

Abstract

Amidst widespread debates and discussions around labour market implications of gig and platform work, this thesis critically examines multiple dimensions of India's expanding platform economy. It illustrates and emphasizes that platform work is continuously reorganizing and reshaping labour markets in urban India, with significant implications for workers, consumers as well as public policy. Through a multi-dimensional approach, it integrates multiple and varied aspects of platform-based work. Starting with investigating and highlighting the methodological and statistical challenges associated with identifying, capturing, and measuring platform-mediated work, it highlights the existing data and measurement issues. For this examination it utilizes data from the national Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) and alternative national-level private datasets, namely the CMIE-CPHS. The analysis reveals key limitations of these datasets. While the PLFS can capture broad sectoral trends, it is inadequate for differentiating between platform workers and other workers within the same occupations. On the other hand, the CPHS indicates over-representation of platform workers from certain states (like Karnataka and Maharashtra) over time, and possible misclassification issues.

In the backdrop of data availability and reliability, the thesis proceeds to examining aspects of platform work in the online food delivery (OFD) sector. Specifically, the analyses focuses on earnings volatility and factors associated with hourly earnings, working conditions, mechanisms of platform control that result in diluted work autonomy, and work satisfaction. Drawing on original primary survey data collected from 326 OFD workers from Bengaluru, Delhi, and Jaipur, it also compares OFD work with longstanding piece-rate wage structures prevalent in India. Empirical results point to a strong output-earnings linkage akin to traditional piece-rate work, long working hours, and tight algorithmic control of the labour process, unique to modern platform work. Qualitatively, it adds to the growing literature on platform work by bringing insights regarding how gamification techniques, performance metrics, access barriers to platform provided social protection, and weak bargaining power of labour, dilute work autonomy.

To incorporate the consumer perspective, complementing the labour perspective, the thesis examines algorithmic pricing on two popular ride-hailing platforms (Ola and Uber) in India. Rather than treating algorithmic pricing as a purely technical phenomenon, it is situated within the broader regulatory context to raise critical issues of consumer welfare, fairness and transparency. Overall, this thesis brings empirical clarity to work precarity in the platform economy, discusses algorithmic transparency, and calls for urgent reforms in labour statistics, and regulatory structures to better reflect the realities of platform labour in urban India.