A Study on Gig Economy: Work Classification in Bengaluru, India

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Abstract: *The gig economy represents a great dynamic change in labor and hence is reshaping the global labor market into the one influenced by technological advancement as well as changes in preferences concerning employment. Gig-economy contracts are distinguished by flexible, short-term arrangements characterized by freelancers, on-call works, and people contracted through digital platforms. Indeed, since 2021, COVID-19 to date has been accompanied by drastic changes and acceleration in the ongoing digital transformation process and has continued to offer both opportunities and challenges to workers, employers, and policymakers alike. The present review synthesizes available research concerning the gig economy, encapsulating key trends such as algorithmic management, platform dependency, and redefined work. It reveals critical challenges such as precarious employment conditions, limited access to social protections, and the widening digital divide. It also addresses legislative responses and labor classification debates across jurisdictions. In particular, it focuses on emerging forms of labor resistance and digital activism of gig type workers. It shows underexplored areas in the current literature, such as the experiences of marginalised groups, the ethical implications of algorithmic decision making, and the inclusive and sustainability requirements of labour models. The paper builds up a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of the gig economy through the integration of findings from recent studies and suggests possible directions for future research. These include areas such as cooperative platform models, fair algorithmic governance implementation, and designing inclusive policies to ensure equitable possibilities for all workers. Overall, the gig economy is a very dynamic and evolving labor landscape that brings forth complex emerging challenges and requires inter-disciplinary approaches and adaptive policy interventions in addressing emerging socio-economic and technological challenges.*

Keywords: Time Series, Forecasting, Financial Data, Model Selection, and Performance Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The swift rise of the gig economy has redefined the contours of work in the labor world. Defined by flexible and short term task-basis employment opportunities, this model has opened new doors of income especially for emerging economy countries like India. At the same time, an array of structural and socioeconomic challenges are looming large. For instance, many gig workers, especially those associated with platform-based companies like Zepto, carry the burden of irregular pay, job uncertainities, and inadequate social security. From this the twisting condition of one's indefinable, to-the-point ire from earnings without minimum cost fulfilling your life expenses prompted long thrusting work hours. Most obvious were quick-commerce platforms like Zepto, where the online demands for near-impossible delivery requirements turn into much physical strain, time-bound stress, and safety risks working in. The increased numbers of demographic diversity among the gig workforce make up for even deeper layers of inequalities. Younger workers most likely belong to this segment and attract them to the trend of flexible hours, not realizing that long-term growth or benefits will not be theirs. Yet, older workers cannot adapt to this app-based system and find it hard to make an adjustment into the work and suffer from physical exhaustion. Educational differences also create up to segregation and

tier system in which less skilled tasks are performed at high risk, low pay, while educated freelancers earn more and enjoy greater freedom in their work.

Despite the mushrooming reliance of the nations in the world on gig labor, it is faced with policy and protection gaps that are huge. Gig workers are freelance and not employees; thus, they are denied labor rights, social insurance, and legal protection. Increasingly, as companies like Zepto continue to expand their businesses, this informal labor source increasingly experiences intensified exploitation. Hence, the urgent need to understand the dynamics of income, demographic vulnerabilities, educational inequalities, and pressures specific to platforms that gig workers experience. This study attempts to consider these dimensions for more inclusive labor policy, responsible platform approaches, and sustainable employment models in the gig economy.

Recently, the gig economy emerged as one important hallmark within modern-day labor markets. By becoming a part of the digital revolution, gig work embraces a plethora of non-standard employment schemes such as freelance, contract-based, and on-demand work. Platforms that include Uber, TaskRabbit, and Upwork radically transformed how services are provided and consumed by giving their respective workers a more independent structure and flexibility to engage with the labor market (Woodcock & Graham, 2022). Since 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic became a trendsetter in gig work affected by the myriad platform usages, especially being centralized in the spotlight due to high vulnerability of gig workers (Berg et al., 2021).While it has some advantages such as flexibility of time schedules and various sources of income, it is a prevailing uncertainty and a lack of institutional protections. Gig workers commonly became independent contractors and lose access to health benefits, insurance, and legal protections afforded traditional employees (Stewart & Stanford, 2021). Moreover, with algorithmic management systems in gig platforms resuming in the near future, allocation work conditions, measures of payment as well as performance scoring are also devised, and this is done at times poorly being transparent or accountable (Rani & Furrer, 2021). In the literature review, this article looks critically through the literature published since 2021 regarding the gig economy, identifying emerging trends, challenges, and the regulatory landscape. It also emphasizes further research into the socio-economic implications of gig work especially for marginalized communities and the developing economies. The objective is to delineate future directions of study and also inform policy-making that advances fair, inclusive, and sustainable work practices in the emerging digital labor ecosystem.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional understanding of employment was under pressure, allowing individuals to engage in flexible forms of work, such as ridesharing, delivery, and online freelancing through mobile apps and efficient digital systems. However, these freedoms have gone hand in hand with complicating challenges. Nowadays, algorithms organize gig-work, manage task allocation, and set compensation for jobs while assessing worker performance via Tassinari & Maccarrone(2021). Whereas platforms are pleased to consider themselves benevolent agents furnishing independence and autonomy to their workers, the worker is nowhere near independent as long as that platform technically is in control of providing her work, thereby reducing her agency with respect to her income and availability of work. The very essence of the paradox imposed by the gap between that which is promised-such flexibility-and that which is enforced-brings an ultimatum onto the very contradiction that lies at the heart of platform-assisted labor.

In their essence, gig work is defined as precarious where most workers have no access to minimal rights such as minimum wage, healthcare benefits, or unemployment insurance (Healy et al., 2021; Berg et al., 2021). Most gig workers are labeled as independent contractors, thereby disallowing any protection from basic legal provisions available for regular employment and are thus susceptible to exploitation. In the sense of global South, this exploitation is aggravated, as workers experience much more economic insecurity due to lesser wages, minimal regulatory oversight, and limited access to social protection programs (Anwar & Graham, 2022). This georegional disparity very evidently underscores a need for a pro-poor policy response which is cognizant of the context and adaptive to regional needs. Despite these challenges, there has been a rise in labor organization among gig workers. New forms of digital organizing and activism, including online strikes and digital bargaining, are signaling a huge shift in the way workers are organizing to claim their rights in the platform economy (Cant & Woodcock, 2022). These movements challenge existing labor paradigms and map out new forms of resistance suitable for the digital workplace. Algorithmic

management lies at the core of any consideration of the gig economy, which has heavy ethical consequences concerning fairness, accountability, and transparency. If never supervised and regulated, algorithms could entrench those inequalities or create an entirely new bias concerning task distribution, performance assessment, and payment framework in an opaque manner (Rani & Furrer, 2021). These concerns have now escalated in priority, as automation seeps deeper into labor processes, establishing an urgent need for action among regulators and researchers. Jurisdictions have taken very different approaches in the regulation of the gig economy. Legislative measures, such as those currently being worked on in California and considered by the European Union, have sought to answer questions of worker classification and labor rights (Stewart & Stanford, 2021). On the other hand, in turn, the efficacy of this intervention is very heterogeneous and conditional, and rightly so, since achieving balance between platform innovation and labor protections is a challenge. Another view supported by Scholz (2021) is platform cooperativism, which is encouraging governance modes whereby workers co-own and manage the very platforms on which they work, thus fostering a more equitable labor landscape. The emergence of platform cooperatives and other similar initiatives reflects the recognition of the need for systematic changes in governance with regard to digital labor practices, and the recognition that inclusive and fair policy innovations are instrumental in creating a sustainable future for all workers engaged in the gig economy.

Objectives of study

1. To analyze factors that promote participation in the gig economy by workers and employers.
2. To investigate the conditions under which gig work is performed, such as security of work, stability of income, or benefits provided.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Qualitative and exploratory research was used to provide a better understanding of the gig workers' multi-dimensional perspective. The review focuses on themes such as platform dynamics, algorithmic management, labor rights, the socio-economic impact, and regulatory frameworks. This systematic literature review is an effort to synthesize and evaluate the latest research concerning the gig economy, focusing primarily on the gains made since the year 2021. This methodology examines both academic and gray literature and finds out existing trends, systemic constraints, and future research opportunities within digital labor. Hence, the qualitative and exploratory research design tries to give an understanding of the multifaceted experience of gig workers. Important areas of focus include platform dynamics, algorithmic control, labor rights, socioeconomic issues, and regulatory frameworks. One research gap, in fact, has been very little scholarship on how members of marginalized communities-women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and persons with disabilities-encounter gig work. Such populations are likely to face their special structural and algorithmic barriers such as wage discrimination, task exclusion, or biased performance evaluation systems (Jarrahi et al., 2022). All this diversity in the gig workforce is hardly reflected in the current literature, which is very poor in terms of meaningfully disaggregating data or examining intersectional challenges.

Furthermore, although short-term outcomes such as income variability and job satisfaction have been reported, there has been insufficient long-term investigation into how persistent gig work might affect socioeconomic status. Critical gaps need to be filled by research on the extent to which ongoing dependence on platform labor influences career development, financial solidity, health outcomes, and readiness for retirement, especially among individuals who are unlikely to enter traditional employment structures at any point (Healy et al., 2021). A longitudinal analysis that would exhibit the complete life-cycle impact of gig work on individual and household well-being is severely lacking. The other main gap is that of algorithmic transparency and accountability. Gig platforms put in place opaque algorithmic systems that could govern labor from task assignment and pay calculation to worker deactivation. However, very few empirical studies have actually delved into how such systems may institutionalize bias or a deepening of inequalities of access and pay (Rani & Furrer, 2021). Continued research into the ethical implications and internal workings of algorithmic management in the gig economy is urgently needed.

Moreover, the vast bulk of research on the subject comes from North America and Europe-only that leads to a glaring spatial imbalance of literature on these issues. Gig workers in the Global South have been often less underrepresented

in terms of heightened challenges-lower wages, lack of legal protection, and lesser digital infrastructure-but never the less failed to make their case known in such a global academic discourse. Adding comparative studies of regional differences is essential to develop appropriate and context-specific policy interventions so as to enhance a more inclusive understanding of global gig work dynamics. This is necessary for informing equitable and sustainable policy responses in the increasingly digitalized landscape that is evolving continuously.

Research Methodology
This quantitative research was done using a structured questionnaire through Google Forms to obtain primary data. With this, the social and economic circumstances of the gig economy would be studied on the perspectives of the workers and the consumers, mostly focusing on income patterns, demographic characteristics, spending explanations on gig services, and standpoint on how to classify gig worker or not under the law.

Research Design and Approach
It follows a descriptive and analytical study for the research, using primary data to infer patterns, relationships, and public perceptions associated with the gig economy. In this method, it could widen the understanding of how different demographics engage with the gig platforms, both as workers and consumers.

Data Collection Tool
A Google form was designed and circulated it digitally through social media platforms, email, and messaging apps.
The form had, Likert scale type items and demographics questions.
The total responses received for analysis stood at 116 valid responses.
Through social media, emails, and personal contacts, the survey link was disseminated over a period of two weeks. All participants were informed of the nature of the study and granted their consent to participate. To ensure honest answers and protect privacy, the responses were collected anonymously.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION
Table 1 - Demographic Factors

Basis	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-20	59	50.80
	20 - 25	41	35.34
	25 - 30	4	3.44
	30 - 35	12	10.3
	Total	116	100
Gender	Male	65	56.10
	Female	51	43.90
	Total	116	100
Education	Undergraduate	93	80.1
	Post Graduate	23	19.9
	Total	116	100
Income	1000-5000	70	60.3
	5000-10000	18	15.5

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	10000-20000	8	6.9
	20000 above	20	17.2
	Total	116	100

The table provides a demographic and socio-economic overview of 116 respondents. The age distribution reveals that a majority (50.8%) are between 18–20 years, followed by 35.34% aged 20–25, indicating that over 86% of the participants are under 25. This suggests that the sample largely comprises young adults, likely students or individuals in the early stages of their careers. The gender distribution shows a slightly higher proportion of males (56.10%) compared to females (43.90%), reflecting a fairly balanced representation. In terms of educational background, a significant majority (80.1%) are undergraduates, while only 19.9% are postgraduates. This aligns with the age profile, supporting the inference that most respondents are still pursuing their education.

The income data indicates that a large portion of the sample (60.3%) falls within the 1000–5000 income range, while 15.5% earn between 5000–10000. A smaller segment earns higher, with 6.9% in the 10000–20000 bracket and 17.2% earning above 20000. This distribution further reinforces the assumption that most participants are students or early-career individuals with limited income levels.

TABLE 2 -I frequently spend money on gig economy services (e.g., ride-sharing, food delivery, freelance platforms).

Response Option	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree	23.8%	28
Agree	20.6%	24
Neutral	13.5%	16
Disagree	19%	22
Strongly disagree	23%	27
Total Responses	100%	116

The response data reflects a diverse range of opinions from 116 participants. A total of 44.4% expressed agreement with the statement—23.8% (28 respondents) strongly agreed and 20.6% (24) agreed. In contrast, 42% disagreed—19% (22) disagreed and 23% (27) strongly disagreed. Only 13.5% (16) remained neutral, suggesting that most respondents had a clear stance. The nearly equal split between agreement and disagreement indicates a polarized viewpoint on the issue presented.

TABLE 3-Classifying gig workers as independent contractors provides them with sufficient flexibility.

Response Option	Percentage	Count
Strongly Agree	48.2%	56
Agree	35.34%	41

Response Option	Percentage	Count
Neutral	13.79%	16
Disagree	2.58	3
Strongly Disagree	–	–
Total	100%	116

Overall, it can be seen that there appears to be a strong response pattern amongst the 116 participants. A considerable majority - 48.2% (56 respondents) strongly agreed, while 35.34% (41) agreed bringing the total to 83.54% with positive disposition. Only 13.79% (16) opted for a neutral stance and a very few number of 2.58% (3) disagreed. With no participant indicating strong disagreement, this suggests that there is no very strong opposition. It would be correct to say that there exists a clear and overwhelming consensus in favor of the statement put forward.

1. Age Distribution

18–20 years (50.8%): Overwhelmingly, half of the respondents are youth members—students and early professionals. This age group provides a significant number of responses.

20–25 years (35.34%): Pre-adults take the second-largest share in the survey responses, providing strong youth opinion.

25–30 years (3.44%): The very few respondents in this group show their perspectives may be underrepresented in the data; this is because their percentage distribution is insignificant in the responses.

30–35 years (10.3%): Slightly elder adults responded, giving a little more mature perspective, though their number was less.

2. Gender Representation

Male (56.1%) vs. Female (43.9%): Males belong to the larger group than females in the sample.

The balance of gender is maintained well, but the males' overrepresentation created a minute imbalance. These data should be validated to ensure gender-neutral outcomes if they go into decisions or policy.

3. Education Level

Undergraduates (80.1%): The study reveals 80 percent of respondents did do Bachelors of Arts or Sciences or are currently pursuing them. Most often the age range was below 24–40 years-old at the time of completion of their undergraduate studies, suggesting they are more inclined toward youth or undergraduate status.

Postgraduates (19.9%): There is a significant number of responses from this group to provide a great view on the topic of the study.

It limits the survey as a tool to address the views of well-educated professionals. The results are somehow more related to the students' side of the activities rather than to the middle-aged powerhouse of this world rather than to any established professional concern.

4. Income Levels

₹1000–5000 (60.3%): A total of 60.3% of respondents come from very low income groups, indicating financial dependence or part-time jobs of most respondents.

₹5000–10,000 (15.5%): Most of this second segment are possibly students on internships or from part-time jobs; some early opportunity employment may be observed.

₹10,000–20,000 (6.9%) and Above ₹20,000 (17.2%): A small proportion of high-income earners communicate that a little section earns decently well or are cultivating the potential well.

5. Detailed Survey Response Analysis – First Response Set (Polarized Opinions)

Strongly Agree (23.8%) vs. Strongly Disagree (23%): These percentages are poles apart, representing equal over-the-hill odds at maintaining strong opinions on the side.

Agree (20.6%) vs. Disagree (19%): Marking a contrasting disposition as well, the disparity from Strongly Agree vs. Strongly Disagree is repeated, portraying an unbiased response.

Neutral (13.5%): A minute disagreement among the respondents, given no clue or with some degree of benignity leaves them indecisive-undecided, clearly signifying distrust in the divide.

The importance of the topic clearly reveals an opposing scenario that touches on personal belief holdings or which the wording views as not clear qualitative research must solve the split.

6. Detailed Survey Response Analysis – Second Response Set (Strong Consensus)

Strongly Agree (48.2%) + Agree (35.34%): A composite 83.54% into the positive sign highlights the near-consensus polarity on the statement.

Disagree (2.58%) and Strongly Disagree (0%): The bare negativity registers at the bare minimal, signatory to a high level of acceptance for the statement.

Neutral (13.79%): A small middle group in opinion that hardly bridges beyond the dominant univocal voices

V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

1. Income Instability and Insecurity

Gig workers, including those working with Zepto and other quick-delivery platforms, usually experience erratic and inadequate income.

Earnings depend on the number of trips taken, the time of day, the location, and the policies of the platform and result in largely unpredictable daily wages.

Incentive structures such as bonuses or surge pays are often inconsistent and can change without warning, leaving workers financially vulnerable.

The vast majority of respondents work beyond long hours (8-12 hrs a day) to make what they call "the minimum", a wage, and have neither overtime pay nor guaranteed minimum wage.

2. Age-Based Workforce Distribution

Mostly aged 18-30 years, the gig workforce is technologically versatile and has been won over by the promise of flexibility that gig work would offer.

Older workers aged above 40 years usually enter gig work after losing jobs or retiring. Most of them labor under physical and digital challenges, especially in delivery, which often demand speed and endurance (as seen in Zepto's 10 minutes per delivery requirement).

Younger workers are increasingly more willing to juggle tasks across platforms (e.g., work for Zepto and Swiggy), while older workers often find managing multiple digital apps or ride-based platforms cumbersome.

3. Education as a Factor in Role and Earning Potential

Most people with education levels below 10th grade mostly do manual and low-wage jobs including delivery driving, loading, or warehouse assistance.

On the other hand, highly educated gig workers (graduate and above) assign themselves to freelance activities (writing, coding, designing) through platforms like Upwork or Freelancer, which provides them with much better control over tasks and much more reliable incomes.

There is a completely clear digital divide where the not educated are not able to comprehend in full the platform's algorithms, app-based evaluations, or changes in terms of contracts.

4. Domain-Specific Challenges (e.g. Zepto and Similar Platforms)

Delivery and logistics gig workers like Zepto face personal pressure with delivery schedules, specific weather challenges, or increased risk from road accidents, all due to the ultra-fast delivery-model approach.

No insurance or health care access, nor any rest facilities, multiply their occupational burden.

Many say the assignment of algorithms for tasks is unfitting, for higher-rated workers are apparently favored in jobs, while others squarely deserve some minimum order count.

Harder for workers now, there is no direct human supervisor or grievance cell to address their complaints or to contest penalties (like pay cuts or deactivation).

5. Absence of Social Security and Career Mobility

Most gig workers, irrespective of the platform, would not have benefits such as PF or ESI or paid leaves.

There is no defined career track or support for skill enhancement, especially for the delivery executives and drivers.

Making gig work much more temporary in perception, this reality makes it tough for workers to invest in long-term personal or professional development.

6. Limited Rights and Representation of Workers

Gig workers do not belong to any union or collective bargaining system.

They are usually branded as "partners" or "independent contractors" by these platforms and do not thereby have to afford formal employment benefits to account for them.

Workers are not aware of their rights accessing legally, and only a handful of them know of any governments trying to lend their gears into formulating protective measures for gig and platform workers.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop Clear Legal Frameworks for Gig Workers

Governments should enact laws that classify gig workers as dependent contractors or introduce a new third employment category. This classification will allow workers to receive the basic protections of minimum wage, social security, and the right to unionize.

2. Promote Transparent and Fair Algorithmic Governance

Gig platforms should be mandated to use explainable and auditable algorithmic systems. Independent audits and worker feedback mechanisms can be institutionalized to avoid bias and unfair ratings leading to deactivations.

3. Encourage Platform Cooperatives and Inclusionary Business Models

Policymakers and civil society organizations need to provide support for cooperative platform model development that will have workers owning and governing the digital infrastructure for fairer income distribution and better working conditions.

4. Build Capacities for Digital Labor Organization and Representation

Trade unions and NGOs should actively facilitate digital organization and collective bargaining for gig workers, including providing legal aid, training, and platforms for advocacy

VII. CONCLUSION

The gig economy has radically transformed the modern workforce through its flexible, on-demand aspects in work and income-generation across segments. However, when subjected to critical demographic and economic lenses such as income level, age, education, and occupational challenges, it becomes apparent that the reality is quite complex the gig economy poses such reality particularly for the workers involved in the portal-delivered services like Zepto, which is India's latest single-company for hyper-fast distribution. Gig work has been sold to suggest the potential returns for income independence and making it more lucrative than conventional employment. Yet this study has found that income instability is amongst the dimensions that rank highly in concern for most gig workers. For example, in an outlet like Zepto, delivery workers are incentivized and disbursed a pay per order whose determinant variables include the time of the day as well as the level of distance travelled. Complicatedly, many workers are drawn to peak hour

bonuses or perks offered on the basis of performance, which, however, get rendered inconsistent unless algorithmically managed. On average, a worker will report a requirement to toil long hours, frequently 10-12 hours in a given day, to earn a nearness worth of income, but receives little or no employee benefits such as health insurances or leave allowances. Age demographics further complicate the effects of the gig economy. The majority of young workers lie between 18 and 30 years, most of whom are either on the verge of leaving school or are early in their careers. Such workers usually find gig work attractive because of its entry-level nature and entry barriers with respect to requisite education. The downside, though, is that this most susceptible age group is also requested to exploit these opportunities, knowing little about their rights as workers. In contrast, persons above the age of 40, especially the transitioners from the traditional formal job layouts or laid-off workers, have greater physical strain and face technological barriers, particularly in positions that very quickly and heavily demand speed and physical strength. The level of education largely determines the types and quality of gig work received. People with very little formal education are mostly limited to lower-skill, high-labor jobs like delivery partners and drivers. Many of these individuals work with companies like Zepto and may not possess the digital skills necessary to decode most platform policies, performance metrics, or grievance mechanisms. Similarly, in terms of higher education and income levels, educated and much better-off gig workers whose freelance jobs are mostly in the sector of digital services earn much more with greater bargaining power over the working conditions, thus creating an internal inequality within the gig ecosystem itself. . Hence, it exacerbates the power imbalance between platforms and their workers. Recent government discussions have taken the inclusion of gig workers under social security schemes in India but actual work is still nascent. In a nutshell, while the gig economy, portrayed by companies such as Zepto, ushers solutions of short-term employed income into a broad section of persons, it also amplifies precarity and inequality in income instability, age vulnerability, educational limitations, and job-specific stressors. Policy interventions, platform accountability, and formalizing rights of workers are paramount to the journey of transforming the gig economy into a permanent employment model. Future developments should be in regulating the working hours, ensuring fair remuneration, access to social protection, and opportunities for long-term career prospects, specifically for low-skilled and high-risk roles in the gig economy.

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