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Growth of the Gig Workforce in India and Its Key Expansion Drivers

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Abstract

In the last decade, the gig economy has become an important component of India's labour market. Digital platforms, smartphone penetration and the rise of e-commerce have created new employment opportunities in the form of short-term and flexible work. The present study analyses the growth of the gig workforce in India during the period 2019–2026 and identifies the major drivers responsible for its expansion. The study is based on secondary data collected from government reports, open access journal articles and industry publications. The findings show that the number of gig workers in India has increased steadily, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital platforms, internet expansion, e-commerce growth, start-up ecosystem and changing work preferences of youth are found to be the key factors driving this growth. The study concludes that the gig economy will continue to expand in India, but proper policy support and skill development are required for sustainable and inclusive growth.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Platform Workers, Digital Labour

Introduction

The nature of employment in India has been undergoing significant changes in recent years. Traditional long-term and permanent jobs are gradually being complemented by new forms of flexible and short-term employment. One of the most important developments in this context is the rapid growth of the gig workforce. Gig workers are individuals who work on a task-based or contract basis instead of having regular full-time employment. They usually work through digital platforms such as ride-hailing apps, food delivery services, e-commerce logistics platforms, online freelancing portals and other app-based services. India, being a country with a large and young population, faces the challenge of providing sufficient employment opportunities to its growing labour force. At the same time, technological development and digitalisation have transformed the way businesses operate and services are delivered. The spread of smartphones, affordable internet and digital payment systems has created a favourable environment for platform-based work. As a result, the gig economy has expanded rapidly across urban as well as semi-urban areas in India. The period from 2019 to 2026 is very important for studying the growth of the gig workforce. This period includes three major phases: the pre-pandemic period, the COVID-19 pandemic phase and the post-pandemic recovery phase. During the pandemic, many traditional jobs were affected due to lockdowns and economic slowdown. However, demand for online delivery services, digital services and platform-based work increased significantly. This situation accelerated the growth of gig employment in India. Even after the pandemic, the digital habits of consumers continued, which further supported the expansion of the gig economy. Another important aspect is that gig work is no longer limited to transportation and food delivery sectors. It has expanded too many new areas such as online tutoring, digital marketing, content creation, IT freelancing, home services and professional consulting. This indicates that the gig economy is becoming more diversified and integrated with the overall digital economy of India. Despite its rapid growth, the gig economy also raises several questions regarding job security, long-term career growth and labour protection. However, the present study mainly focuses on analysing the growth trends of the gig workforce and identifying the key factors that are driving this expansion in India. Understanding these drivers is important for policymakers, academicians and industry stakeholders to plan future employment strategies and skill development programmes.

Therefore, the present research paper aims to examine the growth of the gig workforce in India during 2019–2026 and to analyse the major expansion drivers responsible for this growth using secondary data analysis.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the growth trend of the gig workforce in India during the period 2019–2026 using available secondary data.

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2. To identify key factors responsible for the expansion of gig work in India, such as digital platforms, internet penetration and changing employment preferences.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is entirely based on secondary data. The required data have been collected from various reliable and open access sources such as government reports, policy documents, research articles and industry publications related to the gig economy in India.

The time period selected for the study is from 2019 to 2026. This period is chosen to capture the growth of the gig workforce before the pandemic, during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic digital expansion phase. Since the study relies only on secondary data, the findings depend on the reliability and consistency of the published sources.

Review of Literature

Recent literature on the gig economy in India indicates a continuous rise in platform-based employment and highlights various factors responsible for its expansion. The report by NITI Aayog (2022) projected a significant increase in the number of gig workers in India and identified sectors such as ride-hailing, delivery services and professional freelancing as major contributors to workforce growth. Mehrotra and Parida (2022) explained that the expansion of gig employment is closely linked to structural changes in the Indian labour market and the limited capacity of the formal sector to generate sufficient jobs. Rani (2023) observed that gig work has increasingly become an important supplementary income source for youth and semi-skilled workers, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating rising workforce participation in platform-based jobs. Chaudhary and Sharma (2023) found that digitalisation and platform-driven business models have played a crucial role in absorbing surplus

labour and supporting the expansion of gig employment in India. Similarly, Bhowmik (2023) highlighted that gig work is part of the broader informal labour market and its growth reflects changing employment patterns in the digital economy.

Further studies emphasise the role of digital platforms and technological progress as key drivers of gig workforce expansion. Kumar and Singh (2024) reported that the rapid growth of e-commerce and app-based services in urban India has significantly increased short-term employment opportunities through digital platforms. Gandhi (2024) noted that the spread of platform-based work is closely associated with rising digital adoption and changing work preferences among workers who prefer flexible employment options. Sachdeva (2024) also argued that technological advancement and platform-led service delivery are reshaping labour market structures and accelerating the expansion of the gig economy in India. Studies published in IJFMR (2025) indicated that digital transformation and global integration have expanded freelancing and gig-based employment across both low-skilled and high-skilled service sectors. Similarly, IJCRT (2025) found that gig employment in India is gradually shifting from traditional service roles to knowledge-based digital services due to increasing digitalisation and platform growth. More recent studies further confirm the importance of technological and behavioural factors in driving gig workforce growth. Duggal and Saini (2025) observed a sectoral shift from low-skilled delivery roles to professional and digital freelancing, reflecting the influence of technological progress and skill development. Sharma (2025) concluded that digital platforms are transforming employment structures by creating flexible job opportunities and contributing to the continuous growth of the gig workforce in India. Nalini (2025) also stated that the expansion of gig work is driven by labour market flexibility, digital platforms and changing employment preferences among workers.

Analysis and Discussion

Growth of Gig Workforce in India (2019–2026)

Table 1: Growth Trends of Gig Workforce in India (2019–2026)

Year	Estimated Gig Workforce (Million)
2019-20	6.8
2020-21	7.7
2021-22	8.0
2022-23	9.0
2023-24	9.5
2024-25	10
2025-26	12

Source: author's estimates

The table shows a steady increase in the number of gig workers in India during 2019–2026. The growth accelerated during the pandemic period due to increased demand for delivery and online services. Post-pandemic digital adoption further strengthened gig employment opportunities. This trend indicates that gig work has become an important component of India's labour market.

Key Expansion Drivers of Gig Workforce in India

The rapid growth of digital platforms is one of the most significant drivers of gig workforce expansion. Companies providing ride-hailing, food delivery, logistics, online freelancing and home services depend

heavily on gig workers. The increasing number of such platforms has directly created more employment opportunities. The expansion of affordable internet services and smartphones in India has enabled millions of people to access digital platforms.

Workers can easily register on mobile applications and start working, which has reduced entry barriers to employment. This digital connectivity has played a crucial role in the growth of gig work. The growth of e-commerce and quick commerce has also significantly increased the demand for delivery partners and logistics support workers. This has led to a large increase in gig-based employment in the logistics and supply chain sector. Additionally, India's start-up ecosystem has grown rapidly in the last decade. Many start-ups operate on platform-based business models which depend on flexible gig workers instead of permanent employees. Finally, changing employment preferences among younger workers have also supported the growth of gig workforce. Many youth prefer flexible work arrangements instead of fixed jobs, as gig work provides freedom to choose working hours and earn through multiple platforms.

Major Findings

1. The gig workforce in India has shown continuous growth during the period 2019–2026.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of platform-based work and increased demand for gig services.
3. Digital platforms, internet penetration and e-commerce expansion are the major drivers of gig workforce growth.
4. The rise of start-ups and changing work preferences of youth have further supported the expansion of gig employment.
5. The gig economy is gradually diversifying from low-skilled service roles to include professional and knowledge-based digital work.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the gig workforce in India has grown significantly during the period 2019–2026 due to rapid digitalisation and expansion of platform-based business models. The analysis shows that digital platforms, increasing internet access, e-commerce growth and start-up ecosystem are the key drivers responsible for this expansion. Gig work has emerged as an important employment avenue, especially for youth and semi-skilled workers. However, for sustainable growth of the gig economy, there is a need for supportive policy measures. Skill development programmes should be designed to improve digital skills of workers so that they can access better gig opportunities. Policymakers should also focus on creating a balanced regulatory framework that supports innovation while ensuring fair working conditions for gig workers. With proper policy support and technological development, the gig workforce in India is expected to continue its upward growth trajectory in the coming years.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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