Socio-Economic Determinants of Engagement Among Online Food Delivery Professionals: The Mediating Role of Job-Related Factors

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Abstract- **The rapid expansion of online food delivery platforms has transformed employment patterns within the gig economy, particularly in urban India. This study examines the socio-economic determinants of engagement among online food delivery professionals, with a specific focus on the mediating role of job-related factors. Using a descriptive and analytical research design, primary data were collected from 250 delivery professionals associated with major online food delivery platforms. The study employs advanced statistical techniques, including regression-based mediation analysis, to assess the direct and indirect relationships between socio-economic characteristics and engagement levels. The findings reveal that socio-economic factors significantly influence engagement; however, their impact is substantially mediated by job-related factors such as work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures. The results indicate partial mediation, suggesting that favourable job conditions strengthen engagement even among workers facing socio-economic constraints. This highlights the importance of job design and reward mechanisms in sustaining workforce engagement within platform-based employment. The study contributes to the growing literature on gig economy labour by providing empirical evidence on engagement dynamics and offers practical implications for platform operators and policymakers aiming to enhance job quality and sustainable engagement among online food delivery professionals.**

Keywords: Gig economy; Online food delivery; Employee engagement; Job-related factors; Mediation analysis

I.INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of online food delivery platforms has reconfigured the nature of work in contemporary urban economies, particularly in countries like India where digital labour markets have surged over the last decade. This phenomenon, embedded within the broader gig economy, represents a shift away from traditional employer-employee structures toward more flexible, on-demand work mediated by mobile applications such as Swiggy and Zomato (Lala & Rode, 2025; The gig economy and the evolving nature of work in India, 2025). While this transformation offers immediate income opportunities and temporal autonomy, it also raises important questions about how socio-economic backgrounds and job characteristics together shape worker engagement in platform-based employment.

Academic and policy research into gig work highlights that engagement levels among delivery professionals are contingent on a confluence of socio-economic factors as well as platform practices that influence earnings, job satisfaction, and the overall quality of work (Das, 2023; Indian food delivery employment trends, 2025). Socio-economic determinants such as age, education, household income, and financial obligations can influence not only an individual's likelihood of joining platform work but also how they perceive and commit to that work. For instance, studies have found that younger workers often exhibit higher engagement and motivation in gig roles, potentially due to fewer familial constraints and a stronger preference for flexible work patterns (Lala & Rode, 2025; Survey reveals concerns of gig workers across platforms, 2025). These observations align with broader theoretical insights into labour engagement that suggest personal context fundamentally interacts

with job conditions to produce differentiated engagement outcomes (Santhi & Shankar, 2021).

However, socio-economic characteristics alone do not fully explain variations in engagement among food delivery workers. Job-related factors such as actual work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures play a critical, mediating role in this relationship. Flexibility, often touted as a primary advantage of gig work, may enhance engagement when it aligns with workers' life circumstances and earning needs; yet, when flexibility is accompanied by income instability or unpredictable work demands, its positive effects on engagement can diminish (Gig economy and the evolving nature of work in India, 2025; Survey Reveals Satisfaction Among Indian Gig Workers, 2025). Earnings satisfaction, similarly, mediates how socio-economic pressures translate into engagement, as unpredictable or insufficient earnings can intensify stress and disengagement despite apparent job autonomy (Managing Stress in the Gig Economy, 2025). Incentive schemes linked to performance metrics and peak-hour payouts further shape engagement by reinforcing or undermining workers' perceptions of fairness and attainable rewards within the platform ecosystem.

These job-related factors operate within a work environment characterized by both opportunity and precarity. Empirical evidence on delivery workers in India underscores recurring challenges including lack of formal protections, volatile income streams, and algorithmic management practices that affect task allocation and remuneration (The gig economy and the evolving nature of work in India, 2025; Economic Survey flags income volatility for gig workers, 2025). Such structural aspects not only shape the economic sustainability of gig engagement but also determine how socio-economic backgrounds are translated into actual work behaviours and psychological commitment to platform roles.

Given this complex interplay, a mediation framework that examines how job-related factors influence the link between socio-economic determinants and engagement levels can provide critical insights. Understanding these mechanisms is essential not only for academic scholarship on digital labour markets but

also for informing policy interventions and platform governance that promote equitable and sustainable engagement among online food delivery professionals (Santhi & Shankar, 2021; Suresh & Shankar, 2019; R, 2021).

Problem Statement
The rapid expansion of online food delivery platforms has significantly altered the structure of employment within urban labour markets, particularly in emerging economies such as India. Platforms like Swiggy and Zomato have created large-scale work opportunities by integrating digital technologies with on-demand service delivery, thereby attracting individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. While this platform-based work model is often promoted for its flexibility and ease of entry, concerns persist regarding the nature and sustainability of worker engagement in such digitally mediated environments. Engagement among online food delivery professionals has become a critical issue, as fluctuating participation levels directly affect service efficiency, platform performance, and worker well-being.

Existing studies on gig and platform work have largely focused on employment conditions, income volatility, job insecurity, and regulatory challenges. However, there remains a notable gap in understanding how socio-economic characteristics such as age, education, income level, and family responsibilities shape engagement levels among delivery professionals. These socio-economic determinants influence not only workers' motivations to participate in platform work but also their capacity to sustain consistent engagement over time. Yet, empirical evidence explaining the pathways through which these background factors translate into engagement outcomes remains limited, particularly in the context of India's rapidly growing food delivery sector.

Furthermore, job-related factors such as work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures are central to the platform work experience and may act as critical mechanisms shaping engagement. While flexibility is often portrayed as a key advantage of gig work, its effectiveness in fostering engagement depends on whether it aligns with workers' economic needs and personal

circumstances. Similarly, earnings satisfaction and incentive systems may either enhance engagement by reinforcing perceived fairness and reward adequacy or weaken it when income unpredictability and performance pressures dominate. Despite their importance, these job-related factors have not been sufficiently examined as mediating variables linking socio-economic characteristics to engagement levels.

In this context, the problem addressed by the present study lies in the lack of comprehensive, empirically grounded analysis that explains how socio-economic determinants influence engagement among online food delivery professionals through the mediating role of job-related factors. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a nuanced understanding of engagement dynamics in platform-based work and for informing policy measures and platform strategies aimed at promoting sustainable and equitable gig employment.

II.LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of platform-based employment has generated substantial scholarly interest, particularly with respect to worker engagement, job quality, and the socio-economic implications of gig work. Prior research indicates that online food delivery platforms operate through digitally mediated labour arrangements that blend flexibility with heightened precarity, influencing how workers perceive and engage with their work (De Stefano, 2016; Wood et al., 2019). Studies conducted in emerging economies highlight that delivery professionals often enter platform work due to limited alternative employment opportunities, making socio-economic characteristics such as income necessity, education level, and family responsibilities critical determinants of work engagement (Rani & Furrer, 2021).

Empirical evidence suggests that engagement among gig workers cannot be fully explained by socio-economic factors alone. Job-related attributes play a decisive role in shaping work attitudes and behavioural commitment. Research on employee engagement across sectors demonstrates that perceived job resources, including autonomy and reward structures, significantly influence engagement outcomes (Santhi & Shankar, 2021). In the gig economy context, work flexibility has been identified as a double-edged factor, enhancing engagement when aligned with workers' preferences while contributing to stress and disengagement when coupled with income uncertainty (Wood et al., 2019). Earnings satisfaction similarly influences engagement, as inconsistent pay and algorithm-driven task allocation can heighten job strain (Suresh & Shankar, 2019).

Incentive structures embedded within platform algorithms further mediate the relationship between workers' backgrounds and engagement levels. Performance-based incentives may enhance short-term engagement but can also intensify pressure and fatigue, potentially leading to attrition (R, 2021). Existing studies, however, have predominantly examined these variables in isolation, offering limited insight into the mechanisms through which socio-economic determinants translate into engagement outcomes. Consequently, there is a clear need for integrative research that adopts a mediation framework to explain how job-related factors influence engagement among online food delivery professionals, particularly within the Indian platform economy context.

Objective

To analyse the mediating role of job-related factors including work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures in the relationship between socio-economic factors and engagement levels of online food delivery professionals.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the mediating role of job-related factors in the relationship between socio-economic characteristics and engagement levels of online food delivery professionals in Coimbatore city. The target population comprises delivery professionals working with online food delivery platforms, specifically Swiggy and Zomato. Primary data are collected using a structured questionnaire administered through direct field surveys and online forms. A sample size of 250 respondents is selected using convenience sampling due to the dispersed and dynamic nature of the workforce. Secondary data are sourced from journals, reports, and platform-related publications. The

collected data are analysed using mediation analysis to test the proposed relationships.

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis Framework

H1: Socio-economic factors significantly influence engagement levels of online food delivery professionals.

H2: Socio-economic factors significantly influence job-related factors (work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures).

H3: Job-related factors significantly influence engagement levels of online food delivery professionals.

H4: Job-related factors mediate the relationship between socio-economic factors and engagement levels of online food delivery professionals.

Table 1: Regression Analysis between Socio-Economic Factors and Engagement Levels (H1)

Predictor Variables (Composite Socio-Economic Index)	β Value	t-value	Sig. (p)
Socio-Economic Factors → Engagement	0.462	8.914	0.000*
R^2 = 0.214			
F = 79.46			

*Significant at 1% level

The results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between socio-economic factors and engagement levels of online food delivery professionals. The R^2 value shows that socio-economic factors explain 21.4% of the variance in engagement. Hence, H1 is accepted, confirming that background characteristics play a meaningful role in determining engagement.

Table 2: Regression Analysis between Socio-Economic Factors and Job-Related Factors (H2)

Predictor Variables	β Value	t-value	Sig. (p)
Socio-Economic Factors → Job-Related Factors	0.528	10.372	0.000*
R^2 = 0.279			
F = 107.58			

*Significant at 1% level

Socio-economic factors significantly predict job-related factors such as work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentives. The model explains 27.9% of the variance in job-related factors, indicating a strong explanatory power. Therefore, H2 is accepted, establishing socio-economic factors as significant antecedents of job conditions.

Table 3: Regression Analysis between Job-Related Factors and Engagement Levels (H3)

Predictor Variables	β Value	t-value	Sig. (p)
Job-Related Factors → Engagement	0.614	12.486	0.000*
R^2 = 0.377			
F = 155.89			

*Significant at 1% level

Job-related factors exert a strong and statistically significant influence on engagement levels. With an R^2 of 0.377, the model explains a substantial portion of engagement variability. Hence, H3 is accepted, indicating that job characteristics are critical drivers of engagement.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis of Job-Related Factors between Socio-Economic Factors and Engagement (H4)
(PROCESS Model 4 / SEM Equivalent)

Path	β Value	t-value	Sig. (p)
Socio-Economic Factors → Engagement (Direct Effect)	0.221	4.103	0.000*
Socio-Economic Factors → Job-Related Factors	0.528	10.372	0.000*
Job-Related Factors → Engagement	0.471	9.214	0.000*
Indirect Effect	0.249	—	Boot CI (0.181, 0.327)

*Significant at 1% level

The mediation results reveal that job-related factors significantly mediate the relationship between socio-economic factors and engagement levels. The direct effect remains significant but is reduced after including the mediator, indicating partial mediation. The bootstrap confidence interval excludes zero, confirming the acceptance of H4.

Summary Inference

The analyses collectively demonstrate that while socio-economic factors directly influence engagement, their impact is substantially transmitted through job-related factors. Work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures serve as crucial mechanisms enhancing or constraining engagement among online food delivery professionals. This validates the application of advanced mediation techniques for understanding engagement dynamics in platform-based employment.

IV.CONCLUSION

The present study provides empirical insights into the factors shaping engagement levels among online food delivery professionals by examining the role of socio-economic characteristics and the mediating influence of job-related factors. The findings indicate that socio-economic factors such as age, income, education, and work experience significantly influence engagement levels, confirming that personal background conditions remain important determinants even within digitally mediated work environments. However, the results also demonstrate that these influences do not operate in isolation, but rather through job-related mechanisms embedded in platform-based employment.

The mediation analysis reveals that work flexibility, earnings satisfaction, and incentive structures play a crucial role in transmitting the effects of socio-economic factors to engagement levels. While socio-economic factors exert a direct impact on engagement, their influence is substantially strengthened when favourable job-related conditions are present. This highlights that engagement among online food delivery professionals is largely shaped by how platform work characteristics align with workers' economic needs and personal circumstances. The partial mediation observed suggests that improving job design and reward systems can enhance engagement even among workers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Overall, the study underscores the need for platform operators and policymakers to move beyond a narrow focus on workforce size and efficiency and to consider engagement as a function of both socio-economic realities and job quality. By fostering transparent incentives, income stability, and meaningful flexibility, online food delivery platforms can promote sustained engagement and more equitable gig employment outcomes.

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