 articles, which resulted in the exclusion of 15 papers. The final step of screening involved reading the full texts of 94 articles. An additional 3 papers were removed during this round, because they did not contribute towards answering our research question. This left us with a final sample of 91 articles in the disclosure phase, which have been included in our systematic review (see Figure 1 for the search process).

Next, we developed a detailed coding template that documented author(s), year of publication, title, citation metrics, journal, research objectives, theoretical frameworks (if any), key definitions, main arguments, methodology details (research design, context, sample, level of analysis), main findings, and suggestions for future research. This enabled us to map the literature and examine the dominant theoretical frames, while also validating our application of the critical pluralist perspective on voice for organising this review. We used thematic analysis for extracting and comprehensively synthesising the key themes that emerged across studies to advance understanding on *why* and *how* platform workers have used voice. The coding process comprised three main steps: (a) first-order coding, whereby we assigned keywords to describe and capture the key findings of the articles concerning the research question (e.g., sharing work experiences, expressing dissatisfaction with work conditions, creating private chat/social media

TABLE 1 | Search string.

Search string	("worker voice" OR "employee voice" OR "informal voice" OR "formal voice" OR "direct voice" OR "indirect voice" OR "employee participation" OR "employee involvement" OR "employee communication" OR "employee consultation" OR "protest" OR "resistance" OR "activism" OR "collective" OR "union" OR "organising" OR "organizing" OR "solidarity" OR "mobilisation" OR "mobilization" OR "bargaining" OR "social dialogue") AND ("platform economy" OR "gig economy" OR "platform work" OR "gig work" OR "app work" OR "app-work" OR "crowdwork" OR "crowd work" OR "gig worker" OR "platform worker" OR "algorithmic management")

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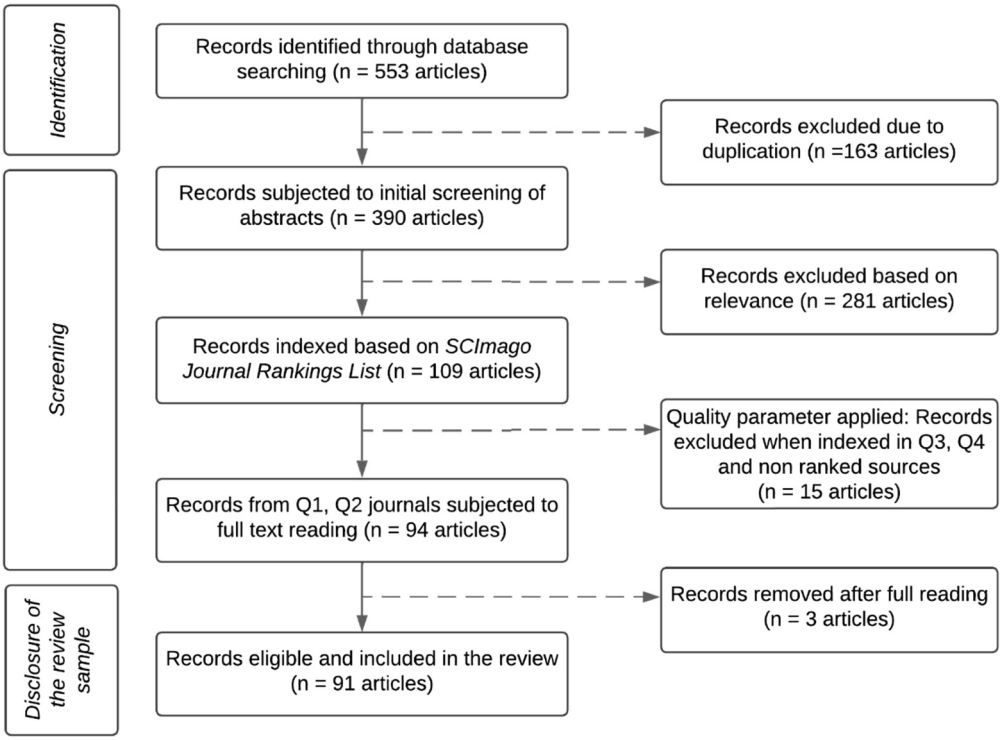

FIGURE 1 | Systematic search process and sample selection.

groups, relations with co-workers, dealing with non-work problems, overcoming individualisation/isolation, identifying public spaces to freely socialise and network); (b) second-order coding, involved grouping the codes obtained from the previous step into more overarching categories (e.g., peer-to-peer interactions, self-help networking facilitated by social media/communication tools); and (c) aggregate theme development, combining motives for and channels of voice (e.g., *voice for mutual aid* via *digital communication technologies*) (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix for illustrative quotes).

The first author undertook the coding independently, which was followed by detailed debriefs, independent reviews, and discussions between all authors after every stage of the coding. We organised these themes to answer *why* platform workers utilise voice, where we distinguish between four motives for voice use, namely, *mutual aid*, *organising*, *visibility*, and *confrontation*. With regards to our use of the term 'motive', we note its usage within the literature from an organisational standpoint, to denote the reasons organisations establish voice systems and mechanisms (e.g., to reduce employee dissatisfaction and to capture employee suggestions for improving business performance) (Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse 2015). We, however, use the term 'motive' to represent the reasons platform workers use their voice. In addition, to understand *how* workers have expressed voice, we identify novel voice channels (e.g., *digital communication technologies*, *alternate worker-led organisations*), which supported these core motives and were leveraged by workers to escalate their voice. In the literature, the term 'channel' has been used to refer to various communication/representation avenues that vary widely in formality and structure through which employees can express their opinions, concerns, and feedback within an organisation (Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020). We use the term in a comparable manner but recognise that such channels may not be organisationally provided nor supported in platform work arrangements.

4 | Mapping the Scholarship

The literature is dominated by authors (based on first-author affiliation) from the Global North (n = 78); particularly the UK (n = 26) and the USA (n = 11). There is a balanced mix of single-authored (n = 27), joint-authored (n = 37), and multi-authored (n = 27) publications. Evidence of cross-country author collaboration appears limited (n = 25). Overall, the frequency of publications has maintained an upward trendline since 2016.

Most papers were empirical (n = 84), with the vast majority being qualitative (n = 73), with few mixed-method (n = 7) and quantitative (n = 4) studies. The dominant data collection tools included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, non-participant and participant observation, and online ethnography of conversation threads/posts/comments on public and private chat groups and/or social media forums. The use of these latter tools suggests scholars have looked at more innovative approaches to understand worker voice in the platform economy. While authorship is heavily dominated by the Global North, the Global South (China, India, Latin America, South-East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa) has some representation with respect to the empirical context (n = 33). Location-based platform work was the dominant form of work examined (n = 69), with few studies centred on online web-based platform workers (n = 15).

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The papers were published across 55 different journals, representing a wide range of disciplines. At an organisational level, Hirschman's exit-voice theory (e.g., Maffie 2023), the disciplinary views on voice (Employment Relations/HRM) (e.g., Kougiannou and Mendonça 2021), and concepts of 'sideways voice', 'e-voice', and 'peer-to-peer interactions' (e.g., Walker 2021) have been used to discuss how platform worker voice emerges in the absence of traditional voice mechanisms. Scholars have also used Labour Process perspectives, attributing their voice to the indeterminacy of labour power and structurally antagonistic workplace relations, wherein worker voice is expressed through various forms of individual and/or collective resistance (e.g., Cameron and Rahman 2022; Heiland 2021; Moore and Joyce 2020; Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2021).

At a systems level, scholars have drawn from Labour Geography (e.g., Anwar and Graham 2020; Iazzolino 2023; Johnston 2020; Morales-Muñoz and Roca 2022) to highlight how worker agency and approaches to voice can be constrained or enabled by social, cultural, political, and overarching institutional systems and structures. The centrality of context has also been highlighted by Social Movement and IR scholars. For example, several studies used mobilisation theory to explain how workers, particularly in favourable socio-political environments, have used voice to build solidarity and mobilise resources, for establishing worker-led organisations and representation structures, thereby enhancing their ability to escalate their voice (e.g., Chesta, Zamponi, and Caciagli 2019; Cini 2023; Cini, Maccarrone, and Tassinari 2022; Però and Downey 2024; Wood, Martindale, and Lehdonvirta 2023).

5 | Motives and Channels of Voice in the Platform Economy

We find that the motives and channels of voice by platform workers tend to differ from conventional voice mechanisms. We establish how these heterogenous channels (e.g., digital communication technologies, alternate worker-led organisations, public spaces, and judicial systems) support a range of *expressions and/or actions* (e.g., peer-to-peer interactions, community coalitions, striking) that workers undertake to *influence key stakeholders (*e.g., other workers, labour and non-labour actors, legislative authorities). These underscore the platform workers' different motives for using voice (i.e., for mutual aid, organising, visibility, and confrontation) by which they seek to *advance their interests*, *and/or defend their rights*. In the four themes that follow, we elucidate these distinct motives for voice use and identify the novel channels used by platform workers that lend support to their motives.

5.1 | Voice for Mutual aid via Digital Communication Technologies

The use of voice for mutual aid centres around members voluntarily offering support to each other across all facets of life, extending beyond the work sphere (Ford and Honan 2019). There is an underlying emphasis on self-help, reciprocity, and cooperation, with members sharing their resources for a common benefit. We find that voice for mutual aid arises from the hyper-individualisation at work stemming from the spatially dispersed organisation of the labour process in platform work (Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020; Wood, Lehdonvirta, and Graham 2018). This augments workers' sense of struggle and uncertainty, motivating them to network and build relationships with other workers which the DLPs either fail to facilitate or actively discourage through their business model. Studies suggest that workers tend to leverage various communication tools and social media forums which allows them to create online spaces where they can freely socialise beyond the confines of organisational monitoring and surveillance (Maffie 2020; Parth, Bathini, and Kandathil 2023; Walker 2021; Zhou and Pun 2024). Here, the adoption of independent digital communication technologies represents a new channel for worker voice that facilitates settings akin to digital watercoolers, thus allowing workers to influence each other by way of using their voice and, at the same time gaining access to the voice of others (McDaid, Andon, and Free 2023).

Studies note that this voice extends beyond basic socialisation, often involving the sharing of personal work experiences to facilitate mutual support (Kwan 2022). Examples include offering assistance or advice to others on dealing with clients and avoiding unpaid labour, collaboratively identifying strategies to improve earning opportunities, problem-solving, navigating challenges around work intensification, reputational insecurity, and quality of tasks received, including venting or articulating grievances (Anwar and Graham 2020; Soriano and Cabañes 2020; Vasudevan and Chan 2022; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2023). This, however, tends to vary based on the type of platform work (i.e., location-based work vis-à-vis online web-based work), worker characteristics/orientation and participation on the platform, as well as the technological dexterity of the worker which often depends on socio-economic and demographic factors (Parth, Bathini, and Kandathil 2023; Yao et al. 2021; Zhou and Pun 2024).

Research has also noted how these virtual settings have expanded to physical spaces such as common pick-up points for food delivery (Popan 2021; Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020), base camps (Qadri 2021, 2023), car washes, petrol stations (Iazzolino 2023), and airport or railway parking spots (Parth, Bathini, and Kandathil 2023; Wells, Attoh, and Cullen 2021), promoting social identification amongst workers. This has resulted in the formation of close-knit worker networks, which were noted more prominently by studies that focussed on location-based platform work like ride-hailing or food delivery services. Emphasising how these worker networks operate in the spirit of mutual aid to help one another deal with work and non-work-related issues (Kwan 2022; Medappa 2023; Walker 2021), Ford and Honan (2019, 536) describe how, '*each community also nominates a member to be part of a rapid response team…which is responsible for assisting drivers on the road*, for example *if a driver has a road accident*, *if they experience conflict with conventional transport drivers or if their vehicle breaks down in the district*…'. We note that peer-to-peer interactions exemplify voice use within these spaces (Bonini et al. 2024), which is likely sustained by a sense of

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mutual aid, collective responsibility, and belonging shared by a network or community of workers, thereby motivating its continued use.

5.2 | Voice for Organising via Alternate Worker-led Organisations

The use of voice for organising focuses heavily on building and sustaining solidarity. Interestingly, the online spaces/communities enabled by digital communication tools/platforms that supported and facilitated worker voice for mutual aid, have promoted a growing sense of camaraderie among workers based on their shared struggles and conditions (Chesta, Zamponi, and Caciagli 2019; Mieruch and McFarlane 2022; Popan 2021). Studies have noted how these online communities have spontaneously evolved to take the shape of alternate, worker-led organisations as channels through which worker voice for organising emerges. For example, Chesta, Zamponi, and Caciagli (2019, 835) reported a participant sharing, '*before the aggregate forms that we created, we established a group of friends. The Riders Union was born spontaneously from friendship relations that started socialising concerns...*'. As platform workers are typically denied formal access to trade union representation on account of their employment classification, multiple studies noted the development of worker-led organisational forms, such as of associations, micro-collectives, cooperatives, and indie unions, that have acted as a channel to advance worker interests and rights (e.g., Lenaerts, Kilhoffer, and Akgüç 2018; Però and Downey 2024; Rubert 2023; Webster et al. 2022).

Worker-led organisational forms vary, not only, from context-to-context, but in scale, capacity, and worker participation levels, commonly noted by studies on location-based platform work. The localised nature of this work allowed workers to physically interact with each other and the context, as opposed to the global nature of remote work that dis-embedded the worker from the jurisdictional setting, thereby hindering the emergence of collective voice and trust-based relationships (Johnston 2020; Panteli, Rapti, and Scholarios 2020; Schou and Bucher 2023). For location-based platform workers, these organisational forms functioned as a medium of worker representation, signifying a departure from traditional top-down union structures. Acting as an independent channel for expressing collective voice, it enabled workers to influence and forge instrumental alliances, and coalitions with labour and non-labour community actors. This is notable in the way workers in certain studied contexts have garnered solidarity from unions that have a strong political positioning (Akorsu et al. 2023; Cant and Woodcock 2020; Hau and Savage 2023; Joyce, Stuart, and Forde 2023; Moares and Betancor Nuez 2022).

Workers have successfully liaised with left-wing political parties, leftist lawyers, and city councils (Kougiannou and Mendonça 2021; Morales-Muñoz and Roca 2022), and secured backing from civil society advocates, academics, journalists, and the media (Cini 2023; Marrone and Finotto 2019; Zhou and Pun 2024). For instance, Morales-Muñoz and Roca (2022, 1427) noted how '*Spanish couriers also established both national and international alliances. On a national scale, they cooperated with radical unions, leftist lawyers' associations and left-wing political parties...These parties have been critical in upscaling Spanish couriers' initiatives...*'. Further, isolated cases of involvement from marketplace actors, such as restaurants and customers who directly participate in the workflow in the case of food delivery, have also been observed (see Yu, Treré, and Bonini 2022). This includes instances where workers have leveraged these ties to inflict reputational damage and sabotage the platform's consumer base (see Vrikki and Lekakis 2023).

Overall, we find that multiple actors act as distinct voice channels, contributing to a landscape of advocacy and representation. Worker organisations, channelling their grievances via these actors have turned to framing their struggles around precarious working conditions as matters of the community. Evidence suggests the adoption of a communicative strategy which involves articulating their concerns as a violation of their human rights or as a social justice issue (Però and Downey 2024; Stylogiannis 2023). This highlights the multifaceted nature of how worker voice is expressed, and its ability to influence various stakeholders and traverse organisational boundaries, occasionally transcending even transnational borders (Miguez and Menendez 2021).

5.3 | Voice for Visibility via Public Spaces (Online and Offline)

Voice for visibility centres around tackling the perceived invisibility of platform workers. Due to the remote, transitory, and highly transactional nature of work exchanges, the degree of invisibility experienced by online web-based workers from all sides of the marketplace (i.e., the customer/task requester, platform, and other workers) appears to be higher than for location-based workers (Johnston 2020; Panteli, Rapti, and Scholarios 2020). This contributes to a higher level of competition amongst web-based workers, which deters their ability to organise themselves (Wood, Lehdonvirta, and Graham 2018). However, there is evidence of voice use for greater visibility, which has emerged most prominently through a public letter writing campaign by Amazon Mechanical Turk[2] workers that was directed at the platform owner. For example, the content of these letters illustrated sentiments such as, '*I am a skilled and intelligent worker... I am a human being, not an algorithm, and yet Requesters seem to think I am there just to serve their bidding. They do not respect myself and my fellow Turkers with a fair wage*' (Panteli, Rapti, and Scholarios 2020, 485). This study highlighted the campaign's call for proper recognition of workers as skilled individuals who deserve tools to represent themselves, including access to improved communication and feedback channels with both task requesters and the platform. Further, this letter-writing campaign, as an expression of voice, was hosted on an independent online collaborative platform co-designed by academic researchers to provide workers with a space to develop a collective voice (Cini 2023; Hiessl 2018).

In contrast, location-based workers have converted their access to local structures of the city (e.g., public spaces and urban centres) into a spatial channel for voice. This enables them to reach the public and generate greater visibility and awareness

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around their poor working conditions (Chesta, Zamponi, and Caciagli 2019; Cini 2023). Relying on solidarity networks forged through organising, as well as communication technologies for planning and coordination (Bulut and Yeşilyurt 2024), these workers have undertaken a range of actions in these spaces to secure concessions from the DLPs by influencing and appealing to the sentiments of sympathetic spectators. These have included physical demonstrations (e.g., overnight sit-ins), rallies, informal protests on the main streets of the city, outside popular restaurants, and company premises (Cant and Woodcock 2020; Chesta, Zamponi, and Caciagli 2019; Dhar and Thuppilikkat 2022; Moares and Betancor Nuez 2022). Wild-cat strike actions that integrate physical and digital pickets through activities such as 'critical mass ride-outs' and 'coordinated log-offs' have also been employed (Joyce, Stuart, and Forde 2023, 23). Some actions have yielded concrete victories with institutional investors withdrawing their funding from these firms (see Grohmann, Mendonça, and Woodcock 2023). Collectively, these actions demonstrate voice use by workers, often by inconveniencing the public and provoking strong criticism of DLPs, to counter the invisible nature of platform labour, as well as assert their rights and demands for improved working conditions.

5.4 | Voice for Confrontation via Judicial Systems

Voice for confrontation centres around platform workers approaching the judicial system of the country and utilising legal action to assert their voice and contest the DLP's business model. We find evidence of location-based platform workers pursuing strategic litigation (Joyce, Stuart, and Forde 2023) and class-action suits to influence legislative authorities to effect systemic changes that introduce favourable policy supports for them and/or set legal precedents to regulate the DLP's operations (Collins and Atkinson 2023; Wood, Martindale, and Lehdonvirta 2023). As Joyce, Stuart, and Forde (2023, 13) noted, '*... the method of legal enactment figured strongly in our findings. The IWGB[3] has been active in pursuing legal action over misclassification, and CLB[4] members had been involved in these cases...The union lost a case against Deliveroo over collective bargaining rights, but was also appealing*'.

Many of these efforts have originated from Global North countries, where there is a history of collective bargaining, worker representation through labour unions or works councils, and comprehensive social welfare systems and labour laws designed to safeguard worker rights (Johnston 2020; Pernicka and Johnston 2021). These traditions have not only empowered workers to articulate and frame their struggles using a discourse centred on employment precarity, but in certain cases, induced DLPs into adopting varying worker voice regimes (Gegenhuber, Ellmer, and Schüßler 2021), or even conform to the context's employment relations model (Johnston 2020). Examples include the formation of a works council by Foodora food delivery couriers with support from a trade union (Vida) that represents workers in the transport and service industries in Austria (ibid.). Additionally, there was the first platform-initiated collective bargaining agreement between an on-demand platform cleaning company (Hilfr) and Denmark's trade union (3F) (Ilsøe and Larsen 2023; Moore and Joyce 2020). In the case of web-based platform work, the German example of extending multi-enterprise agreements to online web-based platform workers demonstrates an alternate approach to conflict resolution and a mechanism for social dialogue between platform stakeholders and trade unions (Johnston 2020).

Notwithstanding the large, under-regulated informal economy in the Global South where labour precarity is normalised, we find efforts (e.g., in Chile and India) involving parliamentary and political lobbying through public meetings and letters by driver associations (Medappa 2023; Morales-Muñoz and Roca 2022). While these findings underscore the importance of the jurisdictional context in shaping worker voice and influencing power dynamics between workers and the DLPs (Karanović, Berends, and Engel 2021), it reinforces the argument that workers may naturally gravitate towards specific voice channels depending on the type of platform work (location-based vis-à-vis web-based).

6 | Discussion

6.1 | Theoretical Contributions

By problematising opportunities for worker voice in contemporary, non-traditional employment arrangements, we set out to examine *why* and *how* platform workers have expressed voice despite lacking access to institutional and/or organisational voice mechanisms. We identify four core motives for using voice, namely, for mutual aid, organising, visibility and confrontation—all focussing on direct benefits for platform workers such as advancing their interests, and/or defending their rights, rather than aiming to serve organisational interests explicitly. This intimated that their motives are primarily aligned with a broader, contested rather than a shared '*agenda*' (Kaufman 2014). We deliberate that prospects of a shared agenda are undermined by the structural and operational characteristics of platform work arrangements such as opaque employment boundaries, the transactional nature of the work, and the systemic inequalities platform workers face because of their exclusion from institutional voice structures. The DLPs' reluctance to provide meaningful voice channels, stemming from their prioritisation of operational functionality over genuine worker involvement, could also act as a contributing factor (Gegenhuber, Ellmer, and Schüßler 2021). When voice channels exist, they are narrowly designed to serve platforms' immediate business needs, such as gathering feedback for task efficiency, rather than recognising worker inputs for strategic purposes or empowering workers participation in decision-making processes (ibid.). Importantly, a contested voice agenda allows necessary acknowledgement that platform workers are a heterogeneous group representing a fragmented and diversified workforce (Wilkinson et al. 2021). Consequently, a unified voice is difficult to form among workers themselves—as evidenced by their multiple motives for voice use.

We recognise how digital communication tools and social media have been used as a primary voice channel that supports peer-to-peer interactions, and from which voice for mutual aid

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emerges. What is particularly distinctive is the way platform workers have expressed their voice through leveraging existing voice channels as building blocks (e.g., communication technologies) to mobilise, supplement, and/or reinforce newer channels. This is most notable in the way voice for organising, visibility, and confrontation arises and is expressed. We elucidated how these *motives* are realised through several bottom-up *channels* of voice (e.g., digital communication technologies, alternate worker-led organisations, public spaces, and judicial systems), which complement each other to support a grassroots '*form*' of voice by workers. In this regard, we refrain from adhering to classifications such as direct or indirect (Kaufman 2014; Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse 2015), because of the absence of institutional or organisational voice structures.

Our analysis further revealed that variations in worker voice use, are guided by a set of fundamental *contextual factors*; the type of platform work (Johnston 2020; Pernicka and Johnston 2021), worker characteristics (Zhou and Pun 2024), socio-political heritage of the context, supportive community (Cini 2023), and institutional structures and capabilities (Johnston 2020). Specifically, we recognise how these contextual factors may impact the identification, choice, and consolidation of voice channels adopted by platform workers. However, when considered collectively, we observe the potential for platform worker voice to '*influence*' a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., other workers, labour and non-labour actors, legislative authorities), transcending organisational and transnational boundaries (Bryson et al. 2013; Miguez and Menendez 2021). We note how influence of these voice channels has extended to shaping public opinion and drawing attention to the need for regulations and policies (Collins and Atkinson 2023; Wood, Martindale, and Lehdonvirta 2023). This reveals the reach of worker voice, aiming for transformative changes across the platform industry, rather than simply trying to affect the actions of individual DLPs. This takes the discourse of voice outside the organisation (Kaufman 2014, 2015), thus extending how influence of worker voice is realised beyond affecting management decisions and workplace affairs.

Building on Kaufman's (2014) dimensions of voice (agenda, form, influence), we present our review findings through an integrative framework (see Figure 2). This allows us to expand our understanding of these dimensions to accommodate transient working relations and arrangements exemplified by platform work. More importantly, it lends support to our conceptualisation of a '*grassroots voice mechanism*' constituted by spatially dispersed platform workers, which is better able to grasp their labour-power indeterminacy. For instance, the opaque employment boundaries of platform work, makes the effort bargain less predictable; wherein workers' effort may extend to include expressions and/or actions to influence diverse stakeholders and advocate for their interests and rights in the working relationship. We, therefore, contend that when such structural and operational aspects of platform work intersect with the above-described contextual factors, it can contribute to an ongoing indeterminacy that provides the essential momentum for a grassroots voice mechanism to emerge and evolve.

Our conceptualisation of a grassroots voice mechanism carries important connotations for extending HRM's remit and view on voice channels—enriching its theoretical foundations and relevance in addressing the complexities of modern labour relations. Most notably, shifting the discourse on voice beyond the confines of the organisation (Kaufman 2014, 2015) allows us to redraw the boundaries of HRM (Cross and Swart 2022); this is particularly valuable given the growing prevalence of such non-traditional work arrangements, and their inevitable influences on traditional workplaces. It also enables HRM's stance on voice to remain current and inclusive, by aligning with two major

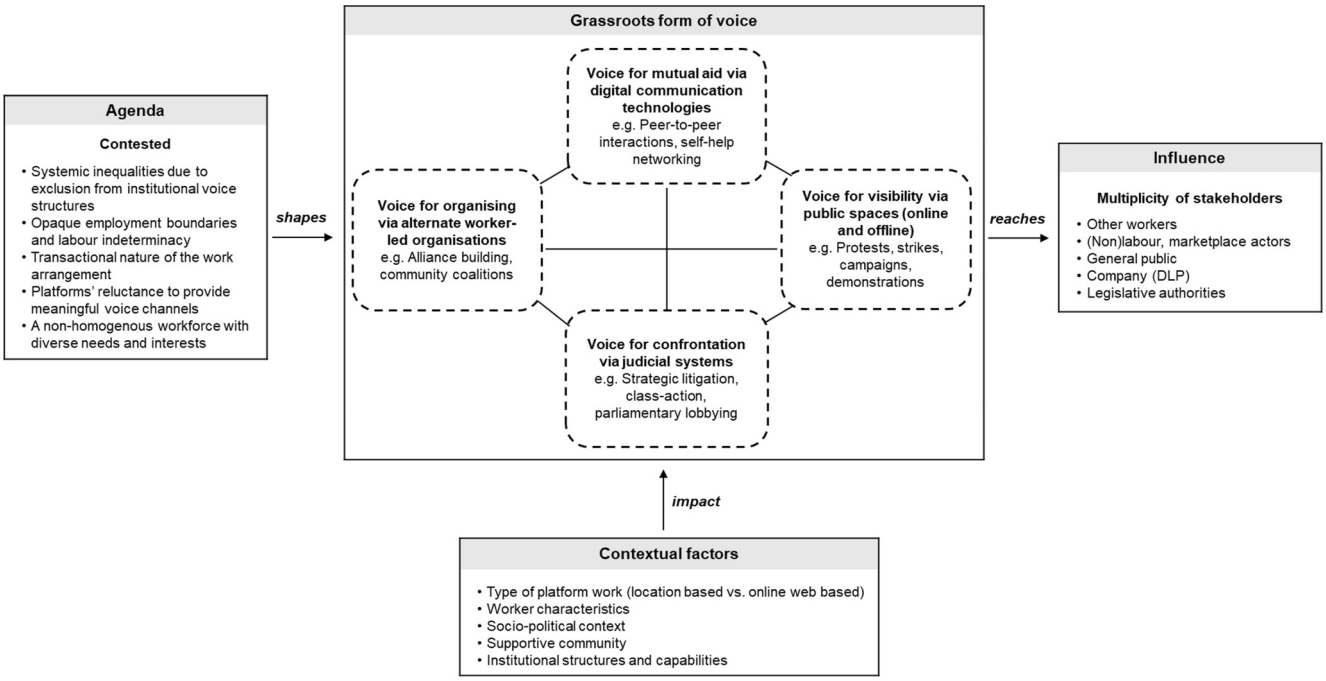

FIGURE 2 | Grassroots voice mechanism by platform workers.

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trends; digitalisation, which has paved the way for these technology-mediated working arrangements, and workforce diversification (Wilkinson et al. 2021).

Beyond HRM, it affords scope to broaden and rejuvenate the mainstream IR view that has strictly focussed on formal institutional voice mechanisms (Barry and Wilkinson 2022), and which may be unrepresentative of the changing nature of the workforce. A grassroots voice mechanism underscores profound shifts in the landscape of labour representation and voice—revealing how the role of trade unions is no longer exclusive—bringing attention to the growing importance and involvement of diverse stakeholders, such as (non)labour actors and alternate worker-led organisations. We recognise this as a point of convergence with the neo-pluralistic thought process (Ackers 2002). Arguably, this complements our critical pluralist framing—by enriching understanding on how marginalised and less formalised forms of worker voice emerge via these novel voice channels, while maintaining a focus on the structural inequalities and power dynamics that shape them. Perhaps recognition of these voice channels could offer a pragmatic pathway for addressing the challenges posed by evolving work and employment structures for both HRM and IR.

6.2 | Research Agenda

Studies examining location-based platform work note that, due to the physical and local nature of the work, workers seem better able to synergise online and offline relationships, whilst capitalising on contextual and spatial resources. This includes leveraging social relationships with a wide range of community and marketplace actors to create a hybrid voice channel. Operating within a particular jurisdictional context also creates greater scope to engage with institutional structures and systems. In contrast, studies on web-based platform work, attribute the dis-embedded nature of this type of work to the workers' heavy reliance on technological means (e.g., social media) for expressing voice.

In this regard, first, the independent uptake of digital communication tools and social media by platform workers presents an interesting contrast to certain organisations, which are likewise increasingly adopting social media and digital channels for 'employee' voice (see Martin, Parry, and Flowers 2015). We question how the voice content and outcomes differ when such voice channels are provided by the organisation compared to when they are autonomously adopted and used outside of the organisations' direct purview as seen with platform workers. Exploring how and in what ways the perception of expressing voice through these channels differs between employees and platform workers may prove to be a worthwhile line of future inquiry.

We highlight that the alternate bottom-up channels of worker voice are not only shaped by digital technologies but also by the dynamic and complex social relations of platform work; and we note that this results in a voice that is socially reproduced and community driven. We attribute this to the multi-sided market organisation of certain platform work variants (e.g., food delivery), where a digital intermediary (i.e., the platform) connects and brings different marketplace actors (workers, customers, suppliers/restaurants) together. Given the hyper-local nature of such work, workers share a physical touchpoint and independent social relations with the different actors involved in the task, often extending to other co-workers, and various community actors or entities, who have sometimes acted as independent mouthpieces for worker voice (Kougiannou and Mendonça 2021; Vrikki and Lekakis 2023). This stands in contrast to the more confined social relations typical of a traditional shopfloor setting, and simultaneously presents a fruitful avenue for future research. This could involve exploring the working dynamics between different marketplace actors, including the motivations and interests of different community actors for acting as intermediaries of worker voice. By adopting a multi-stakeholder study design, research could determine whether and to what extent these alternate channels of voice can be considered as potent, and the extent to which socio-political climate of the institutional context influences effectiveness. Exploring these consequences would also involve greater understanding of the potential power shifts and negotiation dynamics within the platform work arrangement.

From the review, we find that platform worker voice tends to be temporal and need-based, sporadically emerging from the previously discussed portfolio of de-centred, mutually reinforcing channels, as part of a 'grassroots voice mechanism'. In this regard, there is much merit in considering how a grassroots voice mechanism empowers individual workers and communities by redistributing influence in ways that differ from traditional hierarchical approaches. This would require further deliberation of how platform workers choose to articulate their concerns; for example, studies note how their voice may manifest as collective acts of resistance such as protests or 'ride-outs', wild-cat strike-actions or 'log-outs', and public letter writing campaigns (Anwar, Otieno, and Stein 2022; Cant and Woodcock 2020; Iazzolino 2023; Joyce, Stuart, and Forde 2023). At the same time, it also informs the need to understand how platform organisations respond and choose to engage with these diverse voices, given their role as a technological intermediary rather than a conventional employer.

For this reason, there is minimal research evidence of DLPs establishing organisational voice channels, as worker voice may hold no practical/instrumental value for advancing organisations' strategic interests (Gegenhuber, Ellmer, and Schüßler 2021). However, we question whether this is really the case or if the public and socially mediated nature of platform worker voice allow DLPs to access such worker inputs more easily, without incurring the governance costs associated with setting up and maintaining formal mechanisms (Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020; Willman, Bryson, and Gomez 2006 2007). It is worth reflecting on whether these flexible and socially oriented forms of voice, with their fluid boundaries, pose noteworthy consequences for the viability and relevance of more traditional voice mechanisms in the realm of non-traditional work arrangements.

In the same vein, our review also finds that, due to the often 'mutual invisibility' (Polkowska 2021, 27) shared by platform workers and trade unions (Al-Ani and Stumpp 2016;

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Iazzolino 2023; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2021), alternative worker-led organisational entities (e.g., collectives and associations) have emerged as a prominent channel that supports worker representation. The diminished presence of trade unions can be associated with their low interest, coupled with inexperience and lack of capacity/resources to organise within these emerging/fragmented sectors or non-traditional forms of work (Bertolini and Dukes 2021; Kalleberg 2000; Polkowska 2021). At the same time, platform worker attitudes towards trade unions tend to be highly variable as workers see little instrumental value in acquiring a union membership that entails significant costs (Geyer, Vandaele, and Prinz 2024; Newlands, Lutz, and Fieseler 2018; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2021). This is evident in the way Italian trade unions have supported the voice of self-organised food couriers, but without initiating their own unionisation process or formally representing courier interests. Likewise, when it comes to ride-hailing services, research indicates that trade unions have been quite active in the UK and US (Johnston 2020; Pernicka and Johnston 2021), while lacking in the Polish context (Polkowska 2021). These studies explained these differences based on the state's position on employment relations, its institutional structures, and the inclinations of present labour actors from allied industries or sectors.

As most studies identified in our review adopted a qualitative research design, making the findings limited in their generalisability, we call for large-scale quantitative studies, alongside more in-depth qualitative work. This will help to ascertain and unpack both union attitudes on organising this space and worker attitudes towards traditional voice mechanisms and structures (Budd, Johnstone, and Lamare 2023). With the evolving labour relations, it is increasingly essential to examine the underlying factors, motivations, and interactions shaping the attitudes of both unions and workers.

6.3 | Limitations

Like most reviews, our study is also not without limitations. From a methodological standpoint, we acknowledge the exclusion of grey literature, particularly policy documents and reports. These documents may offer valuable, complementary insights and evidence on the outcomes of grassroots voices, how these have informed regulatory efforts and policy development, enabling a more thorough analysis of grassroots voice mechanisms and its potential to influence practice (Adams, Smart, and Huff 2016).

We also note that the systematic search process was conducted in October 2023, potentially excluding studies published since. However, our conceptualisation of a grassroots voice mechanism and its applicability transcends the boundaries of platform work—offering a framework for understanding and being more inclusive towards worker voices in various non-traditional and under-regulated employment settings, which globally are on the rise (Cross and Swart 2022; Oyetunde, Prouska, and McKearney 2022; Wilkinson et al. 2021). That said, our conceptualisation may be constrained by studies informing this review and its findings. Therefore, we welcome future studies to refine our integrative framework, by considering alternate theoretical perspectives (e.g., neo-pluralism) for exploring the potential of a 'shared voice agenda' as a foundation. Such a starting point could allow us to unpack ways in which voice, via these grassroots channels, can be leveraged to address both traditional IR concerns and broader organisational improvements (Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020), that are of benefit to all stakeholders.

6.4 | Practical Implications

As technology is rapidly changing the employment landscape, organisations should proactively engage with these novel channels of voice, including alternate worker representation structures. Worker-led organisational forms have been instrumental for platform worker voice and have prevailed over unions as a voice channel across most studied geographical contexts. We recognise that greater research engagement will be required to assess the potential of such grassroots organisations for worker representation and voice (Pohler, Luchak, and Harmer 2020) as their credibility will ultimately influence whether they can successfully bargain for better terms. There remains a need to understand how DLPs view these organisations and whether they acknowledge the net-benefits of recognising alternate voice channels. Ultimately, we note that receptiveness could potentially facilitate the discovery of common interests, where workers proactively come forward with mutually beneficial suggestions and inputs for improvement (Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison 2020).

While we contemplate whether these worker-led organisations will evolve into a more traditional union structure, we underscore that trade unions could explore partnerships with these worker-led channels to enhance and adapt their organising approaches. This could present a valuable learning opportunity for trade unions who can refine their strategies to better address the evolving needs of the workforce (see Hau and Savage 2023). Therefore, exploring the possibility of mergers between these organisations, despite their stark ideological differences (Borghi et al. 2021; Schmalz et al. 2023), could lead to statutory recognition for these hybrid entities, while offering unions an opportunity to become more relevant. This may pave the way for cross-sectoral and international alliances, which may be necessary to counter the power of global DLPs (Pötzsch and Schamberger 2022), with noteworthy consequences for regulatory practice, public policy, and reforms.

Finally, deliberating on the outcomes of platform worker voice via their constitution of a grassroots voice mechanism, we note that its short-term effects can be gauged based on ongoing developments taking place at regulatory and policy levels, such as the adoption of the EU platform directive. This has placed significant emphasis on the presumption of employment in platform work arrangements (European Council 2024). Depending on how countries adopt and transpose these guidelines into law, there remains a possibility that this current conversation on 'worker' voice in non-traditional employment relations is lost to 'employee' voice; that is yet to unfold. We therefore take advantage of this interstice to demonstrate and reaffirm how voice is fundamentally an exercise of worker

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agency. This may manifest as a range of individual and/or collective expressions or actions, conveyed via; (a) institutionally recognised union/non-union structures and mechanisms, (b) organisationally supported direct/indirect, formal/informal channels, and—in their absence—through the constitution of (c) a grassroots voice mechanism, to influence and impact issues pertaining to work.

7 | Conclusion

Our use of a critical pluralist frame to examine *why* and *how* platform workers have used their voice provides optimism regarding the indeterminacy of labour power. Such a perspective equips us with the necessary analytical tools to uncover the resilience and adaptability of labour in overcoming structural barriers and inequities. We highlighted how blurred employment boundaries, combined with the fragmentation, spatial dispersion, and diversification of the workforce, structurally intensify labour power indeterminacy in platform work. Subsequently, we revealed platform workers' core motives for voice use, supported by the identification of novel voice channels. These channels facilitate a variety of voice and possess different levels of influence. This is evident in how workers have used their voice to impact various stakeholders, demonstrating its multifaceted nature and potential to transcend organisational and transnational boundaries. We contend that recognising this transcendence is crucial for expanding and advancing the discourse on voice which so far has been contained within the organisation. From an HRM standpoint, greater consideration and inclusivity, as 'people advocates rather than employee advocates' (Cross and Swart 2022, 233), may be warranted with the growing concentration of independent work(ers) and non-traditional work arrangements. In this regard, platform workers and their voices may be representative of the 'many missing and neglected voices from parts of the labour force' (Wilkinson and Barry 2016, 342), which need to be heard. Our review is a step in that direction, where we highlight that platform workers express voice, by constituting a bottom-up grassroots voice mechanism, particularly when institutional and/or organisational voice structures are absent or fail to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Endnotes

[1] Classification of platform workers varies between countries and regulatory contexts. Such an employment classification may not accurately represent the situation of workers who are economically dependent on a single platform, resulting in them being falsely self-employed (Lenaerts, Kilhoffer, and Akgüç 2018).

[2] Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is a crowdsourcing micro-work platform, which connects businesses or individual customers (called 'requesters') with a vast network of remote workers (called 'turkers') who complete small, often repetitive Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) like data entry, transcription, image or video labelling, and survey participation in exchange for payment.

[3] IWGB refers to the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, a rank-and-file union in the UK.

[4] CLB refers to the Couriers and Logistics Branch of the IWGB.

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