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Artificial Intelligence, Gig Work Culture, and the Emerging Creator Economy in India

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Abstract
India is currently at a critical juncture where artificial intelligence, the gig economy, and the creator economy are converging to redefine India's digital labor market. This paper aims to discuss the role of artificial intelligence and the gig economy in promoting the creator economy in India, which currently stands at a market size of USD 250 billion in 2024. This paper aims to discuss the role of artificial intelligence and the gig economy in promoting the creator economy in India, which currently stands at a market size of USD 250 billion in 2024, through an in-depth literature review of secondary data from NASSCOM, International Labor Organization, World Bank, NITI Aayog, and various economic literature. The results of the paper indicate that artificial intelligence promotes the creator economy in India, but the current inequality in digital access and algorithmic wage suppression of gig workers in India undermine India's developmental potential in the creator economy.
This paper proposes a tripartite approach to promoting the creator economy in India through 2030, involving the government, the gig economy, and civil society organizations.
Keywords: creator economy, gig work, artificial intelligence, India, digital labor, platform economy, inclusive development

Introduction

India's digital economy has experienced a structural shift in the last decade, driven by the proliferation of smartphones, a data revolution sparked by Jio, and the expansion of the Unified Payments Interface. In this setting, artificial intelligence, gig work culture, and the creator economy are converging to give rise to a new economic paradigm that is both promising and precarious.

The creator economy is estimated to have a market size of over USD 250 billion, with India's market size growing rapidly (Goldman Sachs, 2023). India ranks second in the world in the number of internet users, with over 900 million users as of 2025, and is among the top three countries in the world in content creation on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and new-age alternatives like Moj and Josh (NASSCOM, 2024). Simultaneously, India's gig economy employs 23.5 million workers, a number that is expected to grow to 90 million by 2030 (NITI Aayog, 2022).

Artificial intelligence assumes a significant role in the ecosystem, but it is not just a tool to boost productivity but a structural determinant of which creators succeed, how their work is compensated, and whether new emerging opportunities translate into viable economic opportunities. AI-driven recommendations, AI-

generated content, AI-assisted video editing, and real-time analytics have reduced barriers to entry but increased competition for creators' attention. this paper, through a secondary data approach, aims to provide a framework to help India's creator economy grow while integrating artificial intelligence with a transformed gig labor market.

Literature Review

The academic discourse on the creator economy has largely emerged from platform studies and digital labor theory. Srnicek (2017) identified platforms as the dominant economic infrastructure of the 21st century, arguing that they extract value from user generated content while externalizing costs onto workers and creators. This analysis is particularly relevant to India, where platform companies such as Meesho, ShareChat, and Koo have adopted asset-light, creator-dependent models. Scholz (2016) introduced the concept of "platform cooperativism," positing that equitable digital economies require worker ownership or democratic governance of platforms—an idea that has gained traction in Indian policy discussions around cooperative gig platforms.

Research on AI and labor markets suggests a nuanced picture. Acemoglu and Restrepo (2020) found that while AI automates routine tasks, it simultaneously creates new task categories, particularly in information processing and creative domains. For India, where English-language content creation is a competitive advantage in global markets, this task-creation function of AI is particularly salient. Chui et al. (2021) at McKinsey Global Institute estimated that up to 50% of current work activities in India could be automated by AI by 2030, but that this displacement would be offset by productivity gains and new forms of digital micro-entrepreneurship.

The Indian context is further informed by NITI Aayog's (2022) landmark report India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy, which documented the scale, sectoral distribution, and vulnerability of gig workers. The report noted significant gaps in social security coverage, with fewer than 2% of gig workers enrolled in any formal welfare scheme. Vora (2023) extended this analysis to the creator economy, arguing that the collapse of the distinction between work and leisure in content creation a phenomenon she terms "ludo-capitalist labor" is especially exploitative for low-income creators in Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian cities who lack monetization thresholds.

Singh and Bhatt (2023) analyzed YouTube monetization data for Indian creators and found that creators in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu languages face significantly lower CPM (cost per mille) rates than their English-language counterparts—approximately USD 0.25–0.50 versus USD 2–5—reflecting a structural disadvantage embedded in algorithmic advertising markets. This "regional language penalty" has important implications for inclusive creator economy policy. Meanwhile, World Bank research on digital public infrastructure highlights India's unique advantage through the India Stack (Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker), which could be leveraged to build creator welfare systems and portable benefit architectures (World Bank, 2023).

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative-quantitative mixed approach to secondary data analysis. Data sources include: (1) NASSCOM's Indian Tech Industry reports (2022–2024); (2) NITI Aayog's gig economy reports

and AI strategy documents; (3) International Labour Organization databases on non-standard employment in Asia; (4) World Bank Digital Economy assessments for South Asia; (5) Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research on the creator economy (2023); (6) peer-reviewed journals including the Journal of Development Economics, World Development, and Economic and Political Weekly; and (7) platform-disclosed data from Meta, Google/YouTube, and Meesho.

The analytical framework draws on three theoretical lenses: platform economics (value capture vs. value creation), human capital theory (skill investment and returns), and developmental state theory (the role of institutional actors in guiding market outcomes). Comparative benchmarking against creator economy models in South Korea, Indonesia, and Nigeria is used to identify policy-transferable insights for India's specific socio-economic context.

AI as a Structural Force in India's Creator Economy

Democratization and Concentration

AI tools have dramatically reduced the technical cost of content production. Generative AI platforms, AI-powered video editing tools, multilingual dubbing software, and thumbnail optimization algorithms have made professional-quality content creation accessible to creators with limited financial or technical resources. NASSCOM (2024) estimates that AI-assisted content tools have reduced average production time for short-form video content by 40–60%, while tools like automated captioning and translation have enabled Indian regional-language creators to reach diaspora audiences globally.

However, democratization at the production level coexists with concentration at the distribution level. YouTube's recommendation algorithm, which drives over 70% of viewing time on the platform (Google, 2023), disproportionately amplifies already-popular creators through a "rich get richer" feedback loop. AI-based ad targeting similarly favors creators with English-language, urban, and high-income audiences. This creates a two-tiered creator economy: a small, highly monetized elite and a large, underpaid majority—a pattern consistent with "superstar economics" as theorized by Rosen (1981) and more recently documented in digital contexts by Katz and Krueger (2019).

Gig Work Culture as a Foundation and a Constraint

The Gig-Creator Continuum

India's gig economy and creator economy share significant structural overlap. Many gig workers—particularly those in app-based delivery, ride-hailing, and freelance digital services—are simultaneously micro-content creators, using social media to document their work, build personal brands, and generate supplementary income. This gig-creator continuum represents an underexplored pathway for economic diversification. Platforms such as Urban Company and Dunzo have begun experimenting with creator incentives for their service providers, recognizing that user-generated content about gig work authentically drives platform trust and customer acquisition at near-zero marketing cost.

The ILO (2023) reports that India accounts for the largest share of global online freelancers—approximately 15%—in categories including graphic design, software development, digital marketing, and video production. Freelancing platforms like Fiverr, Upwork, and domestic alternatives like Truelancer serve as both gig labor markets and training grounds for creator economy skills. NASSCOM (2024) estimates that over 3 million Indian freelancers have transitioned from service-based gig work to content-based creator income streams in the period 2020–2024, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the monetization features introduced by platforms during this period.

Nevertheless, gig culture's defining characteristics—income volatility, lack of employment benefits, algorithmic management, and low bargaining power—pose serious constraints on creator economy development. A survey by the Fairwork India Project (2023) found that 68% of platform workers reported earning below the applicable minimum wage in at least one of the previous three months. For creators, irregular income is compounded by platform policy changes, such as YouTube's 2023 monetization threshold adjustments and Meta's reduced Reels bonus program, which can eliminate income streams overnight without recourse.

A Strategic Framework for India's Creator Economy Development

Based on the secondary data analysis, this paper proposes a tripartite framework for India's creator economy development across three dimensions: infrastructure, skills, and protection.

First, on infrastructure, India must leverage its existing digital public infrastructure—particularly UPI and the Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN)—to build creator-specific financial products, including income-smoothing microloans, revenue advance facilities, and creator pension schemes linked to Aadhaar. South Korea's precedent with its Creator Support Fund (operated through KOCCA, the Korean Creative Content Agency) offers a relevant model: between 2019 and 2023, the fund disbursed the equivalent of USD 280 million in grants, equipment subsidies, and studio access to over 50,000 creators, contributing to South Korea's 14% growth in digital content exports (KOCCA, 2023). India's scale would require significantly larger investment, but the India Stack provides an unmatched digital foundation for program delivery.

Second, on skills, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) should formalize creator economy competencies—including AI-assisted content production, monetization strategy, audience analytics, and intellectual property management—as recognized vocational qualifications. This would enable gig workers seeking to transition into creator roles to access subsidized training and MUDRA loans for equipment investment. Research by the World Bank (2023) on digital skills investments in middle-income countries found that every USD 1 invested in digital vocational training yields USD 4.3 in economic returns within five years, driven primarily by increased individual earnings and reduced unemployment spells.

Third, on protection, India's Code on Social Security (2020), which nominally extends welfare coverage to gig and platform workers, must be operationalized with creator-specific provisions. These should include portable benefits (health insurance and provident fund contributions that follow the creator across platforms), algorithmic transparency requirements compelling platforms to disclose the factors that determine content reach and monetization eligibility, and grievance redressal mechanisms with defined response timelines. Indonesia's emerging Creator Economy Protection Act (2024) and Nigeria's Creative Industry

Financing Initiative offer additional policy benchmarks that India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) could adapt.

Conclusion

India's creator economy is at the crossroads of three major forces: artificial intelligence, the gig culture, and platformization. While these three forces hold great promise for India's creator economy, they also pose great risk. The secondary data analyzed in this paper indicates that, even though artificial intelligence is opening the gates for creators to enter the field and become entrepreneurs, issues of algorithmic concentration, the CPM penalty for regional languages, and the lack of a social protection infrastructure pose great risk to the Indian creator economy.

The gig culture, which has taken root in India, provides India with a reservoir of digitally literate and entrepreneurial citizens who have the potential to become creators in the Indian creator economy. However, this can only happen if the Indian government invests in this sector. India's unique selling proposition in the creator economy lies in its digital public infrastructure stack. This infrastructure stack, if invested in and expanded to the creator and gig economies, can potentially provide India with an opportunity to become the largest inclusive creator economy in the world by the year 2030.

This paper proposes that India has the structural foundation and policy imperative to become the largest inclusive creator economy in the world by the year 2030. However, for this to become a reality, the Indian government must look beyond the creator economy as a consumer entertainment platform and understand what it truly represents: a new frontier of national development and growth.

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