

The Experiences of Online Food Delivery Workers and the Motive Behind Their Choice, A Qualitative Exploration

^[1] Ramakritinan Swathi Lakshmi*, ^[2] Thiruchelvi Arunachalam

^[1]^[2] Department of Management Studies, Anna University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

Corresponding Author Email: ^[1] rswathilakshmi1991@gmail.com, ^[2] thiruchelvi.y@gmail.com

Abstract— *The developing country like India, where unemployment is a huge issue, the majority of workers depend on the gig economy to make a living. Even if this job structure aids in the reduction of unemployment in a country, it is equally vital to have an opinion on such a structure and its long-term viability from the workers' perspective. The present study examined the experiences of food delivery persons working in the online platform companies like Swiggy and Zomato through the qualitative content analysis method. The researcher used the snowball sampling method to recruit participants. A total of 22 interviews were conducted and the interviewed data were analyzed using MAXQDA-10 software and the results were discussed. The overall experience of the workers clearly indicated that they loved the freedom and the money the job provided.*

Index Terms— *Online food delivery workers, Autonomy, Qualitative approach, Incentives, Working hours.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This decade has seen a distinct fascination for a new marvel, the gig economy is “a platform-based business model”. Taylor et al., (2017) advocated that the gig economy as individuals utilizing applications, also ordinarily known as platforms to sell their labour. At this point, the work is digitally distributed to the workers and the payment is based on the accomplishment of tasks (Goods et al., 2019). This article employs a qualitative approach to analyze the work experience of those working on the food delivery platform like swiggy and zomato in the Indian scenario. Our analysis of platform-based food delivery workers was based on original survey and interviewed data, focuses on those responsible for food delivery on online food delivery platforms. The gig workers, whom we spoke with, told us about their experience as food delivery workers. They were attracted to the position because of the independence, it gave them in relation to other jobs. Many liked the food delivery platforms helped them use their spare time to make money. Following a description of the research methods, the present results describe the experiences of temporary workers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of technology has modified the method of individuals work and additionally has given a rise to a brand-new domain known as the gig economy. There is no one concrete definition for the term gig economy. According to Brinkley, (2016), the term ‘gig economy’ is defined as the arrangement in which a person work independently for a company where the individual and the organization are connected through an internet platform, this could be a mobile application or a website. The widespread insight of digitised, irregular work, or ‘gigs’, encompasses a wide range

of potential functions, industries, and business models (Sundararajan, 2016).

Schmidt (2017) provides a broad categorization of online labourers and divides it into two types such as ‘cloud work’ which incorporates micro-tasking crowd work and ‘content-based creative work’; gig work which includes accommodation, transportation, delivery services, menage services and personal services. Heeks (2017) proposed the cloud work as to where tasks are not given to specific individuals which are further subdivided into variety of tasks, it includes data entry, tagging, interpretation of content and completion of a survey. As given by Agarwal et al., (2013) and Margaryan (2017), ‘Online freelancing’ also includes software development, web development, translation and transcription.

Heeks (2017) postulated that gig work is, where the allotment of the job is digitized but performing the task is tangible and delivered to the customer in a physical location. This type of gig work is called physical ‘gig economy’ or ‘on-demand work’. The gig works may be a driver in ola or uber, delivery person in swiggy or zomato and delivery agent in Flipkart or Amazon. This study emphasizes the experiences of location-based gig workers (swiggy and zomato delivery persons) and their motives to work as an on-demand workers.

Despite the wide range of situations and terminologies, most forms of gig works share a few characteristics. Gig workers schedules are frequently disrupted by fluctuations in demand for their services. Most jobs require the worker to provides some or all of the capital equipment directly related to their employment, ranging from a bicycle for food distribution to more complicated and costly transportation or computing equipment. Many gig employees even have their workspace, whether it is at home, in their car, or somewhere

else. The majority of workers are paid on a piecework basis, with salary determined by individual assignments rather than hours employed (Milkman et al., 2020). Finally, the gig jobs are commonly thought to be organized around some kind of digital mediation, such as a web-based platform (Stewart & Stanford, 2017).

Digital platforms can be classified into several dimensions. The Productivity Commission (2016) specifies three major task-oriented categories such as platforms for matching (which connects workers and end-users, or buyers and sellers), and platforms for analysis and sorting (e.g., by offering referrals and reviews), platforms for directly adding value to a product (by facilitating the performance of incremental online work). Another contrast is suggested between 'labour platforms (which organize the performance of productive task) and 'capital platforms' (which facilitate the sale or rental of assets) (Farrell and Greig, 2016). Even this difference isn't ideal, because many 'capital' platform tasks necessitate the use of productive labour (such as temporary room rentals through Airbnb, which involve cleaning, maintenance and other service functions).

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study is to look at the factors motivating individuals to settle on the gig economy as their career alternative and their experiences working with the online platform companies. The participants were individuals operating as delivery executives of online food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato. The inclusion criteria for participants were: they must be currently working with any of the above-said companies and should have a minimum of 6 months of working experience and readiness to participate in the research. The researcher used the snowball sampling technique to recruit participants. The method used to collect data was an in-depth telephonic interview which lasted for about half an hour to one hour. The telephonic interview technique was chosen because the researcher was not able to locate the participants for the face-to-face interview. The time for the telephonic interview was carefully chosen with the combined arrangement between the researcher and the participants. As the sample size for qualitative studies is not specified clearly, a total of 22 interviews were conducted for the present study. The researcher used both open and semi-structured interviews to get information from the participants. The participants were probed in between by the researcher to induce a lot of details.

The method utilized for analyzing the data is qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). As per Downe-Wamboldt (1992), "the content analysis is the method that provides an organized and unbiased means to make effective inferences from verbal, visual or written data to describe particular phenomena". This method helps to extract data from the words of the participants which is further divided into specific categories and subcategories.

The telephonic conversation was recorded using the bold beast call recorder application made for smartphones. The information was transcribed word by word in the paper for in-depth analysis and also the transcribed data were reviewed again and again for developing a comprehensive understanding of the concept. Subsequently, after open coding, data were compared continuously. MAXQDA 10 Software was used for data analysis. As proposed by Elo & Kyngäs (2008), the data were first reduced to codes, these codes were grouped in such a way they belong to the particular category avoiding the overlapping of observations generating categories.

The recorded interviews were listened, transcribed, read and examined multiple times to get a general picture. Key ideas were sorted and clustered based on their relationships. Independent audits were used for credibility. We, therefore, need a researcher who did not participate in both the process and product of the research analysis for the evaluation of the precision and determine whether or not the evidence confirms the results. Also, the opinions of the experts and consultants regarding codes and categories were taken for the assessment of neutrality and the codes were returned to the participants for examination and confirmation.

Secrecy of information, educated assent for the meet, and the privilege to pull out any place during the investigation were among the ethical contemplations regarded in this exploration.

IV. RESULTS

In this research, 22 food delivery persons (21 male and 1 female) working with Swiggy and Zomato were interviewed. Age was ranged between 21 to 36 years.

a. Educational Qualification

Table 1: Educational qualification of interviewed Gig workers.

S. No	Qualification	Number of Respondents
1.	Higher Secondary (HSC)	1
2.	Diploma	3
3.	Under Graduate (UG)	15
3a.	Professional course	11
3b.	Non-Professional course	4
4.	Post Graduate (PG)	2
5.	Others (Research Scholar)	1

b. Duration of the Job

The respondents included both full-time and part-time workers. The part-time workers did this food delivery job as a side hustle while they had some other job as a major one. Among the respondents, the part-time delivery persons included students, professionals (Software Engineer,

Architect, Design Engineer, Management Executive etc). The main categories retrieved after analysis were motives to work with the food delivery platforms, Experiences of online food delivery persons (Working hours, Recruitment, Training, Employments rights and Welfare, Opportunities in the field and Societal views about the job).

c. Motives to work with the food delivery platform

Every individual has a valid reason to do a job. Likewise, the persons working in the online food delivery platforms do have some motive which encourages them to work here. According to the delivery persons,

"This job is stress-free. There is no boss to look around which provides me a lot of freedom." (All the interviewees)

"My full-time job is as a software engineer. After my 9 to 6 job, I have a lot of free time, instead of wasting my leisure time I am working as a delivery executive. Another reason to work as a delivery executive is to earn money because this is the age to work hard and earn money". (Interviewees 5, 9, 6, 12)

"I am a research scholar pursuing my research in the marketing field. I want to gain knowledge about how the food delivery platform works". (Interviewee 7)

"I wanted to buy a gift for my amma's (mother) birthday, during that time this is the only job which gave a lot of money to buy a gift. So I choose this job. I can get the payment immediately after completing tasks. Then after my mom's birthday, I continued this because I loved the freedom which this job provided". (Interviewee 21)

"One thing which makes me excited to do this job is serving food to people when they are hungry". (Interviewee 11, 19)

From the responses, students and young employees who work as food delivery agent said that they all love to ride a bike and another major factor which motivates these people is the monetary benefits gained from this job.

d. Experiences of online food delivery persons

i. Working hours

After the period of industrialization, the working hours for the labourers were fixed by the general sets of laws. All in all, the representatives work for around 40 hours of the week which can be stretched out as long as 48 hours per week. The development of the gig economy has modified how individuals work. Here the working hours fluctuate from the conventional working way. As demonstrated from the reactions of delivery persons, *"I have a fixed working schedule and these timings can be selected by me. I have the freedom to choose my working time. I have to work for at least 4-5 hours from 8:00 pm to 2.00 am daily at night. Saturdays and Sundays are compulsory working days and I am not allowed to take off. I have a fixed login time."* (Interviewee 1, working as part-time food delivery partner in swiggy)

"I am a parent of a girl. Being a parent provides me with a lot of advantages. My working time is 12 hours i.e., 11.00 am to 11:00 pm. I have a fixed login time. I should be online and within the zone for at least 10 hours." (Interviewee 4, Full-time delivery person in Zomato)

"I have a fixed working schedule. I have to work for 10 hours in a day, morning 3 hours, afternoon 3 hours and at night 4 hours. The time in between I don't get any orders. I will be waiting in any park or go to the room and take rest. Even though I don't get any orders I have to be logged in for login time calculation." (Interviewee 22, Full-time Swiggy delivery boy)

"I have to work for a fixed time in Zomato. As a part-time delivery boy, I have to work for about 4 to 5 hours at night. Saturdays and Sundays are compulsory working days. I can take weekly off for one day after informing my hub manager. During Sundays, I will be working for 9 hours, 3 hours during the morning, 3 hours during the afternoon and 3 hours during the night." (Interviewee 16, Part-time delivery boy in Zomato)

ii. Incentive calculation

In general, the salaries of the employees are paid monthly. In the gig economy, incentives are given to the gig workers after the completion of the task. In the food delivery sector, the workers are paid for the orders completed. From the responses of the interviewees,

"We have a rate card which varies daily, during peak hours we get more incentive than any other ordinary time. Working in peak hours is more beneficial for me. I have a fixed login time and my incentive is calculated based on my login time and number of orders completed. In a day I get at least three incentives, morning- 5 orders, afternoon – 5 orders, night – 5 orders, total – 15 orders. In this way, I get 4 incentives in a day. I get time guarantee amount if I am logged in for 10 hours per day and completed 10 orders in a day. I should be within the zone to get orders. If I am out of the zone, I don't get any orders. I get an extra amount for ratings given by customers. If my ratings are high, I get more orders." (Interviewee 7, Swiggy full-time worker)

"I will get more incentive if I work on a rainy day." (Interviewee 2)

"Zomato pays my incentive every week for the orders completed and the login time. I am used to get an amount as time guarantee amount if I have logged in for the time given to us even if I don't get orders". (Interviewee 4)

"We get incentives for completing orders and login time. If an order gets cancelled, we have to give it to the poor people living by road and take a picture of it and send it to the hub manager. So that the amount for completed order gets credited to my account". (Interviewee 6)

iii. Recruitment and Training

Regardless of the sort of organization, it is typically accepted that the employer's success is closely tied to the sort of people it employs. In the same manner, the success of the

online food delivery platforms depends on the food delivery executives who mediate the relationship between the Restaurant, food delivery platform and also the client, thus selecting correct person is important. The recruitment of delivery person as known from interviewees,

"I just went to the hub office and asked for a job. It's a kind of walk-in-interview".

After recruitment, training plays a major role. It is an activity associated with improving the knowledge and skill necessary to perform a particular job, whatever be the kind of job some quantity of coaching is important. The delivery boys are given initial training to perform their task. Based on the interview, the responses given by all the delivery boys are similar. According to the interviewees:

"I just went to the hub and asked for a job. Hub manager gave some presentation on how to use the app and the field training was given by the existing delivery executive. I went along with the delivery boy to learn how to pick up the orders and deliver it to the customer. Then I was given login id, password, uniform and bag. After this, I started working."

iv. Employment rights

Workers have certain rights that can't be meddled with by the supervisors, paying a little heed to their situation in the organization or the size of the business. Employees rights can be secured by the government or the state law by open arrangement, or by contract. The gig economy utilizes online platforms to sidestep the standard duties and responsibilities which is given to the workers.

"I am a full-time delivery executive. I am given one day weekly off. In case of accidents, I can avail insurance from the companies. In some cases, the online platform companies provide loan for us". (Interviewee 6)

"I have to work on Saturdays and Sundays, but I am given off on weekdays. In case of emergency, I can inform to the hub and take off." (Part-time food delivery person)

"I have insurance coverage. Along with that I expect the companies to give minimum travel allowance to perform the delivery. Because the amount I earn is enough for my fuel expenses itself." (Interviewee 10)

v. Opportunities

Working in the online food delivery platforms provides very few opportunities to grow. That too there is no career growth in this job. The food delivery person can go to the next level only, not above that.

"If I have worked for 6 months as a full-time delivery partner and if I am interested, I can get into management-related jobs if any vacancies arise." (Interviewees 1, 3, 5, 15, 19)

"I can go to quality check team and hub manager. Quality check team must monitor whether the delivery boys are wearing uniform and food bag or not. They will be standing outside the restaurant and watch us. If I have gained some experience and worked here for full time, I have the chance to become the hub manager." (Interviewees 2, 6, 7, 10, 14)

Some of the executives are not aware of the opportunities in the job.

vi. Personal and societal views about the job

In India, the job is viewed as the status symbol. People with a good job have a high status in society whereas persons without or ordinary job are considered inferior. Similarly, people view food delivery job as an inferior one and demotivate the people working there.

"My parents didn't accept this job. They were scolding me why are you doing this kind of job." (Interviewees 1, 5, 8, 10)

"My parents are ok with this job since its just part-time job." (Interviewees 2, 3, 6, 13, 14, 16, 18)

V. DISCUSSION

The "gig economy" is creating exciting openings and unleashing innovation, but it is also raising hard questions about workplace protections and what a good job will look like in the future (Sundarajan, 2016). A mechanism that lifts people out of poverty should be achieved through their employment. However, the International Labour Organization (2019) categorized nearly 21% of workers around the globe as "working poor" where their income falls below the poverty line.

Gig workers have no permanent jobs and have to prefer available jobs to run their families, while sometimes it creates a negative impact than that of the real life like getting financial assistance such as loans and mortgages because of unstable income through this work and also no recognition in the society even to bare minimum amenities which are reserved for the "working class" (Pragnya and Lalatendu, 2019).

In the present study, of the total 22 workers interviewed, nearly 68% had undergraduate while 14% as PG/Scholar and the remaining 18% comes from Diploma/Intermediate. However, a study conducted by a group of researchers from TISS (2022), Hyderabad reported that 77% respondents came from Intermediate and the remaining being UG/PG graduates. And also, a majority of workers (53%) earned more than Rs.15,000 pm as full-time job while if a part-time, they earned only less than this. The current study reveals that the interviewed workers noticed a satisfaction in their present job.

Salman (2021) suggested that (1) food delivery segment has done well during the COVID crisis by way of increased average order value (AoV) and an overall improvement in unit economics. However, delivery workers from Zomato and Swiggy noticed that their wages have dropped drastically; (2) though this work was initially flaunted as 'gig work', essentially a temporary job to supplement one's income, many 'delivery partners' think it is a full-time job, given the terms and conditions of employment and (3) after staging mass protests in the past year, food delivery workers are now vocal about exploitation at work on social media, which raises questions about the gig economy model.

Current qualitative study focuses on the experiences of food delivery workers and their reasons behind choosing gig work as the choice of employment. According to the study, independence, love for bike riding, AND money earned from this work are the main reasons behind the choice of work. Most delivery workers are satisfied with their work, while some feel the incentives are not sufficient and companies should provide the minimum travel allowance. Future direction of the research can be extended as an empirical study.

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