

Algorithmic Control, Work Precarity and Physical Well-being among Platform-based Gig Workers in India: A Sociological Study of Delivery Workers and Ride-sharing Drivers

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Abstract: The emergence of platform-based employment has transformed how work is organised and how people experience their daily work in India, particularly in food delivery and app-based transportation services. This study examines the relationship between algorithmic control, work precarity, and physical well-being among platform-based gig workers from a sociological perspective. This research uses primary data from snowball sampling of 200 gig economy workers—100 food delivery personnel and 100 app-based taxi drivers—engaged with platform-based services in Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi. The participants are linked to platforms including Zomato, Swiggy, Ola, and Uber. We collected data through a structured interview schedule covering socio-demographic characteristics, working hours, work intensity, income stability, platform-mediated control, occupational conditions, and physical well-being. We used descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, chi-square analysis, and correlation analysis to examine relationships between working conditions and physical well-being. The findings indicate substantial work intensity: 38% of respondents reported 8–10 working hours per day, 31% reported more than 10 hours, and 59% reported working seven days a week. Income instability was reported by 73% of respondents. Algorithmic control was prominent, with 77% reporting platform-determined task allocation and 83% experiencing rating pressure. Fatigue was reported by 74% of delivery workers and 52% of cab drivers, while back pain was reported by 68% and 48%, respectively. We found a significant association between work type and fatigue ($\chi^2 = 10.42$, $p < .05$), and working hours were positively associated with fatigue ($r = .64$). The findings highlight the sociological and physical consequences of intensive, digitally mediated platform work.

Keywords: Gig Economy, Algorithmic Control, Work Precarity, Physical Well-being, Food-Delivery Workers, Cab Drivers, Sociology of Work

1. Introduction

Digital platforms have become an increasingly important mechanism for organising, exchanging, and monitoring labour. Unlike conventional employment arrangements, platform-based work connects workers and customers through digital applications while simultaneously incorporating systems for task allocation, performance evaluation, communication, and payment. This transformation has created a distinctive form of employment commonly described as gig work, in which workers undertake individual tasks or assignments rather than occupying conventional, continuously structured employment positions. The sociological significance of this transformation lies in how technological mediation is accompanied by changes in workplace authority, worker autonomy, economic security, and the organisation of everyday labour (Duggan et al., 2019; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016).

One central characteristic of platform work is the increasing use of algorithmic management. In such arrangements, application-based systems may coordinate key aspects of the labour process rather than direct face-to-



face supervision. Algorithms can shape task allocation, the visibility of work opportunities, performance assessment, customer ratings, and incentive structures. In their empirical examination of Uber drivers, Rosenblat and Stark (2016) showed that digital platforms can exercise substantial indirect control through information asymmetries and technologically mediated systems. Their findings suggest that the language of flexibility and independent entrepreneurship does not necessarily eliminate organisational power; instead, control may be embedded in the platform's technological architecture.

This tension between autonomy and control is central to the sociological understanding of platform labour. Platform workers may have greater discretion over when they log in or accept work, yet rating systems, incentives, task availability, customer expectations, and the economic need to maintain sufficient earnings can shape their practical choices. Wood et al. (2019) found that algorithmic management can generate flexibility and autonomy while also producing irregular schedules, overwork, social isolation, sleep disruption, and exhaustion. Their research therefore shows that flexibility should not automatically be equated with favourable working conditions; its consequences depend on how technological control combines with workers' economic and social circumstances.

A related issue is the precarious character of platform employment. Conventional employment generally involves relatively identifiable organisational relationships, whereas platform workers may face greater uncertainty about earnings, workload, continuity of work, and the costs of performing their jobs. The worker may be responsible for maintaining the vehicle or equipment necessary for work while also absorbing fluctuations in demand and income. Wood et al. (2019) conceptualise these conditions as the contradictory nature of gig work, where flexibility can coexist with low earnings, irregular working time, and insecurity. Similarly, Wood et al. (2019) show that the commodification of digital labour can weaken workers' embeddedness within stable institutional and social arrangements, making their working lives more dependent upon changing market conditions.

The Indian context provides an important setting for examining these transformations because app-based transportation and food-delivery services had already become visible forms of urban employment before this study. The physical dimension of platform work matters most for workers whose labour requires continuous mobility or prolonged sitting. Food-delivery workers spend substantial working time riding through urban environments, locating customers, waiting for orders, and completing repeated delivery journeys. In contrast, app-based cab drivers generally remain seated for extended periods while driving and responding to digitally generated ride requests. These arrangements can expose workers to long hours, limited recovery time, traffic-related strain, environmental conditions, and repetitive physical demands. Wood et al. (2019) reported associations between algorithmically controlled gig work and overwork, irregular working hours, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion, indicating that the organisation of digital labour may have consequences extending beyond income and employment status.

Physical well-being, therefore, should not be conceptualised exclusively as an individual medical outcome. From a sociological perspective, workers' physical condition can also be understood as an embodied consequence of labour organisation. When workers extend their working hours to increase earnings, remain available to obtain more assignments, or adjust their behaviour in response to platform incentives and ratings, economic and technological structures may become reflected in their everyday bodily experiences. Fatigue, musculoskeletal discomfort, prolonged sitting or riding, inadequate rest, and reduced opportunities for physical recovery can consequently be examined as dimensions of the broader social organisation of work.

The present study brings these issues together through three interconnected concepts: algorithmic control, work precarity, and physical well-being. Rather than treating technology, employment insecurity, and physical health as separate phenomena, the study examines how they may operate within a common labour process. This approach aligns with scholarship showing that algorithmic management has become a key mechanism through which platform organisations structure workers' activities while simultaneously presenting platform work as flexible and autonomous (Duggan et al., 2019; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Wood et al., 2019).

Empirically, the study draws on primary data collected from 200 gig workers in Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi: 100 food-delivery workers and 100 app-based cab drivers. The researchers reached respondents through

snowball sampling, which helped them access workers through existing occupational and social networks. The structured interview schedule covered working hours, work intensity, income stability, platform-mediated control, occupational experiences, and indicators of physical well-being. The comparative design allows the study to examine whether delivery workers' physical experiences differ from those of cab drivers and whether variations in working conditions are associated with differences in fatigue and other physical outcomes.

The study consequently views platform-based gig work as more than a technological innovation in service delivery. It represents a changing social organisation of labour in which digital systems, economic pressures, worker autonomy, and bodily experiences are closely interconnected. By examining delivery workers and ride-sharing drivers within the same analytical framework, this research contributes to the sociology of work by showing how new forms of digitally mediated employment may reshape both workers' social conditions and their physical well-being.

2. Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical foundation of the present study is constructed around the proposition that platform-based gig work represents not merely a technological innovation but a reorganisation of the labour process. Digital platforms alter the location, mechanisms, and visibility of managerial control while simultaneously redistributing economic risks and responsibilities to individual workers. To capture these processes adequately, the study integrates Labour Process Theory, Platform Capitalism, Algorithmic Control, Work Precarity, Job Demand–Control Theory, Effort–Reward Imbalance Theory, and the sociological concept of embodied work and physical well-being. Integrating these perspectives enables the study to connect technological organisation at the macro level with everyday working conditions and physical experiences at the micro level.

Labour Process Theory: Control, Autonomy and the Organisation of Work

The theoretical framework begins with Labour Process Theory, drawing on Marx's analysis of the labour process, which distinguishes between labour power and the process through which labour is organised and transformed into productive activity (Marx, 1976). Braverman (1974) subsequently developed the labour-process perspective by emphasising the systematic separation of conception from execution and the expansion of managerial mechanisms designed to control workers' labour. Edwards (1979) further demonstrated that control in modern organisations can operate through different mechanisms, including direct supervision, technical systems, and bureaucratic structures.

Platform work provides an important contemporary context for reconsidering these classical insights. The conventional factory or office is partly replaced by a digital interface, while aspects of managerial authority are incorporated into software. Gandini (2019) argues that Labour Process Theory remains highly relevant to the gig economy because platforms reorganise where labour is performed without eliminating the fundamental problem of control. Feedback, rankings, ratings, and digital monitoring can perform managerial functions even when workers lack a physically present supervisor. Thus, the platform does not eliminate management; it can reconfigure management through technological mediation, creating forms of visibility and disciplinary control that may encourage workers' self-regulation (Foucault, 1977).

For the present study, this perspective is particularly relevant because food-delivery workers and ride-sharing drivers may formally appear to be independent workers, while platform requirements structure their everyday labour. Task allocation, customer ratings, incentive systems, acceptance expectations, and digital monitoring can shape the worker's practical choices. The theoretical question is therefore not whether workers possess autonomy in a formal sense, but how much effective control workers exercise over the organisation of their labour.

Platform Capitalism: Technology, Data and the Reorganisation of Labour

The second theoretical pillar is Platform Capitalism. Srnicek (2017) conceptualises platforms as digital infrastructures that facilitate interactions between different groups while generating value from the data produced through those interactions. In platform-based labour, the worker's activity generates not only a service transaction but also continuous streams of operational data. The platform therefore becomes a marketplace, an organisational

infrastructure, and a mechanism for collecting and processing information simultaneously. The platform operates simultaneously as a market intermediary and organisational infrastructure and data-oriented system through which interactions are organised and information is generated and processed (Poel et. al., 2019)

This perspective matters because a platform's economic power does not depend solely on owning conventional physical workplaces. Instead, digital infrastructure enables platforms to coordinate dispersed workers while retaining access to information concerning their activities. Rosenblat (2018), in her analysis of Uber, shows how the platform's technological architecture can shape drivers' behaviour while framing the relationship in the language of flexibility and entrepreneurship.

Platform Capitalism consequently helps explain why the worker may be physically independent but organizationally dependent. A delivery worker may own or operate a motorcycle, and a cab driver may operate a vehicle independently, yet access to customers and income can depend heavily upon the platform. The distinction between ownership of the means of work and control over access to work therefore becomes theoretically important.

Algorithmic Control: From Human Supervision to Digital Management

The third component is Algorithmic Control. Algorithmic management refers to using computational systems to allocate tasks, monitor activities, evaluate performance, structure incentives, and influence worker behaviour. Duggan et al. (2019) identify algorithmic management as a central characteristic of app-based gig work and emphasise its implications for work assignment and performance management. Their conceptualisation is particularly relevant to the present study because food-delivery and ride-sharing workers depend on smartphone applications to receive and complete work assignments.

Rosenblat and Stark (2016) demonstrate that algorithmic labour systems can generate significant information asymmetries. Platforms may possess extensive information about demand, pricing, worker behaviour, and performance, while workers may have incomplete knowledge about the rules through which these systems operate. This asymmetry creates a distinctive form of organisational power.

Lee et al. (2015) similarly show that algorithmic systems can alter the traditional relationship between workers and managers by embedding managerial functions into technological systems. In platform work, control may therefore be experienced through notifications, ratings, incentives, task allocation, performance indicators, and automated consequences rather than through direct instructions from a human supervisor.

Wood et al. (2019) provide an especially important theoretical contribution by demonstrating the paradox of autonomy and control. Platform workers may enjoy flexibility in determining when to work, yet algorithmic mechanisms can simultaneously encourage long hours, continuous availability, and behavioural conformity. Consequently, autonomy and control should not be treated as mutually exclusive categories. A worker may possess temporal flexibility while remaining economically and technologically constrained.

Reputation, Ratings and Digital Surveillance

A further dimension of algorithmic control is the transformation of reputation into a measurable digital resource. Gandini et al. (2016) demonstrate that reputation mechanisms in online labour markets can convert customer evaluations and feedback into quantifiable indicators that influence economic opportunities. In this system, reputation is not merely a symbolic assessment; it can become economically consequential.

For delivery workers and cab drivers, customer ratings may therefore operate as a form of continuous workplace evaluation. The worker's interaction with customers becomes both a service encounter and a performance assessment. Rosenblat and Stark (2016) show how ratings and information asymmetries can contribute to what may be understood as a relatively “soft” form of control: workers are not necessarily compelled through direct commands but are encouraged to regulate their own behaviour because their continued access to work may depend upon platform-generated evaluations.

This theoretical mechanism is important for the present study because rating pressure is treated as one dimension of algorithmic control. It helps explain why workers may extend effort, modify behaviour, or remain available even without explicit managerial instructions.

Work Precarity: Insecurity, Risk and Economic Dependence

The fourth major theoretical perspective concerns work precarity. Kalleberg (2009) conceptualises precarious work in terms of uncertainty and insecurity surrounding employment and working conditions. Standing (2011) subsequently developed the concept of the precariat to describe emerging groups experiencing unstable employment relationships, insecure income, and reduced occupational security.

Platform labour can reproduce several characteristics associated with precarious employment. Workers may experience fluctuating earnings, uncertain demand, extended working hours, and responsibility for work-related expenses. De Stefano (2016) argues that on-demand work and crowd work challenge conventional forms of labour organisation because work is increasingly fragmented into on-demand tasks. Cherry (2016) similarly emphasises the need to reconsider conventional categories of employment in the context of digitally mediated labour.

Ravenelle's (2019) qualitative analysis of gig workers provides an important sociological illustration of this tension. Workers may initially be attracted by the promise of flexibility and entrepreneurship, but economic necessity can transform nominal flexibility into a requirement to work longer and harder. Thus, flexible precarity helps explain why workers may describe platform work as both flexible and economically insecure.

Platform Dependence and the Contradiction of Flexibility

Precarity alone, however, may not completely explain differences among platform workers. Platform workers do not necessarily experience the same degree of insecurity. Dependence upon platform income, alternative employment opportunities, and the ability to determine working hours can shape how workers experience platform labour.

This argument suggests that platform work should be understood through a continuum of dependence rather than a simple binary of secure versus insecure work. Workers who depend almost entirely on platform earnings may experience incentives and rating mechanisms differently from workers who use platform work as supplementary income. This distinction matters for the present study because it examines income stability and working hours alongside physical well-being.

The concept of dependence also helps connect macro-level economic structures with individual behaviour. When workers require additional working hours to maintain their income, the platform's demand for labour time may become internalised as a personal economic necessity. Consequently, what appears externally as worker choice may partly reflect structural economic constraints.

Job Demand–Control Perspective

To connect sociological working conditions with physical well-being, the study also draws upon the Job Demand–Control model developed by Karasek (1979). The model proposes that worker outcomes depend on the interaction between job demands and the degree of control workers have. High demands combined with limited control can create particularly stressful working conditions.

This framework is highly relevant to platform work. Long working hours, high workload, time pressure, customer expectations, and continuous mobility can constitute job demands, while limited influence over task allocation, pricing, ratings, and platform decisions can reduce effective control. Together, these factors may contribute to fatigue and other adverse physical experiences. The theoretical value of the Job Demand–Control perspective is that it prevents the analysis from assuming that workload alone determines well-being. Two workers may work similar hours but experience different outcomes depending on their level of autonomy and control. Thus, researchers must analyse work intensity and control together.

Effort–Reward Imbalance Perspective

The Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) model developed by Siegrist (1996) provides another useful theoretical bridge between employment conditions and worker well-being. The model emphasises the relationship between the effort workers invest and the rewards they receive. Rewards may include income, recognition, occupational security, and other returns. Platform work can create an imbalance when workers invest substantial time and physical effort but face uncertain income, limited recognition, or unstable work opportunities. This theoretical perspective is particularly useful for examining the relationship between long working hours, income instability, and physical fatigue. The ERI framework therefore complements the Job Demand–Control model. Whereas the latter emphasises demands and control, the former emphasises effort and reward. Together, they provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding why the same amount of work may have different consequences depending upon workers' perceived economic returns and control over their work.

Physical Well-being as an Embodied Consequence of the Labour Process

The present study does not treat physical well-being merely as an individual medical condition. Instead, it conceptualises the worker's body as an important site where social and organisational processes become visible. Marx's analysis of labour already emphasized the relationship between labour time, productive activity, and the human body (Marx, 1976). Later labour-process scholarship similarly demonstrates that control over workers' time and activity is central to the organisation of production (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979). This insight is especially relevant to platform workers because their labour is highly embodied. A food-delivery worker must physically travel between locations, carry orders, negotiate traffic, and remain available for repeated assignments. A cab driver must remain seated for prolonged periods, drive continuously, navigate traffic, and respond to changing customer demands. Consequently, the physical body becomes an essential instrument of platform production.

Wood et al. (2019) found that algorithmically controlled gig work could coexist with overwork, irregular working schedules, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion. Their findings support the theoretical proposition that the organisation of digital work can affect workers' physical experiences. In the present study, fatigue, back pain, sleep disturbance, and other indicators are therefore treated as potential embodied consequences of the labour process rather than as isolated individual characteristics.

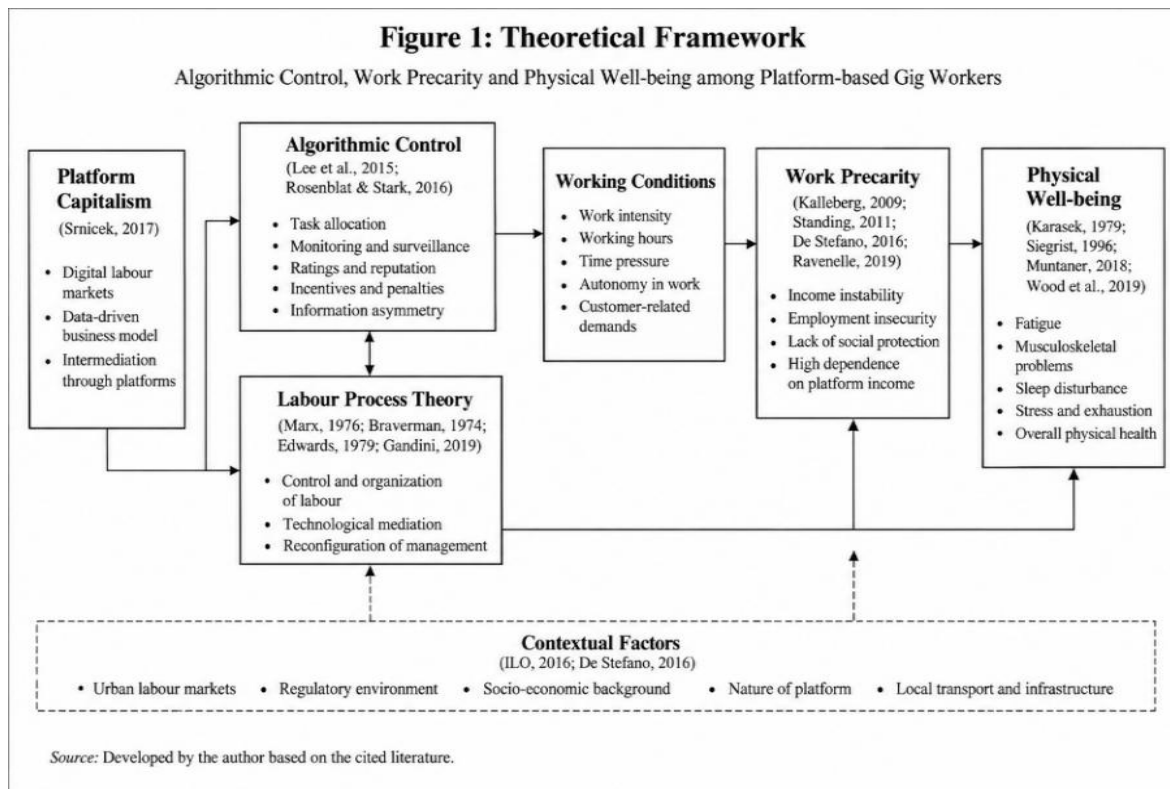
Sociology of Work and the Social Determination of Physical Well-being

The sociological significance of physical well-being becomes clearer when health is considered in relation to social conditions. Muntaner (2018) argues that the expansion of platform capitalism can transform employment and working conditions in ways that affect health inequalities. From this perspective, occupational well-being cannot be separated from the organisation of economic life.

The present study consequently adopts a social-determinants-of-work perspective, in which physical well-being is potentially shaped by working hours, income security, work intensity, control, occupational demands, and recovery opportunities. This approach moves beyond an individualistic interpretation of fatigue or musculoskeletal discomfort and instead asks how the organisation of platform labour creates conditions under which particular physical experiences become more or less likely.

Integrated theoretical framework:

The framework is not intended to establish that algorithmic control mechanically produces poor physical well-being. Rather, it proposes a **mediated relationship** in which technological control influences the organisation of work; the organisation of work shapes demands, autonomy, and economic insecurity; and these conditions may subsequently become embodied in workers' physical experiences.



The framework also recognises an important contradiction in platform work. Digital platforms can provide flexibility, autonomy, and opportunities for income generation while simultaneously producing monitoring, rating pressure, economic dependence, and work intensification (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Wood et al., 2019). The present study contributes theoretically by examining this contradiction empirically rather than assuming that platform work is inherently liberating or inherently exploitative.

Overall, the theoretical framework conceptualises gig work as a digitally mediated labour process embedded in platform capitalism, characterised by **algorithmic control, differentiated degrees of precarity, and potentially significant embodied consequences**. Labour Process Theory explains the organisation of control; Platform Capitalism explains the economic and technological infrastructure; Algorithmic Control explains the mechanisms of digital management; Precarity Theory explains insecurity and dependence; Job Demand–Control and Effort–Reward Imbalance perspectives connect working conditions with well-being; and the embodied perspective connects these social processes to workers' physical experiences. This integrated theoretical approach provides the conceptual foundation for analysing the experiences of the 200 food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers included in the present study.

3. Review of Literature

The literature on platform-based gig work has developed around several interconnected concerns, including the transformation of employment relations, algorithmic management, worker autonomy, labour precarity,

economic insecurity, and the quality of working life. For the purposes of the present study, the existing literature is organized into five thematic areas: (1) the emergence and organisation of platform work, (2) algorithmic control and labour-process transformation, (3) precarity and economic insecurity, (4) physical and psychosocial dimensions of platform work, and (5) comparative evidence concerning delivery workers and ride-sharing drivers. This thematic organisation helps identify the theoretical and empirical space within which the present study is located.

Platform Work and the Transformation of Employment

The emergence of digital labour platforms has challenged conventional understandings of employment, entrepreneurship, and self-employment. De Stefano (2016) described on-demand work as a significant transformation in the organisation of labour, emphasising the fragmentation of work into individual tasks and the shifting of risks away from conventional employers. Cherry (2016) similarly argued that digital technologies were changing traditional employment classifications and creating new questions concerning the organisation and protection of workers.

Srnicek (2017) situated platforms within a broader transformation of capitalism in which digital infrastructures facilitate interactions among different groups while allowing firms to generate value from data and network effects. From this perspective, platform labour cannot be understood merely as independent contracting because the technological infrastructure itself becomes an important component of the organisation of production. Rosenblat (2018), in her study of Uber, further demonstrated how the platform model combines technological coordination with extensive information collection. Drivers' apparent independence coexists with platform-dependent access to customers, pricing information, ratings, and work opportunities. This creates an organisational relationship that differs from the traditional employer–employee model while nevertheless retaining significant elements of managerial power.

Gandini (2019) extended labour-process analysis to the gig economy and argued that the technological character of platform work does not eliminate the fundamental sociological issue of labour control. Instead, control may be reorganised through digital interfaces, customer evaluations, reputation systems, and incentive structures. The literature therefore suggests that platform work represents a transformation in labour organisation rather than the disappearance of organisational control.

Algorithmic Control and Digital Management

A particularly important strand of literature examines algorithmic management. Rosenblat and Stark (2016), in their study of Uber drivers, demonstrated how information asymmetries between the platform and workers can create unequal power relations. Workers may have limited knowledge of how pricing, allocation, and other platform decisions are determined, while the platform can collect and process extensive information about worker behaviour. Lee et al. (2015) showed that algorithmic and data-driven management can alter conventional relationships between workers and managers. Instead of receiving instructions exclusively from human supervisors, workers may encounter managerial decisions through technological systems. The algorithm consequently becomes part of the organisational infrastructure through which work is evaluated and coordinated.

Griesbach et al. (2019) provide particularly relevant evidence for food-delivery work. Their research, based on interviews with 55 workers and a survey of 955 platform delivery workers, found that food-delivery platforms used algorithmic management to assign and evaluate work, although the degree of control varied across platforms. Their analysis matters because it shows that “flexibility” does not necessarily imply equivalent levels of worker autonomy. The study also showed that algorithmic control can influence both working schedules and workers' activities. Veen et al. (2019) examined food-delivery work through a labour-process perspective and identified several interconnected mechanisms of platform control, including technological surveillance, information asymmetry, and opaque performance-management systems. Their analysis demonstrated that the technological infrastructure itself can become an instrument of labour control.

Wood et al. (2019) similarly examined algorithmic control and found a contradiction between autonomy and constraint. Workers may possess discretion concerning when they work, but this discretion can coexist with ratings, incentives, customer evaluations, and economic pressure. Their findings are theoretically important for the present research because they suggest that formal autonomy and effective autonomy are not necessarily identical. Wu et al. (2019), studying Uber drivers in China, identified incentive payments, customer evaluations, and flexible work arrangements as key mechanisms through which the platform shaped the labour process. Their study shows that algorithmic control should not be reduced to automated task allocation alone; incentive structures and customer ratings can also indirectly regulate worker behaviour.

Collectively, these studies indicate that algorithmic control operates through multiple mechanisms rather than through a single technological function. Task allocation, monitoring, ratings, incentive systems, and information asymmetry can collectively influence worker behaviour. This provides the theoretical basis for examining algorithmic control in the present study through multiple indicators rather than treating it as a single variable.

Work Precarity, Income Instability and Economic Dependence

A second major theme in the literature concerns precarity. Kalleberg (2009) conceptualised precarious employment in terms of uncertainty, insecurity, and weak control over employment conditions. Standing (2011) subsequently used the concept of the precariat to describe workers experiencing unstable employment and insecure economic conditions. These concepts are highly relevant to platform work. De Stefano (2016) argued that on-demand work can transfer risks traditionally associated with employers toward workers. Workers may have flexibility in when they work but also face uncertainty about how much work will be available and how much income they can generate. Ravenelle (2019), through qualitative research on gig workers, demonstrated the tension between the promise of flexibility and the economic realities workers experience. Individuals may initially enter platform work because it appears flexible or entrepreneurial, yet economic necessity can later drive longer hours and greater dependence on gig income. Wood et al. (2019) similarly found that platform workers experienced tensions between flexibility and insecurity. Their research suggests that workers may strategically use flexibility while simultaneously experiencing unpredictable workloads, limited bargaining power, and economic pressure.

The literature therefore indicates that precarity in platform work is multidimensional. It includes not only income instability but also uncertainty concerning working hours, dependence on platform-generated opportunities, and responsibility for work-related costs. This study incorporates these dimensions through indicators such as income stability, working hours, number of working days, and dependence on platform earnings.

Working Hours, Work Intensity and Physical Well-being

The literature also indicates that the organisation of platform work affects workers' everyday physical and psychological experiences. Wood et al. (2019) found that algorithmic control could be associated with overwork, irregular schedules, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion. These findings are particularly relevant to the present research because working time and work intensity may serve as pathways linking platform organisation to physical well-being. The physical demands of platform work vary by occupational category. Delivery workers spend significant periods travelling between restaurants and customers, while ride-sharing drivers spend extended periods driving and sitting in vehicles. This distinction matters because the same platform logic can produce different forms of bodily strain.

The Job Demand–Control perspective developed by Karasek (1979) provides a useful conceptual bridge between work organisation and well-being. High job demands combined with limited control may produce adverse consequences for workers. In platform labour, working hours, workload, time pressure, and customer demands can be considered job demands, while workers' control over task allocation, schedules, and platform decisions reflects dimensions of job control. Siegrist's (1996) Effort–Reward Imbalance model provides another relevant perspective. Platform workers may invest substantial time and physical effort while experiencing uncertain financial returns. Where effort is high and rewards are unstable or insufficient, the imbalance may contribute to stress and physical exhaustion.

These theoretical approaches suggest that physical well-being should not be considered simply as an individual characteristic. Instead, it may be influenced by the organisation of work, the intensity of labour, the control available to workers, and the economic rewards generated by that labour.

Food-Delivery Workers: Evidence from Platform-Based Delivery

Food-delivery work has received increasing scholarly attention because it provides a particularly visible example of digitally mediated labour. Griesbach et al. (2019) demonstrated that delivery platforms use algorithmic systems to allocate and evaluate work and that different platforms can impose different degrees of control.

Veen et al. (2019) similarly found that food-delivery platforms combine algorithmic management with technological surveillance and information asymmetries. Their analysis matters because it challenges the idea that food-delivery workers operate as fully autonomous independent contractors. The Indian context provides additional evidence. The existing literature thus establishes food delivery as a form of work characterised by strong technological mediation, economic dependence, and substantial work intensity. However, the literature has paid relatively little attention to comparing the physical experiences of food-delivery workers with those of ride-sharing drivers within a common sociological framework.

Ride-Sharing Drivers and Platform-Mediated Driving Work

Ride-sharing drivers constitute another important category of platform workers. Rosenblat and Stark (2016) demonstrated that Uber drivers experienced information asymmetries and technologically mediated control. Rosenblat (2018) subsequently highlighted the complex relationship between driver autonomy and platform dependence. Wu et al. (2019), examining Uber drivers in China, found that incentives, customer evaluations, and flexible scheduling were central components of labour control. Their study demonstrates that ride-sharing work cannot be understood exclusively through the concept of flexibility because economic incentives and platform evaluations can influence workers' decisions concerning when and how they work. The ride-sharing literature also suggests that drivers' physical experiences deserve greater attention. Unlike food-delivery workers, drivers spend much of their working time seated, often for extended periods. Prolonged driving can therefore create a different pattern of physical strain from the repeated mobility associated with delivery work. This distinction provides a strong rationale for the comparative design adopted in the present research.

Comparative Interpretation of Existing Literature

The literature reviewed above demonstrates several important patterns. First, platform work has transformed labour organisation without eliminating managerial control. Second, algorithmic management has introduced new supervision mechanisms through task allocation, ratings, incentives, and data-driven evaluation. Third, platform workers often experience economic and occupational insecurity associated with precarious employment. Fourth, working-time intensity and limited recovery opportunities may affect physical well-being.

However, the existing literature tends to concentrate on one dimension at a time. Some studies focus primarily on algorithmic management, others on labour precarity, while health-related consequences are often treated as secondary outcomes. Similarly, delivery work and ride-sharing work are frequently studied separately. Consequently, there remains scope for an integrated analysis that examines algorithmic control, work precarity, and physical well-being within a single sociological framework.

The present study addresses this issue through primary data collected from 200 gig workers in Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi, comprising 100 food-delivery workers and 100 app-based cab drivers. By examining these two occupational categories together, the study seeks to determine whether differences in working hours, work intensity, income stability, algorithmic control, and platform dependence correspond with differences in physical experiences such as fatigue and musculoskeletal discomfort. The literature therefore provides a strong conceptual basis for the present study while also revealing the need for a more integrated empirical examination of platform labour. The present research contributes by bringing together the sociology of work, algorithmic management, labour precarity, and physical well-being within one comparative framework.

Research Gap: The existing literature on the gig economy has examined algorithmic control, worker autonomy, income insecurity, and employment precarity (De Stefano, 2016; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Gandini, 2019; Wood et al., 2019). However, several gaps remain.

First, much existing research examines algorithmic control and work precarity separately, with comparatively little integration of these dimensions with workers' physical well-being. Studies of platform work have focused extensively on ratings, incentives, task allocation, and digital monitoring (Griesbach et al., 2019; Veen et al., 2019), but have paid less attention to their physical consequences. **Second**, researchers often study delivery workers and ride-

sharing drivers separately. Comparative research examining how different platform-based occupations produce different patterns of physical strain remains limited. **Third**, the physical dimension of gig work remains relatively underexplored. Issues such as fatigue, prolonged working hours, back pain, and insufficient recovery time require greater sociological attention. **Fourth**, a methodological gap remains in integrating occupational comparison with quantitative analysis. The present study addresses these gaps through primary data from 200 gig workers—100 food-delivery workers and 100 app-based cab drivers—from Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi. It examines the relationship between algorithmic control, work precarity, working conditions, and physical well-being, with particular attention to fatigue and back pain.

Overall, the study seeks to connect the sociology of work with the physical consequences of platform-mediated labour, thereby providing an integrated understanding of contemporary gig work in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following three objectives:

1. To examine the nature of algorithmic control and work precarity among food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers.
2. To assess the physical well-being of gig workers, particularly in relation to fatigue and back pain.
3. To examine the association between working conditions and physical well-being among food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers.

Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following three research questions:

1. How do algorithmic control and work precarity shape the working conditions of food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers?
2. What are the major patterns of physical well-being, particularly fatigue and back pain, among gig workers?
3. What is the relationship between working conditions and physical well-being among food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers?

4. Research Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative, descriptive and analytical research design to examine algorithmic control, work precarity, working conditions, and physical well-being among gig workers. Primary data were collected from 200 respondents, comprising 100 food-delivery workers and 100 app-based cab drivers, from selected urban areas of Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi, using snowball sampling. The researcher collected data through a structured interview schedule. The study focuses on working hours, task allocation, rating pressure, income stability, fatigue, and back pain as key indicators. The collected data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulation, chi-square test, and Pearson's correlation to examine patterns and associations between working conditions and physical well-being.

Data Interpretation

The analysis of primary data from 200 gig workers, comprising 100 food-delivery workers and 100 app-based cab drivers, reveals a consistent pattern of intensive work, economic insecurity, platform-mediated control, and physical strain. The findings indicate that gig work was not experienced simply as a flexible employment arrangement; rather, workers' everyday experiences were shaped by the interaction of working-time demands, platform mechanisms, economic pressures, and occupational conditions.

Work Intensity and Working Patterns

The distribution of daily working hours indicates considerable work intensity. 38% of respondents reported working 8–10 hours per day, while 31% reported working more than 10 hours. Thus, 69% of respondents worked for at least eight hours daily. In addition, 59% reported working seven days a week. The combination of extended daily hours and a seven-day work pattern suggests that many respondents had limited opportunities for regular rest and recovery. These findings are particularly important for understanding physical well-being because prolonged exposure to work without adequate recovery may increase physical fatigue.

Income Instability and Work Precarity

Economic insecurity was another prominent feature of the respondents' work experience. 73% reported income instability, indicating that nearly three-fourths of the sample experienced fluctuations in earnings. Income instability matters for work precarity because uncertain earnings can increase workers' dependence on continued platform participation. In such circumstances, workers may have economic reasons to extend their working hours or remain available longer. The finding therefore connects the economic dimension of gig work with the broader pattern of work intensity observed in the study.

Platform-mediated Control

The findings also provide evidence of substantial platform influence over how work is organised. 77% of respondents reported that the platform determined task allocation, while only 23% reported the freedom to reject tasks. This difference suggests that the formal flexibility associated with gig work did not necessarily translate into equivalent control over how labour was actually organised. Platform mechanisms appear to have played an important role in determining what work was available and how workers responded.

Economic incentives constituted another important mechanism, with 74% of respondents reporting that these incentives influenced their working hours. This suggests that platform-based financial incentives partly shaped workers' labour supply. Rather than operating solely through direct supervision, control could therefore be exercised indirectly by organising opportunities and rewards. Customer ratings further strengthened this pattern. 83% of respondents experienced pressure associated with customer ratings, making rating pressure one of the most frequently reported features of their work experience. Ratings may therefore be understood as an additional mechanism for communicating and maintaining performance expectations. Taken together, task allocation, limited task-rejection autonomy, incentives, and rating pressure indicate a multidimensional form of platform-mediated control.

Physical Well-being

The findings relating to physical well-being reveal significant occupational differences. 74% of food-delivery workers reported fatigue compared with 52% of app-based cab drivers. Similarly, 68% of delivery workers reported back pain compared with 48% of cab drivers. These differences suggest that both occupational groups experienced physical strain, but delivery workers reported it more often. The relatively higher level of fatigue among delivery workers may be linked to the specific characteristics of delivery work, including continuous movement, time-sensitive tasks, road exposure, and repeated journeys. Cab drivers, in contrast, may experience a different physical pattern associated more strongly with prolonged sitting and sustained driving. The comparison therefore indicates that platform work should not be treated as a homogeneous occupational category; physical experiences can vary according to the specific labour process involved.

Statistical Association

The occupational difference in fatigue was further examined statistically. The chi-square value of 10.42 ($p < .05$) indicates a statistically significant association between type of gig work and fatigue. Thus, the difference in reported fatigue between food-delivery workers and cab drivers is statistically meaningful within the study sample. The study also examined the relationship between working duration and fatigue using Pearson's correlation. The analysis produced a positive correlation ($r = .64$) between working hours and fatigue. This indicates that respondents reporting longer working hours also tended to report greater fatigue. The strength of this relationship further supports

the descriptive finding that work intensity is closely associated with physical strain. Nevertheless, because the study is observational, interpret the correlation as an association rather than definitive evidence of causality.

Integrated Interpretation

Overall, the findings reveal an interconnected pattern in which work intensity, income instability, platform-mediated control, incentive structures, rating pressure, and physical strain coexist within the everyday experience of gig workers. The evidence suggests that the flexibility associated with platform work operates alongside significant organisational and economic pressures. The occupational comparison further demonstrates that the physical consequences of platform work vary between delivery workers and cab drivers, with delivery workers reporting higher levels of fatigue and back pain.

The findings therefore support the study's central argument that gig work should be understood not merely as a technologically enabled form of flexible employment but as a distinctive labour process in which algorithmic management, economic precarity, working-time demands, and embodied physical experiences are interconnected. The results provide the empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion of these relationships through the perspectives of Labour Process Theory, Algorithmic Control, Work Precarity, and Physical Well-being.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that platform-based gig work combines technological control, economic insecurity, work intensity, and physical strain. Although gig work is often associated with flexibility, the present evidence suggests that flexibility coexists with substantial platform-mediated control and economic dependence. From the perspective of Labour Process Theory, control over labour has not disappeared with digital platforms but has taken new technological forms (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979). The findings that 77% of respondents experienced platform-determined task allocation and 83% experienced rating pressure indicate that algorithms, performance systems, and customer evaluations played an important role in organising work. This supports earlier research on algorithmic control in platform labour (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Wood et al., 2019; Griesbach et al., 2019).

The findings also support the concept of work precarity, as 73% reported income instability; economic uncertainty was a major feature of the respondents' employment experience. The combination of unstable earnings, incentive-driven working hours, and extended work duration suggests that workers' dependence on platform income may contribute to intensive labour participation (Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2011). Physical well-being is another important dimension. 74% of delivery workers and 52% of cab drivers reported fatigue, while 68% and 48% reported back pain, respectively. The significant association between type of gig work and fatigue ($\chi^2 = 10.42$, $p < .05$) and the positive relationship between working hours and fatigue ($r = .64$) indicate that occupational conditions and work duration are closely associated with physical strain. These findings also suggest that gig workers should not be treated as a homogeneous occupational category because different platform occupations involve different physical demands. The findings can further be understood through the Job Demand–Control perspective (Karasek, 1979) and Effort–Reward Imbalance perspective (Siegrist, 1996). Extended working hours, rating pressure, and limited task control represent significant demands, while income instability may weaken the relationship between effort and predictable economic rewards.

Overall, the study demonstrates that platform work is not simply a technologically enabled form of flexible employment. It represents a distinctive labour process in which algorithmic control, economic precarity, work intensity, and physical well-being are interconnected.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between algorithmic control, work precarity, work intensity, and physical well-being among 200 gig workers, including food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers, in Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi. The findings demonstrate that platform-based work involves a complex combination of flexibility and control. Platform-determined task allocation, rating pressure, incentive structures, income instability,

and extended working hours indicate that workers' autonomy operates within a broader system of technological and economic dependence.

The study further demonstrates that the organisation of platform work has an important physical dimension. High levels of reported fatigue and back pain, particularly among delivery workers, indicate that the consequences of gig work extend beyond income and employment conditions to workers' embodied experiences. The significant association between occupational type and fatigue ($\chi^2 = 10.42$, $p < .05$) and the positive relationship between working hours and fatigue ($r = .64$) further highlight the importance of work intensity in understanding physical well-being. Theoretically, the study contributes by integrating Labour Process Theory, Algorithmic Control, Work Precarity, and Physical Well-being into a single framework. It demonstrates that digital technologies do not simply reorganise employment; they also reshape how labour is controlled, intensified, and physically experienced. The proposed Platform-Mediated Labour Process and Physical Well-being Model therefore provides a framework for understanding the interconnected relationship between platform mechanisms, economic insecurity, work intensity, and workers' physical outcomes.

Overall, the study argues that the sociological understanding of gig work must move beyond the simple distinction between flexibility and insecurity. Platform-mediated employment should instead be examined as a multidimensional labour process in which technology, economic dependence, occupational conditions, and the human body are interconnected. A more sustainable future of platform work consequently requires attention not only to technological efficiency and earning opportunities but also to workers' autonomy, recovery time, occupational conditions, and physical well-being.

Policy Implications

The findings point to several concrete measures for improving the organisational and physical sustainability of platform-based gig work. **First**, introduce work-intensity safeguards, including platform-based alerts when workers approach prolonged daily or continuous working periods and recommended rest intervals between extended work sessions. **Second**, strengthen algorithmic transparency by providing workers with clear information about task allocation, incentives, ratings, and the factors that influence access to work. **Third**, rating systems should include safeguards against disproportionate performance pressure, such as mechanisms for reviewing anomalous or disputed ratings. **Fourth**, platform-based occupational well-being programmes should be developed, including periodic health screening, fatigue-awareness programmes, ergonomic guidance, and information on preventing back and musculoskeletal problems. Such interventions should be differentiated by occupation: delivery workers may require greater attention to road exposure, continuous movement, and fatigue, whereas cab drivers require greater attention to prolonged sitting and driving-related physical strain. **Fifth**, platforms should provide accessible rest and recovery arrangements, including designated rest points or partnerships with existing facilities in high-demand urban locations, and health policy or health care facilities should be provided to those working with the concerned association for more than one year.

Sixth, incentive structures should be designed so workers are not indirectly encouraged to work excessively long hours merely to maintain or increase earnings. Platforms can monitor unusually high work durations and provide neutral health-and-safety prompts without restricting workers' legitimate earning opportunities. Finally, Delhi-NCR urban authorities, platform companies, and worker organisations should collaborate on periodic assessments of gig-worker working conditions, using indicators such as working hours, income stability, fatigue, back pain, and occupational workload. These measures would shift the policy focus from simply expanding platform employment toward creating a more sustainable and physically safer form of digitally mediated work.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

Contribution to Theory

This study contributes to the sociology of work by integrating Labour Process Theory, Algorithmic Control, Work Precarity, and Physical Well-being within a single framework for understanding platform-based gig work. The

findings demonstrate that digital platforms do not eliminate labour control but transform it through task allocation, incentives, ratings, and performance monitoring. The coexistence of income instability, extended working hours, limited task autonomy, and physical strain further indicates that technological control and economic precarity operate together within the platform labour process. The study also extends existing approaches by explicitly incorporating the embodied consequences of digitally mediated work, particularly fatigue and back pain. Thus, the study conceptualises gig work as a labour process in which technological, economic, organisational, and physical dimensions are interconnected.

Contribution to Practice

The study provides practical insights for platform companies, urban policymakers, and worker-support institutions. The findings highlight the need for work-duration safeguards, transparent task-allocation and incentive systems, fair rating mechanisms, adequate rest opportunities, and occupation-specific approaches to physical well-being. The higher reported levels of fatigue and back pain among delivery workers indicate that interventions should recognise differences between occupational forms of gig work. The study therefore shifts practical attention from technological efficiency alone to workers' sustainability and physical well-being.

Theoretical Model Derived from the Study

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical discussion, the study proposes a Platform-Mediated Labour Process and Physical Well-being Model. The model conceptualises the relationship as:

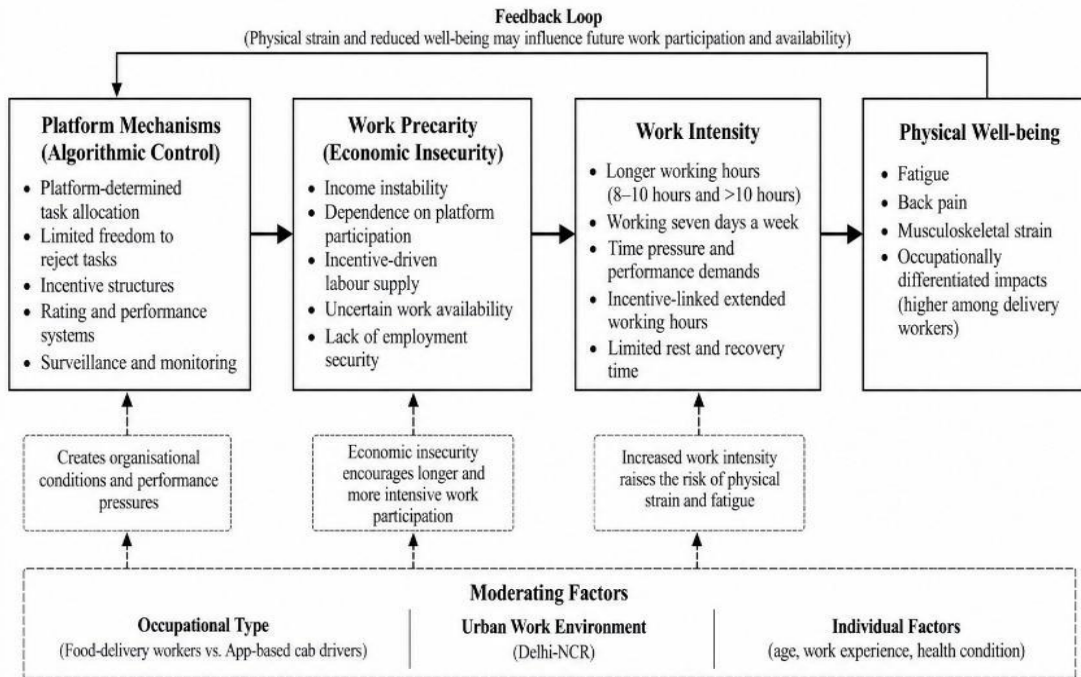
Platform Mechanisms (Algorithmic Control) → Work Precarity → Work Intensity → Physical Well-being

Platform-determined task allocation, limited freedom to reject tasks, incentives, and rating pressure constitute the principal mechanisms of algorithmic control. These mechanisms operate alongside income instability and economic dependence, which represent work precarity. Precarity and platform demands may contribute to longer working hours, seven-day work participation, and increased performance pressure, collectively producing greater work intensity. Work intensity is subsequently associated with physical outcomes such as fatigue and back pain.

The model also recognises occupational type as an important differentiating factor, since delivery workers and cab drivers experience different physical demands. The empirical finding of $r = .64$ between working hours and fatigue supports the link between work intensity and physical well-being, while the significant association between occupational type and fatigue ($\chi^2 = 10.42, p < .05$) supports the importance of occupational differentiation.

The model therefore proposes that the physical consequences of gig work cannot be understood independently of the technological and economic organisation of platform labour.

Figure 1. Platform-Mediated Labour Process and Physical Well-being Model among Gig Workers



Source: Developed by the author based on primary data collected from 200 gig workers (food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers) and the discussion in the present study.

Note: The model illustrates the key relationships identified through the author's empirical findings and subsequent analysis and discussion.

7. Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting its findings. **First**, the study is based on 200 gig workers from selected urban areas of Faridabad, Gurugram, and Delhi; therefore, the findings should not be generalised to all gig workers in India. **Second**, snowball sampling may have introduced selection effects because respondents were reached through existing social networks. **Third**, the study relies primarily on self-reported information, particularly regarding working hours, income instability, fatigue, and back pain, which may be affected by recall or reporting differences. **Fourth**, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships; for example, the positive relationship between working hours and fatigue ($r = .64$) indicates association, not causation. **Finally**, the study focuses specifically on food-delivery workers and app-based cab drivers and therefore does not cover other categories of platform workers. Despite these limitations, the study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between algorithmic control, work precarity, work intensity, and physical well-being within the selected study context.

Biographies-

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