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The Gig Economy and the Evolving Nature of Work in the Age of Convenience

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore the dynamic relationship between the gig economy and economic growth, with a particular focus on employment opportunities, work-related challenges, and policy implications in the evolving age of convenience. The gig economy is redefining work through freelancing and contract opportunities. The gig economy is growing, with a market size predicted to reach $1,847 billion by 2032. This study employed non-probability qualitative research approach for collecting data from gig workers. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 gig workers in Delhi, India, and used NVivo 12.0 for thematic coding, identifying seven key dimensions that affect their work experience. Results of the study revealed seven key dimensions: economic stability, online platforms policies, government policies, job security, work flexibility, gig economy influence and inconsistent work options. The findings of the study enhance the existing literature in labor economics, digital employment platforms, and alternative employment structures. This study propounds strategic recommendations for policymakers and digital platform managers and provides a substratum for future academic research in the gig economy aspect.

Keywords*: gig economy, economic growth, gig workers, employment opportunities, work challenges, age of convenience*

INTRODUCTION

The gig economy has emerged as a disruptive force in the global labor market, reshaping employment patterns and economic development paths (Wood er al., 2019). The gig economy is defined by short-term, flexible, and freelance employment arrangements, and it is powered by digital platforms that link independent workers with customers and businesses (Koutsimpogiorgos et al.,2020). The growth of platforms such as Uber, Upwork, and TaskRabbit has not only created new income opportunities, but has also upset established employment patterns throughout the world, putting legislative frameworks and labor rights under pressure (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021; Kaine & Josserand, 2019).

Over the last decade, the gig economy has expanded dramatically, with more people choosing flexible employment arrangements (Tan et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2021). The gig economy is expanding rapidly throughout the world, with a market of $1.847 trillion projected by 2032 (Charlton, 2024). This expansion is being driven by increased digitalisation, advances in

communication technologies, and the use of platforms that link freelancers with customers. The gig economy serves a variety of sectors, including e-commerce, transportation, and delivery services, and is expected to create 90 million jobs and contribute 1.25% of India's GDP by 2030. The Gig Economy Market, which was valued at USD 556.7 billion in 2024, is expected to grow to USD 646.77 billion in 2025 and reach USD 2146.87 billion by 2033, with a CAGR of 16.18% from 2025 to 2033 (Business Research Insights, 2025). Similarly, India's gig economy is expected to expand significantly, with a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17% (Business Standard, 2024). This expansion is likely to result in a major increase in the number of gig workers and a significant contribution to the country's GDP. According to an NITI Aayog estimate, the gig labor is expected to grow to 23.5 million by 2029-30, up from 7.7 million now (NITI Aayog, 2022).

The gig economy is critical to economic progress because it promotes innovation, boosts productivity, and increases digital labor force participation (Graham et al., 2017). It enables firms, particularly startups and small businesses, to tap into a diversified talent pool without the limits of traditional employment contracts (Pan et el., 2022). Additionally, algorithm-driven task allocation has raised issues about fair compensation and worker exploitation (Zhao et al., 2025). Governments throughout the world are dealing with how to govern gig employment while maintaining economic dynamism and worker protection (Inversi et al., 2023). In the United Kingdom, the Taylor Review on Modern Working Practices (2017) proposed that gig workers be classified as "dependent contractors" to offer better protection (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2023). Similarly, California's AB5 bill sought to reclassify gig workers as employees rather than independent contractors, but it received strong opposition from companies (Prince, 2022). Putting gig workers under official labor regulations, emphasising the importance of a balanced approach that promotes both flexibility and security (Warren, 2021).

As the gig economy grows, the influence on employment and economic growth will remain an important field of study (Okunkova et al., 2023). While it provides unprecedented prospects for revenue creation and economic diversification, tackling its problems is critical to ensuring long-term and fair growth (Chen et al., 2023; Adekoya et al., 2025). This study investigates the complex link between the gig economy and economic development, focussing on job prospects, workplace issues, and policy consequences in the age of convenience. This study is further segmented into review of literature, research methodology, results and analysis, discussion, implications, limitations and scope the future research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The gig economy has had a profound impact on global labor markets and economic institutions (Baber, 2024). This literature review looks at recent research that have investigated the gig economy's influence on job prospects, economic growth, and associated difficulties.

Impact on employment

The gig economy has caused a paradigm change in work, shifting away from traditional, long-term contracts and towards short-term, task-based arrangements (Dhand et al., 2025). According to Şen (2022), this paradigm provides workers with freedom and autonomy, allowing them to pick tasks that fit their abilities and schedules (Dong et al., 2023). However, it also brings disadvantages such as job instability and a lack of traditional work benefits (Gagné et al., 2023). The study emphasises the need for revised labor laws to address these challenges.

Economic growth and business dynamics

The growth of the gig economy has changed economic dynamics, notably the creation of smaller firms (Barrios et al., 2022). This trend represents a tendency towards using contract labor, which allows for greater flexibility and lower prices. While this paradigm encourages entrepreneurship, it has resulted in fewer jobs produced per business, limiting total employment development (Edwards, 2021). The gig economy has affected both economic development and corporate operations (Allon et al., 2023). Digitalisation has played a critical part in this shift, with the worldwide effect of the digital economy projected to be at USD 3.1 trillion, with a 31% growth rate (Sak et al., 2023). This increase is due in part to the gig economy, in which platforms such as ride-hailing services have become integrated with consumer services (Maksimtsev et al., 2022). The gig economy in India has grown significantly as a result of technology improvements and shifting employer preferences (Maurya, 2024). Sachdeva (2024) examines how digital platforms have enabled a variety of gig jobs, ranging from freelance graphic designers to ride-hailing services (Fielbaum & Tirachini, 2021). While this transition creates new income opportunities, it also raises worries about job security and regulatory issues (Nagaraj Rao et al., 2024). The study advocates for regulations that balance the benefits of gig employment with proper worker safeguards.

Challenges faced by gig workers

The gig economy has several benefits, including flexibility, autonomy, and potential for extra cash (Liang et al., 2023). However, it has disadvantages such as unpredictable income, a lack

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of work stability, and the absence of benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans (Celestin & Vanitha, 2023). A detailed examination emphasises the need of politicians, businesses, and workers working together to develop a long-term framework that balances flexibility and equitable treatment (Kossek & Kelliher, 2023). Despite its rise, the gig economy brings a number of concerns, notably in terms of worker rights and protections (Mehta, 2023). The COVID-19 epidemic compounded these problems, since gig workers frequently lacked employment security and social benefits (Ravenelle et al., 2021). During the epidemic, gig workers in Indonesia saw their earnings drop by 67%, forcing them to work longer hours under dangerous conditions (Wolf, 2022). The study emphasised gig workers' weak negotiating position, which was attributable to issues such as vast labor pools and limited organisational representation (Lata et al., 2023).

Despite the extensive body of literature on the gig economy and its impact on employment and economic growth, several key gaps remain unfilled. For example, while existing research (e.g., Himani Srihita et al., 2025) has focused on turnover rates and employment fluctuations, there is little longitudinal analysis on the long-term impact of gig-based employment on economic growth, business sustainability, and labor market stability. Future research might look into how gig employment affects GDP, labor productivity, and economic resilience over time. According to Hofer & Spurk (2025), gig workers experience a variety of issues, including income unpredictability, a lack of benefits, and employment precarity. However, there is limited research on policy frameworks that can address these concerns. Comparative studies of different nations and regulatory contexts may give insights into effective worker protection initiatives. Zhou et al. (2024) found that gender wage inequalities in the gig economy are rising, notably in China. However, more comprehensive cross-cultural research is required to investigate gender-based inequities across various gig economy industries and countries. Furthermore, researchers should look into measures that might help to close the pay disparity. However, little study has been conducted on the ethical and economic ramifications of this change, specifically how gig employment affects job creation, labor rights, and company scalability. Addressing these research gaps will lead to a more thorough knowledge of the gig economy's impact on current labor markets and economic growth. This current research can help to make gig labor models more sustainable and inclusive by focussing on long-term economic implications, worker protection regulations, gender inequities, entrepreneurial dynamics, and technology changes.

While there is a growing body of literature explores the gig economy, the findings are frequently split between two prevailing perspectives: empowerment and exploitation. Scholars suggest that gig labor provides flexibility, autonomy, and entrepreneurial independence, especially for people who are excluded from traditional job arrangements (Şen, 2022; Gagné et al., 2023). It allows workers to choose their own schedules, diversify their revenue streams, and tailor their job to their unique circumstances. Critics argue that platform-based employment encourages precarity, weakens labor laws, and imposes algorithmic control with no accountability. The lack of social security, unstable salaries, and unbalanced power relations between workers and platforms are all major issues. Despite these lively arguments, the majority of extant research is centred in Western contexts particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and portions of Europe where legal, economic, and cultural settings differ significantly from those in developing nations. There is a considerable knowledge vacuum about how gig employment works in India, notably in terms of socioeconomic vulnerability, regulatory inadequacies, and urban informality. This study seeks to fill this vacuum by delving into the lived experiences of gig workers in Delhi, India, utilising qualitative findings anchored in Indian sociopolitical reality and interpreted via pertinent theoretical lenses.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

This study critically examines the experiences of gig workers in India using three interconnected theoretical frameworks: Labor Process Theory, Platform Capitalism, and Precarity Theory. Drawing on Labor Process Theory (Braverman, 1974), the paper investigates how digital platforms impose algorithmic control over workers via automated ratings, performance metrics, and opaque assignment systems, therefore reducing worker autonomy under the pretext of flexibility. Platform Capitalism (Srnicek, 2021) examines the economic model of gig platforms, which externalise labor costs, bypass traditional employer duties, and monetise both employment and user data, presenting workers as both producers and consumers in a highly unequal environment. In addition, Precarity Theory emphasises the structural instabilities inherent in gig employment, such as income instability, lack of legal protection, and absence of social benefits conditions that identify the emergent class of the "precariat." Together, these theories allow for a more nuanced understanding of how control, exploitation, and insecurity are integrated in the digital labor process, particularly in the Indian urban setting where informalisation and platformisation meet.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research technique to analyse the link between the gig economy and economic growth, with an emphasis on job prospects and work problems (De Paoli, 2024). A cluster identification approach was used to categorise gig workers based on industry type, job patterns, and experiences (Hoen, 2002). This approach allowed for a more detailed understanding of how the gig economy impacts different worker groups and contributes to larger economic trends (Easter et al., 2022).

Research design

The research targeted individuals who had been actively engaged in gig work for at least one year to ensure that participants had substantial experience in the field. The study was carried out in Delhi, India, a metropolitan area with a sizable and expanding gig labor. Participants were recruited using a purposive sample strategy, ensuring that insights were gathered from workers with relevant experience (Topp et al., 2004). A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were performed with gig workers from a variety of businesses, including ride-hailing, food delivery, freelance digital labor, and home services.

Sampling technique

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, enabling for open-ended talks about critical subjects such as employment stability, financial security, job flexibility, work-life balance, regulatory difficulties, and the role of digital platforms in employment generation (Knott et al., 2022). All interviews were conducted in Hindi and local languages for the convenience of respondents and later transcribed into English for further research. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted either in person. As the current study used interview methods to obtain data, the data was collected until response saturation was reached (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The sample size was chosen using the data saturation principle, which states that no new insights or themes emerged from the last interviews—an approach congruent with the recommendations. This technique achieved conceptual depth without sacrificing methodological integrity. This study relied heavily on ethical issues. Before conducting interviews, all participants provided informed permission, confirming that they were aware of the research aims and their rights. To preserve the privacy of all participants, the identities were anonymised. Moreover, participation was fully optional, having the option to resign from the research at any time without penalty.

Interview design

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To investigate the lived experiences of gig workers, the study used a semi-structured interview format that allowed participants to openly disclose their perspectives, problems, and coping techniques. An interview outline was created based on major theme areas to guarantee consistency while retaining conversational freedom. These topics included job history and motivation, work type and scheduling, platform engagement and control, income patterns and financial stability, benefits and protections, goals, and future view. These open-ended questions allowed for detailed replies, promoted follow-up questioning, and gave the contextual flexibility needed to capture complex experiences.

Data analysis

The qualitative software Nvivo 12.0 was used to code and analyse interview transcripts as part of the data processing process. Thematic analysis was used to uncover major patterns and insights that emerged from the data. The procedure consisted of many steps: initially, the researchers familiarised themselves with the transcripts through repeated reads. The first classification was then completed by labelling key statements and observations. These codes were eventually combined under bigger topics including income stability, work flexibility, regulatory issues, and digital platform reliance. Finally, the themes were evaluated and revised to make sure consistency and validity. Table 1 shows the demographic and industrial features of the gig workers interviewed for the study. The major respondents (91.30%) were male, while just 8.70% were female, indicating a gender disparity in gig job involvement. In terms of education, the majority of workers had finished higher secondary education (12th pass - 47.83%), followed by those with secondary education (10th pass - 34.78%), with a smaller fraction having graduated or earned a higher degree (17.39%). In terms of experience, the majority of respondents (73.91%) had 1 to 5 years of gig labor experience, while 17.39% had more than 5 years and 8.70% had less than a year. In terms of industry, gig workers were practically evenly spread between ride-hailing and food delivery services (30.44%), with 21.73% involved in home services and 17.39% in digital freelancing. These findings reflect the gig economy's reliance on service-based tasks and a male workforce that is generally youthful and minimally educated.

Table -1 Demographic and Industry Characteristics of Gig Workers Interviewed
(Source: Authors Own Elaboration)

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

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Gender		
Male	21	91.30%
Female	2	8.70%
Education		
10th Pass	8	34.78%
12th Pass	11	47.83%
Graduate and above	4	17.39%
Experience (Years)		
Less than 1 Year	2	8.70%
1-5	17	73.91.%
Above 5	4	17.39%
Industries		
Ride Handling	7	30.44%
Food Delivery	7	30.44%
Home Services	5	21.73%
Digital Freelancing	4	17.39%

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RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data was analysed with NVivo 12.0, a specialised application intended for qualitative data analysis (Allsop et al., 2022). The twenty-three valid replies were sorted and placed into NVivo software for further analysis. There was total 7 themes were identified in the study (Table - 2). Below table 2 show the NVivo's analysis of interview data based on how frequently each of the seven key themes arose.

Table 2 - Themes and Their Occurrences in the Responses

(Source: Authors Own Elaboration)

Themes	**No. of Occurrences**

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Economic Stability	70
Online Platforms Policies	39
Government Policies	10
Job Security	9
Work Flexibility	8
Gig Economy Influence	7
Inconsistent work options	5

Theme analysis

The study uncovers numerous essential features of gig workers' experiences, with economic security and income being the most commonly stated issue (70 times). While gig labor provides some financial freedom, incomes remain unreliable, ranging greatly from month to month. Many interviewees stated that they worked longer hours to compensate for lean periods and maximise their revenue at times of strong demand. Online platforms and their regulations have a substantial role in this revenue variation (39 times). Work availability, customer evaluations, and commission arrangements are all important factors in deciding profits. Workers cited the unfavourable impact of frequent platform modifications and uncertain consumer response, as well as excessive commission costs, which significantly reduced their take-home earnings. Concerns about a lack of regulatory support arose often during conversations regarding government policies and the need for reforms. Participants demanded the introduction of minimum salaries, insurance coverage, pension plans, and even aid with growing fuel and travel expenses, pushing both platforms and governments to accept responsibilities. Similarly, employment security and benefits (9 times) were reoccurring worries, since gig workers had no access to healthcare, sick pay, or job protection—particularly concerning given that unjust consumer complaints can result in account deactivation. Despite these obstacles, many respondents liked the flexibility and freedom (8 times) that gig work provides, preferring it to regular employment since it allows them to choose their own working hours. The gig economy's influence was also recognised positively (7 times), particularly for students and part-time workers, as well as its role in supporting local companies and providing short-term job options. However, many people had to obtain continuous employment (5 times), as job availability fluctuates some days bring in a lot of orders, while others stay slow. Competition tends to climb during normal times, although the holiday season brings a temporary increase in effort. Overall, the data depict a complicated picture in which gig labor provides flexibility

and opportunity but also poses significant economic and social difficulties that need regulatory interventions and platform responsibility.

The conceptual map depicts the developing dynamics of India's gig economy, emphasising how different theme aspects interact to form worker experiences and outcomes (Figure-1). At the top, Gig Economy Influence serves as the primary driver, initiating the digital revolution of labor. This effect has a direct impact on Online Platform Policies, which function as a mediating factor, controlling the flow, nature, and governance of gig employment. These platform-level developments have a direct impact on workers' experiences, such as work flexibility, job security, and inconsistent work options, while also motivating government policies to adapt to growing labor concerns. Economic stability is at the heart of this ecosystem, influenced by all of the previous variables. It represents the whole effect of gig labor conditions, governmental initiatives, and platform architecture on the livelihoods of gig workers in India.

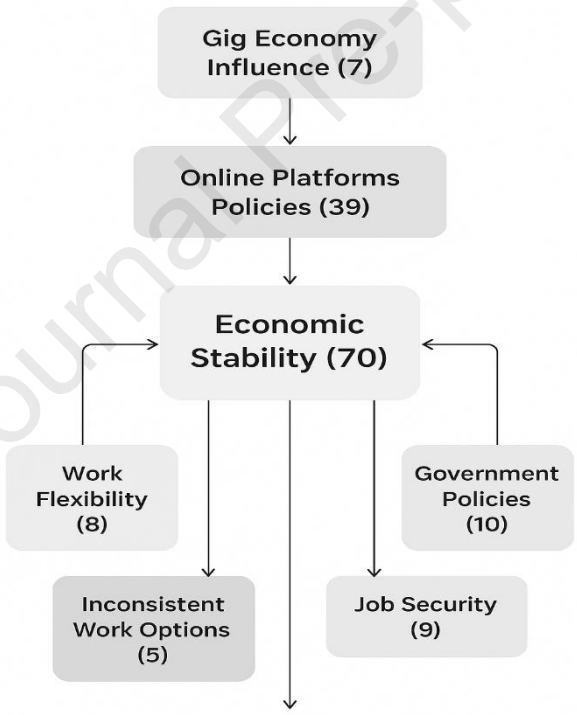


Figure 1 - Conceptual Diagram Structure

(Source: Authors Own Elaboration)

DISCUSSION

The gig economy has evolved as an important component of modern labor markets, providing both possibilities and problems for people and employers. This study investigates the relationship between gig employment and economic growth, focussing on job prospects and

workplace issues. The findings highlight critical aspects that influence the gig economy's impact on economic sustainability and worker well-being.

Economic stability

One of the most important problems for gig workers is financial security and revenue dependability. Unlike typical employment, gig labor does not provide a consistent income, which makes financial planning difficult. Respondents stated that some months produce big revenues, while others cause great financial pressure. Many gig workers deal with this unpredictability by working longer hours or taking on many tasks at once. While gig labor allows for financial freedom and flexibility, the lack of a fixed income remains a significant disadvantage, restricting workers' capacity to achieve long-term financial security. Economic stability and income were among the most commonly discussed issues. Gig workers' incomes vary significantly, making financial planning difficult. While some months provide a strong income, others show a steep fall, making it difficult for workers to maintain a steady financial situation. Many respondents said they worked longer hours or took on extra jobs to compensate for their unpredictable income. Despite the uncertainty, gig labor provides some financial independence by allowing people to earn based on their effort and availability (Pichault & McKeown, 2019). However, the absence of a steady income remains a serious problem. High commissions and the rating system being the primary reasons for income fluctuations

Online platforms policies

Online platform policies are a major issue affecting the financial well-being of gig workers. These online marketplaces control worker treatment, wages, and employment availability. Numerous respondents voiced worries about strict rating systems that affect their ability to get assignments and hefty commission rates that lower their take-home compensation. Workers find it challenging to depend on gig labor as their main source of income due to the dynamic and frequently unanticipated regulatory changes that platforms undertake. These results emphasise the necessity of open and equitable regulations that guarantee gig workers higher wages and employment stability (Pande, 2024). Gig workers rely largely on digital platforms to obtain work; therefore, platform regulations play an important role in their job experience (Vallas & Schor, 2020). Many respondents expressed worry about the hefty commission rates paid by platforms, which considerably reduced their take-home profits. Rating systems play an important part in deciding how much work a gig worker gets. A few poor evaluations or complaints might have a significant influence on their capacity to receive fresh tasks.

Additionally, frequent updates and changes in platform regulations might create uncertainty, hurting workers' wage stability. Many participants voiced anger with these elements, emphasising the need for more equitable regulations and transparency from gig platforms.

Government policies

Another significant issue is how the government should regulate the gig economy. For the establishment of fair labor practices and to guarantee access to basic benefits like health insurance, retirement savings, and minimum wage protections, many workers feel that government engagement is required. When these benefits are not provided, employees are left vulnerable, particularly in times of personal emergency or poor job availability. A significant amount of their wages is spent on travel and fuel, which puts further burden on their finances. Government initiatives to allay these worries could greatly increase gig work's economic feasibility as a long-term job choice. Many gig workers believe that the government should intervene to regulate the business and give adequate benefits. Workers are vulnerable in the long run since there is no job stability, health insurance, or retirement benefits. Several respondents stressed the necessity for a minimum wage legislation that guarantees they get a consistent income despite variations in job availability. Besides, employees stated that their fuel and travel expenditures account for a major amount of their earnings, and that some type of assistance in this area would help them retain financial stability. The need for government involvement underscores gig workers' rising worry about their long-term financial stability (Yaroshenko et al., 2024).

Job security

The gig economy is conspicuously devoid of job security and benefits. Gig workers are constantly at risk of losing their money because of abrupt account deactivations, client complaints, or changes to platform policies, unlike those in traditional employment. Respondents expressed feeling anxious and stressed because they knew that factors outside of their control will determine their job status. Their susceptibility is increased by the absence of paid time off or financial assistance in the event of a medical emergency. By addressing these problems with better labor laws and dispute settlement procedures, gig work would become more sustainable. Unlike regular employment, gig labor offers no job security. Many employees stated that they had no guarantee of job availability, making their financial condition uncertain. Furthermore, there are no provisions for paid leave, which means that if a worker becomes ill, they would lose their salary for that time period (Behl et al., 2022). Another key issue expressed by participants was the ease with which platforms may cancel accounts. Even

modest client complaints, which are frequently harsh or misleading, might result in the suspension or termination of a worker's account, leaving them without a source of income. For many people, gig employment is extremely unreliable and stressful due to a lack of security (Caza et al., 2022).

Work flexibility

Despite these limitations, one of the key reasons people choose gig work is the flexibility and freedom it provides. Many workers like the freedom to choose their own schedules, which allows them to efficiently combine personal and professional duties. This kind of control makes gig labor appealing to students, part-time workers, and people looking for extra cash. However, this freedom comes at the expense of financial stability, since employees must constantly look for work in order to keep a steady income. While gig labor provides greater flexibility, it lacks the structural stability inherent in traditional employment structures. One of the primary benefits of gig labor, as stated by respondents, is the freedom it provides (Au & Tsang, 2023. Unlike typical occupations, gig workers may set their own hours and select when and how much they want to work. Many participants valued being able to better balance their career and personal life. Because of its freedom, gig labor appeals to students, part-time workers, and individuals who wish to work on their own terms (Watson et al., 2021). However, because employees do not have promised tasks or regular incomes, this flexibility frequently results in financial instability.

Gig economy influence

The gig economy's overall influence on employment and economic growth has been mixed. On the one hand, gig labor has offered new career options, especially for people who may struggle to find traditional employment. It has also given firms access to a more flexible workforce, lowering operational costs and improving efficiency. However, due to a lack of security and labor rights, gig work is an unsustainable long-term job alternative for many. The study emphasises the significance of establishing a balance between flexibility and security to guarantee that the gig economy benefits people and businesses equally. The gig economy has had a beneficial and bad impact on both employees and corporations (Cameron & Rahman, 2022). Some participants stated that gig labor has offered employment options for people who may struggle to secure regular jobs. It has also aided local companies by making services such as delivery, transportation, and freelance labor more convenient and efficient. However, the absence of long-term security and benefits renders it an unsustainable career path for many

individuals. While the gig economy has created opportunities, it still requires significant improvements to ensure workers receive fair compensation and stability (Nindwani, 2024).

Inconsistent work options

Finally, one common concern among gig workers is the difficulties of finding stable work. The uncertainty of job availability, along with fierce competition, makes it difficult for workers to rely primarily on gig jobs. Many respondents stated that labor prospects are heavily influenced by external variables such as peak demand times, special events, and seasonal swings. The volatility of employment availability hinders financial planning and long-term career advancement for gig workers. Addressing this issue through better platform algorithms and demand forecasts might assist to stabilise job availability and increase worker happiness. Inconsistency in job availability was a common worry among gig workers. Some days are jam-packed with assignments, while others are light on labor (Glavin & Schieman, 2022). Several respondents indicated that competition among gig workers is fierce, resulting in fewer chances, particularly during off-peak seasons. Many workers rely on exceptional events, weekends, or holiday seasons to supplement their income, while typical workdays rarely give enough projects. This volatility makes it difficult for gig workers to earn a consistent income and prepare for their financial future.

The gig economy offers undeniable benefits, like flexibility, independence, and quick earning potential. However, there are significant drawbacks, such as financial uncertainty, a lack of employment security, and the predominance of platform regulations that typically disadvantage workers. Many attendees underlined the critical need for government regulation and platform enhancements to create a more equal and sustainable working environment for gig workers. Without these changes, the gig economy may remain an unpredictable and unreliable source of income for many individuals. While the gig economy provides several prospects for employment and economic involvement, it also poses considerable issues in terms of income stability, platform regulations, job security, and worker benefits. Policymakers, platform providers, and labor organisations must work together to solve these issues so that the gig economy may contribute positively to economic development and job sustainability. Implementing equitable rules, providing worker safeguards, and delivering consistent income possibilities will help the gig economy grow as a sustainable employment model in the age of convenience.

Thematic analysis found intricate relationships between the seven selected themes, emphasising how diverse features of gig labor interact to influence worker experiences. The most often mentioned issue was economic stability, which was directly related to both platform policies and uneven employment alternatives. Participants repeatedly stated that high platform commissions and opaque grading systems were major factors to revenue volatility, with many workers having to work longer hours or juggling various platforms to stay financially stable. While respondents praised work flexibility for allowing personal autonomy and scheduling control, this freedom frequently came at the expense of job security, since the lack of guaranteed work, paid vacation, or legal safeguards left workers exposed to unexpected income loss. Additionally, government policy gaps and a lack of social security safeguards exacerbated the impression of precarity, particularly during health emergencies or platform account closures. Interestingly, while many workers recognised the gig economy's benefits, such as low entry barriers and supplemental income options, they also emphasised the importance of platform accountability and governmental involvement to ensure fairness and long-term viability. These interwoven themes depict a gig economy atmosphere that is both flexible and unstable, uplifting and predatory.

This study's findings are consistent with several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those linked to economic development, decent work, and decreased disparities. SDG 8, which encourages decent work and economic growth, is especially important since the gig economy gives employment options for those who might otherwise struggle to find regular jobs. However, the study emphasises the precarious nature of gig labor and the necessity for laws that promote fair salaries, job security, and social safeguards, which are consistent with SDG 8's aims. Additionally, SDG 10, which focusses on decreasing disparities, is applicable to gig labor. The analysis finds differences in salaries, employment availability, and access to benefits, especially among marginalised groups. Addressing these concerns through fair labor practices and government engagement can help bridge the gap and foster a more inclusive gig economy. Moreover, SDG 1, which seeks to eliminate poverty, is significant since gig labor provides a source of income for many people. However, because to a lack of consistency and financial security, gig workers struggle to establish long-term economic independence. Implementing social safeguards and minimum wage legislation can help gig workers avoid poverty and achieve economic security.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights variety of issues that gig workers experience, the most significant of which are income volatility, job insecurity, and a lack of social safeguards. Workers face unpredictable wages, restricted access to healthcare and retirement benefits, ambiguous platform regulations, and unexpected account deactivations that jeopardise their livelihoods. Although flexibility and autonomy are desirable qualities, they do not make up for the lack of safety nets or legal protection. The structural architecture of platform capitalism, which externalises wage costs and pushes risks onto workers, lies at the heart of these issues. Algorithmic control, commission-driven income schemes, and performance-based grading systems limit worker autonomy while giving the impression of freedom. Additionally, legislative inadequacies and a lack of official recognition of gig workers under India's labor rules add to their vulnerability. Socioeconomic informality, weak worker bargaining power, and the absence of collective representation all contribute to these fears. To overcome these issues, a collaborative approach is essential. Policymakers must enact comprehensive laws that include minimum wage safeguards, grievance redressal processes, health insurance programs, and transferable social security benefits for gig workers. Platform firms should use transparent algorithmic processes, cut commission costs, and practise fair dispute resolution. Worker groups and unions should be encouraged to strengthen their negotiating power. To support the long-term expansion of India's gig economy, a legislative framework that combines worker protection with operational flexibility is required.

The gig economy has changed current job dynamics, provided flexible options but also brought considerable problems to workers. This study emphasises the precarious character of gig work, where financial insecurity, a lack of job security, and insufficient labor rights create a fluctuating job market. Despite the benefits of autonomy and freedom, gig workers experience ongoing economic instability as a result of variable wages and intermittent employment availability. Online platforms play an important role in the gig economy because they determine job conditions and remuneration through regulations that are not always transparent and fair. High commission fees, strict grading systems, and abrupt policy changes all lead to employee unhappiness and financial uncertainty. Similarly, the lack of government restrictions exacerbates these problems, leaving gig workers without basic benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, and legal protections. The findings highlight the critical need for policy reforms to guarantee gig labor remains a viable and sustainable employment alternative. While the gig economy has increased employment rates by giving possibilities for a diverse workforce, its long-term success is dependent on striking a balance between flexibility and worker security. To promote long-term economic growth, governments, digital platforms, and

labor organisations must work together to create fair wage rules, transparent rating methods, and social safeguards for gig workers. Without these critical controls, the gig economy may continue to exacerbate economic inequities rather than serving as an egalitarian employment paradigm. While gig labor has many advantages, it also needs institutional adjustments to assure worker welfare and economic stability. Addressing income volatility, job security concerns, and regulatory loopholes will be critical in determining the gig economy's future, ensuring that it contributes to overall economic development while protecting worker rights and well-being.

A comparative review of various regulatory frameworks demonstrates that India's response to the difficulties of the gig economy is still relatively immature. In contrast, California's Assembly Bill 5 (AB5) in the United States classed many gig workers as employees rather than independent contractors, requiring access to minimum wages, health insurance, and other worker protections despite fierce opposition from platform businesses. Similarly, the Taylor Review in the United Kingdom advocated the development of a third employment category called "dependent contractors" to provide fair compensation, job stability, and clarity in work status while maintaining flexibility. The European Union has also proposed a historic Directive on Platform Work, which intends to promote transparent algorithmic management and gig workers' presumption employment status until platforms can demonstrate otherwise. In contrast, India's regulatory stance remains essentially passive, with gig workers excluded from official labor standards and social security plans, despite their rising economic importance. This study highlights the critical need for India to take a more proactive and balanced regulatory approach that recognises both the economic promise and hazards inherent in platform-based activity.

IMPLICATIONS

The implication the study is discussion in this section. This section includes theoretical, managerial and practical implications of the research.

Theoretical implications

This study adds to the current literature on labor economics, digital work platforms, and employment structures by providing insights into how gig work affects economic stability, job security, and worker welfare. This research improved the knowledge in Precarity Theory, Labor Process Theory and Platform Capitalism theory. It builds on prior studies on non-traditional employment arrangements, highlighting the issues of income volatility and gig workers'

reliance on platform regulations. Moreover, the study emphasises the significance of government action in regulating the gig economy, supporting the premise that regulatory frameworks must develop alongside technology advancements in labor markets. The findings also corroborate the idea that flexibility and autonomy in work arrangements come at the price of financial stability, which adds depth to labor market studies' concerns about the gig economy's viability.

Managerial implications

This study's findings provide useful insights for platform administrators, corporate executives, and governments. Digital platform businesses must reconsider their commission arrangements and create more open procedures to guarantee that gig workers are fairly compensated. Implementing worker-friendly practices, such as lowering commission fees and providing support programs, can boost employee retention and satisfaction. Businesses that rely on gig workers should adopt hybrid employment arrangements that strike a balance between flexibility and stability, while still providing some level of income guarantee and employment benefits. Policymakers should prioritise regulatory measures that protect workers' rights while maintaining the benefits of the gig economy. Ensuring fair labor practices, giving social security benefits, and setting minimum wage safeguards can all contribute to a more sustainable gig workforce. By resolving these management issues, the gig economy may transform into a more egalitarian and secure job market.

Practical implications

The findings of the research have major practical consequences for gig workers, employers, legislators, and platform administrators. The study emphasises the significance of financial preparation and skill diversity for gig workers as they negotiate the risks of gig employment. To improve employment and economic stability, workers should diversify their revenue streams, invest in financial literacy, and participate in professional growth. For firms and platform administrators, the study emphasises the need of worker-centric regulations that promote a more sustainable gig work environment. Fair salary rules, reduced commission fees, and clear grading systems can all help to boost employee motivation and retention. Moreover, increasing communication channels between employees and platform administrators can lead to better dispute resolution and job satisfaction. From a policy standpoint, the study advocates for governmental measures to preserve gig workers' rights while preserving the flexibility that distinguishes the gig economy. Policies that include social security benefits, health insurance, and income stability measures can help to lessen worker vulnerability. Governments should

also collaborate with platform firms to provide standardised labor protections that are compatible with changing employment structures. Finally, customers' interactions with gig workers help shape the gig economy. Ethical consumer habits, such as fair tipping and providing constructive feedback, this study can help to create a more supportive work environment for gig workers. By promoting a fair and sustainable gig economy, all stakeholders' workers, firms, legislators, and consumers can contribute to the long-term survival of this employment paradigm.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was primarily male, with very few female participants. While this reflects the current male-dominated composition of many urban gig platforms in India, it introduces a gender bias that limits the generalisability of findings to the larger gig worker population, particularly when it comes to the unique experiences and challenges faced by female gig workers. Future studies should purposefully oversample under-represented groups to allow for a more inclusive and intersectional approach. This study is geographically constrained, as labor legislation, economic conditions, and cultural views towards gig employment differ among locations. Comparative studies conducted across many nations can give a more complete knowledge of how varied regulatory contexts affect gig workers. The study is based on self-studied data from gig workers, which may create bias in replies. Future study might include employer viewpoints, platform administrator insights, and consumer behaviour data to provide a more balanced picture of the gig economy's impact. This study focusses largely on economic and employment-related difficulties, other areas, such as mental health, work-life balance, and skill development, warrant additional exploration. Future research might look into the psychological and social ramifications of gig employment to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its viability. As the gig economy evolves due to technology improvements and legal changes, longitudinal studies that monitor gig workers over time may provide more insight into long-term career possibilities, economic mobility, and the future trajectory of gig employment.

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Appendix:

Research Questions

1. What motivated you to join the gig economy, and how does it compare to traditional employment in terms of opportunities?
2. How has gig work impacted your income stability and career growth prospects?

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3. Do you believe gig platforms provide fair access to work opportunities, or do you face difficulties securing consistent jobs?
4. What factors influence your decision to continue working in the gig economy, such as flexibility, earnings, or skill development?
5. In your experience, how does the gig economy contribute to overall economic growth and job creation in your region?
6. Have you observed any significant economic benefits or drawbacks from working in the gig sector, such as better income opportunities or lack of financial security?
7. How do you perceive the role of digital platforms in shaping employment opportunities and economic participation for gig workers?
8. What are the biggest challenges you face as a gig worker, such as job security, lack of benefits, or unfair treatment by platforms?
9. How do you manage financial uncertainties, such as irregular income, absence of social security benefits, or lack of insurance coverage?
10. What policy changes or platform improvements would you suggest to make gig work more sustainable and beneficial for workers like yourself?

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Declaration of interests

☒ The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐ The author *Click here to enter your name* is Choose an item for *Click here to enter the journal's name* and was not involved in the editorial review or the decision to publish this article.

☐The authors declare the following financial interests (e.g., any funding for the research project)/personal relationships (e.g., the author is an employee of a profitable company) which may be considered as potential competing interests:

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