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GIG ECONOMY DYNAMICS: ASSESSING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY CONTEMPORARY GIG WORKERS IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The study looks at the opportunities and difficulties gig workers face in the fast-paced gig economy of today. Globally, the number of gig workers has increased as professionals look for flexibility, independence, and a variety of revenue sources. The report examines the main advantages that gig workers have, such as the flexibility to customize their work schedules, access to a worldwide clientele, and the capacity to operate in a variety of industries. But there are drawbacks to gig labour as well, like inconsistent pay, unstable employment, and restricted access to standard benefits. The study determines the elements that affect gig workers' success, contentment, and long-term viability in this line of employment through surveys and interviews. The results point to important areas where regulations and support systems might increase the viability of gig work, offering strategies to improve gig work in general.

KEYWORDS: *Gig Workers, Gig Economy, Opportunities, Challenges*

INTRODUCTION

Gig work has become a viable career option due to the rise of digital platforms and people's desire for flexibility and autonomy. Companies are embracing virtual teams and flexible work arrangements, creating new opportunities for job seekers. There are remote jobs in a number of industries, including software engineering, digital marketing, customer support, and virtual assistance. Independent contractors with particular abilities like graphic design, content writing, and social media management are in high demand on gig economy platforms. Gig workers, or individuals who make a living outside of the conventional employer-employee relationship, can be broadly divided into two categories: platform-based workers and non-platform-based workers. Workers who rely on digital platforms or online software applications are known as platform workers. Non-platform gig workers are typically part-time or full-time own-account employees and casual pay workers in the traditional industries. According to Niti Ayog, gig workers make up about 1.5 per cent of India's total employment, with 47 per cent in medium-skilled occupations, 22 per cent in high-skilled jobs, and 31 per cent in low-skilled positions. The gig economy in India is expected to increase from an estimated 7.7 million gig workers in 2020–21 to 23.5 million by 2029–30. With 47 per cent in medium-skilled jobs, 22 per cent in high-skilled jobs, and 31 per cent in low-skilled roles, these workers make up about 1.5 per cent of India's overall workforce.

Literature Review

The gig economy has emerged as a significant component of the global labor market, characterized by temporary contracts and freelance work that offer flexibility but also present distinct challenges. The dynamics of this sector are particularly pronounced for skilled women workers, who often find the gig economy a viable alternative to traditional employment due to its adaptability to family responsibilities. A study by A.K.S. (2023) highlights that while skilled women in the gig economy experience greater job satisfaction and engagement compared to those in conventional roles, they also face substantial challenges, including income insecurity, lack of social protection, and privacy concerns.

Moreover, the evolution of the gig economy has been marked by technological advancements that facilitate independent work. The comprehensive analysis by H.S. (2024) delves into the various forms of gig employment and the catalysts driving its growth. It identifies significant challenges, including economic volatility and the lack of legal protections for gig workers, which complicate the employer-employee relationship. In summary, the gig economy presents a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges for contemporary workers, particularly skilled women and older individuals. As the sector continues to evolve, it is imperative for researchers and policymakers to address these dynamics to foster a more equitable and sustainable gig economy. The gig economy

has emerged as a significant aspect of contemporary labor markets, presenting both opportunities and challenges for workers.

Keith et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the engagement of gig workers on platforms like Mechanical Turk, distinguishing between those who rely on gig work as their primary income and those who view it as supplementary. Moreover, the qualitative study by Mohd Salleh et al. (2023) sheds light on the experiences of gig delivery riders in Kota Kinabalu, emphasizing the instability of income and the absence of job security. These workers face significant challenges, including long hours, fatigue, and financial instability due to the unpredictable nature of gig assignments.

Finally, Bricka and Schroeder (2019) further elaborate on the evolving nature of work, emphasizing the importance of work meaning, climate, and work-life balance among gig workers. They contend that the gig economy, while offering opportunities for autonomy and flexibility, also presents challenges related to job satisfaction and personal well-being. Their findings indicate that gig workers often grapple with the tension between the desire for independence and the realities of precarious employment, which can lead to stress and dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, the gig economy presents a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges for contemporary workers. Insights from various studies underscore the importance of context-specific analyses, particularly regarding occupational nuances, gender disparities, and the role of technology in shaping work experiences. Addressing these dynamics is crucial for developing effective policies that support gig workers in achieving sustainable and equitable work conditions.

Research Gap

It is clear from the studies mentioned above that a significant number of studies are done on gig workers and the gig economy. Studies on the opportunities and difficulties faced by gig workers in Kerala have not been conducted. Therefore, the goal of the current study is to examine the factors that lead someone to become a gig worker as well as the challenges that gig workers encounter on the job.

Statement of the Problem

Gig work has become a common employment model in today's modern economy, offering people flexibility and autonomy across a variety of industries. Despite its growing popularity, gig workers face a number of unique opportunities and challenges inherent to their work arrangement; in order to optimize the freelance ecosystem, policymakers, businesses, and gig workers themselves must comprehend these factors. Gig workers face a variety of unique opportunities and challenges related to their work arrangement, despite its growing popularity. To maximize the freelance environment, legislators, companies, and gig workers themselves must comprehend these elements.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the demographic factors and socio-economic profile of gig workers.
2. To assess the opportunities and challenges faced by the freelancer.
3. To analyse determinants to become a gig worker.

Research Methodology

To study the opportunities and difficulties faced by gig workers in Kerala, a descriptive research study has been undertaken by forming a self - constructed questionnaire keeping in mind the objectives of the research which is delivered to the respondents. This study is taken under Ernakulam, Kerala. The study has been under taken during January 2026 to March 2026. A convenience sampling technique has been used to collect respondents for study. A total of 150 gig workers has been considered as sample respondents for the study.

Statistical Tools

The following statistical tools have been used to analyse the primary data collected:

a. Simple Percentage Analysis
b. Friedman Rank Test
c. Chi – Square Test
d. T – Test

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ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Gig Workers

The analysis describes the classification of the respondents under each category. The simple percentage analysis is used for standardization and comparison of data.

Table No. 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

Variables	Categorization	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age	20-24 Years	72	48
	25-30 Years	64	42.67
	31-35 Years	14	9.33
	Total	**150**	**100.00**
Gender	Male	114	76
	Female	36	24
	Total	**150**	**100.00**
Residential Area	Urban	105	70
	Semi-Urban	33	22
	Rural	12	8
	Total	**150**	**100.00**
Marital Status	Married	117	78
	Unmarried	33	22
	Total	**150**	**100.00**
Educational Qualification	SSLC	24	16
	Plus Two	36	24
	UG	36	24
	PG	22	14.67
	Diploma	32	21.33
	Total	**150**	**100.00**
Employment Status	Student	40	26.67
	Self Employed	36	24
	Salaried	22	14.67
	Full Time Gig Worker	52	34.66
	Total	**150**	**100.00**

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation

The aforementioned table indicates that the majority of respondents are younger, with 48 per cent being between the ages of 20 and 24 and 42.67 per cent being between the ages of 25 and 30. Only a small percentage (9.33 per cent) are between the ages of 31 and 35.

There is a notable gender imbalance in the sample, with 76 per cent of respondents being male and only 24 per cent being female. The majority of participants live in urban areas (70 per cent), with the remaining 8 per cent being unmarried. Just 9.33 per cent of people are between the ages of 31 and 35.

Seventy percent of the participants live in urban regions. The remaining members of the group are from semi-urban (22 per cent) and rural (8 per cent) areas. 78 per cent of the respondents are married, while the remaining 22 per cent are single.

The participants' educational backgrounds are rather varied: Full-time gig workers account for the largest percentage of respondents (34.66 per cent), followed by students (26.67 per cent), self-employed people (24 per cent), and salaried people (14.67 per cent).

Additionally, Plus Two and Undergraduate (UG) holders make up the largest segments (24 per cent of the sample), followed by diploma holders (21.33 per cent), SSLC graduates (16 per cent), and Postgraduate (PG) holders (14.67 per cent). 21.33 per cent of people have a diploma. Postgraduate (PG) holders make up the smallest category at 14.67 per cent, while SSLC graduates make up 16 per cent.

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Challenges Faced by Gig Workers – Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics has been used to find the mean scores for the challenges faced by a gig worker. Agreeability level on challenges faced by a gig worker while working is measured by summing up the ratings given by the respondents for statements at five-point scale. The mean ratings have been assigned as 1 for highly dissatisfied, 2 for dissatisfied, 3 for neutral, 4 for satisfied and 5 for highly satisfied.

Table No. 2 - Challenges Faced by Gig Workers

Factors	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Not receiving payment on schedule	150	1	5	2.85	1.099
Having technical difficulties when working	150	1	5	2.58	0.779
Having trouble finding clients	150	1	5	2.10	0.725
Fear of not having a job	150	1	5	2.48	0.888
Overseeing several projects at once	150	1	5	1.62	0.895
Paying taxes for internet employment is ambiguous or difficult.	150	1	5	2.93	0.726
Fulfilling deadlines	150	1	5	2.51	0.925
Juggling work and personal obligations	150	1	5	2.03	0.979
Fulfilling the client's irrational requests	150	1	5	2.01	0.803
Working long hours	150	1	5	2.70	0.966

Source: Primary data

Interpretation

From the above table, it is interpreted that the users have positive agreeability towards the challenges faced towards freelancers that depicts Paying taxes for internet employment is ambiguous or difficult chosen by the respondents has the highest mean score, the mean value is obtained for the factor is 2.93.

T-Test

Table No. 3 - Gender versus Challenges Faced by Gig Workers

Factors	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.	NS/S
Challenges Faced by Gig Workers	Male	23.7475	3.55273	0.568	0.571	NS
	Female	24.1063	3.66673			

Source: Primary data

Interpretation

The challenges faced by gig workers are displayed in the above table, with the highest mean value for female respondents being 24.1063. The t-test reveals a significant value on the attributes that are challenges faced by gig workers and the demographic factor gender is P=0.571. Therefore, the value is greater than the 5% level of significance, and the hypothesis is accepted. There has been a significant difference in satisfaction noted in challenges faced by gig workers when compared with the respondents' gender.

Friedman Test

Table No. 4 - Determinants to Become a Gig Worker - Friedman Test

Determinants	Mean Rank	Rank	Chi-Sq.	f	Sig.
Having the chance to make more money	3.04	1	339.277	7	<.001
Freedom to choose my own timetable	3.13	2			
Enthusiasm for a certain profession or talent	3.29	3			
Allows for the freedom of working from home	3.45	4			
Dissatisfaction with conventional work	5.20	5			
Balance between work and life	5.50	6			
Influence of friends or coworkers who work for themselves	6.07	7			
Provides chances to pursue an additional coursework or a second job at the same time.	6.26	8			

Source: Primary data

Interpretation

The above table shows presents a ranking of determinants that influence individuals' career or work choices, based on their mean scores and statistical significance.

The most important determinant, with the highest mean rank of 3.04 and a significant Chi-square value (<.001), is "Having the chance to make more money," indicating that financial gain is the top priority for respondents. Close behind is "Freedom to choose my own timetable" (mean rank 3.13), highlighting the value placed on flexible scheduling.

Other highly ranked determinants include "Enthusiasm for a certain profession or talent" (3.29) and "Allows for the freedom of working from home" (3.45), emphasizing the importance of personal interest and flexible work environments.

Less influential determinant are "Dissatisfaction with conventional work" (mean rank 5.20) and "Balance between work and life" (5.50), though these still hold significance. The influence of friends or coworkers who work for themselves and opportunities to pursue additional coursework or second jobs are ranked lower, suggesting these are less critical considerations.

Overall, the data indicates that financial opportunity and flexible work arrangements are the primary motivators in career decision-making among respondents, with personal interest and work-life balance also playing notable roles.

SUGGESTIONS

1. The implications of the study are to facilitate more websites and platforms for gig workers to meet clients, focus on creating user-friendly platforms, networking with gig economy communities, ensuring quality control, gathering feedback for continuous improvement, prioritizing security, and fostering a sense of community among users.
2. Encouraging women to participate in gig economy involves creating a supportive environment, providing resources and training, promoting flexibility, addressing gender biases, showcasing successful female gig workers as role models, offering mentorship programs, and highlighting the benefits of gig economy such as work-life balance and autonomy.
3. For successful work as a gig worker, clients can help by providing clear project guidelines, timely feedback, adequate resources, and prompt payment.
4. The last but not least suggestion from this study is to create a legal compliance mechanism and a regulatory body for gig workers to help them be protected from exploitation.

CONCLUSION

The gig economy involves working independently on a contract basis, providing services to clients or companies without being employed by them full-time. It offers flexibility, autonomy, and the ability to work on diverse projects for various clients. In summary, this research explored the factors influencing and challenges faced by gig workers, providing useful information about this dynamic workforce. One of the major challenges faced by gig workers is positive agreeability for paying taxes for internet employment is ambiguous or difficult. The most important determinant is having the chance to make more money, indicating that financial gain is the top priority for gig workers, and freedom to choose my own timetable, highlighting the value placed on flexible scheduling.

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