Minnesota Journal of Business Law and Entrepreneurship

Volume 2026, No. 2

ISSN: 1540-3270

Assessing the Social and Economic Impact of Disability Inclusive Employment in Gig A Study of Zomato's Last Mile Delivery segment of Economy: Network

[1]Dr. Ashwini P. Chavan, [2]Dr. Harshada J. Raut

[1]Assistant Professor, MESIMCC

[2]Assistant Professor, MESIMCC

Abstract

The rapid expansion of gig segment of economy has developed newer employment opportunities, yet its adoption for persons having some disabilities remains underexplored. This study examines the social as well as the economic impact of disability inclusive employment within Zomato's last mile delivery network, with specific reference to its Project ZEAL initiative. The research evaluates how platform-based gig work contributes to financial independence, livelihood generation, and improved quality of life for physically challenged individuals. It further investigates the role of assistive technologies, digital accessibility, and algorithmic management in enabling participation in delivery operations. Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the study draws on secondary data, case-based evidence, and thematic insights from existing literature and organizational outcomes. The observations and findings denote that inclusive gig employment significantly enhances income opportunities, self-esteem, and the social type of inclusion among the persons with disabilities, while also positively influencing customer perception and brand equity. Also, the social possibilities like infrastructural barriers, limited social security, and the precarious nature of gig work continue to affect long-term sustainability. The study concludes that disability inclusive employment in the gig economy represents a shift from a welfare-oriented act towards a rights-based and empowerment-driven model. It denotes the requirement for policy support, inclusive platform design, and scalable assistive solutions to strengthen equitable participation in last mile delivery systems. The research contributes to the growing discourse on social inclusion, digital labour markets, and sustainable employment practices in emerging economies.

Keywords: Disability, Employment, Social Inclusion, Gig Economy, Last-Mile Delivery, Assistive Technology, Accessibility, Algorithmic Management, Economic Empowerment, Reasonable Accommodation

1. Introduction

The global labour market is undergoing a structural transformation with the rapid expansion of the gig economy, driven by digital platforms, flexible work arrangements, and on-demand services. In India, this inclusion has prominently reshaped employment patterns, particularly in urban logistics and last-mile delivery systems. While platform-based contribution has started new area for income generation, its inclusivity for specified group, specifically persons having some disabilities (PwDs), remains a critical area of inquiry. Despite policy frameworks promoting equal opportunity, the unemployment rate among PwDs continues to remain disproportionately high, indicating a gap between legislative intent and actual labour market participation (NITI Aayog, 2022).

In recent years, companies like Zomato have initiated inclusive employment models within the gig economy to bridge this gap. Through its Project ZEAL (Zomato's Equitable Action for Livelihood), the platform has attempted to integrate physically challenged individuals into its delivery network by leveraging assistive technologies, flexible work structures, and algorithmic adjustments. These include the implementation of customized mobility devices like NeoMotion wheelchairs, assignment of shorter delivery routes, and app-based communication to sensitize customers and restaurant partners. Such interventions indicate a transition from traditional welfare-based approaches to a more empowerment-driven employment model (Kumar, 2024).

From an economic perspective, disability-inclusive gig employment has the potential to provide financial independence, livelihood security, and enhanced earning opportunities for PwDs who have historically faced

limited access to formal employment. Many individuals engaged in such platforms report earnings for the first time or after prolonged periods of unemployment, thereby contributing not only to personal income but also to household economic stability (Zomato Report, 2025). Hitherto, the perspective of gig work also raises concerns related to income volatility, lack of social security, and precarious working conditions, which necessitate a balanced evaluation of its long-term sustainability (ResearchGate Study, 2026).

Beyond economic outcomes, the social implications of inclusive gig employment are equally significant. Participation in delivery work enables PwDs to engage with customers, restaurants, and peer networks, thereby reducing social isolation and enhancing self-esteem and dignity. The visibility of persons having some disabilities in active workforce roles also contributes to breaking societal stereotypes and fostering greater social acceptance. Customer interactions and feedback further reinforce positive perceptions, often translating into improved brand image and customer loyalty for organizations adopting inclusive practices (MDPI Study, 2023/2025).

At the introduction of newer technology and inclusion, the portion of the digital accessibility and algorithmic management becomes crucial. Platform-based systems determine task allocation, performance metrics, and incentives, which can either enable or restrict participation for PwDs. Adaptive algorithms, when designed inclusively, can account for physical constraints by modifying delivery distances and time expectations. Similarly, assistive technologies and universal design principles perform a prime portion in ensuring that gig platforms remain accessible and equitable for all users (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

Despite these advancements, several structural challenges persist. Urban infrastructure remains inadequately equipped to support mobility for wheelchair users, and there is little understanding by stakeholders pertaining to disability inclusion. Furthermore, legal frameworks like the “United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (UNCRPD) emphasize the requirement for dignified settlement and equal participation, yet their practical implementation within gig platforms is still evolving. The absence of comprehensive social protection mechanisms for gig workers further complicates the inclusion narrative (IISPP, 2025).

Against this backdrop, this study focuses on social and economic impact of disability inclusive employment within Zomato’s last-mile delivery network. By examining both the challenges and opportunities connected to initiatives, the research seeks to make available to the broader discourse on inclusive growth, digital labour markets, and sustainable employment practices. This is focusing on the platform-based enterprises serving as catalysts for social transformation by integrating accessibility, technology, and equity into their operational frameworks.

2 Review of Literature

The discourse on disability inclusion in employment has evolved significantly from a welfare-oriented approach to a rights-based and capability-driven framework. Contemporary research emphasizes the importance of integrating persons with disabilities (PwDs) into mainstream economic systems to enhance both social equity and economic productivity. Studies highlight that employment remains one of the most critical determinants of social inclusion, yet PwDs continue to face structural barriers such as discrimination, lack of accessibility, and limited institutional support (Tom Shakespeare, 2014).

In this connection of labour markets, the start of new gig segment in economy has introduced flexible employment opportunities that can potentially benefit marginalized groups. However, the specific type of gig work is often characterized by informality, lack of job security, and absence of social protection. Research indicates that while platform-based work offers autonomy and low entry barriers, it simultaneously exposes workers to precarious conditions and algorithmic specific control (Alex Rosenblat, 2018). This duality becomes particularly relevant to participation of PwDs in such systems.

Recent studies focusing specifically on disability inclusion in the gig economy recommends as a digital application may act as enablers of employment by reducing traditional workplace constraints. For, research on food delivery platforms in India provides easy work allow PwDs to engage in income-generating activities without rigid schedules, thereby supporting economic independence (Anita Ghai, 2015). Hitherto, the same work also

warn that digital exclusion, lack of assistive infrastructure, and limited digital literacy may hinder effective participation.

The role of technology, particularly assistive devices and digital accessibility, has been widely recognized as a key enabler of inclusive employment. Assistive technologies such as motorized wheelchairs and adaptive interfaces have been found to significantly improve mobility and productivity among workers with locomotor disabilities. Studies in this domain emphasize the importance of universal design principles in ensuring that digital type new platforms are accessible to diverse user groups (Morten Goodwin, 2021). In the context of last-mile delivery, such technologies become critical for operational feasibility and worker safety.

Algorithmic management, a defining feature of platform-based work, also include remarkable scholarly attention. Research suggests that automated systems governing task allocation, performance evaluation, and incentives can create both opportunities and constraints for workers. While adaptive algorithms can enhance efficiency and inclusivity by tailoring work assignments, opaque and rigid systems may lead to exploitation and stress, particularly for vulnerable groups (Trebor Scholz, 2017). For PwDs, the design of such systems performs a important role in determining their level of participation and overall work experience.

This socio-economic magnitude, many empirical studies have documented the positive impact of inclusive employment on wellness of PwDs. Employment not only contributes to financial independence but also enhances self-esteem, social identity, and community participation. Research indicates that visibility of PwDs in customer-facing roles, such as delivery services, helps challenge societal stereotypes and fosters greater acceptance (Sarah Burch, 2020). Additionally, organizations adopting inclusive practices often experience improved brand perception and customer loyalty, indicating a strategic advantage beyond social responsibility.

At the policy level, frameworks such as UNCRPD tell for an equal opportunity of employment and reasonable accommodation. Studies examining policy implementation highlight gaps between legal provisions and ground realities, particularly in emerging economies where infrastructural and institutional limitations persist (Gerard Quinn, 2018). In India, initiatives by both public and private sectors are increasingly aligning with these principles, yet scalability and sustainability remain key challenges. Furthermore, literature on social sustainability underscores the need to integrate economic, social, and technological dimensions to create inclusive systems. In the logistics and delivery sector, last-mile operations have been identified as both cost-intensive and socially significant, making them a critical area for innovation. Incorporating PwDs into this segment addresses the problem of labour shortages and provide the inclusive urban development (John Allen, 2018). However the research, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies that comprehensively assess the combined social and economic impact of disability-inclusive practices within platform-based delivery networks. This study focus on economic outcomes or social implications in isolation. Hence, it is required for integrated research that evaluates how initiatives like Zomato's inclusive delivery model influence multiple dimensions of well-being, operational efficiency, and societal change.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Problem Statement

Despite of growing awareness around rights against disability, persons having some disabilities (PwDs) continue to face significant barriers in accessing dignified and sustainable employment. The gig economy has introduced flexible work opportunities; however, its inclusivity, accessibility, and long-term viability for PwDs remain uncertain. While initiatives such as Zomato's disability-inclusive delivery model demonstrate promising outcomes in terms of employment generation and social integration, concerns related to precarious work conditions, infrastructural limitations, and absence of social security. The systematic assess whether such platform-based employment models genuinely give to the social as well as economic empowerment of physically challenged individuals or merely offer short-term adaptive solutions.

Despite supportive policies, persons having some disabilities continue to face limited access to sustainable employment. Wherein gig segment of economy offers flexible opportunities, its inclusivity, accessibility, and long-term benefits remain uncertain. Hence, it is essential to assess whether disability-inclusive initiatives in platform-based delivery systems truly enhance social and economic empowerment or simply provide temporary solutions.

3.2. Research Objectives

To examine the extent of disability inclusive employment within Zomato's last-mile delivery network.

To evaluate the economic impact of gig-based employment on physically challenged delivery partners.

To assess the social impact of such employment in terms of inclusion, self-esteem, and quality of life.

To analyze the role of assistive technology and platform-based mechanisms in enabling participation of PwDs.

To identify the challenges and limitations associated with disability inclusion in the gig economy.

3.3. Research Hypotheses

H1: Disability inclusive employment in the gig economy has a significant positive impact on the economic empowerment of physically challenged individuals.

H2: Disability inclusive employment significantly improves social inclusion and quality of life among physically challenged individuals.

H3: Assistive technology and digital accessibility have a significant positive influence on the participation of PwDs in last-mile delivery services.

H4: Algorithmic management and platform-based support systems significantly affect the work efficiency of physically challenged delivery partners.

H5: There are significant challenges related to infrastructure, job security, and working conditions affecting the sustainability of PwDs' participation in the gig economy.

3.4. Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to evaluate both social and economic dimensions of disability-inclusive employment. The research is exploratory in nature, as it examines an emerging phenomenon within the gig economy.

3.5. Data Collection

Secondary Data:

The research is depending on secondary data collected from research papers indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO, along with reports, case studies, policy documents, and organizational publications related to disability inclusion and gig economy practices.

Case Study Approach:

Zomato's Project ZEAL is used as a focal case to understand practical implementation and real-world outcomes.

3.6. Analytical Approach

a. Thematic Analysis: To analyze social and behavioral outcomes such as inclusion, dignity, and mental well-being.

b. Comparative Analysis: To compare traditional employment barriers with gig-based opportunities.

c. Conceptual Analysis: To link key constructs such as accessibility, algorithmic management, and economic empowerment.

3.7. Scope of the Study

a. Focuses on physically challenged individuals (PwDs) engaged in last-mile delivery services.

b. Limited to the gig economy platform model, with Zomato as a case reference.

c. Covers both social and economic dimensions of inclusion.

3.8. Mejor Limitations

a. The study relies primarily conducted with the secondary type of data, which may limit empirical generalization.

b. Findings are largely based on a single platform case (Zomato) and may not completely represent entirentire segment economy models.

c. Rapid evolution of gig platforms and policies may affect the long-term applicability of results.

4. Data Analysis and Inferential Statistics

This research is focused on a secondary data-driven analytical framework, supported by documented case evidence and empirical insights from existing research on disability inclusion in the gig economy. The analysis is structured around the key dimensions of economic impact, social impact, technological enablement, and operational challenges.

4.1 Economic Impact Analysis

The available data indicates that disability-inclusive employment in Zomato's delivery network has contributed significantly to income generation and financial independence. Many delivery partners with disabilities reported earning for the first time or after prolonged unemployment. Enhanced earning structures, including higher pay per kilometre and flexible working hours, have improved income stability. This reflects a positive shift from dependency to self-sustained livelihoods.

4.2 Social Impact Analysis

The findings suggest a substantial improvement in social inclusion, self-esteem, and mental well-being among physically challenged delivery partners. Increased interaction with customers, restaurant staff, and peers has reduced social isolation and enhanced confidence levels. Visibility in public roles has also contributed to breaking societal stereotypes and fostering acceptance.

4.3 Technological and Platform Enablement

Assistive technologies like, motorized wheelchairs and adaptive delivery mechanisms had performed a crucial part in enabling participation. Platform-level interventions, including short-distance order allocation and app-based sensitization, have improved operational feasibility. These measures highlight the importance of digital accessibility and inclusive platform design in supporting PwDs.

4.4 Challenges and Constraints

Despite positive outcomes, several challenges persist. Urban infrastructure barriers, lack of ramps and accessible roads, and safety concerns continue to affect operational efficiency. Additionally, the absence of social security, insurance coverage, and job stability indicates the precarious nature of gig employment. The factors talk around the long-term sustainability of such inclusive models.

4.5. Inferential Statistics (Conceptual Interpretation)

Given the qualitative and secondary nature of the data, inferential analysis is conducted through logical validation of hypotheses and pattern-based interpretation rather than primary statistical testing.

Table 1 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Result	Inference
H1: Disability inclusive employment improves economic empowerment	Supported	Evidence shows increased income, financial independence, and livelihood opportunities
H2: Disability inclusive employment improves social inclusion and quality of life	Supported	Improved self-esteem, reduced isolation, and enhanced social interaction observed
H3: Assistive technology and accessibility influence participation	Supported	Use of NeoMotion devices and platform adaptations enabled active participation
H4: Algorithmic management affects work efficiency	Partially Supported	Adaptive delivery allocation improves efficiency, but system rigidity may limit flexibility
H5: Challenges affect sustainability of participation	Supported	Infrastructure gaps, safety risks, and lack of social security remain major concerns

4.6. Key Inferences

Disability-inclusive gig employment positively impacts both economic and social dimensions of PwDs' lives.

Technology acts as a critical enabler, bridging the gap between capability and opportunity.

Platform design and algorithmic flexibility significantly influence participation and productivity.

However, the precarious nature of gig work limits long-term sustainability and security.

A balanced model integrating inclusion, protection, and policy support is essential for scalable impact.

4.7. Conclusion

The analysis indicates that Zomato's inclusive delivery model represents a progressive step toward equitable employment, demonstrating measurable improvements in financial independence and social integration of physically challenged individuals. However, to transform this initiative into a sustainable employment model, there is requirement for institutional support, infrastructural development, and stronger social protection mechanisms.

5. Findings

5.1. Objective-wise Findings

1. Disability Inclusive Employment in Zomato's Delivery Network

The study finds that Zomato's inclusive initiative has successfully integrated persons with disabilities into last-mile delivery operations. The model demonstrates that gig platforms can act as viable employment avenues when supported by inclusive policies and adaptive mechanisms.

2. Economic Impact on Physically Challenged Individuals

Disability-inclusive gig employment has led to financial independence, regular income generation, and improved livelihood opportunities. Many individuals experienced their first formal earning opportunity, reducing dependency upon the family members support and enhancing economic self-sufficiency.

3. Social Impact and Quality enhancement for Life

The social inclusion of PwDs in delivery roles has significantly improved self-esteem, confidence, and social participation. Increased interaction with customers and society has reduced isolation and contributed to breaking stereotypes associated with disability.

4. Role of Assistive Technology and Platform Support

Assistive technologies such as motorized wheelchairs and platform-based adjustments like short-distance delivery allocation have performed a critical act in facilitating participation. Digital type accessibility and inclusive design have emerged as key enablers of operational efficiency.

5. Challenges in Disability Inclusion

Despite positive outcomes, challenges such as inadequate urban infrastructure, safety concerns, low form of social type security, and income uncertainty persist. These factors highlight the limitations of gig-based employment in ensuring long-term stability.

5.2. Suggestions

a. Strengthening Policy Support and Social Security

Government and platform companies should collaborate to provide insurance coverage, health benefits, and minimum income security for PwDs engaged in gig work.

b. Improvement in Urban Infrastructure

Development of accessible public infrastructure, including ramps, smooth pathways, and inclusive transport systems, is essential to support mobility and efficiency.

c. Enhancement of Assistive Technology Accessibility

Subsidies and financial support should be provided to make advanced assistive devices affordable and scalable for persons with disabilities.

d. Inclusive Platform Design and Algorithmic Flexibility

Gig platforms should further refine algorithmic management systems to account for physical limitations by customizing delivery distances, time expectations, and workload allocation.

e. Skill Development and Digital Training

Training programs should be introduced to enhance digital literacy, operational skills, and safety awareness among PwDs.

f. Awareness and Sensitization Programs

Continuous efforts are required to sensitize customers, restaurant partners, and society to foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

g. Diversification of Employment Roles

Platforms should explore alternative roles such as warehouse management, customer support, and backend operations for PwDs who may face challenges in delivery tasks.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that disability-inclusive employment within the gig economy, particularly in Zomato's last-mile delivery network, performed a significant role for economic type of empowerment and social acceptance of physically challenged individuals. The implementation of assistive technology, flexible work structures, and

inclusive platform design has enabled PwDs to participate actively in income-generating act, hereby developing the required quality of the life and societal engagement.

However, the findings also reveal that the gig economy, while inclusive in approach, remains structurally fragile due to issues such as lack of social security, infrastructural barriers, and job uncertainty. Therefore, for such models to achieve long-term sustainability, there is a need for holistic interventions combining policy support, technological innovation, and inclusive infrastructure development.

Overall, the research highlights that disability inclusion in the gig economy is not merely a corporate initiative but a transformative pathway toward equitable growth and social justice. With the right ecosystem support, platform-based employment can evolve into a sustainable and scalable model for inclusive development in emerging economies like India.

References

[1] Kumar, A. (2024). Diversity dialogue II: Building an inclusive fleet – Insights from Zomato's equitable action for livelihood. Zomato Blog.
[2] Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. (2024). National award for empowerment of persons with disabilities. Government of India.
[3] NITI Aayog. (2022). India's booming gig and platform economy. Government of India.
[4] Revista de Cine Forum. (2026). Employment prospects for people with disabilities in the food delivery gig economy.
[5] ResearchGate. (2026). Invisible burdens of platform work: A study on delivery riders in India.
[6] Taylor & Francis. (2024). Digital accessibility and algorithmic management in gig economy platforms.
[7] MDPI. (2023/2025). The impact of hiring people with disabilities on customers' perspectives.
[8] IISPP. (2025). A comprehensive review of disability inclusion in the Indian economy.
[9] Zomato. (2025). Impact assessment of Project ZEAL and inclusive delivery employment.
[10] Allen, J., Browne, M., Woodburn, A., & Leonardi, J. (2018). The role of urban consolidation centres in sustainable freight transport. Transport Reviews, 32(4), 473–490. (Scopus, Web of Science)
[11] Burch, S., & Wood, A. (2020). The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace and its impact on organizational outcomes. Journal of Business Ethics, 162(4), 835–848. (Scopus, SSCI)
[12] Ghai, A. (2015). Rethinking disability in India. Routledge India. (Scopus Indexed Book)
[13] Goodwin, M., & Rusu, L. (2021). Assistive technologies and digital inclusion: Implications for employment. Technology in Society, 67, 101745. (Scopus, SCI)
[14] Quinn, G., & Degener, T. (2018). Human rights and disability: The current use and future potential of United Nations human rights instruments in the context of disability. United Nations Publications. (Web of Science Indexed)
[15] Rosenblat, A. (2018). Uberland: How algorithms are rewriting the rules of work. University of California Press. (Scopus Indexed)
[16] Scholz, T. (2017). Uberworked and underpaid: How workers are disrupting the digital economy. Polity Press. (Scopus Indexed)
[17] Shakespeare, T. (2014). Disability rights and wrongs revisited. Routledge. (Scopus Indexed)
[18] Zomato. (2025). Impact assessment of Project ZEAL and inclusive delivery employment.