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Platform-Mediated Work and the Rise of Labour Market Precarity

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Abstract

The rapid growth of platform-mediated work has reshaped labour markets by redefining employment relations through algorithmic management and task-based contracts. Although often promoted as flexible and income-enhancing, such work has raised concerns regarding income volatility, limited social protection, and rising labour precarity. This study empirically examines the determinants of labour precarity among platform workers in India using a multidimensional framework. Based on primary survey data, a Labour Precarity Index is constructed through Principal Component Analysis (PCA), incorporating indicators of income instability, financial insecurity, social protection deficits, and exposure to platform penalties. The index is categorised into low, medium, and high precarity levels and analysed using a multinomial logistic regression model with robust standard errors.

Findings show that higher income significantly reduces the likelihood of medium precarity, while asset ownership (landholding) strongly predicts both medium and high precarity. Increased working hours do not significantly improve economic security, indicating that greater labour supply does not guarantee stability. Gender and age differences further reveal uneven vulnerability. Overall, platform work interacts with existing socio-economic inequalities, intensifying precarity for certain worker groups.

Keywords : Platform-mediated work, Labour precarity, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), Multinomial Logistic Regression, Social protection

ILC26/029

The Triple Challenge of Gig Work: A Systematic Review of Workers' Satisfaction, Job Turnover, and Pricing Dynamics

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Abstract

The gig economy is rapidly transforming work globally, offering flexibility and independence while intensifying precarious work and unfair practices. Despite the growing importance, only a few studies have comprehensively investigated how job dynamics in the gig economy influence workers' experience and platform market sustainability. Our study addresses this gap by conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 85 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. The findings highlighted that the major factors leading to job satisfaction are flexibility, autonomy, social support, and fair algorithmic management, whereas insecurity, stress, low pay, and poor algorithmic control lower it. Besides this, job turnover is highly influenced by income instability, insufficient payback, and mental distress. However, supportive HR practices and a conducive environment can moderate these effects. Pricing mechanisms are usually determined by the platform's incentive structure, algorithms, and surge patterns, which eventually affect platform outcomes, but frustration and poor communication between the platform manager and workers may also erode them. Additionally, this research highlights that an integrative approach to these aspects plays a critical role in ensuring the gig economy's sustainability. Consequently, government intervention is necessary to promote fair algorithmic management, provide adequate protection, and ensure the effectiveness of grievance-redressal mechanisms.

Keywords
Gig Economy, Job Satisfaction, Job Turnover, Pricing dynamics, Algorithmic Management, Systematic Literature Review
JEL: J28. J63. D40. L86. J16

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There is No Free Lunch: The Social Costs of Convenience in Doorstep Deliveries

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There is No Free Lunch: The Social Costs of Convenience in Doorstep Deliveries

Abstract

The Quick Commerce industry has been a primary driver of the demand for gig workers, which is continually evolving. The sector has constantly been scrutinized for social concerns, including the welfare of gig workers and consumer safety. This research conceptually addresses a pertinent question: how to raise the safety of both gig workers and consumers, who are adversely affected in the name of convenience. This conceptual work describes who gig workers are, their types, and the gig worker economy. Thereafter, the focus is specifically on the quick commerce industry, which is driven by gig workers, and an explanation of why it is an essential sector for emerging markets is given. Next, a conceptual framework for this research, based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, is developed and discussed. The environmental stimuli (S) examined are consumer impulse buying behaviour, small-discrete customer orders, and unethical treatment of delivery partners; the psychological responses (O) considered are perceived inferiority and inequality, as well as learned helplessness and self-efficacy; the behavioral responses (R) are categorized into internal and external. Internal behavioral responses are directed towards the self and may or may not have external consequences, e.g., depression, anxiety, frustration, and substance abuse. External behavioral responses are those directed towards others and have external consequences, e.g., theft, aggression (including road rage), abuse, assault, harassment, and domestic violence. Further, two novel moderators are proposed: relationship orientation toward the comparison target (competition vs. cooperation) and workplace safety climate. The future implications of this research are then discussed.

Who are Gig workers? What are the types of Gig workers?

Gig workers are individuals who engage in work outside the traditional employer-employee relationship. They are broadly categorized into two groups: platform workers and non-platform-based workers. Platform workers rely on online software applications or digital platforms for their work. In contrast, non-platform gig workers are typically casual wage workers or self-employed individuals in conventional sectors, and they may work either part-time or full-time. Gig workers differ from traditional employees in several ways, including their location (mostly residing in urban areas), age group (typically between 18 and 45 years), education levels (usually between secondary school and college graduates), and income levels (often those whose household consumption expenditure is below the 75th percentile of monthly per capita consumption). Additionally, ownership of mobile phones and access to bank accounts are essential factors in estimating the number of gig and platform workers.

Gig Workers Economy

In the Indian labor market during 2020-21, approximately 7.7 million workers were involved in the gig economy. This number is projected to grow significantly to 23.5 million by 2029-30 (NITI Aayog, 2022). Currently, around 47% of gig jobs fall into the medium-skilled category, about 22% into the high-skilled category, and approximately 31% into the low-skilled category. There is a noticeable trend of a gradual decline in the concentration of workers in medium-skilled positions, with increases in both low-skilled and high-skilled roles. It is expected that, while medium-skilled jobs will continue to dominate until 2030, gig work will rise across other skill levels. The following factors have contributed to the growth of the gig worker economy:

1. The Platform India Initiative, which includes the Startup India Initiative, has accelerated the development of platforms across various sectors. This has resulted in the emergence of numerous new ventures, such as Rapido. These services cater to passengers across all categories, offering transportation options ranging from two-wheelers (bike taxis and bike pooling) to three-wheelers (rickshaws and autorickshaws), four-wheelers (taxi services and carpools), and even 10- to 12-seater vehicles (mini-buses). Additionally, self-employed individuals selling regional and rural cuisine and street food have also connected with platforms like Zomato, allowing them to reach broader markets in towns and cities. This growth has been supported by easier access to finance, including institutional credit and venture capital funding.

2. The government is implementing various measures to develop skills and create jobs in the gig sector through the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). These initiatives aim to nurture skilled workers and support micro-entrepreneurs. A key component is transformational upskilling, which creates opportunities for both horizontal and vertical mobility, allowing workers to pursue jobs in the gig and platform sectors and enhance their earnings.

3. The government encourages social inclusion in the new-age digital economy. Platform businesses undertake partnerships with Civil Society Organizations to create employment opportunities for women and PWDs

4. The social security benefits are planned to be extended to gig and platform workers in India.

5. Measures to protect and support Gig workers on the platform are being implemented. Some industry platforms have created corpus funds, e.g., the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation in Kochi partnered with food delivery service Zomato to list grains and other essentials on the app, and the “Drive the Driver Fund” to support cab drivers after the pandemic setback.

This research focuses on gig workers in the quick commerce industry. Quick Commerce caters to our fast-paced lifestyle by providing fast, easy access to essential goods. Quick Commerce serves immediate consumer needs (last-minute purchases) and primarily offers groceries and other essentials such as medicines, stationery, and cosmetics. This is facilitated either online or by app ordering. Quick Commerce is targeted mainly at a younger, digitally savvy population and is typically suited to smaller SKUs and more frequent purchases.
The following are the cardinal features of Quick Commerce:
·"Quick Commerce is appreciated more by younger consumers who are comfortable with mobile apps and prefer not to waste time visiting the supermarket for small purchases" (Tugberk Ariker, 2021, p. 141).
·Items in small quantities are frequently ordered, especially when people run out of a specific product or prefer to buy ingredients for a meal they intend to prepare immediately after the order (ChannelSight, 2021).
·"Typical products ordered include dairy products, freshly baked goods, chocolates, snacks and chips, soft drinks and alcoholic beverages, vegetables and fruits, personal hygiene products, and ready-to-eat meals" (Tugberk Ariker, 2021, p. 141).
·Order delivery in Quick Commerce within a short timeframe involves the use of agile two-wheeled delivery fleets, such as e-bikes or motorbikes (Delivery Hero, 2020).
·Delivery fees on Quick Commerce platforms are very low, and product prices are approximately the same as those in supermarkets.
·"Quick Commerce is feasible in areas with a highly dense population, making it financially viable" (Villa/Monzón 2021, p. 2).
·To succeed with this business model, warehouses must be in central areas of large cities. These small, centrally located warehouses, also known as dark stores, are reserved exclusively for company employees, indicating that customers are not permitted to enter.
·As these dark stores are centrally located, rental costs are significantly higher than in areas outside cities. Hence, dark stores typically carry only the most popular products, often in small quantities, unlike large department stores, which offer a vast selection (Bloomberg, 2021).

Quick Commerce has been a primary driver of gig worker demand in 2024 and is expected to grow by at least 60% in 2025 (Aggarwal, 2025). The quick commerce industry is maturing in developed nations and has been evolving rapidly in emerging markets like India. As discussed above, Quick Commerce thrives on efficiency, convenience, and superior customer service by focusing on a limited assortment of high-demand products and a limited delivery area, both supported by centrally located stores. India has been a home to e-commerce for almost two decades, where e-commerce platforms offer a long-term promise to consumers by catering to users' preferred selection, quality, and price. As discussed previously, Quick Commerce is an advanced form of e-commerce that leverages technology and urban logistics to deliver goods within 30 minutes or less. In the 1990s, the internet boom facilitated the expansion of e-commerce, with companies like Amazon and eBay, and it matured in the 2000s-2010s with global platforms like Alibaba and Rakuten. In the 2010s,

mobile commerce (m-commerce) experienced significant growth, particularly with the rise of app-based ordering. Key players, including Amazon, Walmart, and Tesco, introduced same-day or one-hour delivery options in select regions (Ntumba et al., 2023). As m-commerce grew, the focus changed from convenience to speed. Following the introduction of quick commerce, delivery speed has also become a key factor in evaluating e-commerce platforms. Quick commerce heavily relies on gig workers for two key roles: in-store staff who manage operations at dark stores and delivery agents who provide fast, doorstep delivery. Dark stores are the warehouses of quick commerce companies like Blinkit and Zepto, which are very small, packed with racks and items, and expected to operate nonstop. The pickers or delivery agents are expected always to run, without regard for their safety. Quick commerce promises to generate income for gig workers, supporting their livelihoods in fast-growing cities and thereby contributing to the economy. The gig economy has also enhanced Quick Commerce's last-mile logistics capabilities.

With shifting consumer demands and technology shaping consumer purchase habits, it is pertinent to develop approaches that benefit businesses, workers, and consumers. Despite the immense popularity of quick commerce for the value it offers, it faces several criticisms (Abrar, 2024), including societal and environmental concerns. Further, concerns have been raised about the ethical treatment of delivery partners when they are unable to reach the customer delivery location on time, or when products of questionable quality are delivered to meet short-term demand. Sometimes, these delivery agents work without periodic breaks and bear the brunt of any mistakes. The quick commerce industry has constantly been scrutinized for social concerns, including the welfare of gig workers and consumer safety. This research addresses a pertinent question: how to raise the safety of both gig workers and consumers. Is convenience coming at the cost of safety and accountability as doorstep deliveries become part of our daily routine? We cannot eliminate quick commerce matters for emerging markets (discussed in the next section). However, we can strengthen the ecosystem to safeguard the safety of gig workers and consumers.

Why Quick Commerce matters for emerging markets?

Quick Commerce is critical in emerging markets for the following reasons:

·Urban population density: High urban density offers opportunities for faster, more cost-effective last-mile delivery, as consumers tend to live close to urban centers. The delivery distances tend to be shorter, thus lowering logistics costs and enhancing the business's viability. This is unlike the cities in the USA or Europe, where delivery distances are usually longer. This ensures that delivery speed, a key USP of the Quick Commerce business, remains a priority.

·Young and digitally savvy population: A growing, young, digitally savvy population consisting of Gen Zs and millennials who expect instant gratification. Smartphones and mobile internet have also penetrated these consumer segments well, and they have familiarity with digital payments and food delivery apps. In India, for instance, the total number of internet subscribers increased by 6.83% annually, rising from 824 million in March 2022 to 881.25 million by March 2023 (TRAI, 2024). Thus, a demand for Quick Commerce is inherent in these markets.

Lifestyle and household structure: There has been a significant shift in lifestyles across emerging markets. For instance, dual-income nuclear households are the most prevalent, and hence, disposable income is rising. The disproportionate rise in real estate costs in metropolitan and Tier 1 cities leads to smaller kitchen and storage spaces. A hectic work schedule and prolonged working hours leave less time for grocery shopping. Time scarcity drives consumers towards Q-com, making them less ·inclined to shop physically at supermarkets. Thus, there is a latent need for quick replenishment over weekly bulky shopping. These platforms provide quick and convenient solutions that seamlessly integrate into their busy lives, enabling them to manage immediate needs with ease (Goyal, 2024).

·Digital payment infrastructure: It is growing stronger in emerging markets. For example, the UPI (Unique Payment Interface) in India offers frictionless micro-transactions, and was further strengthened in 2020 through the establishment of a zero Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) for merchants using Rupay debit cards and BHIM-UPI transactions. MDR is the fee that merchants pay to banks or payment service providers for accepting card or UPI transactions per customer transaction. The zero MDR ensures that merchants and customers incur no transaction fees when using UPI (Paytm Blog, 2025). This not only facilitated consumer digital adoption but also lowered the entry barrier for local vendors in India, enabling them to participate in Quick Commerce platforms. In general, a robust digital payment infrastructure in emerging economies has reduced reliance on cash-on-delivery, and overall trust in online commerce has increased with incentives tied to digital payments. The psychological implications of digital payments are that payments become invisible, leading to increased transaction frequency.

·Organization of unorganized retail (Kirana): Quick Commerce has organized the unorganized retail (Kirana) infrastructure, as discussed earlier. Q-com uses technology and logistics to connect Kirana with modern consumers. Q-com has modernized the retail supply chain and reduced stockouts through data-driven insights for inventory optimization.

Gig economy: In the Indian labor market in 2020-21, 7.7 million workers were engaged in the gig economy, and this workforce is forecast to expand further to 23.5

·million by 2029-30 (NITI Aayog, 2022). Q-com offers opportunities for youth without formal education, as it relies heavily on gig workers for two key roles: in-store staff who manage operations at dark stores and delivery agents who provide fast, doorstep delivery. Quick Commerce has been a primary driver of gig worker demand in 2024 and is expected to grow by at least 60% in 2025 (Aggarwal, 2025). Thus, Quick Commerce promises to generate income for gig workers, supporting their livelihoods in fast-growing cities and thereby contributing to the economy. The gig economy has also enhanced Quick Commerce's last-mile logistics capabilities.

·Micro-consumption and emergency needs: With the rise of nuclear households, there is an increase in demand for last-minute groceries, baby products (babies being cared for by parents themselves with no extended family support), missed ingredients (both couples working means a lack of keeping a record of inventory, and often realized later), convenience products with high margins (profitable SKUs), and impulse purchases. A higher transaction frequency yields a higher lifetime value.

As discussed above, Quick Commerce aligns uniquely with the socio-economic realities of emerging markets: dense urbanization, young digital consumers, strong fintech ecosystems, and the need to modernize informal retail while generating large-scale employment opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic, from 2020 to 2021, catalyzed customers to opt for home delivery and contactless shopping, driven by health concerns and government-imposed restrictions. This significantly increased the demand for home delivery, driven by habit.

Conceptual Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model has been used in this research (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), in which an environmental stimulus (S) elicits an emotional response (O), which in turn elicits a behavioral response (R). The SOR model examines how different environmental stimuli shape the behaviour of gig workers and, in turn, largely determine societal well-being. Various environmental stimuli (S) in the quick commerce sector are examined that would elicit psychological responses (O) among gig workers, such as perceived inequality, inferiority, and feelings of helplessness compared to customers. This, in turn, would determine their behavioural responses (R).

The environmental stimuli (S) considered in the quick commerce sector are as follows:

1. Consumer impulse buying behaviour

Quick commerce is perceived as more of a delight than a necessity. For consumers, the implications of quick commerce could include brand switching, compromises in quality and quantity, unhealthy consumption, and pricier purchases. The above discussion highlights the growing materialism among consumers, which leads to overconsumption and food waste. Materialism is a trait in which possessions are central to an individual's happiness, and the acquisition of products is seen to pursue it (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Further, materialism leads to Impulse buying (Pradhan et al., 2018). Thus, in the context of quick commerce, impulse buying appears evident.

2. Small, discrete customer orders

A growing, young, digitally savvy population consisting of Gen Zs and millennials who expect instant gratification. Smartphones and mobile internet have also penetrated these consumer segments well, and they have familiarity with digital payments and food delivery apps. In India, for instance, the total number of internet subscribers increased by 6.83% annually, rising from 824 million in March 2022 to 881.25 million by March 2023 (TRAI, 2024). Thus, a demand for quick commerce is inherent in these markets.

3. Unethical treatment of delivery partners

Instances of unethical treatment of delivery partners have been reported, such as customers misbehaving with delivery partners, for example, in cases of delayed deliveries, or when the customer order is short of items, delivery partners are handed products of questionable quality (near expiry date) to meet customer demand. Since most consumers in metropolitan and tier-1 cities live in gated communities, there are also clashes between security guards and delivery personnel over parking, especially when consumers insist on doorstep delivery and delivery partners cannot leave their vehicles (having other deliveries) unattended due to the risk of damage or towing (Jhangiani, A. 2025). This is in addition to issues such as workforce exploitation, wage structures, safety, and the mental and physical demands on delivery personnel.

Next, psychological responses (O) among gig workers, including perceived inferiority and inequality, as well as learned helplessness and self-efficacy, are examined.

1. Perceived inferiority and inequality

According to the social comparison theory, people evaluate themselves as inferior after comparing themselves with higher, superior standards (Mussweiler et al., 2011). Gig workers may feel inferior to consumers who can order products through quick commerce for doorstep delivery, indulge in impulse buying, and place small, discrete orders throughout the day. Gig workers may sometimes feel envious of not being able to provide such products to their own family members, but they can still deliver to customers. This experience of inferiority further results from perceived inequality, i.e., asymmetrical distribution of resources such as wealth and income (Willis et al., 2022).

2. Learned helplessness and self-efficacy

The quick commerce industry is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, with rapid shifts (Yadav and Dey, 2026). In such a high-stress environment, learned helplessness may develop among workers, further negatively influencing the work environment (Rizvi and Sikand, 2020) by decreasing motivation and job involvement. Learned helplessness is characterized by a give-up attitude in individuals (Seligman, 1991). This psychological state occurs when individuals feel they lack control over their circumstances. Learned helplessness consists of three primary elements: (a) Internal Blaming (Personal): Individuals doubt their own abilities and perceive themselves as the cause of their problems, leading to what can be described as the 'It is me' syndrome. (b) Global Distortion (Pervasive): People believe their problems will affect other areas of their lives, leading to the 'It will affect everything I do' syndrome. (c) Stability Generalization (Permanent): Individuals perceive the problem as unchanging and enduring, often referred to as the 'It will last forever' syndrome. Learned helplessness develops for two reasons: reduced self-efficacy (i.e., the perception of a lack of control) and an unsupportive organizational culture. In the quick commerce context, organizations are new, dynamic, and rapidly evolving. They are more results-oriented and employ gig workers for tasks such as delivery. In the process, organizations are not tolerant of minor glitches and are bound to replace employees.

Hence, the hypotheses,

H1: Environmental stimuli (such as consumer impulse buying behaviour, small, discrete customer orders, and unethical treatment of delivery partners) would trigger psychological responses among gig workers (such as perceived inferiority and inequality, as well as learned helplessness and self-efficacy).

Further, behavioural responses (R) among gig workers are examined in relation to the previously discussed environmental stimuli (S) in the quick commerce environment and psychological responses (O). These behavioural responses can be seen as coping mechanisms adopted by gig workers to address psychological responses (O) such as inferiority and learned helplessness, resulting from environmental stimuli (S). These behavioral responses (R) could be categorized into internal and external. Internal behavioral responses are directed towards the self and may or may not have external consequences. Examples include depression, anxiety, frustration, and substance abuse. External behavioral responses are those directed towards others and have external consequences. Examples include crimes like theft, aggression (including road rage), abuse, assault, harassment, and domestic violence. Several adverse incidents have been reported in this context, involving delivery staff visiting the homes of individuals living alone or senior citizens (Mavad and Shettar, 2025).

To combat adverse incidents, regulatory authorities are taking several steps. For example, Bengaluru police urged people to report crimes involving delivery staff via "Namma 112" amid a rise in such cases. Quick commerce firms were also directed to verify documents and background checks before onboarding gig workers, who are required to follow traffic rules and safety guidelines (Reddy, 2025). In India, for example, many quick commerce firms have outsourced background verification to third-party organizations, where detailed background checks are rarely conducted. Verification, training, and monitoring are crucial aspects of employing gig workers. For full-time gig workers, firms have been directed to maintain proper safety setups, with GPS-based delivery tracking, area-wise delivery logs, and the employee's active contact number (Mavad and Shettar, 2025). Gig workers operate on a 'to each their own' principle, with minimal or no daily interaction with company officials. As more female gig workers enter the workforce, these regulatory steps help build a secure, responsible delivery ecosystem that benefits both consumers and workers.

Hence, the hypotheses,

H2: Psychological responses among gig workers (such as perceived inferiority and inequality, as well as learned helplessness and self-efficacy) would trigger behavioural responses among gig workers (internal: depression, anxiety, frustration, and substance abuse, external: theft, aggression, abuse, assault, harassment, and domestic violence).

Next, a few variables that could moderate these relationships are examined.

1. Relationship orientation with the comparison target: competition vs. cooperation

The nature of the relationship with the comparison target—whether competitive or cooperative—plays a significant role (Colpaert et al., 2015). In competitive relationships, one person's gain often comes at another's expense. In the context of quick commerce, this means that consumer benefits, such as on-time and pleasant deliveries, may increase personal physical and mental risks for gig workers as they strive to meet delivery deadlines. Conversely, delivery personnel may experience advantages, such as high customer ratings or financial rewards, when their deliveries are satisfactory, suggesting a cooperative relationship. However, the comfort that gig workers experience may come at the cost of financial and professional risks, including job loss or reduced compensation. When customers show understanding and empathy toward riders or are flexible with delivery times, this behavior indicates a more cooperative relationship. Zheng et al. (2018) showed that the experience of inferiority is amplified in competitive relationships and reduced in cooperative relationships. Hence, the hypotheses,

H3: The influence of environmental stimuli on psychological responses among gig workers will be greater (lesser) in the case of a competitive (cooperative) relationship orientation.

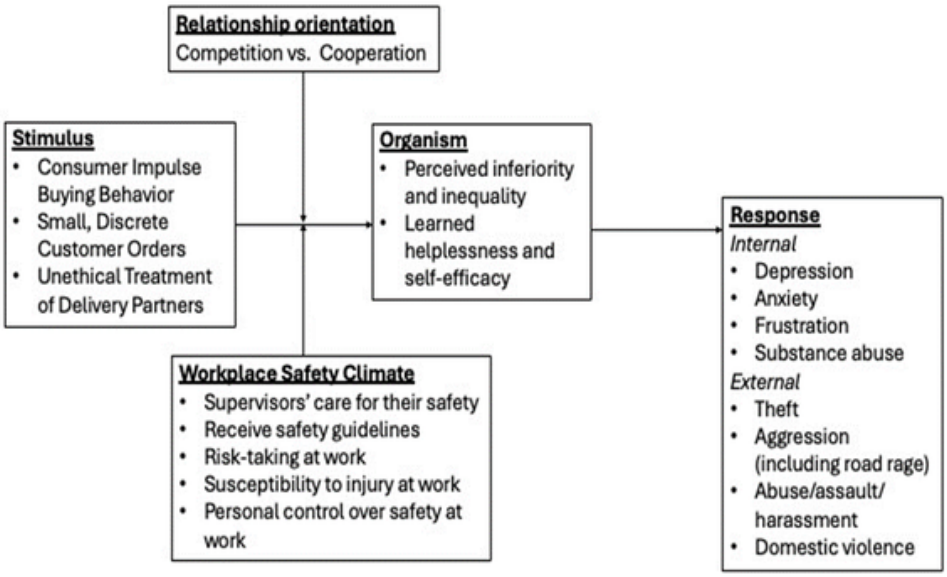
H4: The influence of environmental stimuli on psychological responses among gig workers will be greater (lesser) in the case of competitive (cooperative) relationship orientation

2. Workplace safety climate

This refers to workers' perceptions of the safety environment in their workplace (Gillen et al., 2002). In the quick commerce industry, this would include, but not be limited to, perceptions of supervisors' care for their safety, whether they have regular job safety meetings to receive safety guidelines, risk-taking at work, susceptibility to injury at work, and whether they have personal control over safety at work. If the workplace safety climate is perceived as high, psychological responses to environmental stimuli will be attenuated. In contrast, they will be amplified if the workplace safety climate is perceived as low.

Hence, the hypotheses,

H5: The influence of environmental stimuli on psychological responses among gig workers will be greater (lesser) when workplace safety climate is perceived as high (low).



Proposed Research Methodology

I plan to use a mixed-method approach to test the framework (Figure 1) and hypotheses. The methodology will consist of initial qualitative interviews with gig workers (offline) to understand their psychological responses and past behavioral responses or behavioral intentions (or those of someone in their network). Snowball sampling is appropriate for this kind of data (Parker et al., 2019). Based on the insights from qualitative interviews, quantitative data will be collected through a mixed survey (both online and offline) in metropolitan, tier-1, and select tier-2 cities. The survey will include questions designed to measure the variables captured by the framework (using established scales from the literature). It may also be needed to refine the framework and survey questions based on insights from qualitative interviews.

Future Implications of this Research

This research may have several implications for various stakeholders: quick commerce firms, gig workers, consumers, society, and government.

This research would help firms identify the stimuli that trigger adverse psychological and behavioral responses among gig workers and learn how to manage them better.

Firms may adhere to a minimum order value or quantity for doorstep delivery. Additionally, the number of orders customers can place for delivery to the same address in a day may be limited to one or two. Quick commerce firms may also focus on reducing impulse buying among consumers, thereby mitigating the adverse effects on gig workers. For instance, adding hedonic items to the cart, such as chocolates, ice cream, or packaged chips, should be penalized with an additional service fee that goes to delivery partners, or by prompting consumers to buy one of those hedonic products for delivery partners as well. This could ensure the relationship is cooperative rather than competitive, which is important for alleviating the adverse psychological impact on gig workers.

Quick commerce firms must strive to foster a positive workplace safety culture. Supervisors must be trained to show empathy and care for the safety of gig workers. There must be regular job safety meetings to deliver safety guidelines and reward the gig workers who go out of their way to deliver orders to consumers on time and ensure a positive customer experience. Firms may develop strict policies requiring CCTV cameras to be installed on delivery partners' two-wheelers and in gated communities they visit. In case of any adverse events, it is expected that firms take responsibility and ownership by conducting thorough investigations using CCTV footage and enquiring with gig workers and security guards. Unless proven guilty, firms must handle the situation calmly by allowing them to leave till the investigation is over. Given the job's stress and its psychological consequences, all quick commerce firms must have counselors on their payroll. Gig workers must undergo counselling at least once a week for their experiences, the problems they face during deliveries, and the possible healthy coping strategies they can adopt.

This research is the first to address the rising social concerns in the quick commerce industry. Society and government together can ensure that quick commerce firms implement measures like those above that enhance the well-being of both gig workers and society as a whole.

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ILC26/52

When Convenience Meets Conscience: Cognitive Imbalance and Customer Moral Disengagement in the Platform-Mediated Gig Economy

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Abstract

Gig service platforms have transformed everyday consumption, making services faster, easier, and more accessible than ever before. At the same time, they have made the challenges faced by gig workers increasingly visible to consumers. People routinely encounter reminders of worker precarity, yet platform use continues to rise with surprisingly little lasting moral unease. This conceptual paper examines the psychological puzzle underlying this tension. This paper adopts a theory synthesis approach that integrates balance theory with moral disengagement theory. We propose that platform mediated consumption systematically generates cognitive imbalance, as consumers often hold positive evaluations of platforms, sympathetic regard for workers, and awareness that platform business models may contribute to worker vulnerability and exploitation. Drawing on balance theory, we argue that this inconsistency creates psychological tension that motivates cognitive adjustment. Rather than resolving tension through behavior change, consumers frequently restore balance through moral disengagement. We develop a process model explaining how disengagement mechanisms reconcile convenience with conscience and identify boundary conditions under which disengagement weakens. The paper contributes to consumer ethics and moral psychology in platform-mediated gig economy while offering implications for platform design, ethical strategy, and public policy.

ILC26/53

Reconfiguring Gig Work in the Age of Generative AI: A Conceptual Framework of Task, Skill and Platform Transformation

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Abstract

The emergence of the integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) within the digital labor paradigm represents a paradigm shift from conventional automation to the primordial transformation of cognitive and creative labor. Transcending the dichotomy of technological utopianism and displacement, a three-fold conceptual framework is presented to investigate the transformation of the "human-in-the-loop" paradigm within the Task Deconstruction, Skill Recomposition, and Platform Intermediation axes.

The analysis reveals a pivotal point where professional undertakings are disassembled into modular, AI-enabled workflows. As a result, human labor is shifted from the process of generative production to the critical task of evaluative curation, transforming the value of the laborer within the digital production paradigm.

This shift initiates a bimodal skill pressure, wherein the skill set of novice technical skills experiences deskilling, while the importance of high-level "meta-skills," such as rapid architecture and critical synthesis, increases. Simultaneously, platform architectures are undergoing a transformation from passive marketplaces to active "co-productive environments." This makes "algorithmic enclosure" possible, wherein platforms are able to harness the surplus value of human-AI collaboration, while simultaneously undermining the classical autonomy of independent contractors. By integrating labor process theory with current scholarship on algorithmic management, this analysis provides a strong framework for understanding the new "augmented labor process" and the pressing need for a new social contract to cope with the growing problem of digital precarity.

Keywords: Generative AI, Gig Economy, Digital Labor Platforms, Task Deconstruction, Skill Recomposition, Algorithmic Management, Human-AI Collaboration, Digital Precarity, Algorithmic Enclosure.

ILC26/55

"They are all anti-developmentalist": Examining the interface between capitalism and environmental social movements in Kerala, India

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Abstract

Using the case of labour-environmental conflicts in the Eloor-Edayar industrial hub in Kerala, this paper explores the interface between capitalism and social movements in the Global South. The paper is based on the data collected during extensive field research conducted from April to July 2018. The hybrid ethnographic method used in this project is informed by a postcolonial sensibility and operationalised through a combination of the extended case method and constructionist grounded theory. Frame analysis is used to uncover the intersection of structural and individual factors that mediate the relationship between capitalism and social movements in the region. The analysis reveals how the hegemonic alliance established between the state, industries, and institutionalised trade unions seeks to repress the local environmental movement. The strategies used to demobilise the local environmental movement include structural and ideational processes, including the (1) formation of a countermovement by incentivising participants, (2) shifting political opportunities, and (3) launching a counterframing campaign. Furthermore, shifting labour politics in Kerala play a crucial role in altering the political opportunity structure, intensifying tensions between the two movements. The paper argues that these measures are indicative of a larger trend in Kerala, where the political left and grassroots environmental struggles are polarised over issues of economic growth and development, thereby creating fragmented class interests and identities. Importantly, the paper underscores the role of context in fostering diversity in mobilising experiences, social categories, and settings to unpack the local moorings of capitalism, particularly in relation to movement studies.

Keywords: Sociology of work, Trade Unions in Kerala, Labour and the Environment, Uncertainty and Precarious Employment

ILC26/62

Algorithmic Control and Perceived Stress:Evidence from Food Delivery Partners

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between algorithmic control and perceived stress among food delivery partners working in Kerala, India. As digital labour platforms increasingly rely on algorithmic management systems to allocate tasks, monitor performance, and regulate incentives through automated ratings and penalties, concerns have emerged regarding their psychological impact on workers. Using a descriptive and correlational research design, data were collected from 145 delivery partners through a structured questionnaire measuring algorithmic control and perceived stress (PSS-10). Statistical analyses, including correlation, regression, t-tests, and ANOVA, were conducted, and the instrument demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.873). The findings reveal a significant moderate positive relationship between algorithmic monitoring and perceived stress ($r = .499$, $p < .001$), with regression analysis indicating that algorithmic control explains24.9% of the variance in stress levels. Among the dimensions of algorithmic control, rating-based control emerged as the strongest predictor of stress, highlighting the psychological burden associated with customer-dependent evaluations and opaque performance systems. Significant differences in perceived stress were observed across gender, age, income, and working hours, with female, older, and lower-income workers reportinghigher stress levels,while no significant difference was found based on the number of platforms worked. The study concludes that algorithmic management is not merely a technological coordination mechanismbut a significant determinant of worker well-being, underscoring the need for transparent, fair, and worker-centred platform governance.

ILC26/63

A Review of Human Activity Recognition of Gig Workforce: Linking with Productivity, Safety Improvement, and Customer Experience

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Abstract

Gig workforce is said to rapidly expand across various sectors such as food delivery, home services, and logistics governed by digital platforms. Human activity recognition, or HAR, is a time series classification problem that is complex to wield. It is used in various applications such as medicine, human-computer interaction, and sociology. But many challenges exist to accomplish this task such as detection of multiple suspicious activity within a single frame. Recently, deep learning based advanced neural network architectures have gained popularity in the activity recognition as it outperformed the traditional method such as only sensor-based methods through autonomous feature extraction by using the concept of convolution achieving state-of-the-art results. In this paper, we present a comprehensive review of different existing literature on activity recognition methods and their usage in gig work force for improvement in productivity, safety, and customer experience, based on sensors, machine learning, deep learning, and fusion of algorithms examining from both management and labour side perspective. Finally, this paper identifies research gap and future work that could help improvise the privacy and surveillance to reduce discrimination risk and right-based governance of the gig workforce.

Keywords: Gig Workforce, Human Activity Recognition, Sensors, Machine Learning, Deep Learning

ILC26/68

Compassion for Gig workers: An exploratory study

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Abstract

Background: The Indian economy continues to grow rapidly (World Bank, 2025). The support system and associated labour are evolving rapidly along with economic growth. In the past few decades, management teams have employed contract workers to supplement alongside regular employees. The advancement of technology, along with the need for workplace flexibility and short work hours, has led organisations to use temporary or gig workers to support their daily operations in sectors such as retail, healthcare, logistics, and personal and home care. (De Stefano, 2016; NITI Aayog, 2022).

Gig workers have emerged as an emerging phenomenon in India over the last decade (NITI Aayog, 2022; Fairwork India, 2023). The literature indicates that gig workers have very different experiences from those of regular employees or even contractual employees. They are under immense pressure to be on time, to deliver, maintain quality, remain punctual, and secure essential health insurance assistance from the organizations (Wood et al., 2019; Bajwa et al., 2018). More significantly, they appear to be experiencing stress, accidents, and health hazards, in addition to psychological well-being, as indicated by how managers, customers, and other stakeholders interact with them (Apouey et al., 2020).

Empathy and Compassion are critical human traits in any business operation, and their relevance has increased further in the post-pandemic work environment (Kniffin et al., 2021). In this paper, the authors explore the significance of Compassion for the effective performance of gig workers. Also, they examine how customers extend Compassion to gig workers to support their role effectiveness.

This study has employed an exploratory design with a sample of respondents in Bangalore, utilizing semi-structured interviews for data collection. Preliminary findings indicate the gravity of the situation. The study highlights the need for comprehensive research to see how Compassion can be extended to Gig workers by stakeholders. The policy implications at the country and organisational levels need further examination.

Objective: This exploratory study aims to examine the experiences and perceptions of Compassion among gig workers and to understand how their interactions with customers affect their role effectiveness and well-being.

Methods: The authors have used a qualitative exploratory design. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 gig workers in Bangalore, India. Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data, revealing persistent patterns and multi-dimensional influences that shape experiences of Compassion in platform-mediated work settings.

Results: Five main themes have come out of the study as follows: (1) Compassion as Basic Human Recognition; (2) Micro-gestures as Emotional Validation; (3) Structural Constraints and Algorithmic Pressures; (4) Emotional Labour and Self-Regulation; and (5) Embodied Strain and Desire for Recognition. Participants characterized Compassion mainly as respectful treatment and recognition of effort, rather than exceptional acts of kindness.

Keywords: Gig workers, Compassion, Platform work, Emotional labour, Stakeholders, India.

ILC26/69

The Illusion of Compliance: Organizational Decoupling and Algorithmic Coercion in the Post-'10-Minute' Quick Commerce Era

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Quick Commerce in India has ignited a critical debate regarding the tension between hyper-fast consumer convenience and gig worker safety. Following a January 2026 Ministry of Labour directive mandating the removal of "10-minute delivery" marketing claims, this study investigates whether platforms have genuinely reduced operational pressures or merely engaged in organizational decoupling. Adopting an exploratory qualitative design, this research draws on semi-structured interviews with delivery partners navigating the urban infrastructure of Kolkata. Data was analysed using a directed thematic analysis approach, applying the rigorous Gioia methodology to systematically map the transition from localized, lived realities to higher-order theoretical constructs. Findings reveal a stark contrast between external corporate safety messaging and internal algorithmic architecture. Despite the removal of explicit marketing slogans, the implicit "need for speed" persists. The algorithmic "black box" remains highly coercive; inflexible estimated times of arrival (ETAs), suppressed base pay offset by volume-based financial incentives, and automated penalty mechanisms continue to structurally mandate unsafe driving practices. The study concludes that Q-commerce platforms are engaged in profound organizational decoupling—deploying superficial compliance measures while externalizing transit risks onto vulnerable workers. True ethical corporate governance necessitates a foundational realignment of internal operational algorithms with external safety commitments.

Keywords: Quick Commerce, Algorithmic Management, Organizational Decoupling, Ethical Governance, Gig Economy.

ILC26/70

From Marginality to Precarity in Platform Economy: Experiences of Dalits Ride Hailer in Mumbai

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Abstract
This study aims to explore an interlink between occupational marginality with the precarious nature of platform work. It attempts to bring out a comparative assessment of the Dalit ride hailers compared to non-Dalits in Mumbai, based on their experiences in the platform work. Historically, Indian occupational structure has placed marginalised identities in the lower receiving end, determining their socio-economic outcomes. A market interaction of the worker and the work, predominantly mirrors this relationship. It can be found that the market share of Ola & Uber in the transport platform allows them to harness a first-mover advantage indicating their dominance in the platform ride-hailing jobs. It further determines wages, working conditions and social security concerns for platform drivers. The primary objective of the paper is to study (a) factors associated with occupational choices of Dalits and their Participate on in the platform economy and (b) to understand the gain from occupational mobility and documents their narrative of piece wages earnings among the platform workers. It, however, indicates that the occupational marginality of Dalits in the Indian labour market undermine or overlook in the larger economic understanding, wherein their rights are compromised for macroeconomic gains. As the entrepreneurial mindset (like platforms) of the neo-liberal market manages to claim to democratise the workspace where social identity has less or no role to play, as can be seen in NITI Aayog (2022) report "platform work is fundamentally gender, race, caste and age agnostic". Nevertheless, the new changes in the market through network effects have led to the growth of precarity induced by the labour market flexibility, zero-hours contracts and profit motive of the platform. The study involves a mix method research design. The study has collected a primary data through random sampling with semi-structured interviews from different locations in Mumbai city. Through a random sampling, more than 50 platform drivers were interviewed for a comparative assessment of the SC drivers with non-SC drivers. The secondary data involves a review of contemporary empirical studies on the Indian platform economy. The study's finding shows a lack of community association among Dalit riders compared to non-Dalits identities; in our studied platforms, there are few samples of Dalit workers. It shows that Dalits, in the context of marginalised labour, are less represented in the platform because of a lack of socio-economic capital like education, income, information and 2 endowment for free entry into the platform economy. While, the study has its limitation to incorporate marginality as an intersectional phenomenon which is derived from the experiences of diverse and intersectional identity of Dalit workers, as it can be found that among all the respondents, we note that there are rare Schedule Tribe and no Woman driver in our sample. Therefore, the moot question is if the platforms are promising to create jobs for all, then who are benefiting from it. And are these jobs equitable to all marginalised section and assures freedom from occupation caste-ridden marginality.
Keywords: - Precarity in Platform, Identity in Platform, Dalit Ride Hailer, Marginality, Indian Platform

ILC26/75

Earning while learning in the Gig economy: Experiences of Student workers

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Abstract
Earning while learning is becoming a common feature of contemporary Higher Education. However, there are still limited traditional part-time employment opportunities available for students to be employed, especially in the Indian scenario. In this context, the gig work emerges as an alternative option for students. Despite the growing prevalence, there is limited knowledge about the experiences of student gig workers exploitative environment like gig work. This qualitative study aims to examine the experiences of student Gig workers, focusing on their motivations for engaging in gig work, their perceptions and challenges of gig work, and the strategies they use to balance work and academics. The data were obtained from 30 semi-structured interviews with students. The results showed that students used Job crafting to maintain their work and study boundaries and viewed gig work as an instrumental short-term opportunity. This study also has implications for educational institutions and digital labor platforms.
Keywords: Careers, Education, Gig Economy, Higher Education, Young Employment

ILC26/79

The strike that didn't happen: A critical realist ethnography of gig work

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of gig work among delivery partners working from a quick-commerce dark store located in central India. Although debate in the public sphere and academic scholarship have addressed issues such as low wages, algorithmic management, and risky conditions in platform work (Healy et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019), there has been limited focus on how workers perceive these factors and why expressed dissatisfaction seldom results in organized resistance. Using a mini-ethnographic analysis involving participant observation and interviews with 8-10 delivery workers, this paper employs a critical realist epistemology to enable explanations beyond descriptive levels. The paper illustrates, in the absence of overt domination, how compliance and consent are generated within a state of precarity. Operationally, it provides methodological utility in ethnographic studies by demonstrating the application of critical realism in combining workers' views with analytical frameworks. Theoretically, it contributes to the contemporary discourse on gig work by demonstrating the continued existence of platform labor despite its well-documented problems.

Keywords: Gig work, Platform economy, Algorithmic labor, Critical Realism, Ethnography

ILC26/83

Logistics of labour: Ethnographic Insights from Quick Commerce Staffing in India

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Abstract

As just-in time delivery intensifies, India's fast growing quick-commerce industry relies on staffing companies to recruit and manage their core workforce—pickers and packers—across hyperlocal dark stores in cities. Using the micro theoretical framework of transaction cost economics, we examine how staffing companies optimize intermediation processes to help businesses adjust to vagaries of the market demands. Based on eight months of workplace ethnography at a leading staffing company in Bangalore, we argue that the staffing company - a modern reincarnation of the traditional Thekkedaar, liquifies labour into a tractable, "on-tap" input within the production process. Highlighting the advanced and expansive services provided by them to q-commerce firms, we contend that the staffing company is not a neutral broker but an active agent signalling labour market flexibility under contemporary capitalism. Unlike Thekkedaars limited to micro-geographies, staffing companies operate at scale, rendering labour free-flowing, expendable, and fungible.

Keywords: picker-packer, staffing companies, quick-commerce, labour market intermediaries, liquid labour, workplace ethnography

ILC26/88

Employee Satisfaction of The Drivers (Pilots) of On-line Bike App Services in Kolkata: An Empirical Study on The Role of Technology in Driving Gig Work

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Abstract

The current study is conducted to identify the factors having impact on deriving the job satisfaction level of the drivers/ pilots of on-line bike app services in Kolkata. The study reveals that the most of the drivers have their own bike which are used for providing the customer service. Though only very few of those drivers are solely engaged exclusively for providing services to the customers or passengers whereas, most of them are engaged in some other profession also along with being the drivers of on-line bike app services or platform. This empirical study is conducted based on collecting data from 267 such bike drivers/ pilots. Following the employee satisfaction model on technological aspects, this study has identified 5 factors having impact on the employee (drivers) satisfaction level. For the purpose statistical techniques like Factor Analysis and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis were applied.

Keywords: Employee Satisfaction, On-line Bike App Services, Gig Worker, Factor Analysis, Regression Analysis.

ILC26/90

Algorithmic Control and Economic Precarity: Rethinking Labour Protection in India

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Abstract

India's platform economy currently engages an estimated 7–8 million workers, with projections suggesting rapid expansion over the next decade. Recent empirical studies indicate that income instability is a defining feature of this workforce: survey evidence from Karnataka and Rajasthan shows that nearly two-thirds of gig workers report significant month-to-month income volatility, while a substantial proportion lack access to provident fund, health insurance, or paid leave. City-level studies from Bengaluru further reveal high workforce concentration in ride-hailing and food delivery, extended working hours (often exceeding 10–12 hours per day), and algorithm-driven performance management that shapes earnings through opaque incentive structures. Gender-disaggregated research also highlights barriers to entry and lower average earnings for women platform workers. Against this backdrop, India's regulatory response particularly the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023 marks an important but incomplete shift toward formal recognition and welfare provisioning. This paper evaluates whether existing contribution mechanisms, welfare board structures, and proposed cess-based financing models adequately address income volatility, risk externalization, and informational asymmetries embedded in platform-mediated labour markets.The paper argues that without clearer contribution mandates, enforceable data transparency norms, and institutionalized risk-pooling arrangements, current frameworks may fall short of ensuring durable income security. It proposes a calibrated policy design that integrates portable benefits, platform co-financing, and algorithmic accountability to strengthen labour market resilience while preserving economic dynamism.

Keywords: Platform economy; Gig workers; Income volatility; Code on Social Security, 2020; Cess-based financing; Algorithmic management; Risk externalization; Welfare boards.

Platform-based Gig Work and SDGs: Contrasting Global Policy and Worker Perspectives

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Abstract

Platform-based gig work (PBGW) has emerged as a significant form of employment, rapidly changing labour markets across the Global South. Its evolution can be traced in the wider context of neoliberal economic development and market flexibilisation that began in the 1980s, which led to a decoupling of employment from the goals of economic growth and development. In India, the rise of PBGW needs to be understood in the specificities of our contemporary employment landscape marked by persistent informality, stagnant wages, and limited structural transformation. The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, we critically examine PBGW through the lenses of the UN Sustainable Development Goals – SDG 8 (on full and productive employment and decent work for all) and 9 (on industry, and fostering innovation). Here, we highlight not only how this non-standard form of employment falls short on achieving these goals, but also the underlying tensions between the SDGs 8 and 9. Second, based on two ongoing empirical studies that foreground perspectives of platform-based gig workers, we find that precarity emerges as a significant concern, along with long working hours, severe deficits in decent work and barriers to organisation. In doing so, we highlight the tensions between global and national policy agendas and workers' lived experiences. The widening gap between concepts and operationalisation—the backsliding of the decent work agenda—is not inevitable. We advocate for the centrality of 'decent employment' rather than 'decent work', in policies of economic growth and development.

ILC26/98

Changing Dynamics of Work & Role of Technology and AI in driving Gig Work

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Abstract

The global world of work is undergoing its most significant structural transformation in over a century. Accelerated by digital innovation, the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting generational values, and rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), the traditional model of fixed-location, single-employer, long-term employment is giving way to a more flexible, distributed, and self-directed system. Hybrid work has evolved while organizations increasingly rely on data-driven workforce planning and Tech AI infrastructures. We also note that employee expectations have shifted beyond compensation toward flexibility, purpose, well-being, and meaningful engagement. Gig worker capability has correspondingly evolved, with adaptability.

This transformation is closely intertwined with the rapid expansion of the independent gig economy. The global independent workforce fractional professionals' and specialists serving multiple organizations simultaneously. The evolution of the gig workers economy can be traced from pre-digital limitations constrained by geography through the technology platform revolution, to the AI phase. Intelligent matching systems, dynamic pricing algorithms, generative AI productivity tools have significantly expanded access, productivity, and earning potential for independent workers. India's gig workforce, and the growth of solopreneurs illustrates the scale and strategic importance of this shift.

Collectively, these developments signal a redefinition of employment structures, professional identity, and organizational design. The future of work increasingly favours autonomy, digital fluency, and purpose-driven systems. Technology and AI are not merely disruptive forces; they represent the enabling infrastructure of a more flexible model. We see that the central challenge for today is to shape this changing workplace dynamics transformation sustainably, and with human well-being at its core.

Keywords: Gig Workers, Artificial Intelligence, Changing Workplace Dynamics, Fractional Work, Solopreneur, Gig Economy

ILC26/101

Exploring the Impacts of Algorithmic Control in Gig Work: Learned Helplessness as an explanatory Mechanism

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Abstract

The global world of work is undergoing its most significant structural transformation in over a century. Accelerated by digital innovation, the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting generational values, and rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), the traditional model of fixed-location, single-employer, long-term employment is giving way to a more flexible, distributed, and self-directed system. Hybrid work has evolved while organizations increasingly rely on data-driven workforce planning and Tech AI infrastructures. We also note that employee expectations have shifted beyond compensation toward flexibility, purpose, well-being, and meaningful engagement. Gig worker capability has correspondingly evolved, with adaptability.

This transformation is closely intertwined with the rapid expansion of the independent gig economy. The global independent workforce fractional professionals' and specialists serving multiple organizations simultaneously. The evolution of the gig workers economy can be traced from pre-digital limitations constrained by geography through the technology platform revolution, to the AI phase. Intelligent matching systems, dynamic pricing algorithms, generative AI productivity tools have significantly expanded access, productivity, and earning potential for independent workers. India's gig workforce, and the growth of solopreneurs illustrates the scale and strategic importance of this shift.

Collectively, these developments signal a redefinition of employment structures, professional identity, and organizational design. The future of work increasingly favours autonomy, digital fluency, and purpose-driven systems. Technology and AI are not merely disruptive forces; they represent the enabling infrastructure of a more flexible model. We see that the central challenge for today is to shape this changing workplace dynamics transformation sustainably, and with human well-being at its core.

Keywords: Gig Workers, Artificial Intelligence, Changing Workplace Dynamics, Fractional Work, Solopreneur, Gig Economy

ILC26/102

AI and White-Collar GIG Economy: Role of Meta Skills in changing White Collar GIG economy

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Abstract

The Fast expansion of the gig economy has transformed professional work arrangements, offering flexibility and global market access while simultaneously exposing emerging skill gaps and labor market inefficiencies. Despite increasing reliance on freelance professionals of white collars across sectors such as information technology, finance, consulting, and creative services, the absence of a standardized classification framework limits transparency regarding competencies and constrains targeted skill development interventions. This study examines how technological advancements—particularly generic and agentic artificial intelligence (AI) models—are reshaping the structure of white-collar gig work. It proposes a three-tier classification based on task structure and the degree of AI adoption. Building on this typology, the research extends the SDS Meta-Skills Framework to the white-collar gig context and establishes a conceptual framework for Meta skills in AI dominated white collared gig economy and introduces a 3×3 task–skill matrix to identify the relative importance of meta-skills across varying levels of AI integration and task complexity in white collared gig economy. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and AI–human complementarity perspectives, the study adopts an exploratory design using a systematic review of existing literature and secondary data sources. The findings provide a structured approach to understanding evolving workforce-technology dynamics and identifying critical skills necessary to thrive in an AI-dominated online freelance labor market.

ILC26/106

Gamification as an Innovative intervention for life skills development among GIG workers:A quasi-experimental study

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of a mobile-delivered gamified life skills intervention designed for platform-based gig workers within India's expanding digital labour economy. While gig work offers flexibility and income opportunities, it is frequently characterised by income volatility, algorithmic performance management, and limited access to structured developmental support. The present research evaluates whether gamified microlearning modules can strengthen core life skills—emotional regulation, communication competence, financial literacy, and problem-solving—and whether these competencies translate into improved occupational and psychological outcomes.

A quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design (N = 386) was implemented over an eight-week intervention period. Participants in the experimental group engaged in structured gamified learning modules incorporating scenario-based simulations, reflective exercises, and feedback mechanisms. Structural equation modelling was employed to examine the mediating role of life skills between intervention exposure and work outcomes, including job performance, psychological well-being, and work engagement. Moderation analysis assessed the influence of digital literacy on intervention effectiveness.

Findings indicate significant improvements in life skills among intervention participants, accompanied by positive downstream effects on performance and well-being indicators. Mediation results suggest that enhanced life skills constitute a key mechanism linking gamification to improved work outcomes. Digital literacy further strengthened the intervention's impact.

The study contributes to gig economy and workforce development research by integrating behavioural theory and digital learning design within an emerging market context. Practical implications are discussed for platform organisations and policymakers seeking scalable strategies to enhance worker capability and resilience.

Keywords: gamification; gig economy; life skills; digital training; platform labour

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Creating Shared Value through a Decentralized Gig-Work Model for Empowering Urban Slum Women: The Case Study of Thermikron and Cloud UpcycleWorks ®

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Abstract

This case-study based paper explores the shared value creation achieved by Thermikron, a nature-integrated technology brand, through its unique and decentralised Gig-work design and patent-pending, pathbreaking technologies. The Thermikron model seeks to addresses the grand challenge of urban boiling, while simultaneously providing urban slum-dwelling women, a regular and dignified, work-from -home (WFH) opportunity through its gig-work design, that also allows significant agency for the woman to WFH and earn as per convenience. By leveraging its patent-pending technologies, Thermikron transforms urban balconies into carbon-sequestering assets, reducing surface temperatures significantly, through shade and evaporative transpiration.

The operational core of the Thermikron brand, Cloud UpcycleWorks®, upcycles post-consumer textile waste into modular "Home Jungles". In an approach that can be appropriately conceived as Creating Shared Value, the Thermikron model redefines productivity by integrating marginalized urban women into a decentralized gig-work ecosystem. Utilizing neighbourhood-based, co-located "Craft ATMs," women perform unitised WFH tasks, gaining financial agency and digital inclusion via QR-coded payments without sacrificing domestic responsibilities. By reconceiving products and fostering local cluster development, Thermikron offers a scalable, carbon-negative blueprint for cooling urban India. The study concludes that aligning social inclusivity with environmental action creates a sustainable competitive advantage and a humane path toward industrial-scale productivity.

Keywords: Gig Work and Sustainable Development Goals, Gig workers – Financial empowerment inclusion, Gig Work and Work-Life Conflict, Social Protection in Platform and Shared Economy, Creating shared value, upcycling, Cloud UpcycleWorks, Craft ATM, Biothermal Microconditioning

ILC26/123

Guiding The 'Helping' Ones: GIG Workers rights in India

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Abstract

The study considers the gig workers as guiding/helping ones because many a times peoples' lives revolves around gig workers from an Ola/Uber driver to reach office or back home, Swiggy or Zomato person who delivers cooked meal while you attend an important meeting skipping making home cooked meals. The increase in the demand for gig workers due to unemployment rate being high has lead the aggregators like Uber, Ola, Swiggy and Zomato to employ large group of youngsters who may not be able to get a job and seek to be a platform worker. While the Code of Social Security, 2020 (CoSS) defines aggregators, platform worker and gig workers. CoSS wanted the aggregators to contribute between 1-2% capped at 5 % to social security fund, which is unique model till date. Draft Rules 2025 proposed in December 2025 is also becoming relevant for implementation of various social security benefits for the gig workers in India. State-led regulatory movement became promising with five states such as Rajasthan[i], Karnataka,[ii] Bihar[iii], Jharkhand [iv]and Telangana [v]taking lead to pass the state level legislation safeguarding the rights of gig workers. The current interpretation of the law and the judgments by courts are hinting towards lesser social security protection when compared to traditional employer-employee relationship.

India's legal ecosystem for gig workers is premised on welfare-based incrementalism without employment rights. Workers gain visibility, registration, and modest social security contributions, yet they do not gain minimum wages, job security, paid leave, or the right to collectively bargain. The law deliberately preserves the "non-employee" status of gig workers, managing the social risk of the gig economy without disturbing the commercial model on which platforms are built. The theoretical framework governing employer-employee relationship has been tested to understand the nature of this relationship affecting gig workers. In traditional employment, the human supervisor who was exercising control, supervision or giving remuneration based on assessed work were involved whereas in the newer model it is the algorithm which controls the worker and their work assessment. UK Supreme Court in 2021 has considered Uber drivers as 'workers' who is entitled to all social security benefits including minimum wage, paid leaves etc,. In Yodel Delivery Network Ltd (EU Labour Court, 2020) also held that the right to use substitutes and work for competitors was not inconsistent with employee status if in practice those rights were never exercised. The judgment in The Indian Federation of App Based Transport Workers versus Union of India is expected to settle the principles and the benefits straight.

The research methodology used in this study is doctrinal and comparative legal methodology, analyzing statutory provisions of the COSS 2020 with many state legislations, in addition to the judicial precedents. The study of latest Codes adopted along with case law from Court decisions are the primary sources, scholarly articles and judicial decisions would be examined to arrive at an understanding on how gig workers could be protected and provided employment rights. The research questions to be studies focus on, (i) role of non-governmental organizations in ensuring gig workers employment rights, (ii) the measure taken by the Supreme Court to address these challenges, (iii) celebrated cases on this issue, and (iv) theoretical fault lines if any.

Test	**Core Question**	**Key Indian Case**	**Strength**	**Limitation**
Control Test	Who controls *how* work is done?	Dhrangadhara (1957)	Simple, direct	Fails for skilled/autonomous work
Integration Test	Is the worker part of the organisation?	Silver Jubilee (1974)	Captures economic dependence	Vague boundaries
Economic Reality Test	Who bears economic risk?	Ram Singh (2004)	Holistic, fact-sensitive	No single determinative answer
Dominant Purpose Test	What is the primary nature of engagement?	H.R. Adyanthaya (1994)	Resolves mixed relationships	Subjective
Sham/Disguise Doctrine	Does the contract mask true employment?	SAIL (2001)	Anti-exploitation	Burden on worker to prove sham
Mutuality of Obligation	Are minimum obligations mutual?	(Emerging)	Technically precise	Misused to deny gig workers status
Algorithmic Control Test	Does platform algorithm constitute control?	IFAT (pending)	Most relevant for gig economy	Not yet settled in India

One of the challenges to apply the theories so far is the concept of algorithmic accountability and transparency, Fair contracts and working conditions, A human-led grievance redressal mechanism, Recognition of gig workers as a distinct employee group entitled to specific rights. A Model Law for Platform Led Gig Workers has been proposed by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. The interface between technology and law has taken gig economy to a task and the far stretched benefits not being passed on to the gig workers stating their non conformity to traditional employment model is a real test of time. Sector wise regulations such as Motor Vehicles Aggregators Guidelines of 2020 was amended in 2025 to provide a light-touch regulatory system while ensuring safety and security of the platform workers in that sector. Major pitfalls include non-binding nature of language, gaps in adaptation through effective dispute resolution mechanism, and divergent approaches among states in addressing this matter, also are evidentiary.

This watershed codes needs to be checked to ensure that one does not throw the baby with the water. Gig workers in India face a condition of 'digitally organised informality' where there is lack of enforcement of a wage floor, absence of working time, absence of enforcement of health and safety conditions, denial of legal facilitation of collective voice, and complete neglect of work-linked social security measures. Into this vacuum, a diverse ecosystem of trade unions, civil society organisations, legal think tanks, and international federations has stepped in, each fighting on different fronts, such as courts, legislatures, streets, and policy tables. Hence, the role of non-governmental organisations/civil society is extremely contributory in maintaining the balance.
The Indian Gig Workers Union such as Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT), is the petitioner in a case before the Supreme Court against Union of India (2021). In its effort for passage of Rajasthan's legislation, IFAT engaged with other unions such as the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and few more, sought support from the ruling party, built mass awareness about the issues affecting platform and gig workers through Jan sunwais (public hearings). In Karnataka, IFAT's advocacy was critical — workers' concerns were central to the state's legislative drafting process, and IFAT's national general secretary participated directly in the legislative consultation roundtable organised by Vidhi and the Karnataka Labour Department. In the legal battle between The IFAT v. Union of India petition before the Supreme Court invokes Articles 14, 21, and 23 of the Constitution, arguing that the classification of gig workers as 'partners' rather than employees violates fundamental rights to equality, life, and freedom from forced labour.

There are other major platform workers unions such as Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU), Gig Workers Association (GIGWA) and Amazon India Workers Union (AIWU), All India Gig Workers Union (AIGWU), Gig and Platform Services Workers Union (GIPSWU), All India Gig & Platform Workers Union (AIGPWU), Central Trade Union Federations such as CITU, INTUC, AITUC, HMS, SEWA and others; and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). In this regard, All India Gig Workers Union (AIGWU), is leading a legal battle in All India Gig Workers Union v. Uber India Systems Pvt. Ltd., gig workers contested Uber's practices, particularly the company's refusal to provide minimum wages and social security benefits, which was one of the significant early legal challenges against platform companies in India.

Among legal and policy organisations, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) are notable with their consistent legal approach. Among international bodies, the contributions of UNI Global Union and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) cannot be overlooked as they brought together trade union representatives, researchers, academics, and lawyers to shape the framework that ultimately influenced state-level legislation.

The Strategic Architecture: How They Operate

What distinguishes India's gig worker movement is its multi-channel approach — no single organisation operates alone:

Channel	Lead Organisations
Supreme Court litigation	IFAT (petitioner in IFAT v. UoI)
State legislative advocacy	IFAT, TGPWU, GIGWA, AIWU
Legal drafting / policy research	Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy
Mass mobilisation / strikes	AIGWU, CITU, GIPSWU
Grassroots awareness	MKSS (Jan sunwais)
International pressure	UNI Global Union, FES
Women workers' issues	GIPSWU, SEWA
Digital/social media campaigns	AIGWU, TGPWU

Despite significant victories, four state laws, a pending Supreme Court case, and formal recognition in the COSS, the core demands of these organisations remain unmet: a minimum wage for gig workers, formal employer-employee recognition, the right to collectively bargain
through recognised trade unions, and algorithmic accountability at the national level. The organisations listed above constitute the entire front line of this unfinished legal struggle.

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