



A study on Gig Economy with Special Reference to Platform-based Workers in Alappuzha Municipality

Dr. Mahima S¹

Ms. Lessa Benadict²

¹ Assistant Professor, Sree Narayana College Chenganur, Kerala, India.

¹ I MA Behavioural Economics and Data Science, Sree Narayana College Chenganur, Kerala, India

Abstract

The gig economy represents a major transformation in the modern labour market, characterized by the growing prevalence of short-term, flexible, and task-based employment arrangements rather than traditional full-time jobs. The rapid development of digital platforms has significantly facilitated this shift by connecting workers with clients or companies seeking specific services on a temporary or on-demand basis. Through these platforms, individuals engage in various forms of gig work such as transportation services, food delivery, freelance professional services, and other types of digital labour. Despite its increasing popularity and opportunities for flexible employment, the gig economy also raises several economic and social concerns. Gig workers are typically classified as independent contractors rather than formal employees, which often excludes them from benefits such as job security, health insurance, pension schemes, and paid leave. Additionally, earnings in gig work tend to be uncertain and may fluctuate based on demand, platform algorithms, and competition among workers, creating challenges for economic stability and worker protection. In this context, this study examines reason for selecting job, the working conditions, income patterns, and perception towards platform-based gig work.

Keywords: Gig economy, Gig workers, Flexible Employment,

Introduction

The global labour market has experienced significant transformation in recent years due to rapid technological progress and the expansion of digital platforms (Berg et al., 2018). One of the most prominent outcomes of this shift is the rise of the gig economy, which is characterized by short-term, flexible, and task-based forms of employment rather than traditional permanent jobs (De Stefano, 2016). Digital platforms play a central role in

¹ Assistant Professor, Sree Narayana College Chenganur, Kerala, India.

² I MA Behavioural Economics and Data Science, Sree Narayana College Chenganur, Kerala, India.

enabling this system by directly connecting workers with clients or businesses that require specific services on an on-demand basis (Sundararajan, 2016).

Gig workers those engaged in livelihoods outside the traditional employer-employee arrangement can be broadly classified into platform and non-platform-based workers. Platform workers are those whose work is based on online software apps or digital platforms. Non-platform gig workers are generally casual wage workers and own-account workers in the conventional sectors, working part-time or full time.

The widespread use of smartphones, improved internet connectivity, and the development of platform-based applications have made it easier for individuals to participate in gig work. Platforms associated with ride-hailing, food delivery, online freelancing, and other digital services provide opportunities for workers to earn income by completing individual tasks or “gigs.” This type of employment offers considerable flexibility, allowing workers to decide when, where, and how much they want to work.

This model originated during the post-World War II era when temporary job agencies provided temporary workers to companies in need of short-term staff. The concept evolved with the advent of the internet. Gig economy workers were officially recognized as workers in the legal system by the US. (Prassl, 2018) In the gig economy, there are three primary stakeholders: companies that hire gig workers, the workers themselves, and the government, which serves as a mediator between the two and enacts laws that directly impact both parties. (De Stefano, 2016).

The term "gig" is commonly used to refer to a range of activities, including part-time employment, contract labour, and on-demand staffing services. Despite its widespread popularity and usage, the gig economy primarily revolves around independent contractors and freelancers rather than full-time, permanent employees.

Gig workers frequently encounter issues such as unstable income, lack of job security, absence of formal employment contracts, and limited access to social protection benefits including health insurance, pensions, and paid leave. Moreover, algorithm-based management systems used by digital platforms can significantly affect workers' earnings and working conditions, often without adequate transparency or worker protection.

In India the platform-based work in the gig economy has expanded rapidly in recent years due to the growth of digital platforms, increasing smartphone usage, and improved internet connectivity. Platform-based services in sectors such as transportation, food delivery, logistics, e-commerce, and online freelancing have created new forms of employment based on short-term, flexible, and task-oriented work arrangements. Companies such as Uber, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, and Amazon have played a significant role in expanding gig work by connecting workers directly with customers through mobile applications. India currently ranks fifth in terms of its gig economy workforce, but projections suggest that by 2030, it could climb to third place. It is also estimated that by 2030, the number of gig economy workers in India will increase by approximately 200% and contribute around 2.5% to the GDP. The gig workforce in India is expected to grow significantly, reaching 23.5 million by 2030, a substantial increase from the 7 million recorded in 2021. (Srivastava, 2021)

Platform-based services like ride-hailing, delivery services, e-commerce logistics, and online freelancing have created new employment opportunities in Kerala, especially for youth and individuals seeking flexible work arrangements. The high level of digital literacy and smartphone penetration in the state has further facilitated participation in gig work. Despite these opportunities, gig workers in Kerala face challenges such as income instability, lack of job security, and limited access to social security benefits. Many workers also experience pressure from platform rating systems and algorithmic management practices, which influence their earnings and working conditions. As the number of gig workers continues to rise, there is an increasing need for appropriate policy measures and regulatory frameworks to ensure fair working conditions, income security, and improved social protection for workers engaged in the gig economy. (Bhattacharya & Singh, 2022).

Statement of the problem

The rapid expansion of digital platforms in sectors such as transportation, food delivery, and online freelancing, has attracted a large number of workers, particularly young people seeking flexible employment opportunities. While these platforms have created new avenues for income generation, they have also raised several concerns regarding the working conditions of gig workers. Issues such as income instability, lack of job security, inadequate social security coverage, and limited regulatory protection have become increasingly significant.

Therefore, the present study seeks to analyse the reason for selecting platform based working conditions, income patterns of gig workers on digital platforms and also exploring possible suggestions that can improve worker welfare, ensure fair working conditions, and promote sustainable development in the evolving digital labour market.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the reason for selecting platform-based work
2. To examine the working conditions and income patterns of the respondents
3. To study perception towards platform-based work among the respondents

Research Methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data to examine the socio-economic conditions and working environment of gig workers. The study area is Alappuzha district in Kerala, where platform-based services such as food delivery, transportation, and other digital platform jobs have expanded in recent years. The study mainly focuses on gig workers associated with different digital platforms operating in this region.

The primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to gig workers working on various digital platforms. A sample of 50 respondents was selected from Alappuzha district using a convenience sampling method. The questionnaire included questions related to socio-economic characteristics, income patterns, working hours, job satisfaction, and challenges faced by gig workers. In addition, secondary data were collected from books, research articles, government reports, journals, and reliable online sources related to the

gig economy and platform labour. The collected data were analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentage analysis and tabular presentation to interpret the results.

Findings of the study

The age distribution of the respondents shows that the majority (62 percent) belong to the under-25 age group, indicating that a significant proportion of platform workers are young individuals who are either entering the labour market or seeking flexible employment opportunities. The 25–30 age group accounts for 20 percent of respondents, while the 30–35 age group represents 18 percent. Overall, the findings suggest that platform-based gig economy work is predominantly undertaken by younger individuals, highlighting that the sector mainly attracts youth who prefer flexible work arrangements or are exploring supplementary employment opportunities.

The gender distribution of the respondents included in the study. Out of the total respondents, 76 percent are male, while 24 percent are female. This indicates that male participation in platform-based gig work is significantly higher compared to female participation. The comparatively lower representation of female workers may be influenced by factors such as safety concerns, social responsibilities, nature of platform-based gig work, and limited access to certain types of platform-based gig jobs. Overall, the study highlights a noticeable gender disparity in participation within the gig economy.

The educational qualification of the respondents included in the study. 38 percent have completed graduation, indicating that most gig workers possess a higher education qualification. Additionally, 58 percent have an educational qualification below graduation, while only 4 percent have above graduation. The data indicates that although individuals with different educational backgrounds are involved in platform-based gig work. This highlights that the platform-based gig work attracts a considerable number of moderately educated individuals seeking employment or supplementary income.

The occupational status of the respondents shows that 58 percent of the respondents are students, suggesting that platform-based gig work is popular among young individuals who use it as a flexible means of earning while continuing their education. 10 percent have no other occupation, indicating that platform-based gig work serves as their primary source of livelihood. In addition, Meanwhile, 32 percent are engaged in another occupation, indicating that they participate in gig work as a supplementary source of income. Overall, the findings highlight that platform-based gig work functions both as a primary livelihood option for some and as a flexible supplementary earning opportunity for students and employed individuals.

The marital status of the respondents included in the study. 84 percent are single, 16 percent are married. This indicates that the majority of individuals engaged in this work in the sample are unmarried. The higher proportion of sample respondents suggests that platform-based gig work is more common among younger individuals who may prefer flexible employment arrangements. In contrast, a smaller proportion of married respondents are involved in platform-based gig work, possibly due to the need for more stable and secure sources of income.

The monthly income distribution of the respondents engaged in gig work. 38 percent earn a monthly income between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000, which represents the largest share of the sample. This indicates that a considerable proportion of platform-based gig workers earn a moderate level of income from platform-based work. In addition, 32 percent earn below ₹10,000 per month, suggesting that a significant number of workers receive relatively low earnings. Meanwhile, 30 percent earn above ₹15,000 per month. The data highlights that income levels among platform-based gig workers vary considerably, reflecting the unstable and demand-dependent nature of gig work. Overall, the table suggests that while some workers earn relatively higher income, many still fall within lower and moderate-income brackets.

The distribution of respondents based on the digital platforms they work with in the gig economy. The majority (52 percent) of the respondents are associated with Swiggy, indicating that food delivery services represent the largest share of gig employment among the respondents. This suggests that platform-based food delivery has become a major source of income for many gig workers. Additionally, 40 percent work with Zomato, while only 8 percent of respondents are associated with Uber. Overall, the data indicates that food delivery platforms dominate the gig economy among the sample respondents, highlighting the growing demand for delivery services and the increasing participation of workers in this sector.

The primary reason respondents chose platform-based work is to earn income while seeking a regular job, accounting for 62 percent of participants. Smaller proportions cited other reasons, including balancing career and family needs means flexible working hours in platform-based work enables individuals to earn income while taking care of household duties, childcare, or other family obligations. (16 percent), relying on gig work as their only source of income (13percent), and earning extra income to supplement their earnings (13%). This indicates that majority of the respondents were engaged in the platform-based work as a temporary or transitional opportunity, flexibility and additional financial support also play significant roles in their decision to participate in the gig economy.

The majority of respondents (86 percent) have been engaging in this type of work for less than one year. This indicates that many workers have recently joined, reflecting the increasing popularity of platform-based employment. On the other hand, 14 percent have been working in the platform-based work for 1–3 years. Overall, the data highlights that the platform-based workforce in the study is relatively new, with most workers having entered the sector in the recent past.

The daily hours that respondents dedicate to work reveals that majority of respondents, (77 percent) spend between 4 - 6 hours per day, representing the largest segment of the sample. Additionally, 12 percent of respondents work more than 6 hours daily, while 11 percent spend less than 4 hours per day.

The respondents' views on whether platform-based work provides flexible working hours. 92 percent of the respondents clearly agree with the flexibility of the job. The findings indicate that majority of the respondents recognize the flexibility associated with work.

The respondents' perceptions of platform-based gig work as a source of good employment opportunities reveal a largely negative outlook. A significant majority, 82 percent, disagreed with the statement, indicating that most participants do not consider platform based gig work to offer satisfactory or stable employment prospects. This suggests that despite its popularity, especially among students and part-time workers, gig work may be perceived more as a supplementary income source rather than a viable long-term career option.

Regarding the respondents' opinion on whether platform-based gig work helps improve skills and work experience, 80 percent disagreed with the statement, indicating that most participants feel this type of work does not significantly enhance their skills. Meanwhile, 20 percent expressed a neutral opinion, reflecting uncertainty or mixed experiences regarding skill development through gig work. Overall, the data suggest that a majority of respondents do not view gig work as a strong opportunity for professional growth, highlighting a limitation of gig employment in terms of skill enhancement.

Regarding respondents' opinions on whether platform-based gig work helps maintain a work-life balance, 70 percent responded affirmatively, while the remaining 30 percent disagreed. This suggests that a majority of respondents perceive platform-based gig work as flexible enough to support a balance between work and personal life, although a notable minority do not share this view, indicating some variation in experiences.

A majority of respondents (66percent) reported facing difficulties in their gig work, including limited time for delivery, work pressure, or lack of support, while 34 percent indicated that they do not encounter such challenges. This suggests that while gig work offers flexibility, a significant proportion of workers still experience stress related to workload and platform expectations.

The respondents' opinion on whether platform-based gig work will be increased in the future. The majority of the respondents (78 percent) agree that this type of work will grow in the coming years. 12 percent expressed a neutral opinion, indicating that respondents are uncertain about this type of work.

A significant majority of respondents (72%) expressed that the government should introduce welfare schemes for platform workers, highlighting the perceived need for social security and support within the gig economy. This indicates that most gig workers recognize the importance of government intervention to provide benefits such as health coverage, insurance, and other welfare measures to improve their work conditions and financial stability. The findings indicate that although a considerable proportion of respondents support the introduction of government welfare measures.

Suggestions to improve condition of gig workers

Measures to be taken for paid sick leave, health access and insurance may be adopted by platforms as a part of their workplace or work- engagement policies for all the workers they engage, round the year. This will have positive implications for offering a social security cover to platform workers engaged by these firms. The govt should offer work accident insurance to workers through digital mechanisms, ride-hailing, delivery and e-

commerce platforms may adopt such a model for providing accident insurance to all delivery and driver partners, and other platform workers across India.

At the same time, platforms should ensure fair and transparent payment systems and consider minimum earning guarantees to reduce income instability. Improving working conditions by regulating working hours and reducing excessive work pressure is also important. Finally, the government should formulate effective policies and regulatory frameworks to safeguard the rights of gig workers and promote fair and sustainable development in the platform-based labour market.

In conclusion, the platform-based gig economy has emerged as an important source of employment, especially for young individuals seeking flexible work opportunities. While platform-based work provides benefits such as flexible working hours and additional income opportunities, it also presents challenges including income uncertainty, lack of social security benefits, and limited job security. The findings of the study highlight the need for appropriate policy measures, improved working conditions, and welfare support for gig workers. Ensuring better regulation and social protection will help in improving the well-being of platform workers and promote the sustainable growth of the gig economy in the future.

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