

Breaking Financial Barriers: Women's Economic Independence Through Food Delivery Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Food delivery platforms have become an important source of flexible jobs in the dynamic Indian urban economy, providing women with new livelihood opportunities in recent years. With the digitization of workstations redefining the condition of work, this paper sets out to examine how, to what extent, these platforms support the economic empowerment of women in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Using primary data based on 271 women involved in formal and informal food delivery services, the study assesses such important dimensions of empowerment as generation of income, mastering financial empowerment, decision-making, and social recognition. The results demonstrate that the use of these platforms increases financial independence and self-confidence among many women, whilst business development and sustainability levels are low. The findings of Garrett are as follows: their ranking results present financial independence and family respect as the most valued outcomes, and the findings of the Chi-square analysis show that there exists a significant relationship between educational level and digital skill barriers. Systemic requirements that are also identified in the study are limitations of capital, safety, digital literacy, and socio-cultural norms, which still slow down the involvement of women completely. The study suggests that the delivery of food through the platforms is a way toward empowerment, yet targeting policy support, design inclusion, and online training are essential to keep access and impact equal.

Keywords: *Women's empowerment, food delivery platforms, digital work, gig economy, financial independence, digital divide, gender barriers, informal economy, Coimbatore, platform inclusion*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital ecosystems has transformed global economies as it has opened new vistas of economic participation of individuals, especially that of women. Food delivery platforms are one of these revolutionary technologies that have become very instrumental in creating a massive change in consumer behavior, and economic empowerment. Due to food delivery services that have gained popularity: Uber eats, Zomato, and Swiggy, the food business has transformed not only the food industry but has provided women opportunities to become economically independent, especially in areas where women have not had a very clear presence in the formal labour market (Nadimpalli et al., 2022).

The idea of bringing women on board with digital platforms on economic strength is relevant to the rationalisation of gender equality and socio-economic growth. The food delivery platforms offer flexible work

schedules and thus present women with an opportunity to juggle between home chores and income-generating activities, which is very significant in cultures where there is a traditional gender specialization (Pelloni et al., 2020). Also, such sites are involved in the decrease of these barriers to transportation, the absence of local jobs, gendered domestic labor divide (Fiala, 2020).

The expanded role of economic independence among women translates to the broader level of discussion on digital literacy and the adoption of technology. Chatterjee et al. (2021) argue that women are spending more time in the digital space owing to the emergence of food delivery companies, a situation that has made those people more competent in issues related to mobile technology, online communication, and financial management. Through their entry into the digital economy, women not only acquire the means to be financially independent but also feel more confident, and this is how they are disrupting the patriarchal folds (Mujtaba & Zaka, 2019).

This paper will examine how the food delivery services are contributing to the end of both the financial barrier and towards the economic independence of women. The research analyzes how, through these platforms, the women in urban and semi-urban locations feel empowered as a result of the financial independence and ability to acquire new skills. Knowledge of such dynamics can be used to influence the policies in furthering gender equality in the digital economy.

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even with a huge advance in gender equality, women in most areas continue to experience great barriers to economic autonomy, such as reduced access to paid work, displaced social roles, and limited mobility. These issues deter women in such societies from being fully involved in the economy, thus they are unable to attain financial independence and self-sustainability (Mujtaba & Zaka, 2019). Food delivery platforms fall into a larger category of the gig economy and possess the potential to mitigate these obstacles by providing women with flexible work opportunities that will enable them to bring in income and tend to familial duties at the same time. Nonetheless, the extent in which the platforms in particular lead to the empowerment of women financially and the elimination of financial impediments has little research.

The research question this study is trying to answer is the way in which food delivery platforms dissolve women's economic dependency, and the opportunities as well as the challenges they encounter when doing so in this digital economy. It aims at exploring how these platforms help to break conventional gender boundaries, improve women's access to income, and achieve economic independence. The study will also address the effect of digital literacy, socio-economic background, and geographical locations, and how they impact the involvement of women in the food delivery ecosystem. Filling these gaps, this research will bring insightful contributions to the use of the digital platform in order to achieve gender equality and empower women to become financially empowered, especially in environments where formal employment opportunities are scarce.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research is important because it has the potential to provide useful information to the area of online platforms, gender equality, and economic empowerment. With the growth of the gig economy, the food delivery systems have become more significant to people in search of employment with flexibility. To women, particularly those in developing nations and traditional societies, the platforms provide an exclusive platform to effectively reduce the structural and societal impediments that have hitherto constrained them financially (Pelloni et al., 2020).

With this in mind, dedicating attention to how women gained economic independence through the use of food delivery platforms, we will better understand the emancipatory power of digital technologies that promote women's empowerment. The results will provide illumination on how these avenues enable women to work around conventional gender-related barriers of access to formal jobs, constraints of movement, and cultural demands of domesticity. This will illuminate the practice of technology being one of the key catalysts in fixing gender gaps in the job market.

Additionally, the research will help in addition to the wider debate concerning economic independence of women in the digital economy. The study of the experiences of women in different socio-economic environments will help to give actionable policies to the policies, businesses, and social organizations working to achieve gender equity and digital inclusion. The comprehension of the challenges and opportunities that women encounter in these sites shall inform the creation of strategies and interventions that will have a role in empowering women economically and decreasing the socio-economic gaps.

Moreover, the research will become important to the academic investigation of technology and labor markets regarding gender. It will close existing literature gaps, as they tend to ignore defining how financial empowerment of women can be achieved through the use of digital platforms, such as food delivery services, in particular. Finally, the results of the present study may strongly excite new studies on digital platforms and their role in generating inclusive economic development and social change in the future.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the impact of food delivery platforms on women's economic empowerment
2. To identify the barriers and challenges faced by women in utilizing food delivery platforms for economic independence
3. To recommend strategies for enhancing women's participation and success in food delivery platforms

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women empowerment and financial independence go hand in hand with a broader topic of gender equality and social inclusion. According to recent studies, economic independence can play a major role in elevating the position of a woman in a community, as well as enabling women to break out of years of molding according to their gender (Ali, 2022). Cultural and socio-economic forces in the past have restricted the input of women in the labor market more so in areas where gender roles were deeply rooted in the day to day routines. Nevertheless, the childbirth has brought new challenges and opportunities to women to get independent financially as digital platforms are introduced to the markets, including the food delivery business (Pelloni et al., 2020).

Research has revealed that in spite of the increased access to the digital platforms, a lot of women continued to encounter a lot of hindrances when it came to the actual exploitation of the opportunities. The Women World Banking report (2021) cites such issues and states that, although financial accessibility has already increased, economic independence is still limited because a diversity of cultural, social, and structural barriers limits women due to a variety of factors. To take one example, women in Indonesia enjoy equal opportunities to access financial services, but use such services less actively, unless compared to men (Women in the World Banking, 2021). This gap is also ascribed to the cultural expectations, where women should not have their own say on financial matters but only on the running of their households.

The role of food delivery platforms in contributing to the empowerment of women in the economy is emphasized by the flexibility and possibility of working at home, which is suitable under the terms of the traditional gender roles where such duties are of higher importance. According to Mandolfo et al. (2022), females prefer to participate in e-commerce and take gig economy jobs more when flexible work enables them to reach a balance between work and home issues. Besides, women have been encouraged to become entrepreneurs through platforms such as Gojek or Bukalapak that offer platforms which are easily accessible to women to generate income at the comfort of their homes (Womennpqucu impress kanken bun aka angel 2021 klar een, 2021).

Nevertheless, these platforms do not completely reduce the obstacles that women have to encounter. Women are subordinates whose jobs can be restricted by the norms of gender, particularly when the work is understood as the secondary to the male occupation as a breadwinner (Ali, 2022). Take the case of women in Indonesia, where they have to stay at home, thus it is usually difficult to take up formal jobs, or even venture into entrepreneurial activities, even on a flexible work platform, such as food delivery services (Women World Banking, 2021).

Moreover, there is a growing economic opportunity related to the provision of food by online services but the new issues that arise are concerning digital literacy and access to technology. Research indicates that even today, women especially those in rural/ underdeveloped areas have far less access to digital presence and thus they

have limited access to utilize such platforms to their full potential (Pelloni et al., 2020). This equality gap demonstrates the necessity of special measures that can enhance the digital literacy and access to digital technologies among women and help them use these platforms more efficiently.

Finally, though food delivery services present an opportunity that could help women become economically independent, it is not fully used because of culture, limited technological access and other structural forces. In order to achieve actual change, we must first comprehend the social factors that influence the involvement of the women in the digital economy and come up with measures that would facilitate the wholesome involvement and empowerment of women in these forums.

2.1. Research Gap

In the current literature, the economic aspect is discussed quite frequently, whereas the role of such platforms in shaping the position of women in their houses and communities is not evaluated at all. To give an example, do women have an opportunity to gain influence and power in their families by earning money via these platforms, or does it allow deploying the prior power imbalance? Moreover, the study might discuss the way women utilize flexibility of such platforms not only as the source of income but also as the way of social mobility, whether they can use it to get acquainted with new social circles or follow other opportunities.

Further, it is important to understand more about policies and rather be able to control the food delivery platforms, but more so it is must in understanding food supply chain and formulation of city-specific policies. Most of the platforms work in an almost unregulated environment that may expose workers to exploitation. Studies may focus on the effect that labor laws and platform policies have on the working conditions of women and their experience. It might also check how it is possible that unions or other advocates of workers could help women to demand their rights in the gig economy. These rulemaking and policy processes are critical in determining how food delivery platforms may be more accommodative to enhance the economic empowerment of women in the long-run.

The expansion of tech and other digital platforms should be matched by an inclusion of the gender-sensitive lens in the process of developing/ implementations of these platforms. Such would aid in coming up with user friendly tools and features to the direct needs of women and women of marginalization mainly because their economic empowerment should be sustainable and fair. By doing so food delivery platforms may do more than earning these people revenue, they may become a great change agent to empower women in the world.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Population and Sample:** The proposed study will focus on the role of food delivery services in enhancing social networking and community building among women in Coimbatore city. The target population will consist of women actively involved in food-related businesses through delivery

platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, WhatsApp-based delivery services, and Coimbatore-based local tiffin networks. According to local entrepreneurial listings and municipal business support documents, there are an estimated 1,250 active women-led food businesses in the city (Coimbatore Smart City, 2024). Using Glenn D. Israel's formula (1992) with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 293 respondents has been determined to be appropriate for data collection.

- **Sampling Technique:** A purposive sampling technique will be used to select participants, as food delivery businesses within the study area are semi-organized and lack formal structure. The participants will be selected based on having at least six months of operational experience with digital or phone-based food delivery platforms, ensuring they have adequate experience with these platforms. Women will be chosen from both core urban and peri-urban areas of Coimbatore to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives from different regions.
- **Data Collection:** Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire, which will be administered both online (via Google Forms) and offline to maximize reach and inclusivity. The questionnaire will be divided into four key sections: 1) Demographic information, 2) Delivery platform usage patterns, 3) Social networking indicators, and 4) Community involvement measures. The anonymity and voluntary participation of the respondents will be ensured to foster openness and honesty in the responses.

3.1. Research Limitations

The cross-sectional design captures data at one point in time, restricting the ability to observe long-term trends or causal relationships. Response bias may occur as participants might provide socially desirable answers, especially regarding community involvement. Additionally, self-reported data could lead to recall bias, affecting the accuracy of participants' responses. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE:

A total of 271 women from Coimbatore participated in this study, which explored women's economic independence through food delivery platforms. The age of respondents ranged between 21 and 55 years, with the majority (around 40%) falling within the 26–35 age group, suggesting that younger adult women are the most active participants in this sector. Approximately 30% were between 36–45 years, while 18% were above 45, and the remaining 12% were under 25. In terms of education, 42% of the women had completed secondary school (10th–12th grade), 34% held a bachelor's degree, 10% were postgraduates, and 14% had only primary education or were uneducated. This indicates that food delivery services are accessible to women across various educational backgrounds. All participants were residents of Coimbatore, with 60% operating from residential areas, 26% near commercial zones or colleges, and 14% working through shared kitchens or local community

spaces. Regarding occupation, 46% identified as full-time food entrepreneurs, 30% as homemakers supplementing their household income, 17% were students, and 7% were engaged in other part-time or freelance work. Notably, 239 participants (88%) confirmed using food delivery platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, WhatsApp-based services, and local tiffin networks, while 32 (12%) managed informal deliveries without formal platform registration. Of those using digital platforms, 45% had been engaged for 1–2 years, 28% for less than a year, and 27% for over two years, showing a growing level of sustained participation. When asked about their primary role, 67% identified as service providers (e.g., cooks, coordinators), 22% reported being both service providers and customers, and 11% were primarily customers supporting women-led food ventures. These findings indicate that food delivery platforms not only offer flexible income opportunities but also foster peer support networks and digital inclusion among women from diverse backgrounds.

4.2. Objective 1: Impact of food delivery platforms on women's economic empowerment

Table 1: Impact of food delivery platforms on women's economic empowerment

S. No	STATEMENTS		SD	D	N	A	SA
Income Generation & Financial Benefits							
	Food delivery platforms provide sustainable income opportunities for women	%	12	45	69	110	35
		No of respondents	4	17	25	41	13
	These platforms offer flexible earning potential that fits women's schedules	%	7	30	53	140	41
		No of respondents	3	11	20	52	15
Financial Independence & Control							
	Women gain greater financial independence through platform participation	%	0	31	89	140	11
		No of respondents	0	11	33	52	4
	These platforms enable women to have more control over their finances	%	9	23	92	115	32
		No of respondents	3	8	34	42	12
Entrepreneurial Opportunities							
	Food delivery platforms create entrepreneurial opportunities for women	%	34	67	98	68	4
		No of respondents	13	25	36	25	1
	Women can start and grow food businesses through these platforms	%	9	41	96	105	20
		No of respondents	3	15	35	39	7
Economic Skill Development							
	Women develop valuable business and financial management skills	%	0	4	63	175	29
		No of respondents	0	1	23	65	11
	These platforms teach women about digital marketing and customer service	%	9	33	128	101	0
		No of respondents	3	12	47	37	0

Economic Security & Stability							
	Food delivery platforms provide economic security for women	%	0	37	56	137	41
		No of respondents	0	14	21	51	15
	Women can rely on these platforms for consistent income	%	0	27	63	163	18
		No of respondents	0	10	23	60	7

Table 1 illustrates that food delivery platforms are widely perceived as tools for economic empowerment among women in Coimbatore. In terms of income generation, a combined 55.7% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that these platforms offer sustainable income, while only 7.7% disagreed, showing general satisfaction with the earning potential. Additionally, 68.2% believed the platforms provide flexible earning options that align with women’s schedules, underscoring the importance of time adaptability for working women and homemakers. Regarding financial independence and control, over half of the participants (54.6%) felt that involvement in food delivery services improved their autonomy over financial decisions, with only a small percentage (4.1%) expressing disagreement. This reflects the platforms’ role in enabling women to manage and control their income directly.

However, the responses on entrepreneurial opportunities show a more divided perspective. While 24.7% agreed that platforms helped create entrepreneurial paths, a significant portion (49.5%) remained neutral and 14% disagreed, indicating some hesitation about whether these platforms truly support long-term business growth. Nonetheless, 45.7% agreed or strongly agreed that women can start and grow their food ventures through such platforms, reflecting moderate confidence in entrepreneurial potential.

Responses to economic skill development were highly positive. Over 75.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they developed business and financial management skills, and 37.3% acknowledged learning digital marketing and customer service through platform engagement. This shows that beyond income, the platforms also foster essential entrepreneurial competencies. Finally, in terms of economic security and stability, a strong majority (70.8%) believed these platforms offer consistent income and financial safety, reinforcing their role as dependable livelihood options for women. Collectively, the data reveal a generally favorable view of food delivery platforms, particularly in terms of flexibility, skill enhancement, financial control, and economic stability, even though perceptions about entrepreneurship remain somewhat cautious.

Table 2: Garrett Ranking of Aspects Influencing Women's Economic Empowerment through Food Delivery Platforms

Ranks		1	2	3	4	5	Total	mean	Rank
Garrett value (X)		75	60	50	40	25			
	F	29	72	53	31	16			

Ability to support children's education or household needs	Fx	2233	4536	2862	1426	592	11649	14.67	V
Confidence in decision-making	F	31	48	50	123	37			III
	Fx	2387	3024	2700	5658	1369	15138	19.07	
Control over income and expenses	F	2310	2394	5670	2024	1998	14396	18.13	IV
	Fx	44	111	29	74	13			
Financial independence	F	127	34	27	47	36			I
	Fx	9779	2142	1458	2162	1332	16873	21.25	
Respect in family/community	F	44	111	29	74	13			II
	Fx	3388	6993	1566	3404	481	15832	19.94	

Table 2 presents the Garrett ranking of key aspects reflecting the impact of food delivery platforms on women's economic empowerment. Among these, financial independence emerged as the highest-ranked factor, with a mean Garrett score of 21.25, highlighting its significance in transforming women's financial agency and autonomy through platform-based work. This was followed by respect in family/community with a mean score of 19.94, indicating that increased earnings and active participation have improved women's social standing and recognition within their households and local communities. The third-ranking aspect was confidence in decision-making (19.07), suggesting that involvement in food delivery work contributes positively to women's self-esteem and assertiveness, particularly in managing financial and operational decisions. Control over income and expenses ranked fourth (18.13), showing that while platforms do offer women the means to manage money, it is perceived slightly less empowering than overall financial independence. Lastly, ability to support children's education or household needs received the lowest mean score (14.67), although still valued, suggesting that immediate household contribution is not always the primary or most visible outcome of platform engagement. Overall, the ranking reveals that economic autonomy and social recognition are the most critical dimensions of empowerment experienced by women participating in food delivery platforms.

4.3. Association between Platform Use and Perceived Financial Independence

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant association between platform use and perceived financial independence among women.

Table 3: Association between Platform Use and Perceived Financial Independence

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	74.125 ^a	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	80.219	24	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.470	1	.493
N of Valid Cases	271		
a. 21 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.			

The results from the Chi-Square Table 3 reveal statistically significant associations between platform use and perceived financial independence ($p < 0.05$), as well as between income category and decision-making confidence ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that women who actively engage in food delivery platforms are more likely to feel financially independent and confident in decision-making. Furthermore, higher income from these platforms is strongly associated with greater personal empowerment. Thus, platform participation plays a critical role in shaping women's economic agency.

4.4. Objective 2: Barriers and Challenges Faced by Women in Utilizing Food Delivery Platforms for Economic Independence

Table 4: Impact of food delivery platforms on women's economic empowerment

S. No	STATEMENTS		SD	D	N	A	SA
Technology & Digital Literacy Barriers							
	Limited smartphone or internet access restricts women's platform participation	%	4	15	66	165	21
		No of respondents	1	6	24	61	8
	Lack of digital skills creates barriers for women using these platforms	%	7	61	76	112	15
		No of respondents	3	23	28	41	6
Financial & Resource Constraints							
	Initial investment requirements prevent women from starting on platforms	%	0	16	53	151	51
		No of respondents	0	6	20	56	19
	Limited access to capital restricts women's business growth on platforms	%	0	13	45	158	55
		No of respondents	0	5	17	58	20
Social & Cultural Barriers							
	Family responsibilities limit women's time for platform activities	%	0	31	54	158	28
		No of respondents	0	11	20	58	10
	Social expectations restrict women's participation in delivery work	%	0	38	62	130	41
		No of respondents	0	14	23	48	15
Safety & Security Concerns							

	Safety concerns during delivery work discourage women's participation	%	4	52	72	126	17
		No of respondents	1	19	27	46	6
	Lack of secure payment methods creates trust issues for women	%	5	34	34	163	35
		No of respondents	2	13	13	60	13
Platform-Specific Challenges							
	Commission fees reduce women's earnings significantly	%	5	55	91	112	8
		No of respondents	2	20	34	41	3
	Complex platform requirements make it difficult for women to participate	%	10	71	81	96	13
		No of respondents	4	26	30	35	5

Table 5 presents the key challenges women face in using food delivery platforms, across five major areas. Under Technology and Digital Literacy Barriers, 64.2% of women agreed or strongly agreed that limited access to smartphones or internet restricts participation, while 43.5% cited lack of digital skills as a barrier. This highlights the continuing digital divide affecting platform accessibility. In terms of Financial and Resource Constraints, 78.6% of respondents reported that initial investment needs are a hurdle, and 78.5% agreed that limited access to capital restricts business growth. These figures indicate that startup and scaling costs are major barriers to entry for women.

Social and Cultural Barriers were also significant: 68.6% agreed that family responsibilities limit time for platform activities, and 63.5% felt social expectations discourage delivery work. These reflect how traditional gender roles still shape women's access to work opportunities. Regarding Safety and Security Concerns, 48.3% expressed that safety fears during delivery discourage participation, while 73% agreed that lack of secure payment methods creates trust issues highlighting both physical and financial safety as critical concerns. Lastly, under Platform-Specific Challenges, 45.4% of women agreed that commission fees reduce their earnings, and 37.2% found platform requirements difficult to meet. These operational hurdles can discourage long-term engagement. Overall, the data show that women's participation is shaped by a combination of digital, financial, cultural, safety, and platform design barriers. Addressing these systematically is essential to unlock the full empowerment potential of food delivery platforms.

4.5. Digital and Operational Barriers in Food Delivery Platform Usage

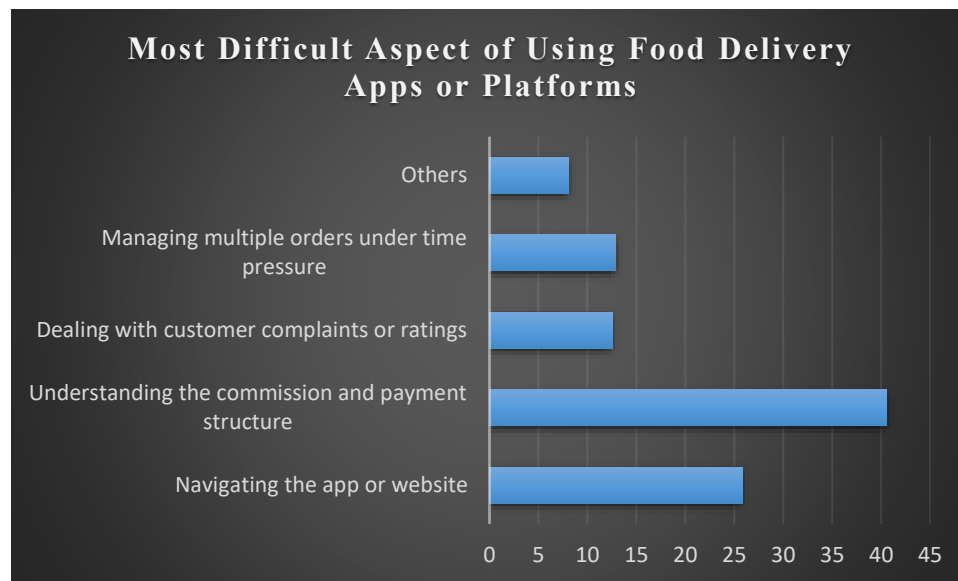


Figure 1: Most Difficult Aspect of Using Food Delivery Apps or Platforms

Figure 1 shows the most challenging aspects of using food delivery platforms as reported by women. The majority about 39% found understanding the commission and payment structure to be the most difficult. This was followed by navigating the app or website at 28%, highlighting digital literacy as a key barrier. Around 11% each cited difficulties with managing multiple orders under time pressure and handling customer complaints or ratings, while 7% selected other issues. These results indicate that nearly two-thirds (67%) of respondents struggle primarily with platform design and financial clarity, underscoring the need for simpler interfaces and transparent payment systems.

4.6. Association Between Demographics and Reported Barriers

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant association between a woman's education level and reporting lack of digital skills as a barrier.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	92.457 ^a	20	.000
Likelihood Ratio	88.859	20	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.221	1	.040
N of Valid Cases	271		
a. 19 cells (63.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.			

Table 7 shows a significant association between women's education level and reporting digital skills as a barrier ($\chi^2 = 92.457$, $df = 20$, $p = 0.000$), confirming that less-educated women are more likely to face digital challenges. The trend is supported by the Likelihood Ratio ($p = 0.000$) and Linear-by-Linear Association ($p = 0.040$), indicating that digital barriers decrease with higher education. Although 63.3% of cells had expected counts below 5, the result still highlights the need for targeted digital literacy support for women with limited education.

5. DISCUSSIONS

The research shows that food delivery has emerged as a great source of economic strength by allowing women to make up their income and derive greater agency over finances in Coimbatore. The majority of women said that their income was under their control, and they could now share in the family cost, which meant that these websites redefine the traditional gender rules by offering a solution to the traditional work pattern. The participants also depicted that they felt more respected both in their families and communities, and that they were more confident in decision-making. Some women perceived platforms as a means to launch or grow their businesses with food, and others were not sure: different access rates to resources and entrepreneurial support.

Nevertheless, the study also outlines major obstacles that do not allow full participation. The issue of money, like the inability to finance starting and the possibility of getting expansion capital, still needs to stop most women from getting in or even expanding their operations. Societal and cultural norms (also concerning caretaking situations and mobility) then limit their capacity to work regularly in platform-based jobs. Issues related to safety during delivery and the absence of safe means of payment also became potentially vital challenges, both concerning the physical and financial security.

Digital barriers were quite strong, especially in lower-educated women who expressed problems with using apps or comprehending platform demands. They got frustrated by the complexity of commission structures and the technicalities of the platforms. This digital gap underlines the importance of focusing on specific training, making interfaces easier to use, and including more people to ensure that even women of other backgrounds can be effectively included.

On the whole, the food delivery can be a gateway to empowerment, but due to the existence of social, economic, and digital boundaries, its effects prove to be asymmetrical. To truly be inclusive and give women a chance to shine both in the platform economy and when engaging with platforms, it is key to resolve these challenges.

5.1. Suggestions

In order to increase the inclusiveness and effectiveness of food delivery platforms to the empowerment of women, a number of actions should be taken. First, it is evident that digital literacy level of women, particularly, illiterate ones needs to be increased. The digital divide would be bridged through training programs, in the local tongues to be precise, in mobile usage, apps navigation and customer management online. Moreover, the

platforms need to ease their interface and payment system to ensure they are understandable and easier to work with; fewer wires are crossed between the amount of earnings and how the commission is deducted.

It also requires financial support. To secure start-up capital requirements like packaging, equipment, or even smartphones women could be helped in covering the requisite funds through micro finance schemes, start up lending without interest, or even government grants. To promote the use of safe, secure, and accessible payment channels by the women, including the non-banked women, such efforts should go hand in hand with partnerships with banks, and fintech services.

There should also be enhancing of social support mechanisms. With the help of the community awareness programs, the old customs that inhibit the work of women outward, and primarily in the delivery positions, can be changed. Childcare and flexible working arrangements can enable women to balance family and platform activities, more effectively. Verified delivery areas, emergency issue alert within the app, and community policing would solve the increasing issue of the lack of security during deliveries.

Lastly, there is a need to have platforms that is more proactive through the application of inclusive onboarding strategies and providing constant guidance, as well as actively seeking women in underserved regions. It is viable that the positive outcomes of digital employment by surrounding women should be seen across the socioeconomic spectrum, and therefore, network annotations between the platform providers, the local governments, the NGOs and the self-help groups should aim to deliver their advantages. All these combined are not only going to eliminate the barriers in place but will also create a sustainable, empowering ecosystem of women in the platform economy.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of food delivery platforms in promoting women's economic empowerment in Coimbatore and identified the key barriers limiting their full participation. The findings reveal that digital platforms offer meaningful opportunities for income generation, financial independence, confidence building, and social recognition. Many women reported positive changes in their ability to make financial decisions, contribute to household income, and operate independently through flexible, home-based platform work.

However, the study also highlights several persistent barriers, particularly financial constraints, lack of digital literacy, safety concerns, and restrictive social norms. These challenges disproportionately affect women from lower educational and income backgrounds, limiting their ability to enter or grow within the platform economy. While the potential for empowerment exists, it is unevenly realized due to these structural and socio-cultural limitations.

For food delivery platforms to become truly inclusive and empowering, targeted interventions are needed at multiple levels. These include digital training, financial support mechanisms, safer work environments, and community-based efforts to shift gender norms. By addressing these barriers, stakeholders can unlock the full

potential of digital platforms as a sustainable and equitable livelihood option for women, especially in urban and semi-urban India.

6.1. Implications and Future Scope of Research

The findings of this study carry important implications for policymakers, platform developers, NGOs, and community-based organizations aiming to enhance women's participation in the digital economy. The evidence suggests that while food delivery platforms can be transformative in fostering financial independence and social empowerment, their full potential remains untapped due to layered digital, financial, and cultural barriers. Policymakers should prioritize integrating women-focused digital literacy programs and micro-finance schemes into entrepreneurship and urban employment initiatives. Platform companies, in turn, must adopt inclusive design practices, simplify payment structures, and provide localized onboarding support to ensure that women especially from low-income or low-education backgrounds can participate effectively and safely.

The study also implies the need for collaborative frameworks involving local governments, tech firms, and women's cooperatives to address safety concerns and promote supportive social environments. Tackling societal stigma around women's work in public and gig sectors will require consistent engagement through awareness campaigns and community dialogue.

In terms of future research, further studies could explore longitudinal impacts of platform participation on women's economic trajectories, such as sustained income growth, asset creation, or transition into formal entrepreneurship. Comparative studies across regions or different types of platforms (e.g., ride-hailing, e-commerce, online tutoring) could offer a broader understanding of how digital work affects women in varying socio-cultural settings. Additionally, qualitative research focusing on the voices and lived experiences of women platform workers would enrich the understanding of empowerment beyond economic metrics. There is also scope to examine platform-specific gender policies, algorithmic biases, and the role of digital infrastructure in shaping inclusion outcomes. These areas would provide valuable insights for designing more equitable digital ecosystems that genuinely support women's economic empowerment.

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