

ANALYSE THE CHALLENGES FACED BY GIG WORKERS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC IN INDIA - CASE STUDY OF OLA DRIVERS

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ABSTRACT

The uncertain and unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the economic status of many businesses worldwide. The paper aims to critically examine the degree of devastation experienced by the Indian gig workers due to the pandemic restriction. The uncertainty and illegal practices of the gig employers and the way the gig workers in India get exploited from time to time due to their unemployment status is critically analysed in this paper. The paper compactly discussed the challenges experienced by the Indian gig workers, especially the Ola and other cab drivers during the very beginning of the lockdown. The way the cab drivers and the entire Indian cab industry have already suffered is included in the report. The present status of the gig workers involved in Ola is also analysed in this paper. The socio-economic issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the survival of the cab drivers in India is illustrated in this paper. The paper also identified the strategies implemented by abroad countries to deal with the uncertain condition of the Indian gig workers. The measures taken by the Indian government to uplift the condition of the Ola drivers is also included in the paper.

Keywords: COVID-19, Ola, gig economy, drivers, pandemic.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Challenges for the Indian gig workers started on 22nd March 2020 when the Indian government called for a 14-hour voluntary lockdown. However, on 24th March 2020, the Indian government called for a nationwide lockdown for 21 days till 14th April 2020. As people were restricted from going out of their homes, the Indian roads became empty, with only frontline workers out in the streets working for their essential services towards the societal people. Due to the imposed lockdown restrictions, the need for these transportation services reduced drastically, and the workers engaged in that profession suffered the worst. Those dependent only on the gig employment like driving Ola or Uber Cabs found themselves in an overwhelming situation without any income or support. However, this was only the beginning as the 21-day lockdown was further extended for another 21 days till 3rd May which was then extended again for another 2 weeks (The Economic Times, 2021; Express Web Desk, 2021). During this entire period of almost two months, the gig workers associated with the cab services suffered the most due to the complete restriction on travelling. This can be ascertained from the fact that the monthly average users for cab services like Ola saw a 44% drop from March 2020 to April 2020 and an almost 25.2% drop from March to May 2021 that is during the second wave (Malik, 2021). As the demand for taxi service reduced, the income and employment for Ola cab drivers including other gig workers in this field started feeling financial burden due to the lack of any other alternative employment opportunities. It is in this context important to investigate the challenges and hardships that the gig workers faced during the covid-19 pandemic with particular reference to Ola Cab drivers.

RESEARCH AIM

This paper aims to identify the factors associated with the rise of the gig economy and the way the gig economy suffered due to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper will also evaluate how gig workers, especially those involved in the cab service industry, suffered from the lockdown restrictions due to the pandemic followed by the measures taken by the car service industry to cope with the adverse effects they experienced.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The paper intends to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify and investigate gig working in India
- To analyse the problems caused by covid-19 pandemic for the gig workers in India
- To critically evaluate challenges faced by gig workers, especially Ola drivers during the covid-19 pandemic
- To analyse the measures taken by on-demand cab service companies to mitigate the challenges faced by Ola drivers

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is

- What are the challenges faced by gig workers, especially Ola drivers during the covid-19 pandemic?

The sub-questions are as follows:

- What is the current state of gig working in India?
- What are the problems caused by covid-19 for the gig workers in India?
- What useful strategies were taken to mitigate the challenges faced by gig workers, especially Ola Cab in the post-covid-era?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A literature review is a comprehensive summary of previously done research works on a particular topic. In research, the literature review section effectively surveys books, articles and other relevant resources relevant to a particular area of research (Peters et al. 2020). For this purpose, the Literature Review section will enumerate, summarise, discuss and objectively evaluate previous research works to help individuals get sufficient data regarding the chosen research topic (Chaput et al. 2020). The literature review section will first critically analyse emerging digital technology's contribution to increasing the gig economy's size. After that, the informal nature of the gig economy will be critically evaluated by identifying how the gig workers suffer from their employers, who often exploit them according to their business needs that affect their survival under poor economic situations. As the whole world witnessed the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the gig workers suffered the worst. The challenges gig workers faced during the pandemic will be critically analysed in the report. Ola and other cab drivers struggle to feed themselves and their family members due to their dependency on the gig work life will also be discussed in this section followed by a summary which will be highlighting the main findings of the entire section.

THE RISE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND THE PREVALENCE OF THE GIG ECONOMY:

MacDonald & Giazitzoglu (2019) state that the gig economy refers to the free-market system where organisations hire workers for a shorter period of commitment and pay them. The study by Agrawal & Bhukya, R (2022), mentioned the term 'gig' as slang as these jobs last for a very limited period of time. According to Tolba (2021), recently, global economists are involved in analysing the phenomenon of the gig economy as an on-demand, digital and service-based platform that is attributed to the spread of short-term contacts for a variety of job roles. Due to the rise of IT-enabled services, eCommerce retail, start-up, fast-moving consumer industry, and hospitality services, the demand for gig workers is increasing (Banik & Padalkar, 2021; Tolba 2021). Although it is not known yet which factor contributes solely to the rise of the gig economy though authors like Veluchami et al. (2021) and Watson et al. (2021) pointed out that traditional employment practices have already lost their essence and global workers are in search of getting involved into the work that offers them flexibility and allows them to work according to their schedule. As a result, most of the employees are showing their interest to join the gig economy. As stated by Anwar & Graham (2021), the gig platform sector has little, or no entry barriers and this sector holds huge potential for creating a vast diversity of jobs in India. Moreover, this sector is offering good earning opportunities in contrast to the similar non-gig jobs that motivate many young Indians to become gig workers. The individuals who are studying and looking for temporary sources of earnings are joining in the gig sector to earn according to their convenient time. In this context, Roy & Shrivastava (2021), the number of Indian gig workers increased to over 15 million in 2015. These workers chose the profession to drive competitive advantage, efficiency and innovation in the industry. The study further stated that Indian freelancing workers are joining the gig economy to gain the opportunity of becoming their boss and taking workload according to their convenience, and 41% of the

Indian gig workers are engaged in IT sector-related jobs. The rapid usage of technology and the rising technological tools attracted many individuals to work seamlessly even under less pressure with the earning opportunity. Thus, the need for flexible working, creativity, innovation and constant technological advancement is increasing the demand for gig workers in India.

INFORMAL GIG ECONOMY

According to Bates et al. (2019), gig workers perform and earn from a work arrangement that is not formal at all. They are not engaged in the traditional relationship between the employer and employee. The gig economy is primarily informal and encompasses on-call workers, temporary contractual workers, online platform workers, freelancers and other workers who work in a non-traditional approach. The study stated that employers often take advantage of these short-term employments and the unsustainable practices of the gig economy affect the workers. The study by Dhingra et al. (2022) stated the contractual factor of the gig economy is the primary cause contributing to the ethical issues faced by the gig economy. To support this argument, Lata et al. (2022) and Tronsor (2018) stated that, currently the employers of the gig economy are exploiting the gig workers misclassifying them as independent workers instead of employees. These workers suffer due to a lack of legal and social protection regarding their rights to basic wage, health and insurance advantages unlike the formal workers. Similarly, Pal (2021) stated that, although the gig economy created an enlarged labour market and promoted economic growth, it is unethical for most organisations, workers, as well as society.

According to the perspectives of Anderton (2021), although the gig model seems cost-effective for many employers and employees as both of them work with huge flexibility, the employees suffer in some cases. In this context, Myhill et al. (2021) found that a lack of access to net safety benefits and income volatility are the two crucial factors that put the earnings of gig workers at risk. However, few studies also revealed the benefits of the gig economy due to its informal nature. The research work by Rodgers (2019) stated that the money earned by gig and freelance workers contributes largely to reducing the national wage gap. To support this argument, Anwar & Graham (2020) stated that, the informal gig sector contributes largely to the survival of many workers who are not skilled and experienced enough to get jobs in the formal sector. However, the findings by Bruckner & Forman (2021) mentioned that the rapid declination in insurance plans and employer-sponsored savings contribute less or less to addressing the wealth gap among the workers who work on a contractual basis. The lack of benefit protections left many gig workers in financially vulnerable conditions. However, in 2019, the Parliament of India introduced a new code of social security fund with the concept of gig and platform workers and decided on beneficial schemes for such workers. The social security code in 2020 amalgamated the nine enactments, which include the Employees' Provident Fund Act, 1952, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, to include information or gig workers into this scheme. However, the code is not implemented, challenges remain for the gig workers, especially regarding financial security and livelihood.

THE EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN INDIA: CHALLENGES FOR GIG WORKERS WHO ARE CAB DRIVERS

The sudden arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the survival of Indian workers in a major way. As per Rani & Dhir, (2020), COVID-19 raised concern about the informality of the gig economy. Gig workers who were engaged in location-based platforms like cab services and delivering things started facing risks due to their work nature and the imposed restrictions regarding social distancing. According to the study by Karthik & Sinha, (2021) gig workers experienced health issues also as they failed to afford self-quarantine even after developing COVID symptoms as they depended entirely on task-based work. As per the view of Howson et al. (2021), Thapa (2020) and Korreck (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic drastically enhanced the levels of economic and physical insecurity by providing gig workers with cheap salaries due to economic instability, sparked strikes, ignorance in workers' demand and so on that suppressed the expression of the offline gig workers who were cab drivers mainly.

As per Nicola et al. (2020), COVID-19 increased the demand for online shopping. Schools, colleges, universities and several companies started working remotely to ensure maximum protection to stay protected from the prevalence of the coronavirus. As a result, most of the individuals started staying home most of the time and reduced their transport rates, affecting the growth of Ola and other driving services. For instance, according to Cariappa et al. (2022), Indian Ola drivers struggle to earn their daily income during the lockdown situation due to the reduced rate of transport into the nation during the pandemic period.

As per Jain (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic forced Ola to change its business model as the company's annual revenue dropped by 95% due to the lockdown restrictions. The initiation of 'work from home' or 'remote working'

during the pandemic drastically reduced transportation activities worldwide. As the drivers working for the company were contract workers, they suffered to survive during the pandemic situation. During the poor economic condition due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Car sharing services laid off many workers to reduce employee maintenance costs and save future funding during the Covid time. In addition, many Ola drivers had lost their job as the gig platform wanted to conserve the cash flow at that critical moment to manage the effect of the pandemic that almost dried up its annual revenue (Sivarajan et al. 2021). Another study by Assouad (2021) found that many Ola drivers surrendered their vehicles due to the pandemic situation as they failed to repay their loans with little or no earnings at the pandemic stage. Thus, the Ola drivers suffered a lot during the initial stage of the pandemic.

ANALYSIS OF THE MEASURES TAKEN BY ON-DEMAND CAB SERVICE COMPANIES TO MITIGATE THE CHALLENGES FACED BY OLA DRIVERS DUE TO COVID-19

According to Chi et al. (2022), gig companies and car-sharing platforms started implementing several strategies to rejuvenate business growth after experiencing the devastating effect of the pandemic. Ola, Uber and other ride service providers focused on maintaining 6S sub-constructs, including scan, safety, support, spread, system and speed. Another study by Raja et al. (2022) stated that identifying the threats through advanced technology, realignment of the cultural support from the community, expanding delivery services according to business needs and providing a consumer-centric approach were the strategies taken by the cab service providers to grow the business again.

According to Morshed et al. (2021), in the USA, Uber started utilising its archetypal business model, which is disruptive. This model played a crucial role in rejuvenating the growth of the TNCs (Transportation Network Companies). The USA considered using the 'Sentimental analysis' model to understand consumer attitudes towards car services during the lockdown. To analyse and understand the customers' sentiment, the sentimental analysis aims to create a list of emojis, or words associated with the positive or negative sentiment that motivates customers to think about the brand. Consumers felt safe using TNCs after watching these services maintain the pandemic restriction measures and showed a willingness to use these vehicles for transport purposes. The UK government mandated some rules for the driving partners associated with car-sharing services to monitor consumer retention rate at that period. For instance, the British government mandated the sanitisation of seat belts, door handles and seats after each journey to protect themselves and the passengers from the spread of the virus. The car-sharing organisations motivated the consumers during the pandemic in a way that, instead of walking or cycling, choosing cabs will save the time of individuals to move from one place to another with safety (Nakat&Bou-Mitri, 2021). As per Paramudhita&Sinaga, (2021), the UK focused on a 'partnership system' which follows the principle of mutual benefits during the pandemic. Indonesia also adopted this partnership system to support the gig workers and car driving partners during adverse economic conditions. As per this system, Indonesia and the UK helped the drivers from their business profitability, unlike India's system.

SUMMARY

The section can be summarised with the core fact that car-sharing services are one of the important parts of employment that contribute largely to the growth of the global gig economy. Most global workers are joining car-sharing companies and working as car driving partners to earn according to their convenience and have flexible employment. However, such employments are not permanent. The sudden outbreak of the deadly coronavirus worldwide affected the survival of the gig economy. A large percentage of gig workers who were working offline suffered the most due to the imposed lockdown restrictions. However, India and other countries like the UK, USA and other countries started implementing several strategies like making partnerships, maintaining safety measures and following several models to gain responses from the passengers in the post-pandemic period. India managed to gain a response from the passengers in the post-pandemic period when the global institutions and organisations started opening.

METHODS:

Selection of a proper research methodology based on the nature of the topic ensures that research questions and objectives are answered. Data for this research has been collected from the newspaper reports and some government reports published after the first coronavirus cases reported in India and the initial lockdown was imposed. The data type in this case is mainly secondary qualitative in nature. According to Chatfield (2020), secondary data which is pre-existing data is authentic and provides comprehensive information about a phenomenon or issue. In the case of current research, identifying the challenges faced by Ola cab drivers, using

information from credible newspaper sources and government sources provides this comprehensive information to answer the research question. The research has made use of the thematic data analysis method. Originally developed by Braun & Clarke (2012), thematic analysis allows researchers to become familiar with their study sources, identify coded keywords, identify possible themes and develop final themes based on the coded keywords. For this research, using the thematic analysis process proposed by Braun & Clarke (2012), codes from the selected sources were identified and grouped together to form the themes, then analysed and compared and contrasted against the literature review conducted. This comparison and contrast of the data have provided new insights about the situation of Ola drivers during and after the covid-19.

FINDINGS

Theme 1: The rise of digital technology on the prevalence of the gig economy: The increased demand of gig workers in the car-sharing industry

Recently, with the advancement in digital technology, the rate of prevalence of the gig economy is rising in global countries. In most cases, employees showing their willingness to work in those jobs will provide them flexibility. The rise of IT services and eCommerce services enhanced the need for contractual workers, contributing largely to the rise of the gig economy in this digital world. In this context, it can be said that technology drastically drove the prevalence of the gig economy by creating more flexible options for individuals to earn by various means (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2022). In India, the gig economy is likely to be the source of reducing the wage gap among different individuals.

Theme 2: Informal nature of the gig economy: The insecurity within the gig industry in India

Although the gig economy is good for reducing the wage gap among different global workers, the nature of the economy fails to ensure the safety of the workers, which often puts the survival of these workers at risk. Although the gig workers who work on digital platforms do not suffer, the workers who work offline often face challenges due to several factors. The employers of the gig economy often mistreat the gig workers and do not provide them with insurance benefits and prolonged job duration. In India, the gig workforce comprises up to 15 million workers who are associated with IT services and shared services. After the US, China, Brazil and Japan, as per the report of the India Staffing Federation 2019, India is the fifth biggest gig economy worldwide (Drishiti IAS, 2022). The sudden arrival of the pandemic restricted the mobility of the individuals which contributed largely to the increase of the gig economy size throughout the world. In India, the COVID-19 pandemic worked as a catalyst that increased the size of the gig sector. As per the report by ASSOCHAM (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry in India), the size of the Indian gig sector is expected to project growth of a CAGR of 17% within 2021 (Chakraborty, 2022). Thus, although the gig sector fails to provide legal security to the employees, increased needs for shared services, IT services and other factors are increasing the demands of gig workers.

Theme 3: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the gig workers: Challenges faced by the Ola drivers

Ola drivers and the driving partners of other car-sharing economies are also considered gig workers. This is because these organisations hire these workers on a contractual basis, and they can be laid off anytime, even without being informed. Due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19, the Ola drivers suffered hugely. Ola obtained a 95% decline in revenue due to the pandemic hit that forced the firm to change its business model (Economics Time, 2020). Nearly 200,000 Ola drivers were participated in a strike in Delhi-NCR from September 2020 with demand of hike in fares and need extension time for their loan payment (PTI, 2020).

The coronavirus resettled consumer attitudes towards adopting and using distinct services that forced Ola to revise its growth strategies during the post-Covid period. Ola's driving partners and owners assumed that they would suffer even after reducing the transport fare as the consumers would doubt the service's safety standards and hygiene maintenance (Soni, 2020). Gig workers, especially the Ola drivers, felt the desperate need for an income that forced them to work during the pandemic despite the health risks associated with riding due to the spread of the pandemic (Ranipeta, 2020). Ola drivers who relied entirely on earning from cab services experienced the worst situation during the pandemic.

Theme 4: Strategies taken by car-sharing economies to obtain business growth in the post-pandemic period

The sharing economy utilised models like 6S sub-constructs (scan, safety, support, spread, system and speed) while providing consumers with car-sharing services. India car service providers like Ola adhered to major safety measures like sanitisation before and after riding, compulsory fumigation every 48 hours and mandating the wearing of face-coverings for the drivers. Such safety measures taken by these companies motivated health-conscious customers to use these cars for transport purposes (Parashar, 2020). Apart from safety, the speed of Ola rides, the

easy booking system and the supportive nature of the workers who supported the passengers during the post-pandemic period helped the car-sharing economy to rebuild its economic strength. Thus, during the post-pandemic period, Ola and other cab services provided car-sharing services to passengers while following the 6S sub-constructs model. The mandatory flexible cancellation and selfie authentication procedures also helped the sharing car economies to effectively monitor how they adhered to the measures of the consumers to ensure more consumer safety.

TNCs in the USA used to advance technology in terms of sharing sentimentality. They annotated tweets labelled on the users' value of emotions, which attracted many consumers during the pandemic period. Thus, Indian organisations should use these opportunities as suggestions in order to ensure the growth of the sharing economy in the future. In the future, during any kind of situation like the pandemic, the Indian gig economy must look after sentimental analysis and other models which will help them acknowledge the needs of the customers. The '5 layers of safety' strategy of Ola that contributed largely to the rejuvenation of Ola's growth. Under this layer, apart from sanitisation and using face coverings, the company focused on checking the health status of the drivers and the consumers (India TV, 2020). The study further mentioned that the company additionally installed a protective screen among the divers and the passengers for constantly providing the drivers with every information through training modules and frequent communication. The car drivers' strategies helped the companies gain growth again during the post-pandemic period. Therefore, like the USA, Indian car-sharing industry also modified their services after acknowledging the consumers' psychology that helped them seeing growth again in the post-pandemic period.

DISCUSSION

It has already been analysed that global individuals have started relying on the gig sector for learning purposes. They are less likely to work under formal employment that will never give them the flexibility to balance their professional and personal life. Unlike its formal employment counterpart, the gig sector offers flexibility, huge earning opportunities and multiple professional options to gig workers. In most cases, the gig workers earn almost equally the formal employees do. However, the gig workers are not recruited in a formal recruiting method and mostly they join the gig industry as contractors for certain period. That means gig workers can switch to other job options per their convenience under certain conditions, which is impossible in regular employment practices. As a result, most of the individuals pursuing their education started joining the gig economy to gain work experience for utilising the experience further in their upcoming professional life. The rise of digital tools has helped the unemployed individuals in the world to earn and survive fairly with their earnings, the informal practice done by the employers of the gig economy affects the gig worker's life in terms of exploiting them according to their needs by taking the opportunity of their unemployment status. In this digital world, the rise of the sharing economy, increased the demand of the gig workers. Car sharing market is one of the largest contributors to the global GDP and the market size surpassed nearly 2 million USD in 2020 even after experiencing the worst pandemic effect. The market is likely to grow at a 20% more growth within 2027 (GMI, 2021). Many national governments worldwide have adopted urban mobility solutions that contributed to the growth of the driving industry. In this context, as analysed earlier, the study by Banik&Padalkar (2021), also identified the factors that accelerated the growth of the car-sharing sector and the other contributors to the gig economy. The rising growth of the fast-moving consumer sector, hospitality services, IT-enabled services, start-up and software services enhanced the demand for gig workers. Therefore, as the size of the car-sharing economy is likely to be enhanced further, the demand for driving partners will be growing in the future.

Moreover, after the pandemic period, many schools, colleges, and universities are started operating offline. As a result, many college and university students and office workers who will be in a hurry to reach their destinations will frequently seek help from Ola driving partners and other car-sharing service providers. As the pandemic affected the health of the global population adversely, most of the educated and health-conscious individuals will prefer travelling in cabs instead of cheap public transport with gathering. As a result, the adverse loss experienced by the Ola drivers and other cab drivers will be diluted in the upcoming days.

As per Tolba (2021), the adaptation of advanced technology contributes to the gig economy's rise. In India, the car-sharing industry is rapidly expanding due to the revolution in urban road transportation. The online vehicle service market will likely project a CAGR of 12.93% within 2025. Rapid access, easy availability and affordable rates of the car services in India is giving flexibility and comfort to the users, which contributes to the huge revenue generation of this sector. As a result, many individuals looking for jobs that will give them flexibility and great work-life balance are looking towards the job of driving partners of car sharing services. This is because these jobs will allow them to work according to their convenience. Ola, Uber and other car service providers are the main resources that are

constantly and rapidly upscaling the car sharing industry's business model. Most wealthy Indian citizens, especially office workers, regularly use these car-sharing services for the safety, security and comfort they get from the services while reaching their desired destinations quickly.

The primary issue within the global gig economy lies like informal employment practices. The employers of the gig economy employ workers according to their business needs and do not take these workers' legal and financial responsibilities. The employment relationship within the gig economy is mostly ambiguous regarding the rights of the workers and their working period. In most cases, the employers control the employees' employment contracts without investing in the cost of hiring (The Investopedia Team, 2022). In this context, it is also previously found that the employers of the gig often in most cases are, exploit the gig workers according to their business needs and often force them to work by taking advantage of their unemployment (Tronsor, 2018). In India, the gig economy sector is highly informal because it acts as a platform for bridging and facilitating the transactions of sellers and consumers with fewer maintenance costs. Such a business model drastically reduces the cost of employee maintenance. For example, if an Indian taxi driver looks for customers, connecting with Ola will help that person access the consumer easily. The consumer will also get the vehicle to use it for transport purposes (Business Standards, 2022). Thus, the rise of technological advancement is helping the gig economy to grow rapidly with the help of emerging digital technologies.

Apart from the advantage of the informal nature of the gig economy and the cost-effective ways of earning, pursuing a career in a gig economy is challenging. Due to the uncertain arrival of the pandemic, Indian consumers became more conscious regarding their spending. As a result, car-sharing companies like Ola started charging hefty commissions from drivers to keep the cash flow at the desired levels. They stopped giving them the incentive they deserved. As a result, these workers suffer due to their employment instability and informal nature (Shinde, 2022). Therefore, the workers who depended entirely on Ola and Uber suffered the most. At the same time, they were supposed to provide the cash flow to their employers even after not having consumer support during the pandemic period. Pal (2021) also mentioned that gig employers often follow unethical practices to gain their desired profits, and they barely think about the future of the gig workers.

Although the pandemic affected the business sector of the whole world adversely, the informal gig sector was affected the most. The workers associated with the car-sharing services experienced the worst scenario. As the pandemic increased the trend of work-from-home, most the individuals started working from home, which reduced their need to use transport vehicles. As IT employees contributed 40% to 50% of Ola rides in the major cities in India, the work-from-home mode drastically reduced the earnings of Ola (Bhattacharya, 2021). Therefore, although technological advancement helped the car-sharing industry to grow further, the work-from-home feature adversely affected the growth of the pandemic.

Due to the emerging rise of the gig economy, most of Indian workers started working in the gig sector due to the flexibility offered by this sector. As the size of the car service industry in India is huge, many independent workers started choosing their careers as Ola driving partners and most of them started relying entirely on this source of income. Due to the arrival of the pandemic, when Ola faced a 95% reduction in its consumer demands that affected its growth, the workers faced a challenge to afford the basic needs of their lives, their EMIs, medicines and other costs (Shah, 2020). Therefore, the sudden arrival of the pandemic affected the survival of the Ola drivers in terms of financial factors.

When the cab drivers in India realised that car-sharing during the pandemic would be continued for a longer period, they got tensed and started participating in strikes on demand for the fare they deserved. Many workers participated in strikes to ensure support from the Indian government at that period (PTI, 2020). Most workers also faced challenges in feeding their families as consumer attitudes changed drastically due to the lockdown restrictions. Therefore, while the emergence of technology provided the facilities for car drivers to earn from the help of technology, technology-enabled work-from-home facilities put their life at risk. In this context, it can be said that emerging technology appeared as a curse for the survival of the Indian car service providers during the pandemic period, especially those who only relied on car-sharing companies like Ola, Uber and other firms to live their life.

After experiencing the pandemic shock, the car sharing companies started thinking about implementing strategies to grow and manage the adverse loss it already experienced due to the pandemic. To gain support from the customers, Ola, one of the greatest contributors of the car-sharing economy in India, started focusing on identifying ways to provide consumers with safe services. In this context, the study by Chi et al. (2022) stated the 6S constructive strategy followed by the car sharing companies that included scan, safety, support, spread, system and speed. In the case of Ola, the company focused on the 'spread' element of the 6S constructive strategy by spreading the business into other nations like Sydney to ensure the desired revenue generation.

To motivate the consumers by conveying that they will be protected during the Ola ride, Ola started the following sanitisation. The drivers of Ola started wearing masks and fumigated the cars after every 48 hours. Following these protocols helped these firms gain the customers' trust in terms of safety because most consumers started preferring the car services that protect their health instead of the available cheap transport options. After understanding this psychological demand of the customers, the workers sanitised the seats, seat belts and doors during the pandemic. However, Ola can follow the measures taken by the UK and the USA to protect the service providers during bad economic conditions. Like the UK, Ola can focus on making partnerships with the drivers to gain the mutual benefit of their partnership during bad economic situations (Paramudhita & Sinaga, 2021). Making partnerships with drivers will force car-sharing companies to provide them with a certain percentage of the profit even during poor economic times. This will reduce the risk factors that already affected the Indian car driving partners during the COVID-19 outbreak. Like the USA, Indian car sharing companies may take the help of the sentimental-analysis model to understand the psychological aspects of the customers to provide good customer service. To do so, car-sharing companies may take the help of online surveys to understand the customers' needs and modify their services as per their convenience to serve them in a more consumer-centric approach.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH SCOPE

In conclusion, it can be said that, in many global nations, including India, the prevalence of the gig economy is increasing. The advancement in digital technology and the rise of sharing services worldwide increased the need for gig workers. Globally, many unemployed individuals are joining into the gig economy to gain the opportunity of flexible working and earning simultaneously. However, the flexibility and huge earning opportunity is drastically reducing the global unemployment rate, the lack of legal protection of the workers and the informal nature of the gig economy contributes to the adverse conditions that make the gig workers suffer. Sometimes, employers play the role as a contractor and hire employees for certain work. But these individuals are not formally employed. Therefore, they are exploited by their employers in the worst way possible.

The world witnessed the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in a major way. The impact of the pandemic on gig workers, especially those involved in car sharing services, was vast. The imposed lockdown restricted the mobility of global individuals, and their usage of sharing vehicles dropped almost entirely. As a result, the demand of car sharing services was reduced, which affected the survival of the gig workers.

In India, the sudden arrival of the pandemic caused a 95% decline in the annual revenue of Ola, the most popular TNC in India. Due to the huge loss in the annual revenue growth, Ola was forced to modify its existing business model a little bit and it laid off some employees to save the cash flow for the upcoming future to manage the loss that occurred due to the arrival of the pandemic. In most cases, the Ola drivers provided the car-sharing services to the passengers with major health risks because they were pressured to pay their EMIs and ensure their survival with their basic needs. Apart from India, countries like the USA, UK, Miami and other countries also suffered from the pandemic that affected the survival of the workers associated with sharing car services. While the UK followed the 'partnership approach' to ensure the survival and wellbeing of the gig workers during the worst economic conditions, the USA focused on utilising the 'sentimental analysis' model to effectively motivate the consumers to make purchases after assessing consumer attitudes. In India, Ola, to rejuvenate its growth, implemented strategies like '5 layers of safety' and adherence to the safety methods to stay away from pandemics to motivate the consumers to choose these services for transport purposes as the safest options. Implementation of these strategies helped Ola and other car-sharing companies to grow in the post-pandemic period.

Taking the findings from this research, policymakers need to find more effective ways to cost-effectively ensure the gig workers' legal, physical and financial protection. Doing so will help the gig employers to retain the gig workers and obtain business growth even under bad economic conditions because, gig economy is the future of employment for many global countries including India.

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Appendix 1:

Articles	Theme 1: The rise of digital technology on the prevalence of the gig economy: The increased demand of gig workers in the car-sharing industry	Theme 2: Informal nature of the gig economy: The insecurity within the gig industry in India	Theme 3: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the gig workers: Challenges faced by the Ola drivers	Theme 4: Strategies taken by car-sharing economies to obtain business growth in the post-pandemic period
Article 1: https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/technology-human-rights/gig-economy/	gig economy provides ease in the delivery of needed services			
Article 2: https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/indias-gig-economy		India is the fifth largest in flexi-staffing globally, after the US, China, Brazil and Japan		
Article 3: https://yourstory.com/2022/04/india-emerging-gig-economy-cohire-mymobiforce/amp		Gig sector in India is expected to increase		
Article 4: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/aftermarket/how-the-pandemic-has-hit-ola-uber-hard-in-india/76938562			Ola's revenue in April and May declined by almost 95 per cent	
Article 5: https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/corporate/story/covid-19-crisis-ola-uber-drivers-threaten-strike-in-delhi-ncr-from-september-1-271282-2020-08-27			Around 2 lakh drivers working with cab aggregators will take part in the strike	

<p>Article 6: https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/sme/coronavirus-covid-to-hit-cab-booking-uber-ola-businesses-due-to-lower-consumer-demand-hygiene-issues/1950086/</p>			<p>Address hygiene concerns for consumers on a war footing</p>	
<p>Article 7: https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/ola-and-uber-drivers-are-putting-their-health-risk-make-ends-meet-131177.</p>			<p>When Ola and Uber cabs resumed post the lockdown, it came as a sigh of relief for lakhs of drivers dependent on these auto and cab services, who had been out of income</p>	
<p>Article 8: https://www.carandbike.com/news/coronavirus-ola-ensures-fumigation-of-fleet-and-safety-equipment-for-all-driver-partners-2244795.</p>				<p>Ola performs compulsory fumigation every 48 hours</p>
<p>Article 9: https://www.indiatvnews.com/technology/news-ola-fight-against-covid-19-comes-with-their-5-layers-of-safety-643085.</p>				<p>Ola's fight against COVID-19 comes with their 5 layers of safety says Anand Subramanian</p>