



AN OVERVIEW OF GIG ECONOMY– ROLES, CONTRIBUTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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Abstract:

"Gig Economy" is the most consequential development in the professional sphere. Being much discussed phenomenon gig economy attracts significant attention and controversy in the world. It is described as use of digital platforms to provide on-demand services, freelance workers on their requests, to elaborate with work arrangements temporarily, perform predetermined fixed term tasks. Emerging rapidly, gig economy deserves to be a subject of employment relations, future work, whether academic analysis is needed. The increasing pressure of corporate life is making this choice more attractive for countless employees globally. Currently innovative digital platforms like Airbnb, Uber are establishing larger, more transparent, and more efficient markets to link freelancers with clients seeking their service. In this paper, we would sketch the emergence of adopting and understanding of 'gig work relation', the indicative questions that needs to be addressed for advancement of future work.

Key words: Gig Economy, Future work, Contributions, Experiences.

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What is Meant by Gig Economy?

If the word "gig" brings in mind jazz musicians, you are correct. While this term has historically been linked to musicians. Gig work represents a modern form of employment. It encompasses independent contractors from various sectors, including:

- Software development
- Content writing
- Graphic designing
- Maintenance crew
- Teaching
- And numerous other fields, with list growing.

In a nutshell, the rapidly evolving project-based economy operating as a free-market system where companies collaborate with freelancers, specialists, independent contractors, temporary workers and part-time staff. These companies can range from small enterprises to larger corporations.

Objectives of the Study:

- To provide detailed information on the features of gig economy.
- To examine the overall contribution of gig economy.
- To compare gig economy jobs with traditional full-time employment in terms of future of work, benefits and work life balance.

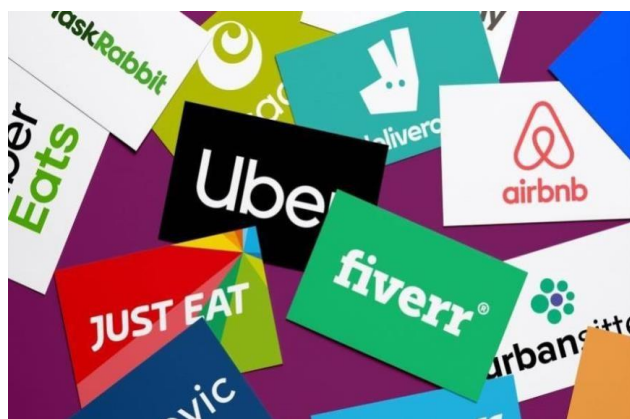
Emergence of Gig Economy:

Working environment across the globe had smash to smithereens and became precarious. Later gig economy emerged as a new way of doing things. The phrase was initially introduced by Tina Brown in 2009, referring to aspects of work that are shared through digital channels, with each task resembling a separate 'gig'- aimed at evoking associations with professional life. Gig economy is the most commonly accepted sobriquet, whereas other interchangeable terms such as "on-demand economy" and "platform economy" are used. However, the interchangeability can lead to difference in conceptualisations of what exactly gig

work avails (James Duggan, 2022).

The gig economy can be described as a free-market framework characterized by temporary positions, short- term jobs, freelance assignments, and similar arrangements. Organisations engage independent workers for brief contracts (Nguyen, 2024).

The gig economy is rapidly expanding in India. The rise of companies such as Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Amazon, and Flipkart has significantly propelled the gig economy forward. The popularity of gig work has steadily risen since businesses started employing individuals on a part time or gig basis. Typically gig workers are discussed in the context of the sharing economy. These roles are facilitated by technology-driven platforms where workers are not bound by a particular employer and can select their working hours at their discretion. In fact, it would not be an overstatement to assert that e-commerce companies in various sectors, from taxi services to food and goods delivery, rely heavily on gig work to achieve success in their business models.



Literature Review:

To gain insights into the characteristics and effects of the gig economy globally, this study has examined existing research in journal articles, newspapers and blog entries at both national and international levels. The Technological Revolution, often referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, has ushered in considerable transformations in the nature of employment. **Djankov and Saliola (2018)** discuss in

their article, indicating that the overall development and distribution of digital infrastructure is enabling an environment where on- demand services can thrive (Saliola, 2018).

In a separate research piece by **De Rutyer and Brown (2019)**, it is noted that the job opportunities present in this economy have minimal entry requirements. The authors discuss the problems and obstacles linked to ‘convention labour markets.’ Gig workers seem to primarily consist of younger individuals who are either in the midst of job searching or pursuing their studies. Consequently, gig employment is generally viewed as a ‘temporary arrangements’ until they can secure more conventional forms of employment (Brown, 2019).

Riley J. (2020) discusses the importance of regulating the gig economy. His research indicates that gig workers should have access to fundamental market protections just like any other employees. Current regulatory efforts primarily focus on protecting consumers and maintaining fair competition. The paper suggests that one possible approach is to implement a system that offers protections akin to those granted to ‘Small Business Workers’ in distinct commercial arrangements (J, 2020).

Roles within the Gig Economy:

Gig model is stated as “heterogeneous model” with broad interests and levels of autonomy (Mackenzie, 2017). It includes a wide range of roles, varying from highly skilled professional to un-skilled labour. Differentiating on these, we identify five types of roles in the platform economy.

The Initial category encompasses the architects and technologists involved in the platforms, which include founders, skilled workers and freelancers (Schor, 2020). These individuals are responsible for creating and maintaining the digital structures of the platforms. The Second category involves consultants or freelancers who offer professional services through platforms like Upwork or Freelancer. Like architects

and technologists, these individuals deliver specialized services, but they function as users instead of being creators of the platforms.

The Third group includes of gig workers whose services are coordinated via platforms and typically carried out in person, such as ride-hailing, food delivery, and caregiving. There exists a strong market for this kind of work, encompassing delivery services, temporary labour, and various odd jobs.

The Fourth category of platform work occurs entirely online and is known as micro-tasking. These workers handle tasks that require human intelligence and cannot be completed by computers. Typically, these jobs demand less training and experience compared to the roles of cloud-based freelancers (Novais, 2022).

A Final category of platform workers operates in the outskirts of social media, encompassing content creators and influencers who are known as aspirational labour (Schor, 2020). This form of platform work is frequently undertaken without compensation, with the expectation of achieving a steady income stream. (Sitko, 2025)

The above figure illustrates a classification of the previously mentioned categories according to skill level and geographical area.

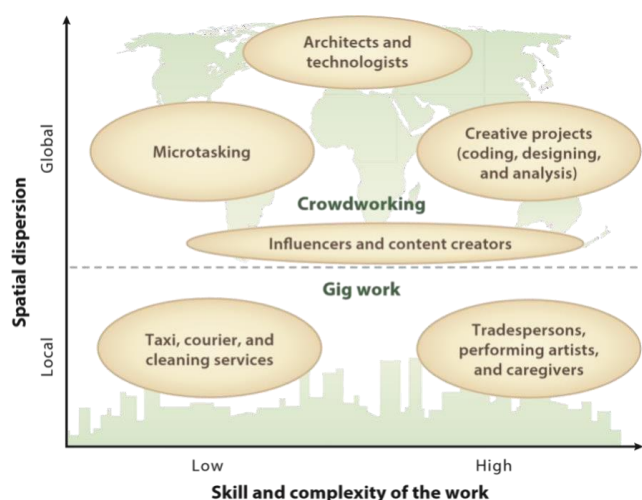


Figure 1: Roles under the gig economy. Figure adapted from (Forde C, 2017).

Major Gig Economy Benefits and Challenges:

To fully capitalize on the benefits of the freelance economy, it is essential to tackle the associated challenges and disruptive effects.

Freelancers enjoy numerous benefits within the gig economy, such as:

- * Increased earnings
- * Flexible work hours
- * Freedom to work from any location

Nevertheless, the freelance economy operates on a contract basis. Unlike traditional full-time positions, independent workers generally do not have access to benefits like healthcare insurance or paid leave. They must seek those benefits individually.

Since a portion of a company's expenses are tied to benefits, employers are able to cut these expenses by hiring independent contractors rather than employing full-time employees. This not only reduces recruitment, hiring, and interviewing expenses but also eliminates the risk of investing heavily in employees who may not ultimately be a good fit for the organization. Employers can tap into a broader range of diverse talent with the necessary skills for specific projects, without concerns about benefits or long-term employment.

One possible solution to the issue of employee benefits is the implementation of new work policies known as "portable benefits." This would entail that companies hiring freelancers must contribute towards the benefits of employees based on the amount of work they complete each month for the organization.

A number of companies have already taken steps to provide benefits to their contract workers. Uber and Lyft are among those offering perks to their drivers. Uber helps with vehicle maintenance costs and provides discounts on phone plans, while Lyft offers savings on fuel, roadside assistance, and telemedicine services.

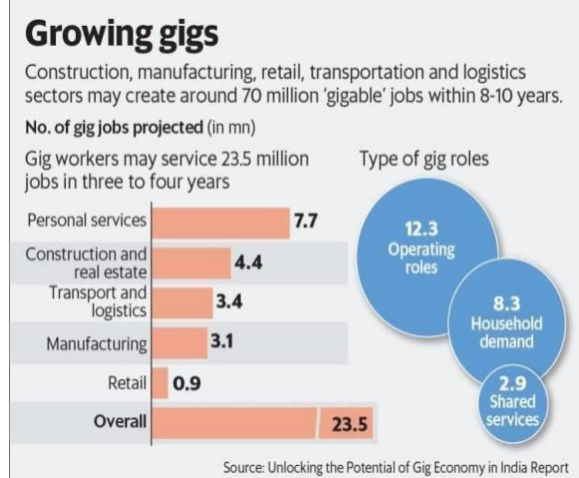


Key Trends (relating to gig economy of India).

- Platforms have scaled most rapidly in fast-growing emerging markets like India, where the pace of urbanisation is supported by substantial informal economies (Surie) and “rising middle-class consumption demands are matched by aspirational class of workers who provide those wide-ranging services (Deshpande, 2022)
- The overall labour participation in the gig economy is higher in emerging economies ranging from 5 to 12 percent in comparison to developed countries varying between 1 to 4 percent (shawl, 2021). The gig workforce is expected to expand to 2.35 crore workers by 2029-30 and gig workers are expected to form 6.7 percent of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1 percent of the total livelihood in India by 2029-30.
- Not only is the workforce participation expected to increase, but the expansion of gig work is also projected to take place across diverse sectors of

India- in transport, retail, sales, insurance and finance, manufacturing, etc (Aayog, 2022). In the last couple years, India has seen massive growth and diversification across delivery, e-commerce, and local ride-hailing platforms, plus platforms emerging in a wider variety of sectors including personal and home (Deshpande, 2022).

- Youth participation (age group of 16 to 23 years) in the gig economy has increased 8-fold between 2019 to 2022 (Verma, 2022).
- Women’s participation in the gig economy is also expected to rise – as per the NITI Aayog, there is an emerging positive trend that suggests women are more likely to take up platform jobs after their education and marriage (Aayog, 2022).
- The platform economy has the potential to create up to 90 million jobs and add up to 1.25 percent to India’s Gross Domestic Product in the long run (Rajah Augustinraj, 2021). As per the NITI Aayog, the concentration of workers in medium skills is gradually declining and that of the low-skilled and high-skilled
- is increasing. It may be expected that while the domination of medium skills would continue till 2030, gig work with other skills would emerge.



**Figure 2: Unlocking the potential of Gig Economy
(Rajah Augustinraj, 2021).**



Projected Gross Volume of the Gig Economy

The Gig Economy is projected to grow to **\$455 B by year-end 2023** in Gross Volume Transactions.

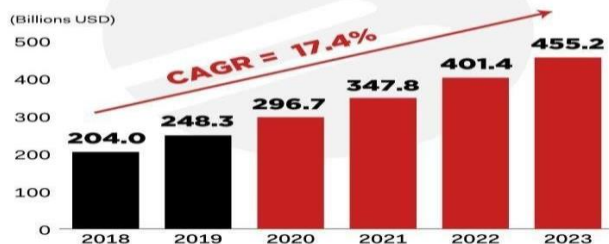


Figure 3: Gig Economy: A new trend in Employment- Nasscom.

Findings:

Key characteristics of gig work include autonomy and flexibility. Gig workers can choose the kinds of tasks they wish to undertake, as well as when and where to perform them, how much work they want to take on, and the method by which tasks are completed. Demonstrating the flexibility linked to gig work, there is usually no fixed salary that companies pay to these workers. Instead, they earn income as independent contractors for each individual 'gig' they fulfill.

Although the perceived benefits of flexibility and independence are considerable, the circumstances are not entirely favorable. In contrast to traditional employees, a major contentious point about gig work is that companies do not provide any social security benefits to gig workers. The lack of financial stability and security is a significant concern for individuals involved in gig work. Additionally, surveys have uncovered a paradox regarding the 'flexibility' of gig work. Life for gig workers on ride-hailing platforms can be very demanding. Many are compelled to work exceedingly long hours to make a living. Proponents of gig work seem to have overlooked the mental strain linked to such intense working conditions.

Lastly, the regulation of the gig economy is a topic of continual discussion in academic forums. The gig

economy is mainly regulated by the free market principles of supply and demand. While supporters of gig work claim this method will lead to ongoing growth, critics warn that a lack of regulation could result in the possible exploitation of gig workers.

Conclusion:

A gig economy can be simply defined as a setting where businesses hire independent workers for temporary roles. Gig workers bring a wealth of expertise, which helps save time. However, a challenge for companies arises when gig workers are located in different countries or cities, as coordination and team rapport become difficult. Organizations are increasingly willing to engage gig workers for various roles, such as government relations, senior leadership when expanding into new areas, product development, tech research and development, and even communications. With the rise of the gig economy, India has the potential to emerge as the leading freelancing and crowdsourcing hub in Asia and even on a global scale. Today, perspectives have shifted, with an increasing number of individuals believing that a perfect job should not interfere with their ability to manage their own time, pursue personal goals, or foster self-growth.

Companies must adapt and develop strategies to address current challenges, and governments must establish a new framework for labour relations. The emergence of platform-based models like Uber and Airbnb has caused concerns. Globally, governments are trying to understand the dimensions, scale, and gaps related to the gig economy, especially in light of ongoing union efforts and protests advocating for regularization or additional benefits similar to those of traditional employees. Gig workers enjoy flexibility but lack paid sick leave, vacation time, and retirement benefits.

The reality is that full-time employees typically receive statutory benefits like provident fund, gratuity, and

bonuses, while gig workers do not enjoy these advantages. Currently, there are no regulations in India to safeguard freelancers, making the contract they sign their most crucial document. Key aspects that should be carefully balanced and included in the contract are:

- * A non-compete clause
- * Intellectual property rights and ownership
- * Duration of the contract
- * Expected deliverables
- * Payment terms – including whether an advance is required and the payment schedule.

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