



INTERNATIONAL LAW  
JOURNAL

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**WHITE BLACK  
LEGAL LAW  
JOURNAL  
ISSN: 2581-  
8503**

*Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal*

The Law Journal strives to provide a platform for discussion of International as well as National Developments in the Field of Law.

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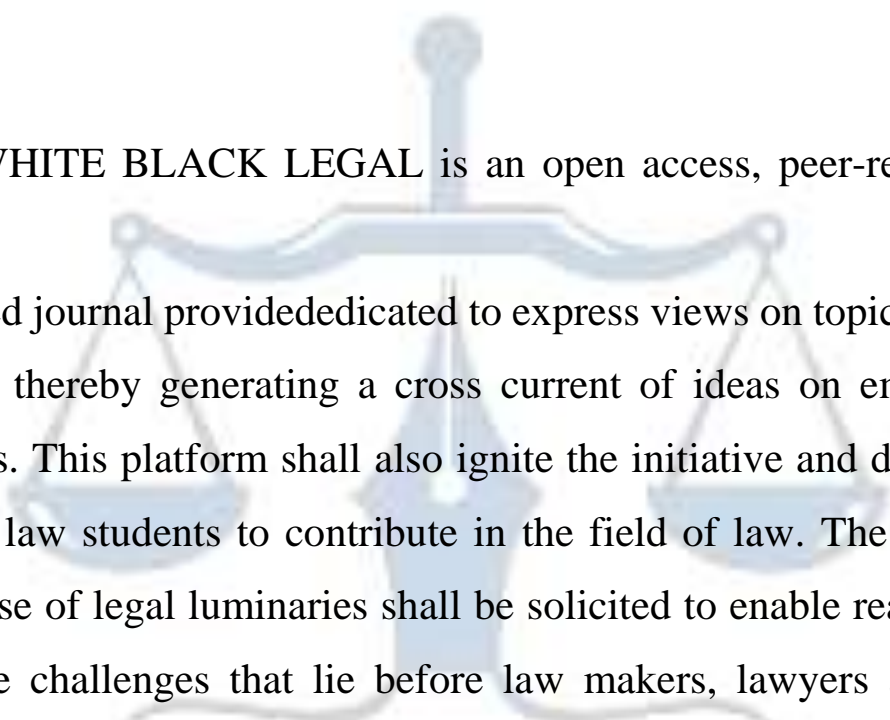


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## ***ABOUT US***



WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

# **PROTECTING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS IN THE GIG ECONOMY: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES**

AUTHORED BY - SURYANSH MISHRA & SUMAYIRRAH VERMA

## **Introduction**

Starting from a few specific types of jobs such as web development and graphic design, freelance work is rapidly growing and changing the traditional concept of employment. This change has also come with several legal implications especially on how and who can best protect and assert ownership to IPR produced within such a flexible work environment. This article explores the special circumstance of how freelancers, independent contractors, and other participants of the gig economy can own their creations. It considers the current law along with its deficiencies and looks at what can help be done to support creators in the gig economy.

## **I. The Gig Economy: A New Era of Work**

### **A. Defining the Gig Economy**

Gig economy refers to a vast array of working relations, that are not attached to normal conventional full-time employment such as independent contract, short-term contract, on-demand work, and freelance work. Flexibility, technology, and anomie between the two categories of employment, employed, and self-employed are other features distinguishing it. All these arrangements give to workers an ability to select projects that they prefer, determine their working hours, and are usually provided with the remote work opportunity. Marketplaces such as Upwork, Fiverr, TaskRabbit, and many others have pumped life into this arena as they help freelancers find clients with various needs for a variety of skills.<sup>1</sup>

### **B. The Rise of the Gig Economy: A Convergence of Factors**

Several key factors have converged to drive the explosive growth of the gig economy:

1. Technological Advancements: The Internet and mobile technology have significantly transformed work and encourage flexible and remote working, connections between freelancers, and their clients. This has diluted geographical confines and effectively

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<sup>1</sup> Elias Sterling, *The Gig Economy Guide: Thriving in the New World of Work* (2023)



created enormous new markets for freelancers, and as such, businesses reap the advantages of manpower from all over the world.

2. Flexibility and Autonomy: The gig economy is all about providing workers more freedom and independence than what the usual jobs provide. Freelancers are deciding on what they want to do, when they work, and where they work, provided that they have a computer connection to the internet. This appeal is especially true for millennials and the generation following them because of issues to do with balance and flexibility at workplaces.
3. Cost Savings for Businesses: Employing freelancers on a project-by-project basis is cheaper compared to employing employees to work for the company. This nightmare can lead to massive savings especially on issues to do with marketing, product design among others, software development area.
4. Shifting Work Preferences: As millennials and the Gen Z populations enter the workforce in greater numbers they are attracted by the flexibility of the gig economy. Employees within this generation prefer non-conventional employment and are much more likely to turn down full-time jobs.<sup>2</sup>

### **C. Challenges and Opportunities of the Gig Economy**

Challenges:

1. Job Security and Benefits: Gig employees have no health insurance, pensions, paid vacations, and jobless benefits as well as other privileges employees receive.<sup>3</sup>This lack of security and benefits can be a great concern to freelancers, especially one with family or for those who have long term obligations.
2. Wage Inequality: Gig economy also tends to widen the wage disparity because everyone struggles to get a particular work or job in gig economy, and competition is stiff; hence, people will be forced to undercut their prices in order to get a job. This can eventually result into a downward distortion of the rates for the freelancers' work and this in the long run will destabilize their financial stability.
3. Lack of Legal Protections: Freelancers alone does not have these privileges of any standard employee, these include wage laws, discriminator and non-discriminator laws and workers compensation. It means that they can easily be exploited and or hard for

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<sup>2</sup> Diane Mulcahy, *The Gig Economy: The Complete Guide to Getting Better Work, Taking More Time Off, and Financing the Life You Want* (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra J Ravenelle, *Hustle and Gig* (2019)

them to speak out for low wages, job insecurity, or poor working conditions, dismissal etc.

Opportunities:

1. Increased Flexibility and Autonomy: Those engaged in gig economy activities enjoy an improved working model that affords them a better control of their time as well as working format. This ability to select projects, decide on when to work, and even work from home can thus be a great boon for freelancers who highly appreciate management of their working lives.
2. Access to a Global Market: Business marketplaces availabilities to freelancers' global market and possibilities to earn more money. Freelancers are able to access the whole world and look for people who need the specific kind of services they offer irrespective of their geo-location.
3. Entrepreneurial Spirit: This is because the gig economy promotes enterprise by enabling people to own and operate businesses for a minimal cost of investment. Some of the advantages include freelancers are their bosses, they have control over their prices, and they work on what they love or are passionate about through self-employed opportunities that do not require a daily, weekly, or monthly paycheck.

## **II. Intellectual Property Rights in the Gig Economy**

### **A. Types of Intellectual Property Relevant to the Gig Economy**

The gig economy encompasses a wide range of creative and intellectual endeavors, making it relevant to various types of IPR:

1. Copyright: Covers writing, dramatic, musical and other artistic works; computer programs, source codes, web content, photographs, and graphic designs. Copyright provides those rights to the creator regarding reproduction, distributing, performing and displaying the work. As independent contractors, those in the gig economy need copyright laws to protect their work especially where they are in industries such as content creation, music production, graphic designing, and software development.
2. Trademarks: Safeguards the verbal and non-verbal trademarks; the titles, slogans, logos and other depictions of goods and services. Trademarks are important for freelancers since they create own unique brand and promote themselves in the market. This is especially important for Those individuals who are in the freelance and basically all

those who provide consultation services, graphic designs, and other kinds of creative work that involve an individual's/ Company's branding.

3. Patents: Securing inventions, processes and designs and awarding the inventor a monopoly to use them for a limited period. Trade secrets are generally not applicable in the gig economy, but valid for freelancers who create any new technology, product, or process. For instance, a freelancer who has designed a new program, or a distinct design for a certain product, can apply for patent protection to ensure that only they can use the design.
4. Trade Secrets: Government shut down important information that if disclosed gives any business a competitive advantage for instance formula, processes, or customer lists. The protection of trade secrets is particularly important to freelancers who are engaged in the providing services that include such secrecy which are software development, consulting or research services.<sup>4</sup>

## **B. Ownership and Use of Creative Works in the Gig Economy**

The ownership and use of creative works in the gig economy are often governed by a complex interplay of contracts, legal doctrines, and platform terms of service:

1. Contracts: Freelance agreements, work-for-hire agreements, and platform terms of service define the ownership and use of intellectual property created within the gig economy. These agreements are crucial for establishing clear expectations and avoiding disputes. They should explicitly address issues such as:
  - Ownership of Copyright: Who owns the copyright to the work created? Is it the freelancer or the client?
  - Use Rights: What rights does the client have to use the work? Can they modify it, distribute it, or create derivative works?
  - Attribution: How will the freelancer be credited for their work?
  - Compensation: How will the freelancer be compensated for their work, including any use of the work beyond the initial project?
2. Work-for-Hire Doctrine: This legal doctrine specifies that if a work is created by an individual under the direction and control of another party (usually a client), the client owns the copyright to the work, even though the freelancer created it. This doctrine is

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<sup>4</sup> Stephan Fishman, *Working for Yourself: Law & Taxes for Independent Contractors, Freelancers & Consultants* (2014)

often applied in traditional employment settings, but its application in the gig economy is complex and can lead to disputes.

3. Independent Contractor Status: If a freelancer is considered an independent contractor, they typically own the copyright to their work unless there is a written agreement stating otherwise. However, determining independent contractor status can be challenging, as it is based on factors such as the level of control exercised by the client, the nature of the work, and the freelancer's ability to set their own hours and work arrangements.
4. Platform Terms of Service: Platforms often have specific terms of service governing the ownership and use of content uploaded or created by users. These terms can be complex and may grant the platform broad rights to use and monetize content created by freelancers. It is crucial for freelancers to carefully review and understand these terms before using any platform to ensure they are not relinquishing too many rights to their work.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. Unique Challenges Faced by Gig Workers in Protecting their IPR**

The gig economy presents unique challenges for freelancers seeking to protect their intellectual property:

#### **A. Lack of Clear Ownership: A Source of Confusion and Disputes**

1. Ambiguous Contractual Language: In many contracts, different parties can even fail to define clearly crucial factors such as ownership of certain IPR, and this can cause confusion and conflict of interest. For instance, a contract may contain the stipulation that the client is the owner of the 'work product,' but do not specify what that means concerning the project. This is a heartache to the freelancer when the owner requires that he or she use the work for other projects or license it.
2. Work-for-Hire Misinterpretation: Often freelancers may find themselves working under work made for hire, in which they surrender their rights to whichever they are working on. This occurs most commonly if one party imposes a tight control over the other or if there are harsh requirements and timelines within the contract or if the contract labels the created work as a 'work made for hire' but doesn't clearly define ownership rights.

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<sup>5</sup> Sara Horowitz, *The Freelancer's Bible: Everything You Need to Know to Have the Career of Your Dreams on Your Own Terms* (2012)

3. Platform-Specific Terms: Such documents may be lengthy or difficult to read and may convey extensive permissions to the platform to use and profit from content created by users of the platform. For example, a platform may state that they own all the content uploaded by the freelancers while the latter maintains copyrights to such work. This can complicate matters and cause conflicts on the usage of works produced by freelancers.<sup>6</sup>

## **B. Exploitation of Creative Works: A Threat to Freelancer's Finances**

1. Unauthorized Use and Reproduction: The authors original artistic content can be utilized by clients or platforms without legal permission and subsequently infringe on creators' rights, and sales revenue. This can from plagiarism of an article written by a freelance writer on a website to the unauthorized use of artwork by a graphic designer in a campaign.
2. Lack of Compensation for Secondary Use: Like many freelancers, these artists are sometimes paid less for their work than they deserve when the work gets utilized for licensing, merchandising, or derivative works. For instance, a freelance photographer used to cover up a ceremony or take shots for a website will not be paid extra when those shots are used to print T-shirts.
3. Attribution Issues: Self-generated content owners also face problems of little control over how their work is used, particularly when it is integrated with other content or when proper attribution may not be easily identifiable from the interface of the website the content is used. This can lower the freelancer's credibility and creates problems in creating a portfolio and procuring other assignments.

## **C. Difficulty in Enforcing Rights: Challenges that have affected Online Freelance Work**

1. Financial and Legal Resources: Unfortunately, freelancers have less money to combat generic infringement or take legal action in defense of their IPR. Sometimes legal costs may be high, and freelancers may not want to go to court or engage in a lawsuit if they are dealing with a large business organization or an influential platform.
2. Limited Awareness of Legal Rights: Some of the freelancers may not know their legal protection or the procedures of enforcing the laws. Due to this lack of awareness, freelancers become open to being exploited, and more so, they cannot easily guard their work.

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<sup>6</sup> Diane Mulcahy, *The Gig Economy: The Complete Guide to Getting Better Work, Taking More Time Off, and Financing the Life You Want* (2016)

3. Platform's Power Imbalance: Business platforms usually have more negotiation advantages and Agency Over freelancers meaning freelancers barely can negotiate for better working condition or even question some of the platform conditions. Platforms can potentially possess huge resources, legal departments, and take advantage of their monopoly/bullying freelancers into accepting unfavorable terms and condition.

## **IV. Strategies for Protecting IPR in the Gig Economy**

### **A. Pre-Engagement Strategies: Building a Basic Framework for Efficient Protection of IPR**

1. Clear Contracts: Freelancers mean that ownership and usage of the intellectual property rights should dictate the licensing, modifiability, and transferability of the work. Contracts should be specific and unambiguous, addressing issues such as:
  - a. Ownership of Copyright: Indicate whose property the copyright to the work is it the freelancer or the client.
  - b. Use Rights: State the manner and purpose for which the client can employ the work together with any prohibition against altering the work, using it commercially, or creating offshoot works.
  - c. Attribution: Indicate that your freelancer will be attributed for the work done and in which manner? Use the freelancer's name, website or social media profiles.
  - d. Compensation: Explain what pecuniary rewards will be given for the work and if there will be any extra charges for any other usage or resale.
2. Independent Contractor Status: Laypeople should endeavour to remain self-employed since this category usually affords the freelancer ownership of the work produced. It is still important for freelancers to understand that the process of determining independent contractor status may be much more complicated and may be subject to change in accordance with a number of different facts and circumstances related to each individual work arrangement.
3. Negotiate Terms of Service: Freelancers must take their time, read and discuss with their lawyers or the referring platforms service terms to avoid giving up too many rights to their productions. The terms that freelancers need to look at more closely are those that give the platform ownership of the content as well as those that allow the platform to use and make money from the content provided by users.

4. Seek Legal Counsel: For instance, freelancers should see an attorney practicing in the field of intellectual property law to determine legal implications. Employment lawyers are of great importance to freelancers since they help in explaining issues such as copyright law, work for hire, and terms of use to avoid falling prey to trap clauses of the platforms.<sup>7</sup>

### **B. Post-Engagement Strategies: Measures That will Help to Guard Your Work**

1. Copyright Registration: There is need for freelancer to taking legal measures and in this view, they should properly and formal register it with the various copyright office for security and possible enforcement. It contains information about the ownership of a product in such a way that if a case gets to the court, it provides the basics of ownership.
2. Watermarking and Metadata: To assert ownership, freelancers are able to add watermarks or metadata into their work in order to distinguish ownership. A watermark is a visible mark, which may be impressed on copies of photographs, films, or documents as a sign of the author; metadata, on the other hand, is the hidden information on the same photographs, films or documents that may also be used to support claims of authorship or prior use of the work.
3. Document Collaboration and Communication: This is specifically important for freelancers who are to outline all the communications and working relationships with their clients to define ownership and usage rights. These are emails, brief description of the project and all other series of communications that show the assurance of the agreement and freelancer involvement in the project.
4. Build a Portfolio and Reputation: Freelancers should gain as much experience and work and establish a good platform to market themselves in a bid to avoid compromising their standards and being exploited by their customers. A good portfolio is evidence of their work capacity, while having a favorable reputation enhances the frequency of freelance business.

### **C. Collective Action and Advocacy: Towards Better Representation of Freelance Workers**

Freelancers can also take collective action to protect their rights and advocate for policy changes that benefit the entire gig economy:

1. Freelancer Associations: This means to join a freelancer association or guild as they offer the freelancer access to tools, legal aid, and negotiating rights collectively. These

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<sup>7</sup> Jhon Cauch, *The Freelancer's Guide to Getting and Keeping Clients* (2023)

organisations can give freelancers details, tuition and support on areas which include but are not limited to copyright, negotiations for a contract and employment litigation.

2. Advocacy Groups: Donations to advocacy groups who fight for gig workers' rights and then change laws regarding freelancers might be helpful. These industry organization can purpose to lobby, advocate for change, enlighten the public on the struggles that these gig workers go through and offer a central hub where freelancers can express themselves.
3. Platform Transparency: Suggestions as to how to increase platform accountability and change policies include demanding that platforms release information about their policies. This includes requesting straightforward terms of service and knowing how platforms deal with the user content among others more.

## **V. Legal Frameworks and Policy Considerations: A Landscape in Transition**

### **A. Existing Legal Framework and its Limitations: A Gap Between Traditional Law and Modern Work**

Current legal protections including the copyright laws, trademark laws, and the work-made-for-hire laws governing employers' and employees' engagements do not capture gig workers. These limitations include:

1. Lack of Clarity on Ownership: The work-for-hire doctrine might prove a challenge within the segments of the gig economy because the distinction between 'direction and control' in freelance relationships might be tricky to determine. The doctrine tends to consider the relationship between the employer and the employee; however, this distinction is different when working with a freelancer because the latter has more independence.
2. Limited Enforcement Options: Many a-time, self-employed workers feel that their rights are quite diminished when it comes to claiming it, especially when they cannot afford to take legal action. Hiring a lawyer can be costly and while pursuing legal matters can take a long time the legal system does not favour freelancers who would want to take legal action against anyone who has infringed on their IPRs.
3. Platform Bias: To freelancers, platforms may be incredibly influential and competitive; sometimes their main focus is more on the platform than on the creator. Platforms can put a lot of time and money into legal resources, as well as use their superior bargaining



power to economically coerce freelancers into accepting unfair terms and conditions and limit freelancer's rights to appeal platform policies or to sue platforms for various abuses.

## **B. Policy Proposals for Protecting Gig Workers' IPR: Shaping a More Equitable Legal Landscape**

To address the unique challenges faced by gig workers, policymakers are considering various proposals:

1. Clarify the Work-for-Hire Doctrine: New amendments may concern the work-for-hire practice in the framework of the gig economy, give clarifications about the ownership of the works made by freelancers unless the opposite has been negotiated. This could involve spelling out what constitutes more prudent "direction and control", thus making the doctrine more level playing field for freelance relationships.
2. Standardize Contractual Provisions: Legal precedents could possibly be set from which model contracts or at least standard clauses could be prepared which clearly spells out this ownership and use rights in freelance contracts. This might include developing common language that will help cover the aspects of IPR relevant for freelancers and which will help the freelancer to have improved understanding of their rights and responsibilities.
3. Promote Platform Transparency: It can help freelancers protect themselves by requesting that platforms provide better information about their relationship with their hosts to give freelancers a better idea of what to expect from the process. It could entail insisting that such online platforms prepare summarized versions of the terms of service which state common avenues like ownership and usage rights as well as compensation.
4. Extend Legal Protections: This requires expanding of employment rights that include minimum wages and anti-discrimination: to gig workers. This could mean redefining existing employees as gig workers or for creating new legal dynamics that will regulate gig economy operations.
5. Promote Collective Bargaining: Support freelancers initiating formation of more freelancer associations or guilds that would in a better way be bargaining for the gig workers in their negotiation with the platforms and the clients. This could entail advocating for formation of union or any other bargaining institutions through which freelancer can be granted competencies to negotiate for favorable as well as acceptable terms and conditions of service delivery.

### **C. International Perspectives: A Global Dialogue on IPR in the Gig Economy**

The legal and policy landscape regarding intellectual property rights in the gig economy is evolving globally:

1. European Union: EU legislation and legislation to be adopted include the digital single market directive which seeks to regulate fair online platforms and rights of creators of the digital content. Some of the problems to be solved with this legislation regard, for example, copyright protection, transparency of the platforms, and the right to reasonable remuneration for creators.
2. United States: The United States is still divided on how to manage the ride-sharing economy as there is uncertainty regarding labor laws or platform regulation along with the subject of who owns what. New material disputes for the United States have emerged concerning the legal status of gig economy participants, alike employees or independent contractors without benefits; but also, reconsideration of existing labor and intellectual property regulations.

### **VI. Future Directions: The Evolving Landscape of IPR in the Gig Economy**

The intersection of intellectual property rights and the gig economy presents a dynamic and evolving landscape:

1. Technological Advancements: As seen with AI and big data now, there remain other related emerging technologies that will pose fresh innovation effects on the entire ownership of knowledge-based property and incorporating this into the gig economy mold. For instance, in case of AI generated content, issues such as ownership and authorship are becoming contentious matter, whereas in the case of Blockchain, this technological application could be a solution to manage approaches to IP protection through decentralized customer platforms.
2. Policy Development: Because the labor market of a gig worker faces different difficulties of the traditional employee, politicians and legislation system will need to further modify legal requirements and rules governing such employment relationship. This will, however, be a delicate balancing of forces where the independent contractors' rights are to be vindicated albeit their work force constitution of significant drivers of innovation and economic growth.
3. Collective Action: Freelancers and independent contractors, therefore, will need to have to keep on mobilizing, lobbying, and coordinating. This includes one forming

associations and forming advocacy groups and bargaining collectively in order to lobby for policies that change the face of gig economy.

4. Education and Awareness: Some users who do not appreciate the rights accorded to them as independent contractors can significantly benefit from increased awareness of their legal rights. This is through offering information, practical sessions, and web-based tools and kits that assist the freelancers in learning more of their working relations, bargaining skills as well as how to defend their creations.

## **VII. Conclusion: A Call for Collaboration and Innovation**

With the rise of the gig economy platform, the practice of working has been rapidly changing to adapt to the roster of demands; however, the issue of safeguarding IP rights is another issue altogether. It is crucial for policy makers, and the freelance platforms, and freelancers to follow the advancement of this economy's legal and policy regulation to supply and secure the very best set of rules that will help them to secure the rights of freelancers as well as allow development of efficient independent economy. This will need to be done with input from multiple stakeholders and using a proactive strategy that recognizes the need to respect intellectual property rights of those driving the creative industries.

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