

Gig Economy and Wage Precarity in India: A Comparative Case Analysis of Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola

Krithav Agrawal

Abstract: *The gig economy has developed from earlier forms of temporary and task-based labour into a digitally mediated system over the years. In India, the growth of food delivery and ride-hailing platforms has created new earning opportunities, followed by retail, finance, manufacturing, and education. The increasing number of smartphone users and the availability of easy internet access spread the demands of gig-works even more. These platforms have created new earning opportunities while also changing the relationship between flexibility and economic security. Acknowledging the complicated relationship between platform-based work and economic protection, this study examines wage precarity in platform work through a case analysis of Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola. Using secondary data from NITI Aayog, International Labour Organization publications, company reports, legislation, and existing academic research, this paper builds themes including earnings, incentives, worker-borne costs, algorithmic management, flexibility, and social protection.*

The findings indicate that platform workers benefit from greater control over their working schedules, so gaining flexibility. However, their earnings remain dependent on task availability, demand conditions, and platform payment systems. On top of that, they also have to pay for resource, maintenance, and connectivity costs from the gross earnings, which ultimately leaves lesser income. Additionally, algorithmic systems influence task allocation and access to incentives. The comparison also indicates a gap between the flexibility offered by platforms and the level of economic security available to workers. The study concludes that the sustainability of India's platform economy requires stronger social protection and greater transparency in platform-based payment and management systems

Keywords: *Gig economy, platform work, wage precarity, algorithmic management, economic security, social protection, Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, India*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Historical Development of the Gig Economy and Platform Work

The term “gig” was first introduced within popular music culture nearly a century ago as musicians' slang for a date or engagement. The authors disclose that musicians originally used the word to refer specifically to a single, temporary live performance [1]. Today, the gig economy refers to the labor market of short-term, task-based, and flexible work that is mediated digitally and is far different from traditional long-term employment. However, it has a long history from ancient times, when spot labor markets required workers to wait at a fixed location for temporary day-to-day jobs, and women did piece-rate work from their homes and sold products to merchants. However, the expression of “gig economy”, with its current meaning, emerged much later than the late 20th century. In 2009, journalist and editor Tina Brown wrote an article for The Daily Beast, with the title “The Gig Economy”. She used this term to describe a labor market in which people increasingly combined freelance projects, consultancies, and part-time activities to sustain a source of income rather than relying on a single conventional job [2].

The major transformation occurred with the development of digital platforms. Historically, the internet-based gig world began with the launch of Craigslist in 1995, which provided information on local services and gigs and let workers connect [3]. Afterward, the successful expansion of gig work started with the help of freelance marketplaces, such as Elance, now known as Upwork, to connect remote freelance workers with global clients. Additionally, several web platforms also began formalizing demand-driven task-based matching by connecting freelancers with short-term gigs. The International Labor Organization (ILO) addresses the growing economic value of this contemporary working medium and identifies online and location-based platforms [4]. In the former, tasks are completed remotely by temporary workers, whereas in the latter, workers perform work from the exact location. This distinction and variations of work change the way labor demand and supply are coordinated, especially because digital applications are integrated in addition to traditional employment agencies and other intermediaries. So, to understand the gig economy, it is necessary to understand the longer history associated with temporary work rather than addressing it as a completely new form of economy.

The economic significance of these digital platforms represents a new medium to coordinate demand, allocate tasks, and find customers at the same time. By replacing traditional employer-employee relationships with algorithmic task allocation, platform firms dramatically reduce transaction costs for both service providers and consumers. Unlike traditional temporary arrangements, digital intermediaries exert centralized control over price discovery, task distribution, and performance metrics, so capitalism operates through the platform system. While it allows smooth coordination with workers, research has identified that this platform model introduces significant drawbacks for workers, especially for those who are in location-based gigs. These platforms force workers to pay for their own expenses and vehicles, closely track them using automated systems while promising “flexibility”, provide zero payment for time spent waiting between tasks, and also neglect to provide basic job benefits or union rights [2]. So, while gig workers might be associated with greater flexibility to decide when to work, the disruption to workload, earnings, access to work, and performance evaluation remains questionable when identifying the potential of the gig economy.

B. Rise of Platform Work in India

Along with the development of digital infrastructure, increasing smartphone users, and app-based services, India's platform economy has also developed. Researchers note that widespread access to affordable internet, digital technology, and smartphones, along with urbanization, supports the expansion of the gig and platform economy in India [5]. In the country, gig work and platform-based services have subsequently expanded across different sectors. It involves transportation, delivery, manufacturing, retail, and many more consumer services that create new forms of work organized through digital platforms [Fig 1]

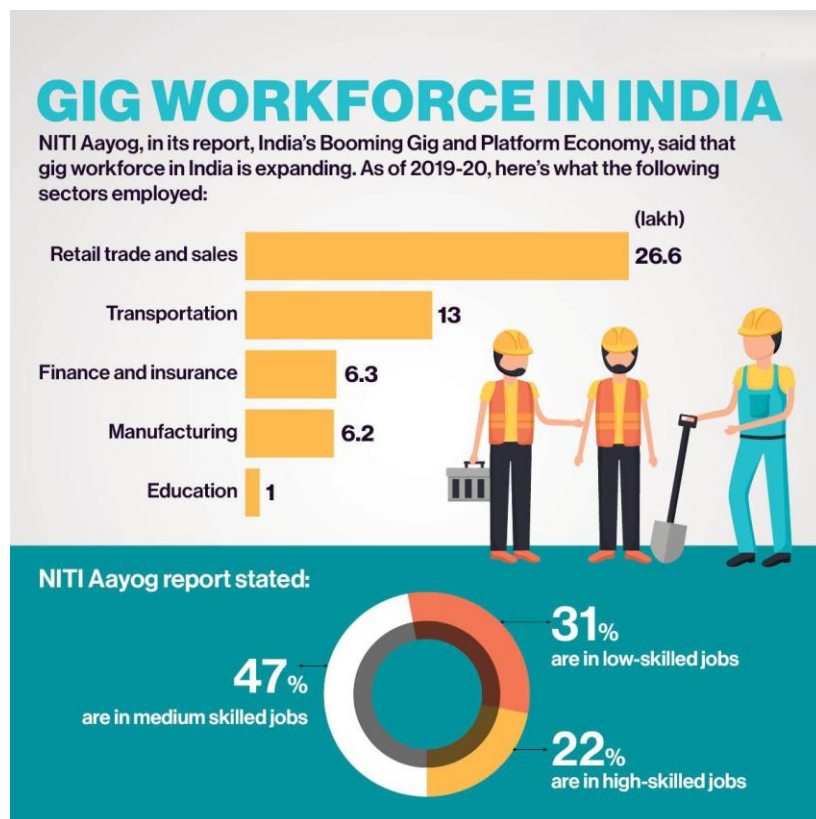


Fig 1: Different Types of Gig Work in India

Source: [6]

The increasing adoption of gig work has a significant impact on the Indian labor market as well. As reported by NITI Aayog, in 2020–21, an estimated 7.7 million individuals were working in gig jobs, making up 1.5% of India's total workforce and 2.6% of non-agricultural jobs [7]. The report acknowledges the importance of smartphone adoption, low-cost internet, and digital platforms, and suggests that platform-based jobs in the gig work sector are projected to triple to nearly 23.5 million workers by 2029-30, and gig workers will account for almost 6.7% of all non-agricultural employment. This sector is mostly influenced by retail sales and transportation, followed by manufacturing and financial services. Additionally, the low entry barriers and vital earning opportunities within the sector allow women, youth, or others with disabilities to seek earnings.

Platform-based jobs started in the early 2010s in India, and gig work, especially location-based or geographically tethered jobs, started to outnumber remote-based work. The reason behind this is the growth in

rapid delivery, ride-hailing, and e-commerce logistics jobs in the country, which require only a minimal amount of technology-based knowledge and education to enter the sector. The transportation sector introduced companies like Ola and Uber between 2010 and 2013, followed by food delivery apps, including Zomato and Swiggy, from 2014 to 2015 [8]. They introduced smartphone-mediated job roles, where semi-skilled workers can easily connect with customers within their potential location and earn by completing the task, and earning money would directly be deposited into their bank accounts. Such accessibility and low barriers to entry of platform work have contributed to its growth as a source of employment. Additionally, gig work on these platforms is spread across low, medium, and high-skilled occupations, making skills and education also an important factor that allows different individuals to be involved.

C. The Problem of Wage Precarity

The economic attraction of platform work is commendable due to its potential to offer gig-based jobs or task-based warnings to individuals without formal training or steady white-collar jobs. However, its impact should be considered alongside the stability of workers' earnings. While these job roles offer flexibility, it does not necessarily produce predictable income. Different factors influence earnings. Workers rely entirely on the volume of incoming orders or gig requests routed to them, so low-task density and odd-peak hours directly affect their income. External market fluctuations, such as seasonal variations, weather events, consumer purchasing power, and local market saturation, lead to unpredictable work [9]. Also, unlike fixed, traditional salaried employment, here, compensation is tied exclusively to active task completion rather than total time logged on the application. Besides these external factors, internal factors, such as the price model and framework the app uses, also affect the gig workers' income [10]. Hence, many researchers have identified income insecurity, limited access to social protection, and weaknesses in working conditions as important issues associated with digital labor platforms and gig work [11].

A further issue arises from the costs associated with performing platform work. In conventional employment, many costs of production are borne by the employer. Location-based platform work can distribute some of these costs differently [10]. Even the ILO has identified the transfer of responsibility for capital assets and operating costs towards workers as one of the features associated with platform work [4]. Especially for drivers and delivery workers, the economic return from platform work should be considered alongside the resources required to perform the work, as they have to pay a portion to the platforms from the amount which is shown in the app.

Algorithmic management adds another dimension to wage precarity. Digital platforms use algorithmic systems to organize aspects of work and manage interactions between workers, customers, and the platform. By deploying automated systems to monitor performance, direct tasks, evaluate outputs, and restrict worker autonomy, digital platforms hold structural control over labor while governing interactions among workers, customers, and the platform [12]. This highlights how the economic position of a platform worker depends not only on the number of tasks completed but also on the rules through which tasks and earnings are organized. Hence, the issue is not whether platform workers receive income from their work. Rather, the economic question is how stable that income is, what costs workers need to pay for generating income, and how much control or flexibility they actually receive from the platforms.

D. Research Aim, Objectives, and Question

The primary aim of this study is to examine the relationship between platform-based work and wage precarity in India's gig economy, with special attention to real-life cases like Ola, Zomato, and Swiggy. To achieve the aim, the study builds upon these objectives:

- To examine the factors influencing the stability of platform workers' earnings,
- To assess the role of incentives, worker-borne costs, and algorithmic management in shaping economic insecurity,
- To evaluate the extent to which India's social protection framework addresses the risks associated with platform work.
- To compare Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola in terms of their platform-based work arrangements and the economic risks faced by their workers.

The central research question that would guide the study is: "To what extent does platform-based work in India provide flexibility at the expense of workers' wages and economic security?" Along with the primary research question, the study also addresses four related questions:

- How does platform-based work affect the stability of workers' earnings in India?
- How do worker-borne costs and platform payment systems influence the effective earnings of gig workers?
- How do algorithmic management and limited social protection affect the economic security of platform workers in India?

E. Research Methodology

The study examines wage precarity within India's platform economy through a comparative case study of Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola. The analysis focuses on earnings, incentive structures, income volatility, worker-borne costs, algorithmic management, and the complicated relationship between flexibility and economic security. The comparison among the real-life cases is intended to examine how different platform business models shape the economic risks experienced by workers. The paper is not based on determining which platform is better or offers a higher level of earnings.

For the data selection, the paper chooses secondary data. The principal sources include NITI Aayog's research on India's gig and platform economy, company reports and corporate disclosures, labor legislation, International Labor Organization publications, and existing academic papers and open-source data. However, it should be acknowledged that the paper used multiple available sources, since estimates of India's gig workforce differ according to data sources, which is also acknowledged by NITI Aayog.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Gig Economy, Platform Labor and Employment Relations

Researchers on the gig economy and platform-based work describe it as a shift from white-collar, salary-based, fixed jobs to blue-collar freelance work, which offers greater flexibility but complicates things in its own way. Digital platforms mediate between workers, consumers, and businesses while retaining control over the work process [13]. It has complicated the conventional distinction between a white-collar employee and blue-collar independent workers or contractors. In this regard, researchers refer to the contractual workers as dependent, since they have to remain economically dependent on a platform for access to customers and income, even while operating as independent service providers [14]. Researchers also agree that platform labor creates new forms of dependence because platforms combine market intermediation with mechanisms of control, making independent workers comply with the platforms' protocols while still working independently [15]. While the employment relationship is less visible than in traditional workplaces, in reality, platforms continue to influence important aspects of workers' activities by imposing control over several factors.

In the Indian case, this is more prominent. Food delivery platforms like Zomato and Swiggy label workers as "delivery partners" rather than employees. This contractual difference shifts contractual workers away from traditional employer-employee relationships and frees platforms from legal liabilities, statutory labor protections, and social security obligations [16]. However, the authors explicitly suggest that, despite the failure to provide protection and responsibilities, these platforms maintain deep, systemic control over work conditions through algorithmic management, ratings, feedback mechanisms, and price-rate compensation structures. This suggests that the central issue of the gig world or platforms-based work is not simply whether workers are formally classified as employees. It is overcomplicated, involving how economic dependence, managerial control, and employment protection interact within platform work

B. Wage Precarity, Income Volatility and Worker-Borne Costs

Researchers have shared serious concerns regarding the wage precarity of platform work. In traditional white-collar jobs, employees receive a fixed salary established over a defined period. However, in a platform setting, Earning is connected to completed tasks, demand, and platform payment systems. This creates the possibility of considerable variation in income across working periods. For example, in India, food delivery platforms offer low wages, limited welfare protection, and unstable working conditions [16]. Due to this limitation in income generation, the platform workers also need to work for longer periods or stay available for extra time with the expectation of getting a new order.

Additionally, many researchers have pointed out that workers in location-based platform services often bear costs associated with the resources, such as fuel, bike maintenance, data, and other maintenance charges required to perform the work [17]. The workers have to pay the amount from their own earnings, resulting in reduced available income after completing several tasks. This suggests that the nominal platform earnings provide an incomplete measure of workers' economic position, as the additional costs must be incorporated when evaluating the economic sustainability of gig work. From evaluating gig workers in Kerala, research found that gig workers are paid less than traditional permanent employees, leading gig workers to frequently indulge in multiple roles just to meet their earning needs [18].

Understanding the difference between traditional salary-based employees and task-based workers is important to conduct an economic analysis of wage precarity. The amount that is displayed on the platforms is not necessarily the full amount obtained by the workers, as they also have to pay for maintenance, resources, and platform fees from that amount. So, in this sector, wage precarity involves both uncertainty over the amount of income generated and uncertainty over the amount retained after work-related expenditure. Therefore, to analyze earnings on this platform, it is necessary to also consider working time and demand conditions to complete the measure of worker income.

C. Algorithmic Management, Flexibility and Social Protection

The platforms significantly maintain control over the contractual workers, highlighting the concern regarding the changing balance between worker autonomy and platform control. While algorithmic management refers to the use of digital systems to organize, monitor and evaluate workers, in reality, it is used to watch over workers' movements and exert control from the beginning. Recent researchers have mentioned that for platform work, algorithmic management operates as a form of "digital taylorism" by using automated data-driven systems to assign tasks, evaluate performance, and enforce discipline without direct human supervision or manual check-in [19]. The researchers have also found that by replacing traditional managerial roles with opaque, automated controls, these platform systems systematically erode worker autonomy and bargaining power, imposing strict algorithmic oversight onto India's predominantly informal labor market.

Such systems impose a highlighter negative side of flexible work and also the idea of flexibility itself. Platform work offers workers greater discretion over when they participate. Research on platform precarity also connects this tension with inadequate welfare and social protection. On top of that, many researchers have also commented on the lack of social protection for them, highlighting how platforms shift operational and health risks entirely onto self-employed workers, and also exclude them from standard labor laws and benefits [20]. Acknowledging this, other researchers also have positioned flexibility as a complex currency traded within a policy dilemma in gig works. Time-based flexibility is a primary intangible benefit within the Occupational Welfare (OW), but in reality, workers are perceived as having control over their schedules, work hours, and immediate task selection as a direct substitute for monetary welfare benefits [20]. From this discussion, it can be suggested that except for the timeline, gig workers have almost no independence over their work, as algorithmic systems influence the conditions under which work becomes available and economically worthwhile.

D. Research Gap

While these previous studies have examined labor work through different aspects, including employment relations, wage precarity, worker costs, algorithmic management, and social protection, their discussion remains fragmented. The reason behind this is the use of singular or less connected factors to examine the research context. Also, the Indian based research is mainly inclusive of the food delivery sector, rather than inclusive of other industries where these dimensions would have different results. This creates a gap in highlighting how economic risk is distributed across different forms of location-based platform work in India. This paper aims to address this gap through a comparative analysis of Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola, linking earnings and worker-borne costs with the dimensions different researchers have discussed.

III. PLATFORM WORK AND WAGE PRECARIETY IN INDIA

A. Growth and Economic Structure of Platform Work

Addressing the growing popularity and demand of platform-based work or gig work, NITI Aayog estimated 7.7 million gig workers in 2020-21 and projected this to reach 23.5 million by 2029-30 [7]. The report also explicitly categorized location-based services, especially ride-hailing and food delivery, as having the most significant share within the platform-based workforce. This expansion is supported by real-time matching between labor supply and consumer demand, allowing platforms to coordinate large numbers of workers through digital applications.

Among these, Ola, Swiggy, and Zomato are the top platforms, providing significant platform-based work across different urban cities of the country. Ola operates primarily as a mobility platform connecting passengers with driver-partners, while Swiggy and Zomato organize food-delivery services through delivery-partner networks. Started in 2010, Ola operated with over 1.5 million driver-partners, providing mobility services across more than 250 cities, illustrating the scale of platform-mediated passenger mobility [21]. The company supports multiple vehicle options, including cabs, auto-rickshaws, bikes, taxis, and metered taxis. Swiggy expanded its delivery-partner network year-on-year to reach an average monthly active network of over 5,00,000 in 2024-25, representing a growth of 31.3% from the previous financial year [22]. Similarly, Zomato's platform has expanded its delivery network, with the wider Eternet ecosystem reporting more than three million delivery partners benefiting from earning opportunities through Zomato and Blinkit by September 2024 [23]. These platforms' growth over the years highlights the growing demand for platform-based work in India. However, while these platforms explicitly offer location-based gig work, their economic structure and framework differ, depending on how they match workers with individual tasks and offer flexibility.

B. Earnings, Incentives and Income Volatility

The central economic feature that is the same across these platforms is that workers' earnings are connected to completed tasks and the availability of demand. However, in this regard, NITI Aayog reports highlight wage discrepancies due to irregular wages and uncertainty in the availability of both work and income [7]. Unlike a conventional monthly salary, platform earnings fluctuate according to the amount and timing of

work available. Also, reportedly, platform workers are predominantly paid for clearing individual tasks rather than their availability and time spent working. This task-based or pay-per-task structure is used by many researchers to evaluate India's gig working culture. The report notes that platforms unilaterally determine remuneration using rate cards, order-based commissions, and performance incentives, leaving very little for ultimate income [24].

Platform	Full-Time Monthly Pay	Part-Time Monthly Pay	Base Pay/Order	Delivery Type
Swiggy	₹25,000 – ₹40,000	₹12,000 – ₹20,000	₹20 – ₹35	Food delivery
Zomato	₹25,000 – ₹35,000	₹12,000 – ₹18,000	₹25 – ₹35	Food delivery
Blinkit	₹25,000 – ₹35,000	₹12,000 – ₹18,000	₹25 – ₹35	10-min grocery

Fig 2: Income Comparison among Food-delivery Platforms
Source: [26]

This is also clear in the selected case platforms. For example, Swiggy follows a single-app ecosystem designed for utility and quick cross-selling, where a user ordering food can cross over into Instamart or send a parcel via Genie without switching apps. Zomato, on the other hand, is deeply rooted in community reviews, rich food photos, curated collections, and social feeds. Zomato acts as a food exploration tool first and a fulfillment engine second, keeping its quick-commerce experience, i.e., Blinkit, intentionally separate. However, the gig economy model used by platforms like Swiggy and Zomato directly affects the working conditions, income stability, and livelihoods of delivery partners. As reported, the platforms pay a base fee calculated per order, which combines distance traveled and estimated time taken [25]. The average base pay ranges from 20 to 35 rupees per order, and they even reduce base pay for a secondary order when they are assigned two orders from the same nearby restaurants [Fig. 2]. Based on this, on average a full-time delivery partner works for 10 to 12 hours on a daily basis and typically gross ₹800 to ₹1,500 per day, depending on location density, timing, and milestone bonuses. However, this too gets deducted for fuel and operational maintenance, leaving an income between ₹500 and ₹1,000. While the system application provided delivery partners with information on earnings, orders and incentives through its partner application to match them with working demands, it also suggests that the earning opportunities are closely connected to platform-mediated demand.

Ride-hailing aggregators like Ola and Uber attracted drivers by offering substantial earnings, often up to ₹90,000 per month during 2014-15 [27]. It involved high incentive structures, deep discounting, and automated, transparent digital payment tracking, which encouraged many informal workers and rural migrants to invest in vehicles and smartphones. However, as the companies shifted focus toward protecting consumer price habits and market share over driver incomes, they drastically reduced incentives and modified payment policies without transparency. As a result, drivers faced severe financial precariousness and struggled to meet loan repayments for vehicles acquired under initial guarantees, leading them to work overtime. However, despite the lack of transparency, the platforms do not provide any wage protection or a "risk transference" model to avoid legal responsibilities for insurance, healthcare, or operational liabilities by making the drivers independent contractors.

Incentive systems also affect the level and stability of platform earnings. Payments received by workers are not determined only by the number of completed tasks, as incentive payments and demand conditions also influence total earnings [28]. For delivery workers, periods of high order demand can increase the number of available tasks, while weaker demand reduces the number of paid tasks available. Ola drivers face a similar dependence on demand surges, with earnings linked to the number of rides completed. Therefore, although the three platforms operate in different service markets, their earnings structures share a common feature, i.e., depending on the interaction between task availability, completed work, and platform payment mechanisms at the same time.

C. Worker-Borne Costs and Effective Earnings

The income received from platform work does not represent the full economic return to workers because location-based platform work requires workers to bear several operating costs themselves. The ILO identifies the transfer of capital and operating costs towards workers as an important feature of digital labor platforms [4]. For delivery partners and drivers, these costs include fuel, vehicle maintenance, mobile data, and other expenses

associated with remaining available for platform work [29]. This creates a difference between the amount received through the platform and the income retained after work-related expenditure.

However, the effect of these costs differs across different platforms, including Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola. The food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato delivery partners generally depend on motorcycles or other personal vehicles like bicycles to complete food deliveries, making fuel and vehicle maintenance recurring components of their working condition. On the other hand, Ola drivers face different vehicle-related costs because of the longer duration and distance of passenger trips, which produce a different cost structure from the general food delivery platforms. However, one thing is similar in every case, i.e., the expenses are incurred in the process of generating platform income. The economic return from a completed task is therefore lower than the gross amount displayed or transferred through the platform once operating costs are taken into account. Additionally, workers spend time travelling between tasks, waiting for orders or passengers, and remaining available during periods of uncertain demand. Such time does not necessarily generate a separate payment, while vehicle and connectivity expenses continue to accumulate [30]. Addressing this, ILO reported that working time, remuneration and work-related expenses are connected dimensions of working conditions on digital labor platforms [4].

D. Algorithmic Management and Wage Setting

Algorithmic management influences how work is allocated, monitored and rewarded across platform services. The ILO identifies automated systems as an important mechanism through which platforms allocate tasks, monitor performance and manage workers [4]. Delivery partners on Swiggy and Zomato receive tasks through dedicated delivery apps which use smart algorithms to assign orders in real-time [31]. The system uses smart matching through GPS location tracking, speed checking, and distance from nearby restaurants. Delivery workers receive an alert with estimated pay and route details through this app and they are given a certain time limit to decide on accepting the order. Ola operates a two-sided digital marketplace that connects passengers needing rides with independent driver-partners through its mobile application [32]. The company partners with individuals, auto-rickshaw, and bike owners, and uses location tracking and demand-supply algorithms to assign the nearest available driver to a customer. Ratings, location tracking, task allocation, and incentive systems therefore influence workers' access to earning opportunities. While these three platforms operate in different markets, their common reliance on algorithmic systems reduces direct managerial interaction. It should be acknowledged that workers' income is determined not by when they work, but by the conditions under which tasks become available and the payment associated with them.

E. Flexibility versus Economic Security

Platform work provides flexibility because workers have greater discretion over when they log in and accept tasks. However, through this analysis of the real-world cases, it can be suggested that flexibility exists alongside uncertain task availability, variable earnings, and worker-borne costs. The ILO reported that income insecurity and limited social protection are continuing concerns in platform work. Across Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola, workers therefore gain flexibility in their working schedules, but in reality, they are too dependent on internal and external factors, without receiving the minimum social protection in return.

F. Comparative Analysis of Swiggy, Zomato and Ola

The comparison shows that Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola share a similar economic structure despite operating in different service markets. Swiggy and Zomato workers depend on food-order demand, while Ola drivers depend on passenger demand. However, in every case, earnings are task-based and affected by incentives, demand conditions, and platform-controlled systems. Workers also bear operating costs, particularly fuel, vehicle maintenance, and mobile connectivity, which reduce effective earnings

IV. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC INSECURITY

A. Employment Classification and Platform Workers

The employment status of gig workers creates an important gap in access to conventional employment protections. Swiggy, Zomato and Ola generally operate through contractual arrangements in which workers are treated as delivery partners or driver-partners rather than conventional employees. This affects access to basic social protection that is required in standard employee arrangements and affects their access to statutory benefits and social security

B. Social Security Framework and Code on Social Security, 2020

The Code on Social Security, 2020 marks a major policy shift in Indian labor legislation by granting formal legal recognition to unorganized, gig, and platform workers. It mandates their portal-based registration through portals like e-Shram and empowers the government to establish comprehensive welfare schemes for them [33]. The

benefits would include life, disability, and health coverage, accident insurance, maternity benefits, and old-age security

C. The Social Protection Gap and Distribution of Economic Risk

Despite this legal recognition, protection still remains weaker than that available to conventional employees. Platform workers continue to bear major risks related to fluctuating income, work-related expenses, accidents, and periods without sufficient demand, which is also addressed by the ILO. Therefore, across Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola, part of the economic risk associated with generating income is transferred from the platform to the individual worker. It highlights a significant gap in social protection and distribution of economic risk for gig workers, compared to conventional employment.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Discussion of Findings

The findings show that platform work provides flexibility through control over working schedules, but this flexibility is limited, as the workers need to be dependent on the platforms, along with external influences like work demands to generate income. Across Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola, workers depend on the availability of orders or rides, while fuel, vehicle maintenance, and connectivity reduce the income retained from platform work. Algorithmic management further influences access to tasks and incentives. These findings indicate that flexibility does not remove economic insecurity; instead, it is accompanied by income insecurity and limited social protection for workers.

B. Economic Implications of Platform-Based Work

Platform work provides accessible income opportunities and supports the expansion of urban service markets of India. However, unstable earnings and limited social protection increase workers' exposure to economic shocks. Even the operating costs or resources and low demand are also borne by the workers. The analysis highlights that the economic risk of providing gig services is distributed unevenly not only within India, but extended to other countries. The case analysis illustrates a tension between the efficiency of platform-based labor coordination and the economic security of those providing the labor.

VI. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that India's platform economy needs a stronger balance between flexibility and economic security. Addressing the Code on Social Security, 2020, the platforms should extend social protection beyond formal recognition of gig and platform workers to provide practical coverage for accidents, health, income-related risks, and old-age security. Additionally, platform companies need to provide greater transparency across their payment structures, incentives, and algorithmic decisions that affect access to work. Combined, these would reduce economic risk and keep a balance within platform-based work.

The present study evaluates Swiggy, Zomato, and Ola to show that platform work creates accessible earning opportunities and greater scheduling flexibility in India's labor market. However, this flexibility is superficial, as it exists alongside income volatility, worker-borne costs, and limited social protection, as well as the company's control over the workers through algorithms. The case analysis and discussion of existing researchers highlight that flexibility in gig work does not mean it provides economic security. A sustainable platform economy requires greater protection of workers while retaining the flexibility that makes platform work attractive.

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