

Counterproductive Work Behavior by Drivers of Platform Based Cab Aggregators in India: A Human Rights Perspective¹

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I. Introduction

Labelled initially as ‘crowdsourcing’, platform work may also be understood as ‘on-demand work via apps’ (Gyulavári 2020). The world is in the grip of transformation led by a furious speed of automation and digitization. This has resulted in new forms of employment in various occupations and sectors, the platform economy being one of them (Behrendt et al. 2019). Practitioners and scholars have utilized numerous terms interchangeably to define the platform economy, such as “digital economy,” “sharing economy,” “collaborative economy,” “gig-economy,” “crowd-work,” “piece-work,” and “gig-work” (see Codagnone and Martens 2016 for a concise overview of these conceptual contradictions). However, we can safely arrange all of these under the term “platform” (Gyulavári 2020). Hence, the users associated with providing service through a platform could be termed as “platform workers.”

Drahokoupil and Piasna (2017) suggest that platform work has three major distinguishing factors—(1) platforms provide algorithms that enable matching of labor providers and users, (2) technology reduces transaction costs for employers / clients to the extent that platforms can also facilitate microtransactions, and (3) platforms provide services that diminish or manage the risks involved in market transactions (for example they address market failures such as incomplete information about the labor provider or the threat of cheating). Thus the digital platform has brought in a revolution of consumerism in India, its growth primarily propelled by a proliferation of internet access and mobile phones in recent years (Jaiswal et al. 2014). Life has become simpler through effortless access to services and doorstep delivery of the products at a competitive cost. Cab aggregators are one of the most noticeable forms of this economy. Companies like Meru Cabs (established 2006), Ola Cabs (established 2010), and Uber (began operations in India in 2013) cater to real-time demand by aggregating cabs for the customers (Shah, Verghese, Jana and Mathew 2020). With a steady rise in the urban population of India, there lies immense scope for the platform based cab aggregators to flourish.

The platform economy has opened up an opportunity for millions of labor who either have taken up part-time platform work to boost their income or even “fulltime” employment. However, this form of working has disrupted the way we knew work. It has dislodged the social and labor market protection due to the workers, thanks to the open-ended contracts. Platform companies are reluctant to recognize the workers as employees. This deprives them of all types of social security benefits. The workers also live under continued fear of unfair dismissal, being divested of minimum pay, being disregarded for unemployment benefit and pensions, being

1. This paper is a part of a larger project on Indian platform workers. An earlier version of this paper was scheduled for presentation and discussion at the 10th ILERA Asian Regional Congress (Philippines, Feb, 2020). However, the Congress was never inaugurated owing to the COVID19 pandemic.”

unable to organize or even bargain collectively (Broecke and Cazes 2019; Coiquaud and Martin 2020; Gyulavári 2020). Further, they are usually driven into fierce competition within themselves, compelling them to accept lower wages. This weakens the industry-wide role of collective agreements in adjusting working conditions, which may be perceived as ‘social dumping’ (Gyulavári 2020). A survey covering 1,100 ride-hailing drivers in the United States revealed that almost 75% of drivers earn less than the minimum wage in their State, while 30% of them make losses once the expenses for vehicles are included (Behrendt et al. 2019). Platform work also encourages a rapid pace of work without breaks. The lack of appropriate training further aggravates the risk of accidents. They are usually denied the right to paid sick leave. This increases the chances of illness and the risk of injury (Garben 2020).

Unfortunately, the consumer side of the platform economy has also not remained immune to despair. Feeney (2015) mentions numerous accounts of customers encountering unacceptable behaviors from the platform based cab drivers. For example, drivers have been accused of violating the personal space of passengers (like photographing them or sending them a friend request over social media), and inflict physical harm on them (such as kidnapping and assault, pp. 5–8). Women passengers have also accused the drivers of rape and sexual assault (Jaiswal et al. 2014). Typically, the platforms maintain that they are not to be held accountable for the misdeeds of their drivers. They argue that drivers are just another category of platform users and not employees (*Ibid.*). However, such an argument resonates as more reckless than legal and represents a myopic vision of the business. Dissatisfied customers would eventually switch their allegiance, which in turn would affect the business viability of the platform organization. Therefore, it is in the platform’s self-interest that they turn not a blind eye on the misdemeanor of the drivers. More importantly, it provides a necessary opportunity to reflect on the deeper causes of these transgressions or counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

We believe that the drivers resort to CWB when they perceive that the platform organizations violate their human rights. In the absence of adequate labor rights dedicated to the platform workers, we are compelled to relabel their collective rights as human rights at work. We are encouraged by Mantouvalu (2012), who suggest that the categorization of labor rights as human rights can be particularly beneficial for workers in non-standard work arrangements.

Accordingly, our paper wishes to identify the various types of human rights violations experienced by the drivers associated with the platform based cab aggregators. Towards that, we initially define the study variables and theorize the relationship between human rights and CWB. Next, we elaborate on the methodology, analysis, and findings. And finally, we discuss the study implications while suggesting recommendations for academic scholarship and practice.

II. Theory and research question

Human rights in the business context

The idea of human rights emerged from the ashes of World War II. In the year 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is based on the principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Every individual irrespective of their place of origin or identity, is entitled to some basic rights and freedoms, which are inviolable (Murphy and Vives 2013). These rights are not a privilege, and they cannot be granted or revoked. The Declaration lists down 30 articles, recognizing among other things, freedom from discrimination, right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and servitude, freedom of movement, to take residence, and have a nationality (Brenkert 2016). It encompasses all basic civil and political rights as well as social, economic, and cultural rights.

The Declaration has the potential to serve as a lighthouse for appropriate business practices. According to its preamble, “*every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall*

strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction” (as mentioned in Clapham and Jerbi 2001). Business organizations cannot exclude themselves from being a part of society. Their activities influence the lives of the individuals. Accordingly, there exists a global debate that argues for businesses to adhere to human rights. In recognition of this, the UNHRC adopted the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGP) in Business and Human Rights in 2011. The UNGP rests on three pillars that attempts to align business activities to human rights: (1) State’s duty to protect human rights, (2) corporate’s responsibility to respect human rights, and (3) access to effective remedies for business-related human rights abuse (Ruggie 2008).

There is an intense debate across forums on the definition of “respect” for human rights by a corporate entity. One aspect of this debate focuses on identifying a limited list of rights that the corporations would endorse. Ruggie (2008) argues that such a list would be expansive and not limited, for there exists few such internationally recognized rights today that businesses cannot impact. Hence, he asserts that a satisfactory way a corporation could operationalize “respect” is to ensure that they are “doing no harm” (*Ibid.*). Clarifying it further, he states that while governments delineate the limits of legal compliance, the “respect” by corporations is characterized by social expectations—“as part of what is sometimes called a company’s social license to operate” (*Ibid.*). He asserts that a lack of attention to this responsibility could expose companies to the courts of public opinion (which could include employees, communities, consumers, civil society, as well as investors), and infrequently to charges in the court of law.

Accordingly, Ruggie (2008) advises that to stay in the favorable side of public opinion, the corporations must exercise “due diligence,” i.e. steps they must embrace to become “aware of, address, and prevent adverse human rights impact” (*Ibid.*). Therefore as a beginning, corporations must study and comprehend the principles embedded within the international bill of human rights and the core conventions of the ILO, for they form the references against which they would be judged by other social actors (*Ibid.*).

Many scholars in the past had endeavored to distil these principles into meaningful categories. One such attempt by Donnelly and Howard-Hassmann (1988) had attempted to group the entire list of human rights to a theoretical framework comprising of four distinct clusters. We believe that their categorization provides a clear pathway through which all organizations, and not just corporations, could self-appraise their commitment and adherence to respect human rights. These include *the survival rights* (that encompasses the right to life and basic necessities to sustain life), *the membership rights* (it provides one the right to be treated equally in the society and provides shelter against discrimination), *the protection rights* (this ensures that there is no misuse of power by the State against the individual), and finally the *empowerment rights* (that imparts control to the individuals over their own life, by giving them the right to education, freedom of expression, practice religion, or peaceful assembly) (*Ibid.*). It may be noted here, that according to the Declaration, none of the (category of) rights are presumed to be more important than the rest. Further, these principles are universal, indivisible, and interdependent (*Ibid.*).

Counterproductive work behavior

Employees may wilfully indulge in activities that can have an adverse effect on the organization and its stakeholders. Such employee behavior that goes against the intent or interest of the organization is labeled as counterproductive work behavior (CWB) (Gruys and Sackett 2003). This could come in various forms—tardiness, theft, workplace violence, bullying, absenteeism, withdrawal from work, knowledge hiding or hoarding, cyber loafing, ineffective performance, sabotage, or turnover (*Ibid.*).

Researchers have engaged in several attempts to explain the emergence of counterproductive work

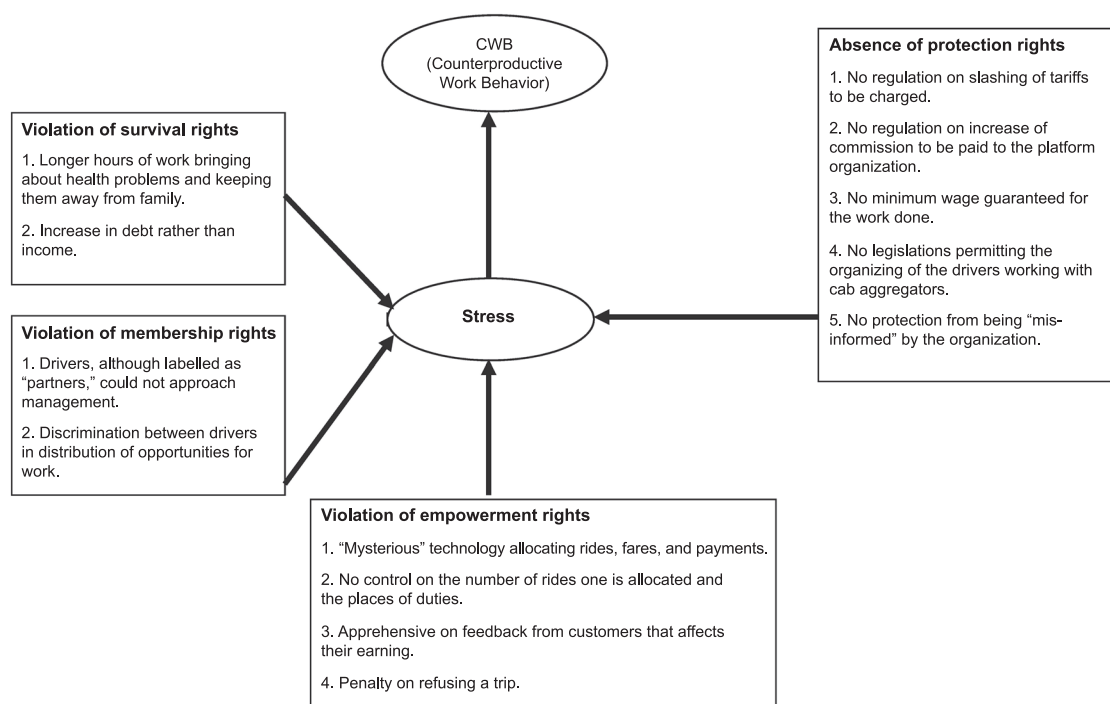
behavior. Some of the notable approaches include Martinko and Gardner's (1982) deliberation on learned helplessness that included organizational, individual differences and attributional variables; Folger and Skalicki's (1998) popcorn model that integrates situational variables, individual differences, and perceptions of injustice; Bennet's (1998) study on perceived powerlessness; Neuman' (1998) discussion on organizational factors leading to workplace violence; as well as O'Leary-Kelly et al.'s (1996) organizational motivated aggression model highlighting organizational variables (please refer Martinko, Gundlach and Douglas (2002) for a detailed review of all the theories). They also developed a causal reasoning model that is based on attribution theory, integrating situational variables and individual differences to explain the origin of counterproductive work behavior. The situational variables responsible for counterproductive work behavior may be stringent policies, competitive environment, leadership style, rules and procedures, economic conditions, reward systems, adverse working conditions, task difficulty, home life, and organizational culture (*Ibid.*). Further, the individual variables that may relate to counterproductive work behavior are negative affectivity, emotional stability, integrity, gender, attribution style, core self-evaluation, locus of control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and non-neuroticism (*Ibid.*). Similarly, drawing from self-control theory, Marcus and Schuler (2004), in their study involving two organizations in Germany, tested 24 predictors of general counterproductive work behavior. They found that self-control, rationalization, pervasiveness, positive self-concept, and trust related negatively to the construct.

Human rights and counterproductive work behavior: social exchange theory perspective

Social interactions include a series of sequential economic and or social transactions between individuals (Emerson, 1976). All such transactions involve a process of reciprocity, and this exchange could be more or less rewarding or costing for one party than the other (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). The social exchange theory (SET) identifies that there is a definite interdependence in relationships due to this. The theory proposes that rewards gained and costs incurred from the series of exchanges help us to determine the worth of the particular relationship and which in turn allows us to decide whether to continue or terminate the relationship (Cropanzano et al. 2017).

Social exchange relationships naturally flourish if employees perceive that their employers tend to their needs and care about them. This, in return, would lead to positive consequences. (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Fair transactions at the workplace among people foster strong relationships, which engenders positive employee attitude, is mutually rewarding, and enhances overall productivity (*Ibid.*). On the contrary, when employees face work stressors, they resort to counterproductive work behavior, which makes the case of an unpleasant social exchange (Spector and Fox, 2010). Under the framework of social exchange theory, this stress is known to be an outcome of an imbalance perceived between the effort that is made and the reward that is received. (Siegrist, Peter, Junge, Cremer and Seidel 1990) This imbalance created due to an unreasonably demanding job and incommensurate rewards received, becomes an antecedent to counterproductive work behavior. The incommensurate rewards could come in varied forms, low esteem rewards (like less respect and support, low income, and low status), poor promotion prospects, employment insecurity, etc. (*Ibid.*).

Based on SET, we reason that the counterproductive work behaviors displayed by the drivers partnered with taxi aggregators in India are a consequence of human rights violations perceived by them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights argues that all human beings belong to a single global community and that every individual has moral ties and responsibilities towards all (Brown 2016). The foundation of the Declaration rests on the concept of human dignity, which in turn is the basis of "freedom, justice, and peace." We believe that taxi drivers feel an absence of dignity in their relationship with management. They feel marginalized, ignored, and avoided, with the management unavailable and reluctant to listen to their grievances. Strung to a relationship of unequal reciprocations, they may feel stressed. However, they remain forcibly coupled to the



Source: Compiled by the authors.

Figure 1. Human rights and CWB—Theoretical framework and findings of the research

organization owing to their enormous investments, lack of alternative opportunities, as well as a lack of skill variety. It may be difficult on their part to terminate the relationship. Consequently, they may subscribe to maladaptive coping methods, which in turn may manifest as counterproductive work behavior. Our argument is consistent with past findings. For example, through a study on a military sample, Tucker et al. (2009) found that indiscipline is a distal outcome of stress. Similarly, Clercq, Haq and Azeem (2019) suggested that counterproductive work behaviors could result when employees perceive insufficient time to do their jobs. Figure 1 summarizes our theoretical framework.

Accordingly, if the organizations desire that the drivers desist from engaging in CWB, they need to restore their dignity. This, in turn, requires adherence to human rights by the management. Therefore, we ask the following question to anchor this study:

Research Question (RQ): What are the human rights violations experienced by the drivers partnering with platform-based taxi aggregators?

III. Methodology

Research design and data

We decided to employ a qualitative research method in this research. Investigations concerning human rights violations by corporations are limited in India. Therefore we seek to identify the variables and concepts that could be the likely causes. Since qualitative research is concerned with developing concepts rather than applying pre-existing concepts (Wilson 2006), we believe this is appropriate for this study.

We studied the description of four strikes (March 2017, January 2018, June 2018, and October 2018), where the drivers working with the cab aggregators participated in Chennai. These strikes were detailed in "Thozhilalar Koodam," a media website dedicated to the cause of the working class. Four reports

corresponding to each of the strikes were considered for this research: the strike of March 2017 (was reported March 4, 2017); the strike of January 2018 (was detailed on January 8, 2018); the strike of June 2018 (appeared in print on June 25, 2018); and the strike of October 2018 (was reported on October 31, 2018).² There were five reasons for resorting to this website for the data. First, in the absence of a dedicated union of platform-based cab drivers, we had little access to them for interviews. Second, the popular newspapers in India did not cover the strikes extensively. Third, the articles in the website contain extensive quotations from the drivers, which helped us comprehend the issues better. Fourth, there exists a barrier in the form of language. Most of the drivers are not conversant in English and Hindi. This makes conversations between them and the researchers a discontinuous and stressful process. As a result, there is little cooperation from them in participating in the interviews. Finally, the drivers are continuously engaged on duty or waiting for a booking. They feel little economic benefit in sparing time for being interviewed.

Analysis

Each of the selected documentation of the strike was subjected to individual and collective scrutiny. They were read, reflected upon, and re-read in an effort to assimilate their messages. After that, we analyzed the data as follows.

We arranged the data into segments of material based on an organizing system derived from the human rights conceptualization (Donnelly and Howard-Hassmann 1988). Specifically, each of us independently studied every line of the four strikes carefully while asking ourselves the following question, “*Which incident/event/experience qualifies as a human right violation?*” Accordingly, we categorized the data either under the following themes: *violation of survival rights*, *violation of membership rights*, *absence of protection rights*, and *violation of empowerment rights*. Frequent discussions intervened in this exercise, often making us revisit the text to comprehend the context of the extracted incident/event/experience. This also helped us gain additional clarity before categorizing an incident/event/experience under a human rights construct. We continued this exercise until all the incidents/events/experiences got arranged.

IV. Findings and discussion

In this section, we present and discuss our findings in light of the research question for this study. We also provide representative evidence in support. However, it may be noted that our results are exploratory and are not representative of all the drivers partnering with the cab aggregators across cities. Figure 1 summarizes our findings.

What type of rights are perceived to be violated by the drivers?

It may be recalled that according to the social exchange theory, stress results when individuals perceive an imbalance between their efforts and rewards (Siegrist, Peter, Junge, Cremer and Seidel 1990). When such

2. The strike on March 2017 was called by Ola and Uber drivers affiliated to Federation of Chennai Call Taxi Unions (CITU, AMOM, TDTUC and TADWA Chennai) for two days (i.e. March 6 and 7). Protesting in front of the Transport Department office, they raised issues such as guaranteed wages, overtime, employment conditions, and lack of redressal mechanisms. The strike on October 2018 was called by drivers belonging to number of driver associations affiliated to CITU, *Urimai Kural* (Rights Voice), *Vazhvirimai Ottunar Thozhil Sangam* (Livelihood Rights Driver’s Trade Unions), and *Thozhargal Car Ottunar Amaipuchara Thozhil Sangam* (Comrade Unorganized Car Drivers Trade Union). Sitting in protest at Chepauk, Chennai, they raised slogans against fare control by the taxi aggregators, the contractual terms, and a flawed incentive system. Further, the strike on January 2018 was a one day affair in Chennai that was joined by almost 700 drivers. Raising angry slogans, the drivers blamed the State and Central Governments of being unconcerned of their welfare. The unions demanded regulation of fares, provision of restrooms and toilet facilities, as well as immunity from penalty for drivers who work beyond 8 hours. Finally, around thousand drivers participated in the fourth strike that spanned for two days in June 2018 (i.e. June 21 and 22). They had two demands: fare revision, and reduction of the commission deducted from the fare.

imbalance remains unaddressed in a transaction, it could be perceived as a violation of one's human rights and may result in stress. Individuals, helpless in decoupling themselves from such imbalances, could resort to counterproductive work behavior.

The perceived human rights violations that we identified from our research are as follows:

(1) Violations of survival rights

Our research revealed that one of the primary complaints of the drivers was that their work involved long hours on the road, which affected their health as well as family life. They lamented that such working conditions are unsustainable in the long run. They feared that *".....after one or two years of working like this, everyone will develop major health problems."* For earning *"Rs 1,000–Rs 1,500 per day, they would have to spend almost 14 hours on the road."* They wondered, *"Aren't we human? Wouldn't we also want to spend time with our wives and children?"*

Further, drivers felt driving the cab was not adequately remunerative for leading a life of dignity. They felt that the companies are remaining competitive by exploiting them. Someone remarked, *"Onions are priced at Rs. 50 per kilo today and we are driving our cab for Rs. 6 per km. How does this make sense? Do customers not wonder how we eat and live? We may as well change our work from Call Taxi to Free Taxi."* Consequently, most of the drivers are in debt. They are struggling to repay the EMIs (equated monthly installments) for the loans they had taken to purchase their cars. Added to that, the companies deduct taxes and their fees from their daily earnings. Diesel expenses add to further reduction of earnings.

(2) Violations of membership rights

We found that drivers often felt discriminated by the management in terms of approachability and opportunity for work. For example, there is a feeling that *"preference is given to the drivers who lease the car from [the company's] subsidiary.....by giving the drivers of leased cars longer rides, while car owners are given shorter rides."* Also, drivers felt that one of the companies *"favored business entities owning a fleet of cars who operate their fleet by employing drivers as daily wage workers."*

Further, the drivers, though seen as *"partners and not workers,"* find it difficult to bridge the power distance in their daily experience with the management. The drivers had little access to the management of the companies for *"airing their complaints."* They feel unwelcome whenever they visit to one of the company's offices, which they liken to a *"prison complex"* with an *"intimidating atmosphere."* Negotiating with a half a dozen security personnel, they are only allowed to enter the premises as individuals and not as a group.

(3) Absence of protection rights

The protection rights stem from the State's commitment to protecting the human rights of its citizens (Ruggie 2008). No business entity can violate these. However, in the absence of these rights, there is a likelihood that the employees could suffer from exploitation. Based on our research, we believe that many problems encountered by the drivers could be traced to this absence of protection rights.

One of the repeated concerns that surfaced during every strike is the relentless slashing of fares by the companies to maximize their market shares. Unlike autorickshaws, there is an absence of a legal framework that regulates the fares of the app-based taxis. In the initial years, the companies offered the drivers a minimum of Rs. 16 per kilometer. During the strikes of 2018, the fare offered was just Rs. 6 per kilometer while the Government-mandated minimum rate for the autorickshaws was Rs. 12 per kilometer. On the other hand, the commission charged by the cab aggregators is only climbing north. The Transport Department expressed its helplessness in helping the drivers. It remarked that the taxis affiliated with the cab aggregators are licensed as tourist vehicles, which makes them beyond the purview of laws regulating taxi and auto tariffs.

The drivers were also worried that little action is being taken against the companies for luring them with false promises. Many had migrated from occupations such as farming in order to capitalize on this “*dream machine*.” They were promised an income up to Rs. 80,000 per month. Even a few claimed to have seen advertisements in newspapers “*claiming that we could make Rs 50,000 or more per month*.” These individuals used to be previously employed with smaller tourists and travel companies. Many had sold their lands to invest in cars. By March 2017, they were “*struggling to make even Rs. 15,000 per month*.” For drivers who migrated from autorickshaws, they were “*guaranteed*” Rs. 6,000 per day with just ten trips. However, they are finding it equally difficult to make ends meet.

Since the drivers are not “employees,” they are unable to aggregate formally as a union to voice their demands with the management. Therefore, they affiliate themselves with other unions that enjoy political patronage. However, this makes them relatively powerless in times of strikes. For example, in October 2018 strike, the police arrested the protestors and “*detained them for couple of hours at a marriage hall in Pudupet*.”

(4) Violation of empowerment rights

Although the companies position themselves as the ones enabling entrepreneurship, yet the drivers believe this advocacy as “*clearly deceptive*.” Every significant activity in the business like “*payment, ride allocation, etc. are decided unilaterally by the company using technology*.” Further, the fare rates, incentive schemes, and mode of payments may alter any given day. Drivers have little control over “*what ‘scheme’ awaits them each morning*.”

The drivers had little say on the number of rides they are assigned, which in turn affected their earnings. One driver remarked, “*There was a time that I worked 14–15 hours a day and somehow managed to complete 53 trips. I waited hoping that I will be assigned the last trip [to meet the target post which an incentive would be paid] but it never came and the deadline was over*.” This makes them stay on the road for long, with many spending the nights in their cars.

The drivers expressed their misgivings on the feedback ratings provided by the customers. Customers are only allowed to book another ride once they have provided their feedback on the previous ride. It is observed that customers do not give feedback at the end of the service, but at the beginning of the next service, which may not occur soon. Therefore, drivers are apprehensive that customers may rate them thoughtlessly, which may affect the number of rides assigned to them. Further, they are also penalized for refusing a trip.

V. Discussion

The platform is the most identifiable business model in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Comprising of a two-sided digital market, they employ networks, data, and information to create an operative environment for companies (Surie 2019). However, in pursuit of technological innovation, platform organizations have ignored the concerns of their service providers. Masking underneath the veil of legal interpretation, they have resolutely crossed the lines respecting human dignity in many instances. With market share driving the show, mannerisms have taken a backseat. Unfortunately, the repressed frustration of the drivers finds a release on the unsuspecting customer. Misbehavior towards customers, not limited to violence and harassment, has therefore become commonplace in many of the platform organizations. Especially it has reached a heightened level in the case of platform-based cab aggregators in India. Accordingly, in this research, we investigated the various violations of human rights experienced by the cab drivers associated with the platform economy in the country. Using social exchange theory, we reasoned that drivers’ experienced breach of human rights leads to stress, resulting in counterproductive work behavior.

Contribution to theory

Our study contributes to theory in three ways. First, it validated previously reported findings on the human rights violations experienced by the platform based cab aggregators in India and elsewhere. Specifically, our study confirmed that cab drivers suffer from depleted earnings, longer working hours, arbitrary delisting, as well as regulatory and situational ambiguity that prohibits them from organizing (Surie 2019; Sharma 2019; Broecke and Cazes 2019; Coiquaud and Martin 2020; Gyulavári 2020). Second, our study aggregated the previous and new findings into a conceptual framework of human rights. We believe this accentuates the meaningfulness of the results and elevates the seriousness of the misfortunes suffered by the drivers. It also provides a promising overarching framework for future scholars to summarize their findings, thus contributing to a disciplined development of the literature. Finally, we argued a theoretical link between counterproductive work behavior and human rights violations based on social exchange theory. We believe this could prove a ready tool of interpretation for many undesirable behaviors and workplace deviance observed in the workplace.

Contribution to practice

Our research suggests two policy initiatives. First, the government must recognize the emergence of such a workforce and release them from a definitional ambiguity. A definition would assist in solidifying their identity, which in turn would make them capable of demanding and realizing their rights. Scholars have argued in multiple forums that the platform workers must be recognized as “employees,” much to the chagrin of the platform organizations (e.g. Lobel 2016). The government must heed to this argument to legally empower the workers. It would enable these workers to organize and authoritatively negotiate. It would help consolidate the workers’ demands rather than splitting their voices into multiple incoherent murmurs. Such a move would be consistent with the ILO Declaration (1998).³ Last, the platform organizations must attempt to go beyond the transactional model their business subscribes to. Individuals cannot be expected to drive a car forever. They need to see growth and are in search of personal meaning. Therefore, platform organizations must envisage a career plan for their workers. An opportunity to grow can balance the need to organize and may reduce the engagement of the drivers in counterproductive work behaviors. It can also enhance the workers’ commitment to heighten customer satisfaction.

Limitations and future research directions

Our study suffers from two principal limitations. First, our source of data is secondary, which raises concern on its neutrality. Further, since the media website (*Thozhilalar Koodam*) from where we sourced the data is dedicated to the working class, it may be reasoned that the data could be ideologically colored. Second, our study was contextualized on the drivers working with the platform organizations. Hence, one must exercise caution in extrapolating the findings to other platform workers (like food delivery apps, grocery delivery apps, etc.). Future research may focus on actual interviews of platform workers as well as the management of platform organizations. Researchers may also attempt to cross-validate our findings by investigating a variety of platform organizations.

3. The Parliament of India recently reformed the labor laws in interest of ease of doing business. It classified 29 existing Central labor laws to four labor codes—The Wage Code (2019); the Industrial Relations Code (2020); the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020); and the Code on Social Security (2020). Only the Code on Social Security (2020) includes the phrase “platform work.” It is defined as “a work arrangement outside of a traditional employer employee relationship in which organisations or individuals use an online platform to access other organisations or individuals to solve specific problems or to provide specific services or any such other activities.” The Code on Social Security (2020) assures that the Central Government would formulate and notify social security schemes specific to platform workers. Specifically, the schemes would cover the worker’s life and disability, would provide insurance against accidents, assure health and maternity benefits (including crèche), as well as provide for old age protection. Platform workers are still excluded from other codes, especially from the Code of Wages and The Industrial Relations Code. This jeopardizes their right to organize and to secure a minimum wage.

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