

Platform Governance and Gig Worker Vulnerability in India: Implications for Labour Protection and Employability



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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital labour platforms has transformed employment relationships across global labour markets and accelerated the growth of the gig economy in India, particularly in sectors such as ride-hailing, food delivery, logistics, and home services. While platform work has created livelihood opportunities for millions of workers, concerns persist regarding employment security, labour protection, and long-term employability. This study examines the structural vulnerabilities experienced by gig workers in India by analysing the intersection of platform governance, labour regulation, and employability outcomes. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach integrating theoretical analysis with empirical evidence collected through a primary survey of 205 gig workers engaged in platform-based services. The study explores worker experiences related to working hours, income dependence, earnings satisfaction, social security access, awareness of labour laws, and perceptions of career sustainability.

The findings reveal a significant paradox within platform employment. Although most workers depend heavily on digital platforms for their livelihood, they continue to be classified as independent contractors, limiting their access to labour protections, social security benefits, and grievance redressal mechanisms. The results further indicate long working hours, moderate to low earnings satisfaction, and limited awareness of labour regulations among workers. The study also highlights the role of algorithmic management systems in regulating task allocation, performance evaluation, incentives, and disciplinary processes. Workers frequently perceive these systems as opaque and lacking accountability, thereby intensifying employment insecurity. From an employability perspective, the findings suggest that gig work offers limited opportunities for skill development and long-term career advancement, leading many workers to view platform work as a temporary livelihood option. The study contributes to the growing literature on gig economy governance by integrating insights from Labour Process Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, Employability Theory, and Institutional Theory within the Indian context. The findings underscore the need for governance frameworks that balance technological innovation with worker protection, institutional accountability, and workforce development.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Platform Work, Algorithmic Management, Labour Law, Gig Workers, Employability, Platform Governance

Introduction

The gig economy is arguably one of the most prominent changes in modern labor markets. The gig economy is driven by developments in digital technologies, mobile networks, and platforms of business operations, which create opportunities for individuals to provide services online on a task or on-demand basis. Online platforms are used to bring buyers and sellers of services in industries such as transportation, food delivery, logistics, home services, and freelancing together.

In recent years, platform-mediated employment has expanded rapidly in India. The growth of digital infrastructure, increasing smartphone penetration, urbanization, and the shortage of formal employment opportunities have contributed to the expansion of gig work across metropolitan and semi-urban regions. For many workers, particularly migrants and semi-skilled youth, gig platforms have become an accessible source of the income due to their low entry barriers and flexible participation requirements.

Nonetheless, this rapid growth in gig economy engagement has raised some issues concerning employment relations in these platform environments. In this regard, gig economy workers are categorized as independent contractors as opposed to employment relationships in more conventional employment arrangements. This categorization enables platform companies to avoid obligations in respect to minimum wage rates, social security taxes, and employment benefits. NITI Aayog (2022) estimated that nearly 7.7 million workers were engaged in the gig economy in India during 2020–21, with projections indicating significant future growth.

As a result, gig workers often find themselves in a situation characterized by economic dependence without legal protection. While they rely on platform earnings for their livelihood, they remain outside the scope of labour laws designed to protect formal employees. This structural paradox has been widely discussed in contemporary labour studies, where scholars highlight the emergence of “economically

dependent but legally independent" workers.

The implications of this paradox extend beyond legal classification and affect broader aspects of workforce sustainability. Gig workers frequently experience income volatility, long working hours, limited access to skill development opportunities, and restricted career mobility. The use of algorithmic management systems further transforms the employment relationship by replacing traditional managerial oversight with automated decision-making processes that regulate task allocation, performance evaluation, and compensation. (Kellogg, K.C.*et al.*,2020)

In response to these developments, governments across the world have started to consider various types of regulatory intervention that can help address the issues related to the vulnerability of platform work. In the Indian context, the introduction of the Code on Social Security, 2020 marked an important change in the way the government has recognized the emergence of gig and platform workers as new categories in the labor market. The legislation has provided a framework for the implementation of social security schemes that are funded by digital aggregators.

Despite these developments, the effectiveness of such policies remains uncertain due to challenges in implementation, administrative capacity, and worker awareness. Many gig workers remain unaware of the legal protections available to them, and the institutional mechanisms required to operationalize these benefits are still evolving.

Given the growing importance of the gig economy in India's labour market, there is a pressing need for research that integrates theoretical insights from labour studies with empirical evidence from worker experiences. Existing studies have often focused on technological or economic aspects of platform work, with relatively limited attention to the intersection of human resource management, labour law, and employability outcomes.

The present study aims at filling this research gap by exploring the role of platform-based governance structures and labor regulations in the employability of gig workers in India. The research combines theoretical perspectives and primary research findings to present an exhaustive analysis of the opportunities and challenges associated with gig-based employment.

Literature Review

Significant literature has been written on the emergence of the gig economy, focusing on the changing employment relations in the context of the digital labour market. Researchers from various disciplines, including labour economics, human resource management, and industrial relations, have contributed to the literature on this topic. One of the important aspects of the literature on the gig economy is the dual effect of this type of work, as

it represents both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, the digital platform provides opportunities for people to engage in the labour market who might not otherwise be able to do so. The low skills required to work in this platform, as well as the flexibility of participation, allow people to earn money without having to go through a long recruitment process or having educational qualifications. The expansion of platform-mediated employment in India has accelerated due to increasing digital penetration, urbanization, and changing labour market structures. The report also recommended policy initiatives to improve participation of women and differently abled workers in platform employment through targeted incentives and safer work ecosystems. They argued for balanced regulatory frameworks that encourage innovation while ensuring fair working conditions and institutional protections for gig workers. (NITI Aayog, 2022)

On the other hand, the absence of formal employment relationships introduces significant risks related to income security, social protection, and career development. Scholars have argued that gig work often exhibits characteristics associated with precarious employment, including unstable earnings, lack of employment benefits, and limited bargaining power. (DeStefano, V.,2016).

Empirical evidence from various countries suggests that platform workers frequently experience irregular working hours and unpredictable compensation structures. Since remuneration is typically linked to task completion and dynamic pricing mechanisms, workers may face substantial fluctuations in income depending on demand conditions and algorithmic adjustments. These conditions often compel workers to extend their working hours in order to achieve adequate earnings.

Another major area of research focuses on the role of algorithmic management in regulating labour processes within digital platforms. Unlike traditional organizations where managerial control is exercised through supervisors, platform work relies heavily on algorithmic systems that assign tasks, monitor worker performance, and determine compensation levels. These systems operate through data-driven decision-making processes that track worker behaviour, ratings, and efficiency metrics.

While algorithmic management improves operational efficiency for organizations, it also raises concerns regarding transparency and accountability. Workers often lack clarity regarding the criteria used by algorithms to allocate tasks or evaluate performance. As a result, the decision-making process may appear opaque, limiting workers' ability to contest outcomes such as reduced task allocation or account suspension.

Another important stream of literature examines the

psychological dimensions of the gig work, particularly the expectations and perceptions of workers regarding flexibility and autonomy. Many platform workers initially perceive gig work as a flexible employment option that allows them to control their working schedules. However, empirical research indicates that economic pressures often limit this autonomy, as workers must adapt their working patterns to platform incentives and demand fluctuations.

This tension between expected flexibility and experienced control has been interpreted through the lens of psychological contract theory. When workers perceive that the benefits promised by platform employment do not materialize in practice, dissatisfaction and reduced organizational trust may emerge.

From the perspective of employability, the literature highlights concern regarding the long-term sustainability of gig work careers. Since many platform jobs involve routine tasks with limited training opportunities, workers may not acquire transferable skills that enhance their prospects in the broader labour market. The absence of structured career progression pathways further limits opportunities for advancement within platform ecosystems.

Institutional scholars have also emphasized the regulatory challenges posed by the gig economy. Traditional labour laws were designed around clearly defined employer–employee relationships, making it difficult to apply these frameworks to platform-based employment arrangements. As a result, gig workers often fall into regulatory grey areas where they are neither fully protected as employees nor entirely independent entrepreneurs. In the Indian context, these challenges are exacerbated by the prevalence of informal employment arrangements. Although recent legislative reforms, such as the Code on Social Security, 2020, have introduced provisions for the welfare schemes of gig workers, the implementation of these policies is still in its nascent stages.

The empirical findings of the present study align with many of the concerns raised in the existing literature. The survey responses reveal patterns of economic dependence, extended working hours, limited awareness of labour rights, and restricted access to social protection benefits among gig workers. These observations highlight the relevance of theoretical frameworks that examine managerial control, worker expectations, employability dynamics, and institutional regulation within the gig economy.

Theoretical Framework And Hypothesis Development

The transformation of employment relationships within digital labour platforms requires theoretical

perspectives that can capture the interaction between technological governance, worker expectations, institutional regulation, and employability outcomes. In order to analyse these dimensions comprehensively, the present research integrates four theoretical frameworks-

Labour Process Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, Employability Theory, and Institutional Theory.

These theoretical perspectives offer complementary insights into the control systems in the context of platform work, the expectations of the workers, the sustainability of the career, and the role of the regulatory bodies. Labour Process Theory provides an important framework for understanding how organization's structure and control work processes in order to maximize efficiency and productivity. Traditionally, labour process research focused on hierarchical supervision and managerial authority within industrial organizations. However, contemporary scholars have extended the theory to analyse digital labour platforms where managerial control is exercised through algorithmic systems rather than human supervisors.

In platform-based employment environments, the management systems allocate the tasks, monitor performance, and determine compensation through automated processes embedded within digital applications. Workers interact with these systems through mobile platforms that track performance indicators such as acceptance rates, task completion time, and customer ratings. Although gig work offers flexibility, platform workers frequently experience algorithmic control, irregular working hours, and income insecurity (Wood et al., 2019)

Although algorithmic management increases operational efficiency and allows platforms to coordinate large distributed workforces, it also introduces new forms of labour control. Workers may feel compelled to adapt their behaviour according to algorithmic incentives in order to maintain access to tasks and income opportunities. Gig workers often modify their behaviour in anticipation of algorithmic evaluation and platform incentives (Bucher et al., 2021)

The results of the present study revealed that gig workers tend to change their working patterns according to the incentives and rating systems provided by the gig platforms and the dynamic pricing structure. This reveals that the algorithm management system acts as a managerial control system even in the absence of an employment relationship.

Based on this theoretical perspective, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Algorithmic management within digital platforms significantly influences worker autonomy and job satisfaction.

Psychological Contract Theory explains employment relationships through the lens of

perceived mutual expectations between workers and organizations. Unlike formal contracts that specify explicit obligations, psychological contracts refer to the implicit beliefs held by employees regarding the benefits, fairness, and support they expect from their employers.

In the context of the gig work, the psychological contract is shaped primarily by the expectation of flexibility and autonomy. Many workers enter platform employment believing that they will be able to control their working hours and manage their work independently.

However, empirical evidence from gig economy research suggests that these expectations may not always align with the operational realities of platform work. Algorithmic incentives, performance ratings, and fluctuating demand conditions often influence workers' schedules and income opportunities, limiting their ability to exercise genuine autonomy.

The survey findings of the present study indicate that many workers experience moderate to low satisfaction levels due to income instability, commission deductions, and lack of transparency in algorithmic decision-making. These experiences may lead to perceptions of psychological contract breach, where workers feel that the expectations associated with gig work are not fully realized. (Rousseau, D. M., 1995).

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Perceived lack of transparency and organizational support negatively influences job satisfaction among gig workers.

Employability Theory focuses on the capacity of individuals to obtain, maintain, and transition between employment opportunities within dynamic labour markets. Employability is influenced by factors such as skill development, work experience, career mobility, and institutional support mechanisms.

Within the gig economy, the relationship between platform work and employability outcomes remains a subject of debate. While gig work provides immediate access to income opportunities, it may not necessarily contribute to long-term career development if workers do not acquire transferable skills or professional experience.

The findings of the study suggest that gig workers are often perceive limited opportunities for skill development and career progression within platform ecosystems. Since many gig jobs involve routine tasks such as delivery or transportation services, the potential for acquiring specialized competencies that enhance employability may be limited.

Furthermore, the absence of structured training programs and career advancement pathways may reduce the long-term sustainability of the gig work as a career option.

Based on these observations, the following

hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Limited opportunities for skill development within platform work negatively influence long-term employability perceptions among gig workers. Institutional Theory focuses on the importance of the regulatory environment and the norms governing the operations of organizations. In the case of the gig economy, the Institutional Theory is very important in determining the level of protection enjoyed by the employees in the form of law and social security benefits.

Labor laws have been designed based on the employer-employee relationship. However, the platform-based employment creates difficulties as the employees are treated as contractors rather than employees.

Recent policy developments in India, such as the Code on Social Security, 2020, represent an important attempt to recognize gig workers within the legal framework. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such policies depends on factors including awareness among workers, administrative capacity, and compliance by platform companies.

The present study examines how institutional gaps in labour regulation affect gig workers' access to social protection and employment security.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Limited awareness and implementation of labour regulations reduce the effectiveness of legal protection for gig workers.

Methodology

Research design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design that combines theoretical analysis, legal framework examination, and empirical data collected through a primary survey of gig workers in India. The mixed-methods approach allows the research to integrate qualitative insights from literature and policy analysis with quantitative evidence derived from worker experiences.

This design is particularly suitable for studying platform work, as the gig economy represents a complex phenomenon influenced by technological systems, regulatory structures, and socio-economic factors. The Primary data for the study was collected through an online survey distributed among gig workers engaged in platform-based employment across India. The survey instrument included a combination of multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale responses in order to capture both descriptive and perceptual aspects of gig worker experiences. Total 205 valid responses were collected in the survey and included in the analysis.

Sampling Strategy

A non-probability convenience sampling method was used in the study, which is common in exploratory research involving platform workers because of the lack of a database of platform workers.

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- currently engaged in gig work through digital platforms
- involved in platform sectors such as ride-hailing or delivery services
- willing to voluntarily participate in the survey

Although the convenience sampling limits the generalizability of results, it enables researchers to collect valuable insights from workers who may otherwise be difficult to reach due to the decentralized nature of platform employment. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentage analysis. This enables the research to identify trends in the experiences and perceptions of the workers based on certain variables. In addition to descriptive statistics, Spearman rank-order correlation analysis is used to examine the statistical relationship between important platform experience variables: earning satisfaction, commission concern, unfair treatment, incentive receipt, labour law knowledge, and social security access. Spearman correlation analysis is used instead of Pearson correlation analysis because the survey items measuring the variables do not assume a normal distribution of the data.

Ethical considerations were well observed in the course of the research process. For instance, participation in the survey was on a voluntary basis, and the participants were made aware of the intended use of the responses before giving their feedback.

No identifiable information was collected in the course of the data collection process, and the data collected was intended for academic purposes only.

Data Analysis And Interpretation

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the primary survey conducted among 205 gig workers engaged in platform-based employment across India. The analysis focuses on key variables related to demographic characteristics, work patterns, income dependence, job satisfaction, legal awareness, social security access, and employability perceptions.

The results are interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier, including Labour Process Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, Employability Theory, and Institutional Theory.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of gig workers is essential for interpreting the broader implications of platform employment. The gig economy often attracts younger individuals and workers seeking flexible entry into the labour market. The survey responses show that the majority of participants belong to younger age

groups, indicating that gig work serves as an important entry point for employment.

Approximately 46.3% of respondents fall within the age group of 18-25 years, while 34.1% belong to the 26-35 age group. Workers aged 36-45 years account for 14.6% of respondents, while those above 45 years represent only 4.9% of the sample. These findings indicate that nearly 80% of gig workers in the sample are below the age of 35, reflecting the strong presence of younger workers in platform-based employment.

From an employability perspective, this demographic pattern suggests that gig platforms function as accessible labour market entry points for young workers who may face barriers in obtaining formal employment opportunities.

Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution of gig workers highlights the extent to which platform work is inclusive or exclusionary in terms of labour market participation.

The survey results reveal a highly skewed gender composition among gig workers. Approximately 92.2% of respondents are male, while only 7.8% are female. This pattern indicates that gig economy sectors such as ride-hailing and delivery services remain heavily male-dominated. Several structural factors may contribute to this imbalance, including safety concerns, long working hours, and the physical demands associated with transportation and delivery-based gig jobs. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that targeted initiatives may be required to enhance gender inclusion within platform labour markets.

Type of Gig Work Performed

Gig workers in the survey are engaged in multiple platform-based sectors. The distribution of work types helps illustrate the structure of the gig economy.

The findings indicate that 51.7% of respondents work in food delivery services, while 32.2% are engaged in ride-hailing services. The remaining 16.1% are involved in other forms of gig work, including logistics services and small platform-based tasks. The dominance of the delivery and the ride-hailing sectors in the sample reflects broader trends in the Indian gig economy system, where transportation and last-mile delivery services represent the largest platform employment segments. These sectors are characterized by task-based compensation models, heavy reliance on algorithmic task allocation, and high levels of worker competition.

Dependence on Gig Work for Income

One of the most important aspects of the study of the gig economy is to identify whether the gig economy acts as a primary source of income or

merely as a secondary source of income. According to the results of the survey, 87.3% of the participants of the survey rely on the gig economy as a primary source of income, while 12.7% of the participants stated that the gig economy acts as a secondary source of income. This finding highlights the economic dependence of workers on digital platforms. Although gig work is often marketed as flexible

or supplementary employment, the results suggest that for most workers it represents a full-time livelihood strategy.

From the view of labour regulation, this dependence strengthens the argument that gig workers occupy a position closer to employees than independent contractors in economic terms.

Working Hours in Platform Work

Working hours represent another critical dimension of gig worker experience, particularly in relation to the narrative of flexibility often associated with the platform employment. The survey findings indicate that gig workers frequently engage in long working hours.

Approximately 41% of respondents reported working between 8 and 12 hours per day, while 27.8% indicated that they work more than 12 hours daily. Another 23.4% work between 5 and 8 hours, while 7.8% reported working less than 5 hours per day.

These results demonstrate that nearly 70% of gig workers in the sample work more than eight hours per day, suggesting that platform work often resembles full-time employment rather than flexible part-time work. From the perspective of Labour Process Theory, these patterns indicate that workers may adjust their working hours to meet algorithmic incentives and income targets rather than exercising complete autonomy over their schedules.

Earnings Satisfaction Among Workers

Job satisfaction in the gig economy is closely linked to income stability and compensation transparency. The survey results indicate relatively low levels of satisfaction with earnings among gig workers. Only 18.5% of respondents reported being satisfied with their earnings, while 52.7% indicated moderate satisfaction, and 28.8% expressed dissatisfaction with their income levels.

These findings suggest that more than 80% of gig workers experience only moderate or low satisfaction with their earnings, reflecting concerns about income instability and fluctuating compensation structures. Workers frequently reported that their earnings were influenced by factors such as dynamic pricing algorithms, commission deductions, and demand variability. From the perspective of Psychological Contract Theory, such conditions may contribute to perceived breaches of expectations regarding fair

compensation and economic security. Institutional awareness plays an important role in determining whether workers are able to access legal protections and welfare schemes. The survey findings reveal limited awareness of labour regulations among gig workers. Approximately 65.4% of respondents reported that they were not aware of labour laws applicable to gig workers, while 34.6% indicated that they had some awareness of legal provisions. This lack of awareness represents a significant barrier to the effective implementation of labour policies aimed at protecting gig workers. Even when legislative provisions exist, workers may not benefit from them if they are unaware of their rights or the procedures required to access welfare programs. Availability of social security benefits is a very crucial factor in determining the sustainability of the gig work as a livelihood option. The survey results indicate that 60.5% of respondents do not receive any social security benefits from platform organizations, while 39.5% reported access to limited benefits such as accident insurance or health coverage.

These findings highlight the limited reach of welfare provisions within platform employment environments. Although recent labour reforms have introduced provisions for gig worker social security schemes, the practical implementation of these policies appears to remain limited. From the perspective of Institutional Theory, these results illustrate the gap between legislative recognition and actual protection experienced by workers. Collective representation can play a significant role in addressing power imbalances between workers and platform organizations. The survey results indicate strong support among gig workers for collective representation. Approximately 94.1% of respondents expressed support for the formation of gig worker unions or associations, while only 5.9% opposed such initiatives. This overwhelming support suggests that gig workers recognize the need for collective mechanisms to address issues such as income instability, grievance redressal, and employment protection.

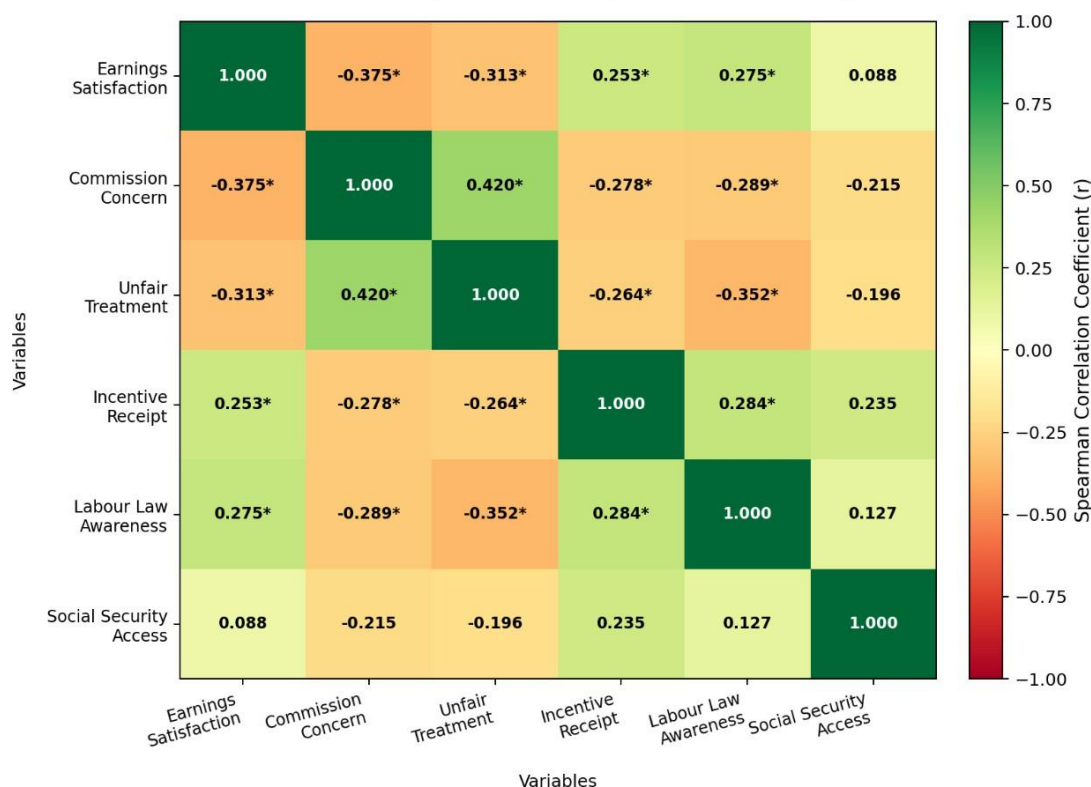
The final dimension of the analysis focuses on how gig workers perceive their long-term career prospects. The survey responses indicate that 71.2% of respondents believe that gig work does not provide significant opportunities for career advancement, while 28.8% believe that gig work can contribute to future career opportunities. These findings highlight concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of gig work as a career path. Workers often reported that the repetitive nature of gig tasks provides limited opportunities for acquiring transferable skills that could improve their employability in other sectors. From the perspective of Employability Theory, this lack of

skill development opportunities may restrict labour market mobility and increase the risk of long-term economic dependence on gig platforms.

Correlation Analysis

In order to add depth to the empirical analysis by going beyond descriptive statistics and gaining further insights into the structural relationships between the key gig worker experience-related variables, a Spearman rank-order correlation analysis was carried out on the primary survey results ($n = 205$). The analysis focused on the inter-relationship between six key variables, namely, Earnings Satisfaction, Commission Concern, Unfair Treatment, Incentive Receipt, Labour Law Awareness, and Social Security Access.

Figure 1: Spearman Correlation Matrix of Key Gig Worker Experience Variables
($n = 205$; * indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.05$)



The analysis revealed four notable and statistically significant correlations below:

Firstly, a negative correlation was identified between Commission Concern and Earnings Satisfaction ($r = -0.375$, $p < 0.001$). This was found to be the strongest correlation in this analysis. This correlation suggests that those workers perceived to be receiving greater levels of deduction in terms of commission from the platform report lower levels of satisfaction with their earnings. This correlation is in line with the descriptive results, in which income volatility and unfair levels of commission were identified as a key source of dissatisfaction among workers. From a Psychological Contract Theory perspective, this suggests that unfairness in terms of compensation constitutes a significant breach in

The ordinal scales used to measure each variable are explained below. Earnings Satisfaction has an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (Not Satisfied) to 4 (Fully Satisfied). Commission Concern has an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (No concern) to 3 (Yes, concerned). Unfair Treatment has an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (No) to 3 (Yes). Incentive Receipt has an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (No) to 3 (Yes, regularly). Labour Law Awareness has an ordinal scale ranging from 1

(Not aware) to 3 (Fully aware). Social Security Access has an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (No access) to 3 (Yes, access).

The Spearman correlation matrix identified a number of statistically significant relationships among the variables, as shown in Figure 1 below.

terms of income expectations.

Second, a high negative correlation was observed between Unfair Treatment and Earnings Satisfaction ($r = -0.313$, $p < 0.001$). Workers who had undergone unfair treatment from the online platform, such as sudden suspension of accounts, payment issues, and arbitrary penalties, had a tendency to report low satisfaction with regards to their earnings. This implies that governance of the online platform and perceptions of compensation are part of a broader

construct of job satisfaction. The Labour Process Theory also affirms this as it emphasizes how a system of algorithmic control can produce a compounded effect of disadvantage for workers.

Third, a substantial positive correlation was found

between Incentive Receipt and Earnings Satisfaction, where the correlation coefficient equalled 0.253 and $p < 0.001$. This means that workers who reported that they received incentives or bonuses on a regular basis from the platform were more likely to report higher levels of Earnings Satisfaction. The importance of incentives in compensating for base income instability and their positive effect on Earnings Satisfaction is evident in this correlation.

Fourth, a strong positive correlation between Labour Law Awareness and Earnings Satisfaction was noted ($r = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that workers who showed awareness of labor laws and the legal protections afforded to gig workers were more likely to report having earnings satisfaction. This could be attributed to the fact that workers who have more knowledge of the institution are more likely to know their rights and effectively utilize the institution to their advantage. This would support the Institutional Theory. Furthermore, an interesting correlation was found between Commission Concern and Unfair Treatment ($r = 0.420$, $p < 0.001$), implying that the workers who are subject to high levels of commission deductions are also more likely to be subject to unfair treatment. This suggests that there is an overarching pattern of the systemic vulnerability, where workers are subject to multiple dimensions of platform-induced disadvantage simultaneously.

Discussions and Implications

The findings of research provide important insights into the structural realities of platform-mediated employment in India. The results reveal that while gig platforms create employment opportunities and provide accessible labour market entry, they also generate several structural vulnerabilities that affect worker welfare, employment security, and long-term employability.

One of the most important findings from the research is the high level of economic dependency on gig work. The results from the research show that the majority of the population depends on gig work as the main source of income. This finding is contrary to the popular view that gig work is only an alternative source of income. Instead, the findings show that gig work has become a full-time livelihood for the majority of the population. This creates a paradox in which the workers are economically dependent on the platform but are legally classified as independent contractors and do not qualify for full employment benefits.

This paradox aligns closely with the arguments presented in Labour Process Theory, which emphasizes the mechanisms through which organizations exert control over labour processes. In the context of platform work, algorithmic management systems perform functions traditionally associated with human supervisors.

These systems allocate tasks, monitor worker behaviour, evaluate performance through ratings, and determine compensation structures. The survey findings showing extended working hours and dependence on platform incentives suggest that workers often adjust their behaviour according to algorithmic signals rather than exercising full autonomy.

The study highlights important insights related to Psychological Contract Theory. Many gig workers enter platform employment expecting flexibility and independence in managing their working schedules. However, the findings suggest that these expectations are not always realized in practice. Income instability, commission deductions, and lack of transparency in algorithmic decision-making contribute to moderate or low levels of job satisfaction among workers. These experiences indicate a breach of psychological expectations, where workers feel that perceived value of gig employment do not fully materialize. Another key contribution of the study relates to employability outcomes. Although gig platforms provide immediate income opportunities, the results suggest that many workers perceive limited prospects for long-term career development. The repetitive nature of tasks in sectors such as delivery and transportation restrict opportunities for acquiring specialized or transferable skills. Consequently, prolonged engagement in gig work may not necessarily improve workers' ability to transition into more stable employment sectors.

The findings also highlight significant institutional challenges in the governance of platform labour markets. Despite recent legislative developments recognizing gig workers within labour frameworks, awareness and access to these protections remain limited. Many respondents reported low awareness of labour regulations and limited access to social security benefits. This gap between legislative recognition and practical implementation suggests that regulatory reforms alone may not be sufficient without effective awareness campaigns and enforcement mechanisms.

Finally, the strong support expressed by respondents for gig worker unions indicates a growing recognition of the need for collective representation. As platform labour markets expand, collective institutions may play a critical role in balancing the power asymmetries between the workers and digital platforms. Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the view that gig economy work should not be understood solely as a technological innovation but also as a transformation of employment relationships that raises important questions regarding labour governance, worker protection, and workforce sustainability.

The findings of this study also have several important implications for platform organizations,

policymakers, and human resource managers in managing the digital labour ecosystem. One of the key managerial implications relates to the transparency of algorithmic management systems. Many gig workers expressed concerns regarding the lack of clarity in performance evaluation criteria, task allocation mechanisms, and compensation calculations. Platforms can enhance worker trust by improving communication regarding the factors that influence algorithmic decision-making. Transparent rating systems and clear performance feedback mechanisms may help reduce perceptions of unfairness and improve worker satisfaction.

Another important implication concerns income stability and compensation design. The findings indicate that income volatility is a major source of dissatisfaction among gig workers. Platforms may consider exploring compensation structures that combine task-based payments with minimum earning guarantees during active working periods. Such approaches could help reduce financial uncertainty while maintaining operational flexibility.

The research also highlights the need for improved grievance redressal mechanisms within platform organizations. Many workers reported difficulties in resolving disputes related to payments, penalties, or account deactivation. Establishing accessible support channels that include human representatives in addition to automated systems could improve dispute resolution processes and strengthen worker confidence in platform governance.

From a human resource management perspective, the study suggests the importance of skill development and employability support initiatives. Platforms can collaborate with training institutions and government programs to offer skill development opportunities that enhance workers' long-term employability. Providing access to digital literacy training, vocational certification programs, and career transition support could help workers diversify their employment prospects.

Another important managerial implication relates to worker engagement and communication. Despite their contractor status, gig workers represent an essential component of platform ecosystems. Creating channels for worker feedback through surveys, advisory committees, or consultation forums may help organizations better understand workforce challenges and improve organizational practices.

Finally, the study emphasizes the need for responsible platform governance. As digital labour markets continue to expand, organizations must balance technological efficiency with ethical considerations related to worker welfare and labour protection. Developing governance models that integrate innovation with worker well-being can contribute to sustainable platform ecosystems.

Future Research

While this study adds to the body of knowledge on the experiences of gig workers in India, there are several avenues for future research in this area. First, future studies could explore longitudinal analyses of gig worker careers to better understand how extended participation in platform work influences long-term employability and labour market mobility. Such studies would provide deeper insights into the career trajectories of the gig workers over time.

Second, comparative research across different platform sectors could help identify variations in working conditions and governance structures. For example, the experiences of workers in delivery services may differ significantly from those engaged in digital freelancing or professional platform work. Third, the future research could examine the impact of regulatory reforms on the gig worker welfare. As labour codes and social security schemes continue to evolve in India, empirical studies assessing their implementation and effectiveness will be important for policy evaluation.

Another potential research direction involves studying gender participation in gig work. The findings of the present study reveal a significant gender imbalance among gig workers. Future research could investigate the barriers that limit women's participation in platform employment and identify strategies for promoting inclusive labour market participation. Finally, further research could focus on psychological and well-being aspects of the gig work, including occupational stress, Work-life balance, & mental health outcomes associated with algorithmic management systems.

Conclusion

The gig economy is one of the most prominent changes in the labour market in recent times. The gig economy has enabled a new form of employment through digital platforms by facilitating flexible engagement in economic activities through technology-based systems. In India, where employment opportunities are scarce, the gig economy has become a vital livelihood option for workers.

The results obtained in this study indicate that while the gig economy is growing at a rapid pace, it faces a number of structural issues in terms of employment arrangements where gig workers remain in a state of economic dependence with unstable income levels, lack of access to social protection systems, and limited opportunities for career progression.

The empirical evidence presented in this research highlights a fundamental paradox within platform employment: workers rely heavily on digital platforms for their livelihoods while remaining

outside the scope of traditional labour protections. Algorithmic management systems further transform employment relationships by exercising managerial control through automated processes without corresponding organizational accountability.

The study also identifies significant institutional gaps related to awareness and implementation of labour regulations. Despite recent policy developments recognizing gig workers within labour frameworks, many workers remain unaware of their rights and lack access to welfare benefits.

From a human resource management perspective, the research emphasizes the importance of developing governance frameworks that integrate technological innovation with worker support systems. Transparent algorithmic management, improved grievance redressal mechanisms, skill development initiatives, and stronger communication channels can help enhance worker experiences within platform ecosystems.

Ultimately, the sustainability of the gig economy will depend on the ability of policymakers, organizations, and labour institutions to create balanced governance models that promote both economic efficiency and worker protection. Ensuring that technological progress is accompanied by institutional safeguards and human capital development will be essential for building a more equitable and resilient digital labour market.

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