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Gig Workers towards Work Engagement

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Abstract

The gig economy has created a huge change in the global workforce. It has become a strong alternative to traditional ways of working. This economy is mostly made up of temporary and flexible work arrangements that are made possible by digital platforms. It includes a wide range of jobs, such as food delivery partners, ride-hailing drivers, independent consultants, software engineers, and creative professionals. The gig economy is booming in India at a rate that has never been seen before. According to a report by NITI Aayog (2022), there were 7.7 million workers in the country in 2020–2021. Estimates say that number will climb to 23.5 million by 2029–2030. This growth is mostly due to the rapid adoption of new technologies, changing work preferences, and the growing need for flexible, on-demand services. The gig economy is a big part of the growth of creative marketplaces and the economy right now. The gig economy is a big element of how new industries grow. New industries and a lot of gig workers with varied skills can lead to new ideas, more jobs, and more economic growth. In the meanwhile, the technologies.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Job Engagement, Technology.

Introduction

The gig economy has become a big element of the current job market because of globalization, shifting professional ambitions, and new technologies. Gig workers, who are frequently freelancers, independent contractors, or professionals who work on platforms, don't have traditional long-term jobs. Instead, they work on short-term, project-based tasks. This strategy gives employees freedom and flexibility, but it also makes it harder to keep them interested in their work. For businesses, lawmakers,

and platform providers that want to make sure that gig workers are productive and that the workplace is stable over time, it is important to understand how gig workers interact with one other.

The economy has become a big part of the job market because of new technologies, globalization, and changing professional goals. Gig workers, who are often freelancers, independent contractors, or professionals who work on platforms, don't have traditional long-term jobs. Instead, they do short-term, project-based work. This paradigm gives people freedom and flexibility, but it also makes it harder to keep them engaged in their work. Organizations, legislators, and platform providers need to understand how gig workers interact with each other in order to keep productivity high and the long-term success of this changing work environment.

In today's interconnected and technology-driven world, the **gig economy** has emerged as a powerful alternative to traditional employment models. Unlike conventional jobs that emphasize long-term stability, the gig economy is defined by **short-term, flexible, and often digital platform-mediated work arrangements**. From food delivery partners and ride-hailing drivers to independent consultants, software developers, and creative professionals, gig workers represent a vast and diverse global workforce.

The gig economy has changed a lot in India, where it has risen faster than anywhere else. A NITI Aayog Report from 2022 says that India has over 7.7 million gig workers in 2020–2021. By 2029–2030, this number is expected to rise to 23.5 million. There are a number of things that are making this growth happen, such as the fast adoption of new technologies, changing work preferences, globalization, and the growing need for flexible, on-demand services.

This economy is not only creating jobs, but it is also changing the way labor markets work by encouraging innovation, productivity, and growth. It is very important for creating creative markets and for starting new businesses. The gig economy holds potential, although it presents significant issues regarding wage stability, social safety, skill development, and, most importantly, worker engagement.

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Comprehending Work in the Gig Context

The psychological notion of work engagement has been thoroughly examined in the field of organizational behavior. Schaufeli et al. (2002) categorized engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.”

- **Vigor:** Being full of energy and able to deal with stress at work.
- **Dedication:** a strong sense of pride, passion, and excitement about work.
- **Absorption:** When you are very focused and involved in your work, time seems to fly by.

In conventional workplaces, engagement is influenced by leadership styles, corporate culture, and systematic career advancement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). But gig workers don't have a lot of these kinds of institutional support. Instead, their level of engagement is more affected by things like their own motivation, feedback from clients, platform rules, and ratings from peers.

Theories of Work Engagement in the Gig Economy

- **Kahn's Engagement Theory (1990):** Engagement occurs when employees perceive psychological significance, security, and accessibility.

In gig employment, meaning may come from being able to do what you want or from working for your own goals. Safety has to do with fair algorithms, clear pay policies, and not being able to be turned off for no reason.

Availability is contingent upon the physical and emotional stamina of workers, which is frequently compromised by extended working hours or unstable income.

- **The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (2007):** When job resources are greater than job demands, people are more likely to be engaged.

For gig workers, resources include freedom, a diversity of tasks, chances to learn new skills, and helpful communication with clients.

Demands include time pressure, unstable income, and no social security.

Gig employment frequently gives people a lot of freedom, but it also comes with financial instability and emotional exhaustion, which can lead to mixed results in terms of participation.

- **Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985):** When three psychological demands are met—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—engagement goes up.

Gig platforms offer autonomy but frequently neglect to foster relatedness (a sense of belonging) or competence (via training), thereby impacting long-term participation.

- **Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964):** Workers are more engaged when they think things are fair and that they will get something in return.

Gig platforms that encourage loyalty, pay fair commissions, and recognize great achievers get people more involved.

Technological Adoption and the Gig Economy

- **Digital Platforms and App Ecosystems**

Apps like Ola, Uber, Swiggy, and Urban Company make work easier by using GPS monitoring, automatic payment systems, and facilities for talking to each other in real time. These systems make things easier for customers and more efficient for staff, but they also keep an eye on them all the time. The platform routinely keeps track of gig workers' travels, delivery timings, and even their breaks.

- **Management via Algorithms**

Algorithms decide who gets a ride, unlike human supervisors. The amount of money a delivery person makes for each job.

If a freelancer's profile is visible on Fiverr. Algorithms make things more efficient, but their lack of transparency makes people less trusting. Workers often say they don't understand why they get fewer work or lower ratings, which makes them worry about justice and their mental health.

- **AI**

Artificial intelligence is having a bigger and bigger effect on gig work: Dynamic pricing: AI controls Uber's surge pricing. Predicting customer behavior: Delivery platforms employ AI to figure out when demand will be highest.

Detecting fraud: Algorithms mark workers who act strangely.

These techniques make the platform more profitable, but they often don't take into account things like traffic, weather, or health problems, which adds more stress on workers.

- **The Digital Skill Gap**

The digital literacy gap is a big problem in India. Young people in cities rapidly learn how to use gig platforms, while many workers from rural or semi-urban areas have trouble with navigation, app interfaces, or digital financial instruments. This gap influences how involved people are and how much money they can make.

So, adopting new technology can both help and hurt people. It might make things easier to get to, but it can also create inequality and mental tension.

Worker Voices and Lived Experiences

To really understand gig work participation, you have to go beyond theory and look at real-life experiences:

- **Drivers for Ride-hailing Services:** According to a survey by Tandem Research (2021), Ola and Uber drivers in India sometimes work 12 to 14 hours a day to accomplish their financial goals. Drivers said they were physically and mentally tired since their pay was unpredictable, even though they liked having flexible hours.
- **Food Delivery Workers:** Swiggy and Zomato delivery partners said they were proud to be "breadwinners," but they also talked about safety issues, especially when they delivered late at night. A worker from Bengaluru said, "I like picking my shifts, but sometimes the penalties for being late are unfair, especially when the restaurant is late."
- **Freelancers:** People who work on Up work or Fiverr can contact clients all around the world, but their income isn't always steady. Many people say they go through "feast and famine cycles," where they get a lot of work that pays well, but then they have to wait a long time for more work.
- **Women in Gig Work:** Many women who work as freelancers favor remote gig work including teaching, making content, and providing digital services because it lets them balance their home life. But they have problems like pay inequalities between men and women and not being able to get to tech infrastructure easily.
- **Rural Gig Workers:** Many young people in rural areas who work in e-commerce logistics or delivery consider gig work as a way to get a real job. But they have trouble getting training and learning about money, which makes it harder for them to move on in their careers.

These stories show how mixed up gig work can be—workers like having control and opportunities, but they don't like being in a precarious situation and not having protections.

Drivers of Engagement among Gig Workers

Despite challenges, gig workers find value in their roles through certain intrinsic and extrinsic drivers.

- **Autonomy and Flexibility**

One of the biggest appeals of gig work is the freedom to choose when and how to work. For many, this autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation (Wood et al., 2019). Freelancers on platforms like Upwork and Fiverr enjoy control over project selection, while food delivery partners can decide their working hours.

- **Internal Motivation and Purpose**

Gig work is often used to pursue passion projects or as a means to supplement income. For example, many young professionals in India drive for Ola/Uber part-time while building start-ups or pursuing higher education. This sense of purpose sustains engagement.

- **Technological Enablement**

The rise of AI-driven algorithms, digital payment systems, and app-based work platforms enables gig workers to connect with clients efficiently. Technology increases transparency (real-time tracking, customer ratings) and enhances engagement through instant feedback.

- **Task Variety and Creativity**

Gig platforms offer diverse projects across industries, from graphic design and IT solutions to marketing consulting. Task diversity enhances engagement by preventing monotony and encouraging skill growth.

- **Fair Compensation and Recognition**

Research by Hall & Krueger (2018) shows that transparent pay structures and timely payments boost worker trust and commitment. Platforms that provide recognition through badges, performance ratings, or incentives strengthen engagement.

Barriers to Engagement

There are drives, but there are also a lot of problems that make it hard for people to stay involved in the gig economy.

- **Unstable Income**

Gig workers' pay changes because to changes in demand, platform rules, and competition. For instance, food delivery partners might make a lot of money at busy times but not so much during slow times. This financial stress makes it harder for people to be mentally available to engage.

- **Not being Able to Move Up in your Career**

Gig labor doesn't usually offer professional advancement, promotions, or training opportunities like regular jobs do. If this stagnation goes on for too long, it could lead to people losing interest and leaving.

- **No Social Security or Benefits**

Gig workers often don't have health insurance, paid time off, or retirement benefits. The Code on Social Security 2020 in India includes protections for gig workers, but they aren't being fully put into place yet. Not having a safety net makes people less likely to stay involved in the long run.

- **Tiredness and Burnout**

Many gig workers take on more than one gig at a time to reach their financial goals, which might make them physically and emotionally tired. For example, drivers who pick up passengers often work more than 12 hours a day, which puts their health and safety at danger.

- **Algorithmic Management and Not Being in Charge**

Gig platforms employ algorithms to figure out who should do what, how well they did it, and how much they should be paid. Even though they perform well, unclear algorithms make workers not trust each other. Deactivations or punishments without explanation lower engagement and mental safety.

Strategies to Enhance Engagement

- **Platform-Led Initiatives**

- Giving freelancers helpful comments and signing them up for more work.
- Setting reasonable deadlines and expectations.

- **Interventions at the Policy Level**

- Governments requiring platforms to pay into social security.
- Tax breaks for gig workers who learn new skills.
- Adding gig workers to labor laws for minimum wage and workplace safety.

- **Strategies Led by Workers**

- Building communities through unions or digital collectives, like the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers.
- Looking for hybrid career models that combine gig work with part-time or traditional jobs.

- **Policy-Level Interventions**

- Governments mandating **social security contributions** from platforms.
- **Tax benefits** for gig workers upskilling themselves.
- Inclusion of gig workers in **labour codes** for minimum wage and occupational safety.

- **Worker-Led Strategies**

- **Community building** through unions or digital collectives (e.g., Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers).
- Pursuing **hybrid career models**, blending gig work with part-time or traditional employment.

Global Perspectives

- **European Union:** The EU suggested a Directive on Platform Work (2021) that would guarantee gig workers' social rights, make sure they get a minimum income, and make algorithms more transparent.
- **United States:** California's Proposition 22 first called ride-hailing drivers independent contractors, which led to discussions about labor rights and platform flexibility.
- **China:** Rules say that delivery workers must have insurance and a minimum wage on sites like Meituan.
- **India:** The Code on Social Security 2020 recognizes gig workers, but there are still problems with putting it into action.

These comparisons show that although while the gig economy is the same all across the world, the rules and ways to get involved

Platform-Led Strategies to Boost Engagement

- **Transparent Pay Policies:** Platforms should make their commission rules transparent and not change them without warning.
- **Insurance and Safety Nets:** Zomato and Swiggy's experimental health insurance plans provide a good example.
- **Skill Development:** Combining digital literacy with professional training can make people more skilled.
- **Programs that Recognize Workers:** Badges, ratings, and leaderboards can help people feel like they belong.
- **AI Fairness Audits:** Platforms should make sure that algorithms don't unfairly hurt workers.

Policy Interventions

India's Code on Social Security (2020): Says that gig workers and platform workers can get social security benefits. But it has taken a long time to put into action.

- **AI and Automation**

As AI does more and more of the work that people do every day, gig workers need to learn new skills that will help them get jobs that require knowledge and creativity. How platforms use AI to make sure tasks are fairly distributed will determine how people will interact with them in the future.

- **Mixed Career Models**

In the future, there may be mixed work models, where people do both gig labor and part-time traditional jobs. This gives you freedom while also making sure your money is stable.

- **Digital Unions and Worker Cooperatives**

Gig workers all around the world are trying out digital unions and cooperatives, like the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers. These groups can make it easier to negotiate and get involved.

- **Models for Long-Term Engagement**

Future engagement frameworks might include:

- Rewards for reaching goals in a game-like way.
- Programs for health and wellness, include applications for mental health and rules about getting enough sleep.
- Making decisions that include everyone, so that workers may help make platform rules.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although gig labor has garnered academic attention, numerous significant domains remain insufficiently examined:

- **Sustainability of Engagement:** The majority of studies concentrate on short-term motivation. There is a need for research on how involvement persists throughout 5–10 years of gig employment, particularly as workers age.
- **Gender and Inclusion:** How do women, people with disabilities, and older workers interact with gig labor in diverse ways? Can platforms make features that work for everyone, such voice-based navigation for blind people and safety rules for women delivery partners?
- **Participation in Rural and Semi-Urban Areas:** Gig employment in India isn't just for big cities. It's important to know how rural teens use platforms and what problems they confront that are different from those of other teens.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Gig platforms, like deliveries and ride-hailing, have expenses for the environment (such fuel emissions and traffic jams in cities). Future research ought to investigate the impact of sustainable practices (such as electric vehicle uptake and eco-friendly delivery options) on employee engagement and well-being.
- **Mental Health and Well-Being:** Stress, burnout, and loneliness are common problems. There is an urgent need for research into digital mental health tools, peer support systems, and access to counselling.
- **Comparative Global Perspectives:** Cross-national research are necessary to analyze the disparities in engagement between regulated environments (EU) and less regulated markets (India, SE Asia).

- **AI Ethics and Governance:** As AI becomes more important for managing gigs, research should look into moral guidelines for making algorithms fair and clear.

Conclusion

The gig economy has changed the way we think about work in the future. Its rapid rise, driven by digital technology, globalization, and changing worker goals, has produced a huge number of opportunities. But it also brings up big problems with unstable revenue, algorithmic control, a lack of social safety, and job threats.

In this changing field, work engagement is based on a careful balance of freedom, justice, acknowledgment, and safety. To make sure that things last:

- Platforms must put fairness, openness, and skill-building first.
- Clients should build respectful, helpful relationships.
- Governments must protect people's rights while allowing for flexibility.
- Workers must work on their own growth and work together.

If all of these different groups work together, the gig economy might become not only an alternative but also a long-lasting and fair way to work that balances the best of freedom and safety.

The gig economy is not just a passing trend in the world of work; it is a fundamental change in what work means. If taken care of properly, it can grow into a sustainable and inclusive paradigm that encourages creativity, dignity, and human flourishing in the digital era.

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