



Gig Economy: Future of work?

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Abstract:

Development of the platform economy is the fruit of COVID-19 pandemic. Although, the post COVID 19 period disrupted the global economy in various ways but it left the deep imprints in the employment market. It changed the mannerism of the work at global level. With the new limitation of people moving out of the house gave birth to numerous innovations and new methods of transacting among people. It added fuel to the growth of tech innovations and today, what we are witnessing is the birth and accelerated growth of AI. As the human labour became global, it also changed the definition and relationship of employer and employee. That's where the concept of the gig economy flourished came into wide lime light. However, the concept of gig economy is not a new concept but it was used previously in the domain of the music and in the farm field in India too. With the fast progression of the technology and tech research the it became widely accepted used and globally accepted by the people. Thus, this fundamental transformation in global labour markets amplified the rise of the digital and platform economy. This research paper throws the light on the progress, socio-economic impact of gig workers and its features in the post-pandemic era, with specific concentrated analysis with respect to the Gujarat State and Indian economy. The paper relies on the secondary data collected from authentic government reports, ILO publications, academic studies, and field-based research, and also the paper explores how digital platforms have emerged over a period of time and restructuring the employ-employee relationships, worker's profiles, and labour protections laws, etc. This paper gives insights into crucial research and policy gaps, including availability of sufficient data, lesser coverage of rural gig workers, and the need for demographic and geographical analysis.

Keywords: *Gig Economy, Platform Economy, future of the work and COVID 19*

Introduction:

The global economy has entered a new phase that is transforming the very nature of work, employment relationships and the structure of labour markets. The COVID-19 pandemic divided the world economies in to the platform and non-platform economies. Technological innovation and digitalization changed labor and employment relationships significantly. This time saw the rapid expansion of various digital platforms in various sectors.



Although, the Gig labor is predated the pandemic; nonetheless, COVID-19 intensified its significance and expedited its growing rate. Lockdowns, rising unemployment, and greater reliance on digital technology have contributed to the heightened the use of platform-based employment. Digital Platform work as a mediator between the seller and the buyer particularly in food delivery, transportation, e-commerce logistics, online freelancing, and digital services. The desire for flexible, task-oriented employment increased as the epidemic progressed, disrupted the traditional job market. A recent study reveals that India has experienced substantial growth in the gig and platform economy during and after the pandemic due to digitization and ease of usage of the technology.

According to the ILO the digital economy grew during COVID-19, especially in delivery services, home based services, freelancing work , software development, digital marketing, and other tech-related jobs. Another reports such as NITI Aayog estimates the rise in platform economy in India estimating 7.7 million gig workers in 2021 and 23.5 million by 2029–30.

Definition and Conceptualization

The gig economy doesn't have one single formal definition but is characterized by short-term, flexible, skill and project-based work arrangements that exist outside conventional employment. It often involves digital platforms or apps that connect workers with clients (e.g. Uber, Upwork). For example, a UK Parliament briefing states that “the term ‘gig economy’ ... can be used to describe multiple economic practices”, typically where “an individual uses a digital ‘platform’ ... to find and perform short-term jobs”. For example, a recent academic study notes that the gig economy is “characterised by flexible and fragmented work patterns,” reshaping the employment structure through short-term, piece-rate arrangements. The definition of platform work is explicitly mentioned in the 2020 Social Security Code of India as “services rendered through an online platform outside the traditional employer–employee relationship which highlights the new, tech-mediated nature of such jobs. In practice, gig work varies from highly-skilled freelance projects (e.g., software or design freelancing) to low-skilled on-demand tasks (e.g., delivery driving), but all have features of flexibility (autonomy over hours and location) and contingency (pay per task and no guaranteed hours).

Typology of Gig Work:

Gig work manifests in many **forms**. The following taxonomy (Table 2) outlines common categories with examples of platform companies for each:



Type	Description	Examples (Platforms)
On-demand services	Local service tasks dispatched via apps, often physical work.	Uber, Lyft (ride-hailing); TaskRabbit/Urban Company (home services); Instacart (grocery delivery).
Food delivery/logistics	Courier and delivery tasks for restaurants or e-commerce, scheduled on platforms.	DoorDash, Swiggy, Zomato (food); Amazon Flex, Delivery (parcels).
Digital microtasks	Very short, often online, tasks like surveys, image tagging, small-data jobs.	Amazon Mechanical Turk, Microworkers, Clickworker.
Crowdwork/freelance	Online project-based work in knowledge sectors (IT, design, writing) arranged via digital platforms.	Upwork, Fiverr, Freelancer.com, 99designs (creative/IT projects).
Contracted ‘gig’ projects	Short-term professional or skilled contracts beyond micro-tasks, often brokered online.	Toptal, Gigster (software/consulting); Kelkoo, Freelancer.
“Platform-based” human capital gigs	Specialized platforms matching skilled labour (e.g. caregiving, healthcare, teaching) on-demand.	Care.com (caregiving); Arise, VIPKid (remote teaching).
Creative/Artistic gigs	Artistic or creative projects (design, videos, writing) typically freelanced through platforms.	Fiverr, 99designs, Behance, Scripted.

(Sources for examples: general industry knowledge; platforms like Uber, Upwork, Swiggy are widely cited in the literature.)

Global Context

From global perspective also, the gig economy has seen rapid growth in the different parts of the world such as in the United States, European Union and China. The platform economy has become an increasingly important component of the labour market in the USA with almost one in four workers involved in the project based work arrangements (ADP Research Institute, 2024). The fast expansion of digital platform work in the European Union has also prompted the development of regulatory frameworks to protect platform workers through employment rights and algorithmic transparency (European Council, 2023). One of the world’s largest platform economies is based in China, with millions employed in ride-hailing and delivery work, although concerns about worker burnout, job insecurity and oversupply loom large (Baiguan News, 2023). The three locations emphasize the benefits of the gig economy involving flexibility and job creation, while



simultaneously addressing concerns related to labour rights, social security, income stability, and employment status.

This categorization aligns with ILO descriptions of platform work and academic typologies: for instance, ILO notes that platform work “comes in many shapes and sizes,” including translation, data-input (crowd work) and taxi-driving. The above table illustrates that gig work ranges from highly automated microtasks to human-powered services, but all share non-standard contract forms.

India

The gig economy in India is expanding and scaling rapidly. As per the projection made by the NITI Aayog report the number of gig workers would increase from 7.7 million in 2020-21 to 23.5 million by 2029-30. This encompasses ride-hailing and delivery services (Uber/Ola, Zomato/Swiggy), e-commerce logistics (Amazon Flex), food and home services (Urban Company), and online freelancing in information technology and creative sectors. Indian workers significantly dominate several sectors of the global gig economy attributing to almost 55% of worldwide software and technology gig projects to India. Other sector wise distribution (NITI 2022) includes approximately 47% medium-skilled labour, 31% low-skilled labour, and 22% high-skilled labour. This indicates a rise in both the blue collar and white collar job.

Global statistics (sample): Different statistics shows that approximately one-fourth of workers in the US or EU have engaged in gig employment. India's gig workforce, although is smaller in absolute numbers, but expanding swiftly: NITI Aayog has stated that the count will be at 7.7 million (2020–21), constituting approximately 2.6% of the non-farm labour force, and it is anticipated to reach at around 4.1% of all livelihoods by 2030.

Regulatory and Policy Responses

Gig labour is a challenge for governments globally. There are few national rules specifically addressing gig work in the US; regulation is largely sector-by-sector (e.g. public ride-share rules) or through state laws on contractor classification. The EU is leading the establishment of binding law (the 2023 Directive) to interpret the work rights. China doesn't have specialized law regarding gig workers. Instead, it governs platforms through commercial and transportation legislation. Ride-hailing companies are required to register drivers. Delivery and courier applications predominantly adhere to normal contract law.

Recently, India has revamped the labour laws. The Code on Social Security 2020 defines gig and platform workers separately. It defines ‘gig worker’ and ‘platform work’ and empowers the states to establish the social security plans for them. It is seen as a landmark step towards extending provident fund, insurance and welfare schemes to self-employed platform workers. However, gig workers remain outside the typical employee



status: the Social Security Code deems them part of the unorganized sector and other labour codes (e.g. pay, industrial relations) do not automatically encompass them. For example, present law doesn't guarantee minimum salaries or regulated hours for gig workers. Unresolved core labour rights The proposed guidelines (2024) would require platforms to pay into worker insurance funds if a person worked 90+ days in a year.

Other laws alternatives include India's e-Shram platform premising the gig and informal workers to register for benefits (though awareness remains weak) and state-level initiatives. For example, Gujarat has already started planning to train youth on digital/tech skills that would indirectly help future gig participants.

The Employment Market in India:

Volume and Expansion: India is experiencing the growing non-agricultural labor. Recent estimates show that gig labor will create millions of jobs and boost GDP. By late 2020s, the gig economy may provide 90 million employments, 1.25% of GDP (Business Standard). As per the estimation by NITI Aayog, it predicts three-fold growth to 23.5 million by 2029-30. India's youth, 50% smartphone infusion, and post COVID-19 shift to digital services are its major contributors of growth drivers.

The gig worker's distribution in India across several sectors.

Transport and Logistics: According to NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) reports ride-hailing drivers (Uber/Ola) and delivery drivers (Zomato, Swiggy, Amazon) constitute greater than 60% of gig employment in India. Numerous graduates and skilled professionals engage in freelancing work on various platforms such as Upwork, Freelancer, or local startup-oriented websites. India is counts as one of the biggest markets for online freelancing work.

E-Commerce and On Demand Services: Services like warehousing and last-mile delivery shown by Blinkit, Zepto, and Amazon Flex are gaining increasing popularity. Not only that but also other on demand services through applications for house maintenance, beauty, and many personal services (Urban Company, Housejoy) are also gaining more attention among population due to ease of use and ease of availing products and services at the doorstep.

Additional: Furthermore, the urban areas are experiencing the growing number of female freelancers in sectors such as writing, design, and coaching; still, the issues around their safety and flexibility continue to impact the women's participation at similar levels. Additionally, the digital economy is majorly driven by the urban workers, specifically millennials and Generation Z. Niti Aayog's data shows a significant surge in the engagement of younger generation (ages 16-23), with an eight-fold rise in recent times.

Economic and Social Implications: Many individuals are valuing gig work for its flexibility, and quick remuneration. Research shows that gig workers receive comparatively lower remuneration and engage in



fewer hours of work. Surveys in India indicate that numerous platform delivery workers receive inadequate compensation, lacking overtime pay and benefits. Despite its advantages, the gig workers lack social security and financial benefits such as lack insurance, pension, or provident fund coverage. The ILO indicated that gig workers are unable to unionize and thus are vulnerable to exploitation in absence of protection under traditional employment laws.

Policy and legal context: Now the government has started recognizing the increasing the number of gig workers and therefore, it came up with the New labour legislation in 2020 formalized gig workers, but it still doesn't include the complete employment rights. The Minimum Wages Act and Industrial Disputes Act are restricted to workers. Although, Indian companies are proposing social benefit insurance for gig workers, including insurance for app driver accidents. However, the applicability is dappled and other factors like minimum income, dispute settlement and occupational safety are still not addressed.

Data and Measurement: Measuring the gig workforce is difficult to do accurately. India's official labour surveys (PLFS) have only recently started to include questions on platform work. NITI Aayog uses PLFS data and targeted surveys to estimate 7.7 million (2020). Industry groups and studies provide higher numbers (~17-24m) by broader definitions. Most of the data points are about urban app-based jobs specifically; the size of other gig segments (e.g. informal side-hustles, rural contractor work) is largely unknown.

Gujarat-Specific Impacts

Gujarat is one of the most industrialized states in India. Ahmedabad, Surat, and Vadodara are major urban cities serving as regional catalysts for innovation and commerce, with active gig employees. Prominent Gujarati cities, including Ahmedabad, Surat, and Baroda, have ride-hailing applications such as Ola, Uber, Bharat Taxi and delivery services like Swiggy, Zepto and Zomato.

A recent field research in Ahmedabad, the largest city in Gujarat, indicated that gig workers, such as Amazon and Zomato delivery riders and Uber drivers, had heightened precarity and vulnerability in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicated that these platform workers primarily stayed in the informal sector, lacking union representation and labour protections, with many increasing their gig work participation owing to employment losses resulting from the pandemic. Involved in protracted labour hours, frequently beyond 10 hours daily, with irregular revenue. The authors assert, "Although certain informal worker collectives are emerging, gig workers in Gujarat presently lack legal protections."

Comparative statistics Gujarat is not individually reported in national studies of the size of the gig economy. But there are anecdotal indications of an urban-centric concentration. There are plenty of startups in Ahmedabad providing gig jobs (local delivery apps, for example); but digital gig chances are significantly less in rural areas. Gujarat's skill development projects (government or NGOs) have begun to include training for



app-based work (e.g. digital literacy for delivery riders), however the coverage is limited.

The Gujarat government must implement the national labour codes. No recognized state-level gig welfare program. Policy response in Gujarat in accordance with federal legislation. Gujarat has been a leader in digital governance and can utilize its e-government systems to register gig workers in e-Shram or comparable portals. Trade unions in Mumbai and Delhi have emphasized gig economy issues, while major business lobbyists, such as textile and pharmaceutical associations, have not addressed them.

Literature Review:

Theoretical Framework

Significant research on the gig economy is based in traditional labour process theory and issues of precarity. Scholars are of the opinion that the gig work represents the modern manifestation of the historical "putting-out" or homework system, inspired by the technological advancements.

Principal concepts:

"Precarity of Labour" Gig employment is inherently hazardous (Kalleberg 2009; Standing 2011). Employees experience less job security, unpredictable earnings, and often lack social safeguards." Research indicates that numerous gig workers are exchanging flexibility for instability due to indecisive working hours, lacking stable income, and no additional benefits unlike traditional jobs. Research indicates that the stresses of instability and insecurity, characterized by "algorithmic management" through digital platforms, accelerate work pace and increase unpredictability. Frontiers assessments indicate that the introduction of automated limits by platforms—such as task matching, ratings, and deactivation—leads to diminished autonomy, economic instability, and psychological distress.

The gig economy alternatively is also known as **platform capitalism** (Srnicke, 2017; Scholz, 2016). Value is generated through the centralized alignment of supply and demand on digital platforms. The worker is considered as a 'free' resource. It exemplifies how large corporates such as Uber and Amazon have taken an advantage of technology and data to prosper without employing individuals. This practice has been criticized in the literature as a form of digital Taylorism, wherein the digitization enhances the job process via ratings and dynamic pricing, simultaneously by reducing the skillset of workers (Braverman 1974).

Algorithmic Management: An emerging domain for prospective managerial applications. Employees report being monitored by an algorithm that incentivizes or punishes them according to their performance which indicates towards a lack of transparency and inherent bias due to system usage. Drivers may manipulate their GPS applications or select less profitable assignments to maintain their ratings and secure bonuses. Individuals who decline to accept meagre salaries are risking their existence. Alterations in the employment process because of usage of digitization might engender the power disparities by platforms exercising near-total



control over the pricing and distribution of labour.

Empirical Studies and Data Sources

Numerous studies (governmental and academic) have attempted to quantify and characterize gig work. Table 3 compares key data sources and methodologies:

Source	Definition/Scope	Methodology	Estimate/Key Findings
NITI Aayog (India)	Gig/platform workers via apps or short contracts (India)	PLFS 2020–21 survey + urban sample	~7.7m in 2020–21; 23.5m by 2029–30 (projected)
ILO (India, 2024)	Gig/platform sector (India)	Literature review, stakeholder input	~7.7m (2020) rising to 23.5m by 2030
ADP Research (US, 2025)	Contingent U.S. workers (temp & 1099)	Payroll & survey data	27% of US jobs involved (2024); 1-in-4 Americans did gig work in past year
EU Commission (2023)	EU digital platform workers	Eurostat & industry data	28m workers in EU (2022), 43m projected by 2025
Census Nonemployer Stats (US)	Self-employed (US)	US Census, business filings	Non-employer businesses grew ~54% (1997–2014) vs 9%–24% for employers
Ahmedabad Field Study (2022)	App-based delivery and drivers (Ahmedabad)	Field interviews (n≈150)	Post-COVID precarity intensified; no formal protections
Chennai Field Study (2025)	Gig workers in Chennai (ride-hail & delivery)	Mixed methods survey	6.8m in 2019–20, 7.7m in 2020–21 (India); law codes define gig without granting employee rights

(Table 3 sources: NITI Aayog report; ILO/EBMO India report; ADP analysis; EU Commission explainer; REDI/US Census; Ahmedabad study; Chennai study.)

Data limitations: Majority of gig data are partial. Official surveys (like India’s PLFS or US Labour Force Survey) traditionally lacks the informal or online work. Researchers often stay grounded on specialized surveys, platform-reported figures, or proxy indicators (e.g. non-employer stats). Thus, estimates from various research exhibit significant variability and typically underestimate high-skill freelancing and rural employment opportunities. Combining sources (as above) helps triangulate but also reveals inconsistencies.



Themes from Empirical Research

Empirical studies converge on several themes:

- **Worker Profile:** The gig workers are heterogeneous. They can be educated and skilled professionals giving IT or design services, as well as low-skilled urban youths engaged in delivery work. ADP says in their reports that temporary workers are youth and receive low payments, whereas contractors are aged and experienced. In India, a higher numbers of gig workers are engaged in lower and medium-skill sectors such as logistics and trade. A thorough research study on safety and social norms indicates that women are still marginalised in the food and transportation sectors.
- **Working Conditions:** Gig employment can also include long working hours and inconsistent income. Qualitative data (e.g. interviews with delivery riders) describe how income drops and aggressive incentives (e.g. lower pay per delivery) compel workers to work for longer duration. Algorithmic control imposes pressures of 'time literacy': workers are closely watched and must meet rating thresholds or face penalties. Research papers have documented stress and burnout related to this regime.
- **Legal Status and Rights:** There is always the question of ambiguous employment status. Studies in India and elsewhere show that gig workers do not have an easy access to labour rights. The ILO observes that gig workers in India lack a robust union and effective legal representation. Interviews disclose workers' lack of clarity, since at many places they are labelled as "partners" by companies while being treated as employees in reality.
- **Social Protection:** A major issue is the inconsistency in benefits to the gigs. Field surveys indicate that the majority of gig workers do not have access to the health insurance, a provident fund, or paid leave. Experts says that this inequality in terms of the benefits and payment may worsen as gig workers might held responsible for company-related costs (such as petrol and data plans) while not having the job security.
- **Digital Divide:** Research shows that the freelancing working possibilities are majorly located in the urban areas. Nearly all platform-based delivery and ride services occur in metropolitan environments. Rural communities with limited smartphone access continue to find platform work predominantly inaccessible. Rural gigging is believed to transpire via social networks or local agencies (e.g., informal day labour markets) rather than applications, however this phenomenon remains inadequately researched.



Objectives of the research:

This study seeks to elucidate the following topics:

- To investigate the growth and emerging tendencies of the gig and platform economy in the post-COVID-19 context.
- To examine the effects of the platform economy on employment, employment conditions, and social security benefits in India, with reference to Gujarat.
- To ascertain the primary possibilities and problems faced by gig workers in the digital labour market.

Research Methodology:

This study is descriptive in nature and grounded on secondary data from various sources, such as books, periodic reports, websites, government and private agency reports, and prior research on the topic.

Theoretical Discourse and Constructs

The nature of gig employment has been disputed in recent scholarship. Some view it via a Marxist/labour process lens: gig work as flexibility for capital — platforms lower fixed labour costs by outsourcing workers as external inputs. But critical analysts say the autonomy is often illusory, as the pace and pricing is determined by platform algorithms. Others view gig labour via a neoliberal lens: as the ultimate market-based type of labour, emphasizing individual choice. For example, some advocates claim gig employment decreases barriers to entrepreneurship. Field interviews show that for some freelancers, the “entrepreneurial identity” is met with hostility about abrupt changes to terms.

Research Gaps and Future Indication

Although the digital economy has been extensively researched, certain areas require further study:

- **Data Quality:** There is still a lack of reliable data in this domain. India needs better assessment of gig employment, especially in regions other than big urban cities. Gathered information about the gig or work applications should be consistently included in the standard surveys.
- **Policy Effectiveness:** Empirical assessment is essential as new regulations are enacted. Will India’s social security schemes effectively reach gig workers? Will the EU’s employment status rules and regulations encourage the wages or deplete the gig opportunities?



- **Technological Change:** The increased use of AI and digital platforms can give birth to new types of workers (e.g. AI-assisted freelancing) or the replaces the existing gigs (e.g. automated vehicles for delivery). Research should also anticipate how technology alters the labour demand and supply in the platform economy.
- **Intersectional Analysis:** India is a country of diversity where the demographic information plays crucial role in the labour market. But only a few studies consider this information. Tapping into these dimensions are worth studying to have better and deeper insights. For example, how do minority communities get into gig opportunities, and what are the onstacles?

In total, the literature study points towards the diverse and dynamic aspect of the gig economy. Inequality is present among different types of gig workers in terms of payments, freedom, work life balance and precarity. Robust, in-depth, and data-driven research is necessary to inform the legislation to maximize the advantages of gig workers (flexibility, opportunity) along with safeguarding their rights and security.

Summary:

COVID-19 has changed the traditional mindset of people across the globe about the work and employment. Moreover, technological advancement has led to ease of people in various sectors which resulted in the birth of gig economy or a platform economy or a digital economy. It changed the labour market dynamics and the traditional way of working. It opened the horizons for people across the globe and gave them multiple work opportunities without the limitations of the geometric boundaries. This new phenomenon in work has given access to flexible working opportunities along with financial freedom. Although there are limitations to this work arrangement such as inequality of pay, lack of social security benefits, instability of work, long and indecisive working hours. Despite these precarity, there is still an increase of gigs in the world and is still going to grow as per the various reports. As far as India is concerned then it is also not free from its effects in terms of change in the nature of employment, particularly for urban youth.

The paper concludes with a recommendation that the sustainable growth of the gig economy requires balanced governmental action, enhanced labour protection laws, and comprehensive social security frameworks to secure economic growth and workers' welfare in the future of employment.

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