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SERVICE WITH A SMILE: A STUDY EXAMINING INTERACTIVE SERVICE WORK AND WORKERS (ISW) IN INDIA

Jina Sarmah[1]

Abstract

Interactive service work has emerged as an inseparable aspect of service work since the 1980s in the post-industrial economies. In the present era, there has been a massive expansion of consumer services across the globe; however, little has been known about interactive service work in the context of India. This paper attempts to review the concept of interactive service work as defined in the western economies and analyse how the framework set in the west fits the context of India. The study uses secondary literature to identify the gaps and scope of research in contributing to the understanding of interactive service work. The study reveals through the process of literature review and analysis of data that the understanding of interactive work has been western centric and has neglected issues pertaining to local cultural norms which shape the participation of workers and how they perform interactive work in India. A deeper understanding of class, caste, traditional social norms, aspects of gender and the notion of skills through workers' participation become crucial areas of focus and further research.

Introduction to Interactive Service Work (ISW)

With the expansion of the service sector, face-to-face/voice-to-voice interaction became a crucial part of work, as most occupations in the post-industrial societies required some level of interaction on a regular basis with the end consumer (Bell, 1973). In the present era, there has been a massive expansion of consumer services across the globe, for instance as McDowell (2009:8) states "from eating out, through travel, to all sorts of care for the body and the soul, from massaging to counselling", the economy has shifted to a weightless economy through the production of 'weightless goods and services'. Gooptu (2013) highlights Shearing and Stenning's use of the concept of "mass private property", by which she explains the rapid urbanisation process which resulted in the growth of "privately owned and managed large scale consumer facilities for public use (pg:11), such as private hospitals, educational institutions, shopping malls, entertainments zones, leisure activities, hotels and hospitality sector. These privately owned and managed consumer facilities demand high quality service efforts to survive in the competitive market. Unlike earlier times, today when one enters a hospital or a school or college campus, or a retail shopping complex, the consumer is immediately assisted, greeted, and lured by staff to create an impression of the brand and project 'how important the consumer is for the organisation'. Thus, individuals are seen to be engaged in new forms of employment in the globalised world and people expect exceptional service quality and 'service with a smile' in the new economy. Post 1970s, several studies emerged after Hochschild's "The Managed Heart (1983)", to several other empirical studies (Leidner 1993; Witz, *et al*, 2003; Warhurst, *et al*, 2000; Warhurst & Nickson,2009; Thompson, *et al*, 2001; Sherman, 2007; Payne, 2009; McDowell,2009; Nickson, *et al*, 2005; Hampson & Junor, 2005, etc.) which focused on work in the new economy. Frenkel *et al* (1999) stresses that the proportion of workers engaged in services increased as compared to manufacturing sectors in the west, and economies witnessed a rise in the number of workers in frontline work, it was not just the

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increasing number in those occupational positions but also the 'strategic' role they occupied 'at the interface of the organisation and its customers' (as cited in Watson, 2003;p:73).

While for the common man interactive work means 'service with a smile', interactive work captures the multiple dynamics of a production and consumption relations in different contexts. Sherman (2007) sees interactive service as a form of service which allows consumers to display their sense of entitlement and the worker's capability to fulfil those demands. Studies on interactive workers might not seem to be very crucial as their numbers are comparatively small, but with the new physical spaces emerging as symbolic of development in the global cities and the increasing competition in the market, the demand for personalised services is increasing and will continue to increase with the parallel increase in economic inequality. Developed economies like the USA and the UK have gone through this phase of exponential growth of the services sector and India has been experiencing the same since the past two decades. Sherman (2007) describes how the increasing amount of wealth among certain sections of the people creates the demand for personalised attention and entitlement to services. The rising economic inequality will continue to create a section of workforce available to work at any given work conditions. The condition in the context of India seem to be a little different; here, along with the wealth of the consumers, there is cut-throat competition in the market from the service provider and there is massive availability of labour, as a consequence of which the demand for additional and personalised services has become so crucial in the city spaces in India irrespective of whether these are luxury establishments or general establishments (the degree of personalised services vary between the different categories of establishments). Looking at it from the organisational perspective, interactive service work is an extremely crucial part of service work employment as it contributes to the smooth functioning of organisations, as not and the interactive service workers become a point of contact, the one who integrates production with consumption and represents the brand name in the competitive global economy. Many establishments survive in the market because of the rating they achieve based solely on their service quality. Interactive service work has been described as the "Unacknowledged management of awkward interactions among the social worlds of people, technology and organisations" (Hampson & Junor, 2005:166). Hochschild in her book 'The Managed Heart' (1983) even though does not use the term interactive work directly, uses emotional labour as representation of interactive work, and mentions the growing importance of the new kind of jobs which have gained "symbolic prominence - the voice-to voice or face-to-face delivery of service and the flight attendant is an appropriate model for it (p:8)". However, contemporary discussions on the role of interactive service workers have remained limited specifically in the context of India as a new economy. Hochschild (ibid) highlights in her book how most jobs in the later part of the twentieth century are more of 'people handling jobs' and require interpersonal skills.

In 'The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (1973)', Daniel Bell states "The fact that individuals now talk to other individuals, rather than interact with a machine, is the fundamental fact about work in the post-industrial society (as cited in McDowell, 2009; p:9)." Unlike, work which was previously performed in the closed factory settings, far away from the final consumer market, present day work to a large extent is organised around the management of surplus capital. Sanyal and Bhattacharya (2011) argued that the cities in the new economy have become the sites of surplus production and surplus

management, for instance banking, legal services, finance, security, insurance, innovation, research, IT. The concept of interactive service work or front-line service workers is comparatively new to the existing literature in the context of India and developing countries in general. Interactive service work as a form of work, even though always visible to the consumer in the day-to-day consumption of services, is yet ignored and unexplored.

Overview of the Economic Transformation of India: Contextualizing Interactive Service Work in India

The western framework for interactive service work lays foundation for one to comprehend an emerging and a significant form of work. However, to accept a universal definition of it would be inefficient when it comes to social science research. The geography and the location in which the economic activity takes place, and its social and culture context is all interconnected and the understanding of one without the inclusion of the other regional factors is incomplete and obsolete. Hence an attempt has been made to locate and analyze interactive work while understanding the political economy of the country.

In the 1990s, the process of 'liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation' marked the beginning of the IT revolution. The opening up of the economy to international and private players through policy reforms in the Telecommunications sector led to the IT revolution[2]. The emergence of the IT industry, with a tremendous information and communication potential, introduced a new economic order, thereby giving a major push to the Indian service sector. However, despite the economic reforms, the economy did not perform well in terms of creating employment. On the one hand, the manufacturing output increased drastically, but employment in the sector did not increase proportionately (Sen and Das, 2015). Unlike much of the western economy, India did not experience the defined linear model of economic progression from primary to secondary and finally the service sector led growth. India leapfrogged the secondary or industrial phase of economic development to service sector led economic growth. Two major debates emerged to analyze the reasons behind the stagnant industrial development in India despite the economic reforms and liberalization. Firstly, the performance of the industrial sector depends to a major extent on the agricultural economy. As a massive number of people in India continue to engage in agricultural sector activities (agriculture accounted for 23% of the GDP and employed 59% of the labour force[3]), it is only if the agricultural sector performs well in terms of output and income that there will be an increase in demand for both agricultural and non-agricultural goods within the economy. Adhia (2015), argues that as three-fourth of the people's livelihood depended on agricultural sector "rising incomes could have been used to finance industrial development (pg. 18)".

The second theory which explains why the LPG programme did not drastically kickstart the process of economic growth and development in India is, as Sen and Das (2015) argued, going by the traditional trade theory, what a labour abundant economy does post liberalization is that it promotes the

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[2] IT refers to the Information Technology industry as a whole, which includes IT infrastructures, computers, networking, software applications, information management, etc., while ICT refers to Information Communications Technology wherein computers and other digital technologies are used in the management of information.

[3] India at a glance http://www.fao.org/india/fao-in-india/india-at-a-glance/en/ Accessed on 23rdJune, 2021.

export of commodities produced in labour intensive manufacturing sectors and imports capital goods which further increases labour intensive activities in an economy. The East Asian economies followed the dual sector model as proposed by Arthur Lewis (as cited in Sen & Das, 2015), where the surplus labour from the subsistence sector is absorbed into the more productive manufacturing sector, with higher wages and the manufacturing sectors focused on production for an export-oriented market. This was the pathway taken by the major Asian economies like Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, which in a true sense integrated their local economies with the global economies (ibid). However, this was not the path India followed, as India's economic growth has been mostly capital and skill intensive growth through the sectors of IT, business, pharmaceuticals, etc. There was an expectation that the economic reforms would target the removal of the existing distortions in the industrial licensing system, relaxation on import and export and this would boost the labour-intensive manufacturing sector, creating a demand for labour and thereby increasing employment and levels of wages. However, what happened instead is the import of capital goods began to replace labour in the labour-intensive industries, resulting in decreased employment rates and even lowering wage rates of the workforce. Firms invested on computerization and machines to cut down cost in the long run and compete with international private players. Therefore, the comparative advantage that a labour abundant economy enjoys no longer remains valid. While growth in value added increased by 8.49% per annum during the period 2000-01 to 2009-10, employment did not increase, but rather slowed to 0.41% from 1.81% per annum (Sen & Das, 2015; pg.108). The organized manufacturing showed an increase in labour productivity but decrease in employment growth. Employment growth took place from 1990's - 2000 from 26% to 31%, however it started declining post 2000s (ibid). This had a major impact on the Indian labour market. The structural reforms simultaneously gave a boost to the skill intensive services sector. The services sector in India is widely represented by the IT industry and the export of software and IT-enabled services globally post globalization. This implies it is a skill and capital-intensive sector, which created a demand and had a spillover effect on other services work. Finally, it is crucial to highlight that with the process of liberalisation and global integration, urbanization began in full swing. Consequently, the demand for different consumer services increased, this resulted in the demand for labour in the services industry. This increased the demand for new skill sets without much improvement in work conditions and quality of life of the workforce (Carswell and De Neve, 2018).

One can categorise three major pockets of labour supply to the urban centres, firstly from the primary sector because of lack of agricultural infrastructure and low income. With the agricultural involution, or the settling of unemployed workers on land no more economically feasible, the services sector has become the sink for the unemployed. In addition to that, a popular notion about the portrayal of the agricultural economy and work as backward adds to the decision of moving away from the agricultural sector. This association of agriculture with a backward economy, low income levels of the farmers and inferior status of work disenchanted individuals from joining or continuing work in agricultural sector (this is not the primary reason but it adds to the primary reason). As per a survey, 80% of the farmer's children do not want to be engaged in agriculture any more (Bardhan, 2009).

Table 2: Employment status (PS+SS) by sectors during 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18

Economic sector	61st Round (2004-05)		68th Round (2011-12)		PLFS (2017-18)	
	Millions	Per cent	Millions	Per cent	Millions	Per cent
Agriculture	238.82	58.5	205.60	48.9	164.47	44.1
Manufacturing (& Mining)	74.05	18.2	101.99	24.2	92.41	24.8
Services	95.38	23.4	112.86	26.8	115.73	31.1
Total	408.25	100	420.45	100	372.63	100

Source: Author's calculation based on NSSO's Employment and Unemployment survey of the 61st, 68th and the PLFS rounds.

Table 1 shows a shift of workforce from the primary sector gradually to the services sector, from 58.5% in 2004-2005 to 44.1% in 2017-2018. The manufacturing sector while it increased from 18.2% in 2004-2005 to 24.2% in 2011-2012, remains almost stagnant from 2011-2012 to 2017-2018 which is almost after 6 years. The services sector rapidly increases from 23.4% in 2004-2005 to 31.1% in 2017-2018, reflecting a structural change in the economy.

Secondly, the underdeveloped regions of the economy (for instance states, around the major metro cities) also become the major pockets of labour supply to the urban centres. As we know, economic development in India is not uniform, and it is urban centric, only a few metro cities are the major engines of economic growth while the rest of the states are marked by absence of infrastructure, educational facilities, employment opportunities, etc, resulting in a huge regional disparity. However, with exposure to the world through social media and the growing aspirations for a better life in the cities, there is a tendency to move to the cities for a new life and social and income mobility.

The third category comprises the low skilled or unskilled population from the metro cities itself. For these job seekers, it is comparatively easy to enter the labour markets through low end service work such as construction work, employment in various services such as delivery services and the rapidly expanding e-commerce platforms, salesperson in retail stores and showrooms, security services, domestic helpers, nursing staff, housekeeping staff, cab drivers, personal care workers, etc. The service sector saw an expansion of employment size from 7.3 million in 2012 to 12.5 million in 2018 (Thomas, 2020). With services as the key driver of economic growth and an immense potential in creating jobs has attracted not just the local labour force but has been successful in attracting migrant labour force. Hence a huge reserve of skilled, semi-skilled and low skilled workforce began to float in the major cities of the economy in search for decent work.

International literature on Interactive Service Work

The conceptual framework defining interactive service work comes from the western post-industrial economies, largely from the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as these economies first began experiencing the shift from the industrial to the service sector of work. The researcher draws out the definitions of interactive service work as defined in previous studies and further analyzes these definitions and whether it complements the nature of interactive work in the context of India. Sociologist Goffman (1959) for the first time defined the term interaction "as the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence" (p:15). It

was later Leidner (1993) who coined the term 'interactive service work (ISW)' as involving face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction with customers, in interactive service work the employees, and the way they look, sound and act, itself forms a part of the product. The idea of interactive service work was further drawn from the term 'emotional labour' which was first used by Arlie Hochschild (1983) in one of the most prominent studies "The Managed Heart". It is in this context of emotional labour that Hochschild highlights the growing prominence of face-to-face and voice-to-voice services with the example of a flight attendant which was termed as 'interactive service work'. Her work on flight attendants was a groundbreaking work which then carved the path for many researchers to follow and study other occupational positions in the interactive service work. Hochschild (ibid) focused on developing the concept of emotional labour and talked about work performed by frontline workers from an individual's perspective in terms of management of emotions (one's own and of the consumers) and the role of organization in generating this form of embodied work. She brings out how workers are trained to generate different types of emotions to produce the desired outcome in the market. The other crucial aspect she highlights, is what happens to the worker engaged in emotional labour. In this process of performing emotional work, they become estranged from their own selves and their own emotions. The phrase 'interactive service work' is a simple term, yet the term encompasses multiple meanings and diverse forms of work in the new economy. Hochschild (ibid) defines emotional labour as "labour requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others-in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place (p:7)" in reference to interactive labour. Leidner (1993) highlights how management plays a crucial role in generating emotional labour through the process of training, selection process, monitoring and control of the workers.

Many other researchers have defined interactive service employment as 'face to face or voice to voice direct interaction between the employees and the consumers' (Thompson *et al*, 2001; Nickson *et al*, 2003; Payne, 2009; Cullen, 2011). It includes jobs in hospitality, retail, restaurants, personal services, tourism, etc. Interactive service workers play a key role in creating a brand image as it is the personal touch of the worker which becomes an extension of the product or service. Nickson *et al* (2005) highlight that no two interactive service workers perform a task in the same exact manner and this is what brings uncertainty in the process of service delivery and becomes a competitive advantage in the global market economy. The New Economy talks about standardization of work, the role played by workers in interactive services is distinguished and unique from one another, unlike the assembly line workers. Hampson and Junor (2005) and Warhurst *et al* (2000) highlight the invisible skills associated with interactive service work and emphasise how interactive service work involves 'articulation work' which is often a complex analysis of emotions and gestures and is yet unappreciated.

Sherman's book 'Class Act' (2007) presents an interesting aspect on interactive services as she focuses on the three main actors involved in interactive work the workers, managers and the consumers. Most studies previously have ignored the consumers, an aspect shaping service interaction. This take on interactive work is crucial as it highlights the connection between work and class.Dowling (2007) and Sherman (2007) both argue that interactive service work is highly valued when it comes to luxury services or consumers belonging to a certain class in society, the high class or high end

customers or the "recession proof" consumers (ibid, p:4). Sherman (ibid) draws a links between interactive service work in luxury hotel services and the prevalent in equal class structure on which such service is organised and further explores aspects of gender, work and race. She uses Burawoy's labour process theory as an analytical framework and draws attention on the concept of 'consent' and 'normalisation', instead of being limited on the idea of organisational control and worker resistance (Kang, 2010). Her work goes beyond the common perception of an antagonistic relationship between worker and employer and investigates how the worker as an individual uses different techniques and strategies and games to cope up at work. Burawoy (1979) termed these strategies as 'making out' where workers establish their own sense of self as a skilled worker who has control over the process of production of services in an organisational structure with unequal power distribution between the workers and the consumers. Sherman (2007) goes beyond the narratives of exploitation and resistance and emphasises the concept of consent and the worker as a conscious agency who makes calculations and decisions (Kang, 2010).

However, a major critique to Sherman's (ibid) work is the focus on class analysis as the umbrella concept and that while her work looked at the micro-dynamics of organisational study, it completely neglected the larger context in which the workers came from and how it impacted their sense of self. The intersection of multiple aspects of an individual's identity such as gender, socio-economic background, caste (in the context of India), race, ethnicity with class was missing in the book. Secondly, although the workers used diverse techniques and strategies to exercise their autonomy over the 'self-subordinating labour', however this did not significantly impact the unequal relation between the workers and the guests. For instance, if a guest demands a specific kind of car to pick them up from the airport to the hotel, the worker can decide to send a different car to pick up the guest but he cannot decide not to send the car, considering the amount of money the guest pays for the service, which means the worker can create a small disruption in fulfilling the demand but that does not challenge the class-based subordination or unequal relations in any major way. Hence, the larger structure which promotes and maintains class inequality remains unchallenged through these little acts of resistance.

Furthermore, regarding skills associated with this form of work, even though the study involved three major actors or units of study and focused on class analysis, it is crucial for one to give a background of the workers to understand the skills demanded at work, in terms of their formal training, on-the-job training, educational attainment or informal training. Sherman (ibid) illustrates the extent of wealth that the consumers of the luxury hotel owned through their demand for services and their consumption levels; for instance, a private jet dropping off the clients every time they come, or the rates of the room at 3000 dollars a night, the context from which the workers belonged to was barely mentioned. Even as one talks about skills, I one needs to probe the criteria based on which the workers are selected to work as interactive workers in positions where they interact with a wealthy clientele.

Linda McDowell (2009) further uses the concept of 'interactive service employment' in her book the "The Working Bodies" where she comprehends the forms and characteristics of interactive service employment through illustrations of different occupations termed as interactive service such as domestic work, sex work, care work in health sector, beauty work in personal services, to explore the different dimensions of the interactive service employment (ibid). She associates interactive work with embodied

work and further states that 'embodiment' and 'emotions' are the two central concepts around which interactive services are defined. Her work goes beyond the individual's experience of service work and brings attention to the intersection of gender, age, social status, care, emotions, geography, or location of work, and diverse social characteristics of the workforce, etc. In the global context, it has been established that the women workers dominate interactive service work as they largely occupy these positions (Hochschild, 1983; Sherman, 2007; Dowling, 2007; Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). The reason being this form of work has been largely associated with feminine characteristics of reproductive labour, care work, aesthetic labour and emotional labour. McDowell (2009) argues that in the neo-liberal era, work that was earlier performed at home for the family and loved ones became commoditized and was marketed and consumed by the wealthy but time-poor household. The rise of the services sector has opened the labour market for both men and women to perform labour in exchange of financial reward. McDowell (ibid) highlights that the UK saw a drastic rise in the participation of female workers "more than two-thirds of all workers, over half of them women, are employed in the service economy. Women's participation has risen from one-third to half of all waged workers over the second half of the twentieth century: in the main in public and private consumer services (p:28)." Further, Adler and Adler (2004) in their book "Paradise laborers: Hotel work in the Global Economy" show the gendered division of work as they observed women working in laundry, housekeeping, hotel operations, human resources, weddings, beauty salon, etc while the male workers took care of departments which included MIS (management information systems), security, stewarding, housemen, bell, valet, water features, and engineering. P:18). McDowell's (2009) study shows how young men who had a lower level of educational attainment would seek employment in the feminized positions and often found themselves at a disadvantageous point due to the preference for women workers. Those jobs that were female dominated, especially the low-end services work which are highly precarious and flexible, are now being occupied by the low-skilled male workers with the diminishing manufacturing sector employments. For instance, work that was predominantly female dominated in the early 1990s turned to predominantly male dominated in 2005, such as chefs and cooks (Grimshaw and Rubery 2007: 99 as cited in McDowell, 2009; p:45). McDowell (ibid) overall presents a view on the transformation of work in the advanced economies and how it impacts work organisation and the labour market, which under the neo-liberal regime uses the segmented labour market to extract profit; she further highlights how the work in the much-celebrated new economy continues to be poorly paid, precarious and casualised employment.

As mentioned above, the advent of global capital flows in the economy has resulted in the globalisation of services, and there is an increased pressure to meet the global service standards with a certain set of skills. As Sanyal (2007) explains, one of the prime tasks of capitalism and the process of globalisation is to maintain efficiency in the economic system. The "market acts as a screening devise: a sieve that separates inefficient activities from efficient ones and allows the latter to continue while keeping the former from being undertaken (p:2)". This applies to all forms of economic activities in a capitalist market where the prime motive is profit maximization and capturing a broad market base through efficiency. Emerging avenues of employment such as hospitality sector, private hospitals, educational institutions, retail stores, shopping malls, leisure activities such as personal care, resorts,

amusement parks, etc. create demand for a workforce which reflects the image of the organizations. Even though these jobs existed earlier, the rapidly growing consumer market and with it the increasing competition to stand out amongst others, have led to the demand for workers who are well groomed and trained to bring a competitive advantage to the organization as they interact with the consumers. A major amount of literature on interactive service work comes from the studies conducted in the western context. Baum & Devine (2007) argue that what is unique about the hospitality sector, specifically the hotel industry, is that it competes on the basis of the services produced by its workers which further sets it apart from its competitors. Hence, such services depend on the performances of the workers; however, these workers do not exist in a vacuum only as workers but are shaped by the social conditions in which he/she exists, and different meanings and constructions of culturally specific meanings are associated with the work and the skills required to perform certain work. The studies have largely focused on emotional and aesthetic labour, with the first study of Hochschild emphasizing the significance of emotional labour when talking about flight attendants, to Nickson, Warhurst and Dutton (2005) highlighting individualistic traits such as appearance, attitude and personal characteristics, to McDowell (2009) stating how the body becomes an object of control by the management in producing social meaning where the task of the worker is not just to satisfy consumers through the services but also to create further expectations so that the consumers keep coming back. As per the theory of immaterial labour, the worker's task is considered as successfully completed only when the worker is able to gain loyal consumers. Warhurst *et al* (2000) argue that ISW is the integration of three skills which are:

Technical Skills

Generic Skills

Aesthetic Skills
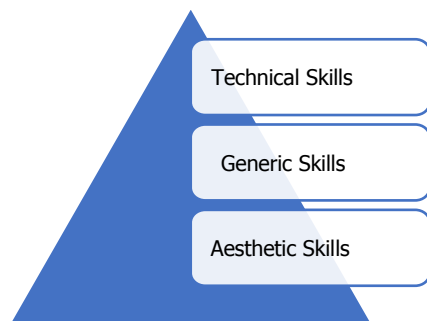
Some of the skills associated with interactive service employment are '*non-cognitive skills*' (Zhou, UNESCO, 2017; India Skill Report, 2017), '*soft skills*', '*people skills*' (Scottish Executive, 1999 in Nickson *et al*, 2003), *interpersonal skills*' (India Skill Report, 2017; Girsberger *et al*, 2017), '*communication skills*', '*articulation work*' (Hampson & Junor 2005), '*emotional intelligence or emotional labour*' (Hochschild, 1983), '*aesthetic labour*' (Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003).

Gorz (2002 as cited in Watson, 2003) argues that while in Fordist era, labour only sold labour power to the employer, however in the post Fordist regime, the employer, and management through different management practises, demanded a level of unquestioned commitment and control of worker which threatens the worker's identity and personal autonomy. Such employment relations create an environment where the workers sell their identity and self to the corporate control (ibid; p:68). However, it is interesting to note that interpersonal and aesthetic skills are not always manifested

through training but such qualities of "social skill or human capital lie embodied in the worker's personality as a result of previous socialization... (Payne, 2009; p: 349)". Otis states "the embeddedness in local consumer markets leads to the influence of region-specific work legacies and cultural practices on the work process of service labour (Otis, 2008:16)". Therefore, the understanding of skills and its outcome needs to be broadened to include multiple factors which shape the notion of skills, addressing concepts such as class, identities, gender, ethnicity, etc. which allows some and hinders others in attaining dignified, rewarding and secured work.

In general, the western literature on ISW focuses on individual characteristics or on the personal traits in the production of services and the role of the management in controlling and shaping these characteristics. There has not been much focus in understanding the socio-cultural factors which shape an individual and the process of acquiring skills. As work in front-line positions is beyond the technical aspect of skills and demands additional attributes to add a competitive edge to the services, the worker goes beyond their scripted work routine to add value to the services, and much of these attributes are influenced by one's identity in the social structure. We therefore compare this literature to literature that exists in the context of India, in order to understand how work and workers in the new economy vary in a different context.

Indian literature on Interactive Service Work

In the Indian context, Gooptu (2013) has described 'interactive work' as "work that has some distinctive features, relating to the need for social interaction with users, customers, clients, or consumers and the imperative to serve and satisfy them in India's rapidly expanding consumer economy (p:12)". Gooptu's (2009, 2013) empirical studies on private security guards and retail store salespersons as interactive service workers focuses on the aspect of class and social identity through the work culture of servility and social interaction at the workplace. Apart from the strict managerial rules and norms which discipline the worker's behaviour, traditional cultural practices and oppressive societal norms such as caste and class are used by modern management systems to regulate workers' behaviour and attitude, to make them feel like it is their responsibility and duty to serve (which could be different from providing a service in exchange for payment). This becomes specifically crucial when it comes to interactive services, as it is the emotional, affective, and aesthetic element of work which comes to prime focus. She talks about the growing trend of organized informality and the role of the state in facilitating this trend through the state sponsored recruitment drives for the private enterprises. She (ibid) also attempts to highlight the significance of 'professionalism', as a systematic process of disciplining the worker's mind and control of the body to produce a regimented work force, to produce workers.

Noronha & D'Cruz's (2009) book "Employee Identity in Indian Call Centres: The Notion of Professionalism" has also is focused on the theme of 'professionalism' at work, where the authors highlight the concept of professionalism through the worker's experience in the BPO sector. This case study provides a framework for one to understand how organizations gain competitive advantage. The book highlights how the concept of 'professionalism' has been carefully tailored by organizations to create a workforce that works committedly without creating hurdles in reaching organizational goals.

The book effectively captures the dynamics and worker's perceptions about work in the 'new services sector' and themselves, through the lens of a 'professional'. Noronha and D'Cruz (ibid) make a fleeting comment on cultural aspects and how employees accept subordination under the organisational structure; however, this cultural dimension focuses on the western identity imposed on them and does not illustrate the kind of class disparity and subordination that is present within the local context which further reflects even in work organisation. Gooptu (2013) on the other hand throws light at a much deeper problem which is rooted in the local socio-cultural context. She describes how the old established forms of social customs of oppression and servitude are reproduced even within the modern corporate setup and used for profit extraction. The root behind such a level of servitude emerges from the age-old practices of caste and class hierarchy. She further uses the concept of "emotional proletariat" where the employer exercises control not just on the workplace aspects of work but at much deeper levels of manipulating one's behaviour and attitude. Gooptu (2009, 2013) and Roy Chowdhury and Upadhya (2021) in their studies bring into attention the creation of neo-liberal subjectivities. They establish this argument of the creation of neo-liberal subjects through their empirical studies on the role of the State and private sector collaborating in designing recruitment drives where workers in the process of training are introduced to new lifestyle and workplace culture. Roy Chowdhury and Upadhya's (2021) study is embedded more in the detailed analysis of the Skill India policy under which the authors highlight multiple issues emerging in this process and how a new set of agencies have emerged sponsored by both the government and the private sector which play a significant role preparing a workforce in the 'new services sector'.

Contributing to this argument on the role of the state, Carswell and De Neve (2018) highlight that the aim behind the skill development programme promoted since 2009 is that improving skills would ensure an increase in productivity, better employment opportunities, increase in participation in formal/regular employment and higher chance of gaining decent work. Geert and Carswell ibid argue that the notion of skills is shaped by the political economy of a unit or a context in which it is analysed (shop floor). They argue that the definition of skills cannot be explained in isolation and attention needs to be paid to the social, cultural, economic and political processes in order to capture the entirety of the concept (the concepts of power, gender, caste, class, ethnicity) play a crucial role in determining one's accessibility to skills and attaining of decent work. These factors also determine the socio-cultural status associated to the skills and a certain occupational position, thus determining the financial recognition and its value in the labour market.

An important study which contributes to this debate on skills in general is Carswell and De Neve's (2018) work, which, even though conducted in the context of garment work in the shop floors, makes a significant contribution to the understanding of skills specifically in the context of Indian and the developing economies. They point out that the understanding of skills has often been in a straight or linear way, by which if one successfully acquires skills, he/she is bound to find employment and upward mobility. Hence the question which arises here is will acquisition of skills guarantee decent dignified work? Carswell & De Neve's (ibid) concept of 'social life of skills' and Sherman's (2007) use of Burawoy's concept of 'consent' and Gooptu's concept of 'servility' can help in building a framework to have a wider understanding of the concept of skills in interactive service work. 'Social life of skills' is

defined as "…the social processes, relationships, and ideologies that enable (or constrain) people's access to skills, and subsequently to employment, wages, satisfaction, and dignity (Carswell & Neve, 2018; P:313)." Studies on interactive labour in the context on India are distinct from the studies in the west in terms of their emphasis on understanding multiple factors which shape an individual into a worker which accordingly shapes the worker's perception of performing interactive work.

Gaps in the studies

McDowell (2009) and Burawoy (1979) emphasize the importance of exploring the local dynamics of any issues. McDowell highlights how geographers and sociologists often end up neglecting the importance of local studies. However, what is essential is to explore and analyze what is unique about a general issue in a specific location or a particular geography. This becomes a crucial lens of inquiry through which the study will attempt to capture the understanding of interactive service workers. Hence, one cannot draw a parallel in the understanding of interactive service work between one set in the developed context and another in the context of developing economies. As Guilmoto and Sandron (2001) mention, labour markets in the developing economies are highly segmented (ethnic ties, strong social networks, perception about workers from certain communities, migration, etc). These differences in the socio-cultural context add to the new dimensions and layers to workplace dynamics in the interactive services employment.

Barkema *et al* (2015) establish through their work the dominance of western scholarships in the field of management that has over the years established theories, concepts and definitions, thereby blurring the contextual differences between the understanding of various management issues between the east and the west. Studies on interactive service work in the Indian context have been limited and only a few detailed empirical researches on different occupational positions such as IT professionals, to BPO employees, to private security guards, retail store salespersons, to hotel staff representing interactive service work exist representing interactive work so far, which has explored aspects of work culture, workplace identity, ethnicity, professionalism, cultural dimensions of servitude and even the broad context of political economy, the role of state and private capital in preparing interactive service workers. Empirical studies in the Western context have described jobs in the interactive service employment such as hotels, retail, personal services as low paid, routinized, low skilled and 'dead end' jobs with absence of career mobility (Brown *et al*, 2001; Lloyd and Payne, 2002; Thompson, 2004 as cited in Payne, 2009). Studies have also highlighted that individuals do not prefer jobs which demand interaction with customers or front-line hospitality jobs which demand that they conform to a certain behaviour, as individuals have a negative perception of work in the hospitality sector. In addition, in the process of appreciation of certain skills and attributes, there has been a segmentation of the workforce based on gender, age, ethnicity, educational attainment, etc. One cannot generalise the same in the Indian context, as there is no clarity on the workers' perception about the nature of work in the interactive service employment, on how do workers experience work in the interactive positions. There is a need in research to explore who participates in this form of work in the context of India, to explore the aspect of servility as mentioned by Gooptu (2013).

Initially, studies on service sector work began with emphasis on understanding the relation between the producer (in this case the worker representing the organisation) and the consumer. These studies expanded to developing concepts such as emotional labour, aesthetic work, embodied work, etc. which eventually all became associated with interactive service work. Worker's subjectivity, individual experiences at work and with management, ways of coping with one's emotions, workplace requirements, handling consumers, the required skills, the kind of skills associated with interactive work became areas of focus for the researchers. Sherman (2007) and McDowell's (2009) work using the Marxist lense looked at capital and labour relations, and further drew attention to much broader aspects of class, inequality, gender, race, ethnicity and contributed to the labour processes which became inevitable in the new economy.

The realities and challenges of work in interactive service positions could vary in the context of Global South as the notion of skills, service to guests, social interaction, and the way work is performed is guided by norms which differ drastically in an economy where traditional norms and culture continue to play an inseparable role in society. A combination of neo-liberal market regime with global capital pouring in an economy, with strong social norms could give rise to different work conditions and experiences of work. For instance, when studying interactive service employment, most studies (Felstead *et al*, 2007) conducted in the western context highlighted the importance of certain skills as 'generic skills[4]' and a category as 'broad skills[5]' in the selection of workers. However, skills which are considered as 'generic' in nature in the developed nations might not be as 'generic' in the context of developing nations considering the fact that literacy, technical, interpersonal skills in third world countries is still considerably low. With little or no western acculturation, when knowledge about the language, etiquettes, interpersonal skills are alien to the people and acquired through years of formal training and high level of investment in quality education, one cannot compare the level of skills between the Global North and the Global South. In the context of India, there is a dearth of literature which explores the understanding of skills; instead of following the western framework of skills, it is crucial for one to understand the social construction behind the analysis of skills specifically when it comes to interactive work, where different societies have diverse standards of measuring skills or the significance of formal and informal education and training on career mobility and the accessibility of such training and exposure across different classes in a society. The idea of how one's social context and factors of class and social inequalities can impact one's access to skill development opportunities, are areas less known in the context of India. Similarly, multiple other issues pertaining to interactive work remain unrecognised and neglected. For instance, as an economy driven forward by the boom of the IT industry, there is no literature on the role of technology and its impact on interactive work, or the way work is organised in the new economy in the technology mediated workplace.

One can draw out a clear distinction in the way interactive service work has been analysed in the two different contexts (the developed Vs the developing) while McDowell (2009) and Sherman's

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[4] Generic skills: skills which are a common requirement in a wide range of occupations, for literacy skills, physical skills, number skills, technical know-how, influencing or high communication skills, planning, client communication skills, horizontal communication, problem solving skills, checking skills, aesthetic skills and emotional skills as identified in the Skills Survey (2006, as cited in Felstead *et al*, 2007)

[5] Broad Skills: occupation specific skills, technical skills, specialization in a particular field (Felstead *et al*, 2007)

(2007) work identifies class distinction and interactive subordination as a characteristic and foundation of interactive work, not many studies acknowledge the significance of the larger context which shapes an individual as a worker. The studies in the Indian context make an interesting contribution as they contextualise this attitude of subordination and servitude in the larger socio-economic, cultural, and political context. Sherman (2007) for instance asks the question of 'where worker subjectivity is produced?" to which labour process theorist Burawoy (1979) states that a worker's consent is shaped at the point of production of services and the identity and attitude that shapes the workers outside of the workplace or production process is irrelevant to the process of consent generation (as cited in Sherman, 2007; p:152). Scholars in the west have seen this aspect of interactive labour as an independent phenomenon, and not influenced by the larger context or the organisation of work. Sherman agrees with this notion and further adds that the worker's perception to work and self as a worker is shaped only by the context in which they are functioning; for instance, in the luxury sector, the organisation, the way work is organized in its division of labour, the work culture and the job itself. Therefore, the individual characteristics integrate with the organisational structure to produce a certain form of work and workers. Sherman (2007) extends Burawoy's claims and argues that the workers' way of projecting themselves is shaped by the context in where it occurs which is the organisation, the job, and the position at work. The policies and practices of the organisation in organising work, division of labour, role of the management determines the workers' notion of self and performance at work and not solely the attitude and culture imported from outside (the larger social context).

Hence the question is, how does one define the point of production, does it begin with the opportunities and access to resources and the process of socialisation one had which shapes their self or is it the organisation in which they are working? In this case how is that the identities and attitudes that shape the workers from outside of the organisation irrelevant in shaping their consent. The researcher disagrees with both of them most Indian studies contradicts this thought, for instance Gooptu in her study on private security guards, specifically highlights the background. The researcher argues that the meaning of skill and the process of attainment of skill do not happen in a vacuum but it is shaped by the social process and the context in which one exists; moreover, it is this social process that shapes one's identity and performance at work. The conceptualisation of skills in larger literature has generally happened in isolation, irrespective of the social processes, excluding factors of gender ideology, class differences, caste, regional socio-cultural dynamics which determines who have access to different skill sets (Harriss, 2009 as cited in Carswell and De Neve, 2018).

Indian studies on interactive workers in the BPO sector, call centers, personal care work, luxury services, as private security guards and salesperson in the retail stores (Noronha & D'Cruz, 2009; Upadhya & Vasavi, 2006; Carswell & De Neve, 2018; Upadhya & Vasavi 2008; Roy Chowdhury & Upadhya, 2021; Bhattacharya & Sanyal2011; Gooptu 2013; Gooptu, 2009; Karlsson & Kikon 2017) stressed on understanding the background of the workers. These workers across different categories of skilled and low skilled work, in the new economy belonged to diverse socio-economic backgrounds which shaped their aspirations of career and career mobility. Gooptu (2013) for instance, highlights that the private security guards are youth belonging to 'Below Poverty Line', lower caste groups, coming from the under-developed regions of the state. Similarly, Bhattacharya and Sanyal (2011) and Karlsson

and Kikon (2017) and McDuie (2012) also find the same in their studies, which state that the youth employed in the urban consumer services are majorly from distressed areas, areas marked by political unrest and poverty-stricken regions. Karlsson and Kikon (2017) and McDuie (2012) further highlight how ethnic minority groups become a target, and highlight how the employers in the interactive services (hotels, restaurants, personal care, etc.) prefer workers from North East India because of their fluency in English, the exotic Asian appearance (mongoloid features) and hospitable nature (McDuie, 2012; Remesh, 2012; Karlsson &Kikon, 2016). While the interactive service employment has provided employment opportunities to a large section of workers with low levels of educational qualification and skills, it has also created segmentation and excluded some sections of the workforce from the labour market based on different attributes. For instance, a worker who can speak English is selected for a particular job while the one who cannot is excluded from participating in that job. A look into how these migrant workers enter interactive service work, why employers prefer workers and the significance of these groups of workers, can make a significant contribution to the knowledge around interactive work in the context of India.

A combination of western knowledge and the realities experienced by the workers in the context of the traditions and cultural norms of a society to understand how society perceives interactive work can provide crucial insights. For instance, most studies (McDowell, 2009) in the west established interactive service work is dominated by female workers; however, it is a completely contradictory scenario in the context of India, as the economy is marked as one with the lowest Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR). Economic surveys have established that the female labour force participation rate in India is one of the lowest compared to most economies, and Mehrotra & Parida (2017) highlight that Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India has been on a continuous decline since the last three decades and the same scenario was observed even in this form of work which is globally known to be represented by women workers. The old traditional societal perception about interactive work as undignified and demeaning for women was popularised, thereby creating a barrier in work participation among the women. Similarly, the notion of skills, the perception of certain kind of work as respectable and other forms of occupation as unimportant, the association of work and the worker's identity with his/her social class, caste, ethnicity and gender and servility (Gooptu, 2009; 2013) is an inseparable aspect of interactive service work in India, and are some of the issues which remain hidden under the larger narratives of interactive work as proposed by the west.

Table 5: Male and female interactive service workers (PS+SS) across different occupational groups (NCO) across 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18 (in millions)

Interactive service workers (NCO)	61st			68th			PLFS17-18		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Health	1.43 (67.7)	0.68 (32.3)	2.11 (100)	1.53 (57.9)	1.11 (42.1)	2.65 (100)	1.36 (49.6)	1.39 (50.5)	2.75 (100)
Teaching	4.90 (57.1)	3.68 (42.9)	8.59 (100)	5.54 (55.1)	4.51 (44.9)	10.05 (100)	5.98 (51.7)	5.58 (48.2)	11.56 (100)
Customer service	2.46 (89.3)	0.29 (10.7)	2.76 (100)	0.83 (77.7)	0.24 (22.3)	1.06 (100)	0.87 (76.5)	0.27 (23.5)	1.14 (100)
Personal services	36.81 (81.5)	8.36 (18.5)	45.16 (100)	24.86 (83.9)	4.77 (16.1)	29.63 (100)	26.53 (82.5)	5.60 (17.4)	32.15 (100)
Elementary services	4.12 (83.4)	0.82 (16.6)	4.95 (100)	5.67 (63.5)	3.26 (36.6)	8.93 (100)	5.05 (63.3)	2.93 (36.7)	7.98 (100)
Others	1.20 (96.6)	0.04 (3.4)	1.24 (100)	10.24 (99.0)	0.10 (1.0)	10.34 (100)	14.45 (98.0)	0.30 (2.0)	14.75 (100)
Total	50.92 (78.6)	13.88 (21.4)	64.80 (100)	48.66 (77.7)	14.00 (22.3)	62.65 (100)	54.23 (77.1)	16.06 (22.8)	70.33 (100)

Source: Author's calculation based on NSSO's Employment and Unemployment survey various rounds. * The occupational positions are based on NCO classification.

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

The table depicts the male-female distribution of workers in the interactive occupational position (NCO code). The table clearly reflects a low female labour force participation. Female interactive workers in Health and Teaching positions have increased since 2004 although the rate of increase is not much from 32.3 per cent to 50.5 per cent for health and 42.9 per cent to 48.2 per cent in teaching. Similarly, in the elementary services, the participation of females as interactive service workers increased from 16.6 per cent to 36.7 per cent. The table shows interactive service positions are dominated by male workers which stands contradictory to the picture shown in the west.

Finally, data on the interactive service workforce in the west clearly indicates an increasing trend while data in the context of India which one of the fastest growing economies dominated by the services sector shows a decreasing pattern in interactive service work which is contradictory to the established pattern of economy evolution. However, an aspect which explains this trend is the presence of the large informal sector in India. Gooptu (2009, 2013) terms this as the organised informality in her work. However, an effective way of data collection, accounting for those informal workers working in interactive service positions, could give a picture representing the size of the interactive service work in India. Similarly, the conflicting results on the low female labour force participation points to the need to encourage studies analysing local cultures and how they respond to this form of employments for woman, going beyond the colorized western lens.

Even though a large number of studies have been carried out on informal workers/employment in India, yet there is a major dearth of literature which portrays the critical intersection between formal and informal sector. With change in the structure of ownership of the organisation, organisations are now owned/managed by multiple stakeholders or management teams, and organisations are increasingly using strategies to cut cost which has resulted in what Gooptu (2009) terms as organised informality. This aspect of work in the formal organisations needs further attention, more so the new management strategies that have redefined work conditions in organisations which go beyond salary and social security and involve the control of the worker.

Conceptualizing the definition of Interactive Service Work (ISW) in the context of India

It is in this context that the researcher attempts to conceptualise work in the interactive service positions. Most of these studies have been conducted in the western context and hence the definitions, the occupational positions and what is expected out the labour is different, from the way this form of work and labour is experienced in the context of India. In defining interactive service work, it is difficult to create air-tight compartments to categorise its characteristic, or even occupational categories into these compartments, as the meanings are often overlapping and can change as and when situation demands. For instance, aesthetic labour is interactive labour, but not all interactive labour is aesthetic labour. If we take the example of any aesthetic labour such as salesperson, receptionist, cabin crew, etc, all these occupational positions are interactive positions, as it requires face-to-face direct interaction with the consumers in order to satisfy them; however, not all interactive positions require aesthetic labour. For instance, a teacher or a police personnel is also a consumer facing position; however, these positions do not require the worker to look good or sound a certain way, and their technical skills overrule the need to look good and represent the brand image in a certain way. Similarly, not all interactive positions require emotional labour, but all emotional labour is in interactive positions. What distinguishes ISW from other forms of immaterial labour is the question of employability. In ISW, the employability of the worker depends on their interactive skills; hence, not all frontline workers are interactive service workers, and the employability of highly skilled professionals is not solely based on their interactive skills but equally on their technical expertise.

When we talk about interactive service work, multiple concepts spring up which are not just associated with interactive work but also used synonymously with ISW, such as emotional labour, embodied labour, aesthetic labour and front-line service; in fact, the term immaterial labour is also used interchangeably along with the rest of the concepts[6]. These terms highlight diverse aspects of immaterial labour and are often overlapping. Braverman (1974) under the Marxist approach, grouped labour under two separate categories of mental and manual labour and used labour process theory to understand managerial control over workforce (Sherman, 2007, p:7).

Maurizio Lazzarato in the year 1996 introduced the term immaterial labour, which refers to "labour that produces informational and cultural content of the commodity (133)". Similarly, Negri & Hardt (2004:108) explain this form of labour as "labour that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response". Here both Negri & Hardt (2004) and Lazzarrato (1996) elucidate immaterial labour under two broad categories, the first category as intellectual labour that is labour which adds informational content or is predominantly intellectual, that is, it involves problem solving, computer control, use of information, analytical skills, linguistic communications, produces codes, texts, etc. The second category of immaterial labour has been identified as labour which produces cultural content, also called as 'affective labour'. "Labour that

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[6] Distinguishing one form of labour from the other is not the most important part of the study as the concepts are overlapping and represent each other; this distinction is done only for the purpose of numerical calculation when using National Sample Survey (NSS) data to be able to have a clearer picture.

produces or manipulates affects such as feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion (Negri and Hardt, 2004:108)".

Defining what is interactive work is a challenging task as there are multiple aspects of interactive work and capturing every aspect of it under one definition is challenging and confusing. McDowell (2009) categorised interactive work under different categories of skills, such as the skilled interactive workers like teachers, doctors, the semi-skilled category which comprises caterers, waiters, receptionists, etc and finally the low-skilled workers like the domestic helpers, personal care workers etc. While McDowell (ibid) has created a comparatively large category for interactive workers, other academics have opted for a more restrictive definition to study interactive labour (Wolkowitz 2006; Cohen 2008) as they define interactive work as work that involved physical contact and management of emotions (of oneself and of the consumers). However, creating this category of who is skilled and who is unskilled is itself a tricky task, as the very definition of skills in terms of interactive work has different dimensions, that is are we looking at emotional skills, or interpersonal skills, or skills in terms of formal training or education.

One cannot deny that these concepts are similar and can be used interchangeably and one cannot challenge that interactive labour is different from what immaterial labour is defined as; however, the researcher disagrees with the categorisation of manual, intellectual and emotional labour. Immaterial labour should be looked at in totality, and one cannot separate the affective or emotional aspect of labour from the intellectual aspect, that is both these dimensions of immaterial labour cannot exist exclusively from one another. The proportion of emotional and intellectual aspect could vary depending on the occupational position, but any form of labour be it material or immaterial is a combination of manual, intellectual and emotional components. For instance, a flight attendant performs emotional labour by providing service with a smile, at the same time pushing a heavy cart to serve food and beverages, and is capable of handling an emergency landing situation. Hence, the separation of intellectual, physical and affective element of labour might seem meaningless in the understanding of ISW.

These terminologies of ISW, emotional labour (EL), aesthetic labour (AL), and embodied labour can be clubbed under the umbrella theory of immaterial labour. For instance, emotional labour is "labour that requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others - in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place (Hochschild, 1983; p:7)" or "defined as the act of expressing organisationally desired emotions during service transactions (Morris and Feldman, 1996 as cited in D'Cruz & Noronha, 2008; pg 131)". The concept of aesthetic labour emerged as a group of researchers in Glasgow observed a rise in the number of jobs in the clothing retain stores in Scotland. They recognised the significance of aesthetic labour, which they described

> "as a supply of 'embodied capacities and attributes' possessed by workers at the point
> of entry into employment. Employers then mobilise, develop and commodify these
> capacities and attributes through the process of recruitment, selection and training,
> transforming them into 'competencies' and 'skills' which are then aesthetically geared

towards producing a 'style' of service encounter (Warhurst, Nickson, Witz and Cullen, 2000; Pg:4)".

Interactive work is a form of labour which requires face-to-face, two ways interaction between the worker and the consumer, where the consumer consumes the services at the point of service transaction. Personal attributes, interpersonal relation, manipulation of emotions to create a 'feel good' emotion, bodily presentation and the performance displayed by the worker influences the process of exchange. Finally, a crucial aspect of interactive service work is that the prime goal of the work is to satisfy and serve the consumer and more so through submissive behaviour. In interactive service work, the employability of the worker depends on his/her performance or interaction. Therefore, distinguishing one completely from the other would be inappropriate. The researcher further poses three important questions which further helps in understanding the features of ISW: firstly, what is interactive work; secondly, who consumes interactive services; and thirdly, what is the position of the interactive workers in the production system?

All of the following conditions need to be taken in totality and cannot be picked one over another to fulfill the necessary conditions of looking into interactive work. Accordingly, the researcher defines interactive service work based on the following characteristics:

1. Face-to-face and voice-to-voice interaction being the prime activity of the worker
2. In some cases, despite limited verbal communication the worker's presence at the point of service exchange will influence the service exchange
3. The sole motive of interaction is to 'please', 'serve' and 'satisfy' the consumer, the cultural aspect of 'guest is god (or rather consumer is god)' should be the prime motto
4. Service which demands two-way interaction
5. The interaction will have an impact on employability and employment outcomes of the worker
6. The consumer or consumption here will be for the purpose of personal consumption
7. The personal attributes of the individual worker are crucial for his/her job

Table 4: Interactive Service Workforce Vs Non Interactive Workforce (PS+SS) across Industry Sub-sectors during 2004-05, 2011-12 and 2017-18 (in millions)

Industry sub-sectors	61st round (2004-05)			68th round (2011-12)			PLFS I (2017-18)		
	Inter	NonIn	Total	Inter	NonIn	Total	Inter	NonIn	Total
Wholesale & retails	27.21 (79.0)	7.21 (21.0)	34.42 (100)	22.07 (56.4)	17.09 (43.6)	39.17 (100)	22.90 (60.9)	14.71 (39.1)	37.63 (100)
Transport	7.04 (50.6)	6.86 (49.4)	13.9 (100)	9.34 (54.7)	7.75 (45.3)	17.09 (100)	12.80 (69.6)	5.58 (30.4)	18.39 (100)
Hotel & restaurant	3.39 (65.8)	1.76 (34.2)	5.15 (100)	3.66 (53.1)	3.24 (46.9)	6.90 (100)	4.21 (60.2)	2.78 (39.8)	6.98 (100)
IT & communications	1.36 (41.7)	1.91 (58.3)	3.27 (100)	0.40 (12.5)	2.83 (87.5)	3.23 (100)	0.32 (8.6)	3.39 (91.4)	3.71 (100)
Finance	1.14 (44.9)	1.40 (55.1)	2.54 (100)	0.73 (19.2)	3.08 (80.8)	3.81 (100)	0.91 (23.1)	3.02 (76.9)	3.92 (100)
Real estate	0.22 (55.1)	0.18 (44.9)	0.40 (100)	0.07 (8.6)	0.75 (91.5)	0.82 (100)	0.10 (12.5)	0.69 (87.5)	0.79 (100)
Profess., scienti., & tech	0.79 (37.6)	1.31 (62.4)	2.10 (100)	0.76 (32.6)	1.57 (67.4)	2.33 (100)	0.94 (30.4)	2.15 (69.6)	3.08 (100)
Administrative support	0.74 (24.5)	2.28 (75.5)	3.02 (100)	1.06 (38.4)	1.70 (61.6)	2.76 (100)	1.92 (43.4)	2.50 (56.6)	4.43 (100)
Public administration	2.93 (39.8)	4.42 (60.2)	7.34 (100)	2.82 (40.1)	4.21 (59.9)	7.03 (100)	2.65 (43.9)	3.37 (56.1)	6.02 (100)
Education	8.93 (90.7)	0.92 (9.4)	9.85 (100)	11.07 (88.5)	1.44 (11.5)	12.52 (100)	12.72 (90.2)	1.38 (9.8)	14.09 (100)
Health & social	2.50 (82.8)	0.52 (17.2)	3.02 (100)	3.03 (78.4)	0.84 (21.7)	3.87 (100)	3.43 (76.8)	1.04 (23.2)	4.47 (100)
Personal service	5.19 (81.8)	1.15 (18.2)	6.35 (100)	4.56 (46.2)	5.32 (53.8)	9.87 (100)	3.74 (45.7)	4.45 (54.3)	8.19 (100)
Others	3.37 (83.7)	0.66 (16.3)	4.03 (100)	3.07 (88.5)	0.40 (11.5)	3.47 (100)	3.69 (91.1)	0.36 (8.9)	4.04 (100)
Total	64.80 (67.9)	30.58 (32.1)	95.38 (100)	62.65 (55.5)	50.21 (44.5)	112.90 (100)	70.33 (60.8)	45.40 (39.2)	115.73 (100)

Source: Author's calculation based on NSSO's Employment and Unemployment survey various rounds.

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

The above tables represent broad categories of front-line interactive service workers and back end workers, employed across all services sectors. The interactive and non-interactive categories of workforce employed in different service industries over a period of time (2004-2018). The proportion of ISW to the total service sector workers is higher than non-interactive but their proportion over the period is declining (Table 3). For instance, in 2004-05, the share of the ISW was 68% and it declined to 61% in 2017-18. At disaggregated service sector level, this proportion is varying between each other. The table reveals that subsectors such as personal and customer service sectors' share is declining to total ISW from 2004-05 to 2017-18. For instance, in the year 2004-05, personal service ISW's share was 68% and it declined to 47 in 2011-12 and 46% in 2017-18. Similarly, one can observe that customer service share also declined from 4% in 2004-05 to 1.6% in2017-18. Whereas other ISW subsectors such as health, teaching, elementary service and others increased during this period.

Methodology

The study is based on the review of literature. The researcher used previous literature on interactive service work to redefine the concept of interactive labour and work in the context of India as a developing economy. However, secondary data has been used for descriptive statistics.

Data used for this analysis is from Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). The EUS is a quinquennial survey which had been conducted by the NSSO comprising information related to various labour force indicators such as labour force participation rate, worker population ratio, unemployment rate, wages of employees, etc., at national and state levels. It also provides this information across region, religion, social group, age, education, gender, and industry and occupational category. Further, the particulars of enterprises, conditions of employment, and formal and informal employment status also can be estimated using EUS. For this study, the researchers have chosen two rounds of NSSOs such as 61st (2004-05), and 68th (2011-12) rounds. The PLFS is being conducted annually since 2017-18 by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Until now, three annual PLFS surveys for the years 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20 were conducted by the NSO. But for this study, only the 2017-18 survey has been chosen. The purpose of choosing EUS and PLFS with five years gap is to see the trending pattern of ISW over the period from 2004-05 with five years interval. The sample size of EUS 61st and 68th are 6,02,833 persons (including 3,98,025 in rural and 2,04,808 in urban areas) and 4,56,999 persons (including 2,80,763 in rural and 1,76,236 in urban areas) respectively. In the case of the PLFS, 4,33,339 persons were surveyed which includes 2,46,809 in rural and 1,86,530 in urban areas.

Firstly, the principal activity status and the subsidiary activity status was integrated to look at the active workforce for calculations. The researcher then recoded the National Industrial Classifications code (NIC) and National Classification of Occupations code. The NIC code was recoded to standardise the list with the help of concordance tables across all the rounds and 5-digit level code was used to recode it into sub-sectors, for instance Education 80101-80904 (NIC, 2004) and removing Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Mining and Quarrying, Manufacturing and other sectors irrelevant for the study.

Secondly, each occupational position in the National Classification of Occupations (3-digit level) was individually tested against the above mentioned 7 criteria of the definition on ISW. A list of occupational positions under the NCO codes were then standardised and classified into interactive and less interactive/backend workers[7]. The Interactive/High interactive sectors are: Health, Teaching, Customer service, Personal services, Elementary services and others. The rest of the sectors are clubbed into one group called as Less/Non interactive. A crosstab of National Industrial Classification (NIC) and National Classification of Occupations (NCO) across three rounds of National Sample Survey (NSS) data was done.

Another crucial gap lies in the limitations of the data set. In order to create a table to capture the trend of interactive service jobs in the economy, the National Sample Survey, Employment and Unemployment data has been used across three rounds. However, using National Sample Survey data can be challenging for several reasons: firstly, one cannot get into the detailed classification of occupational positions, the data allows one to use only 3-digit level classification of NCO (2015) occupational categories and not 4-digit level classification of occupational positions. For instance, under the group 422 (National Classification of Occupations, 2015) Client Information Workers, occupational

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[7] Interactive workers (NCO code) health professionals, nursing professionals, and its associates teaching professionals at secondary education, college, university and higher institutions and its related; Customer services, personal services, elementary services, others. Non-interactive or backend workers are those who do not have a customer facing jobs and whose employability does not depend on their interactive skills.

positions such as Technical Support Executives (non-voice), Survey and Market research interviewers, etc. exist which are not Interactive service workers based on the prescribed definition of ISW, but becomes a part of the data calculation as one cannot separate the 4-digit classification (do not fit the criteria for interactive service work) when taking into account the 3-digit level group. Hence, in several cases, the chance of counting an occupational position which might not be an interactive position was seen to increase or a required occupational category is being eliminated despite being qualified as interactive work. This creates trouble as one is counting additional categories because only the 3-digit level classification has to be used in further analysis of data.

Secondly, much of the occupational positions continue to remain the same and outdated for decades, without any update. For instance, several occupational positions do not even exist in the present economy and have become redundant as those jobs do not exist anymore, for instance, Bath Attendant, Wigman, etc. Similarly, a large number of new occupational positions has emerged in the new economy, such as delivery services, Ola/Uber drivers, or occupational positions from the Gig economy or working under platform work economy, personal shopping assistant/ personal stylists in the shopping malls or social media content creators who constantly interact with their audience through social media. These occupational positions do not seem to reflect even in the latest employment unemployment survey for one to truly understand the dynamic labour market. Hence, for someone to create a category even manually for interactive service workers becomes a tedious task with the absence of basic data on an increasing significant part of the workforce. Therefore, there is an urgent need to create a category representing interactive service workers, who are increasingly becoming a crucial part of the urban economy.

Who consumes interactive services?

In conceptualizing the meaning of the interactive service work, one often neglects the question of 'who consumes this form of services?' McDowell (2009) used the term consumer services to describe interactive service work. She highlights that the state and the market both could provide these consumer services. She cites the examples of the UK and the US and argues that the state in the UK plays a more active role in providing these services such as health care, while the US is a market-based economic model and hence it is more of private players providing consumer services.

The researcher categorises interactive services as consumer services, meaning it is the final product (goods, services or information) that is provided by the worker to the consumer, and is immediately consumed at the point of transaction, and is often immaterial in nature (the services provided by the worker adds informational or cultural value to the actual product). Secondly, within consumer services, interactive services are more personalised in nature. The term consumer services is general in nature, for instance, in the context of India it is the high class private establishments which will pay attention to consumer satisfaction due to the market competition. A state- run health facility for example, like a government hospital, is not bothered about interaction or aesthetic skills, it is there to provide cheap and sometimes free treatments to a certain class of people who are unable to afford personalised services in the private hospitals. The reason being the sole purpose of state-run

establishments is to provide social services to the larger chunk of the population as welfare measures. However, private establishments function on the basis of profit.

Hence only a particular section of the society who are willing to pay a higher price for "high quality customised services", consume interactive services. For instance, when one enters a private hospital, the consumer is personally greeted by a staffer wearing uniforms representing the brand, who individually assists the consumer throughout the process; here, the consumer pays a special price for this kind of personalised services. In this situation, the consumer is the centre of attention and all services revolve around satisfying the consumer. Hence, one cannot generalise between basic consumer services and personalised interactive services. In the recent decade, it has been observed that the disposable incomes of the middle class Indian has drastically increased (Sanyal and Bhattacharya, 2011; Jodhka and Aseem, 2016), specifically those residing in the urban centres of the economy; this has resulted in an increasing demand for personalised services. Therefore, it can be comprehended that the market economy and its private players are the providers of interactive services and not the state.

What is the position of the interactive workers in the production system?

A major reason why the personal attributes of a worker has gained much significance in the new economy is that he/she is the point of contact and in most cases the source of production of the services that are being exchanged in the market. Hence, performativity as much as educational credential and formal training or skills have become a significant part of today's work, as work has transformed to knowledge-based work, and service exchange is loaded with informational content. The worker in interactive service work acts as the interface between the production and consumption of goods and services. The worker is the source through which the value is added to the services and the goods. As Sanyal and Bhattacharya (2011) argued, workers in the new economy are a source of wealth management, as well as wealth generation or value generation. A part of the worker's personal trait adds to the value of the goods and services. To a major extent, the worker becomes a part of the services and goods and hence a part of production himself/herself and also the part of capital generation in the production system. An outcome of the neo-liberal market economy is the competition or the race to the bottom as one may call it. In an open market with multiple players providing similar services and goods, despite investing the maximum capital, the chances of being out of the competition and experiencing economic insecurity and risks always exist. Therefore, if we assume the infrastructure and the services or goods produced (considering of best quality) is constant the only factor that can impact or add a comparative advantage to the organisation's success is the organisation's workforce.

McDowell (2009) argues with the expansion of consumer services, more so as the economy is increasingly moving towards weightless goods and services, analysing the position of the worker in the production system and how it impacts the profits of an organisation is an area which remains unexplored. When one participates in the interactive work position, the emphasis falls on the performance displayed by the workers in satisfying the consumer. Here, along with the informational content of the product or the services, the 'affective/emotional' aspect of labour plays an equally crucial role. Dowling (2007), explains that in the neo-liberal market, the extent to which the personal attributes

of the worker is made productive for capital generation is stunning and studies have observed that this focus on the personal traits of the workers increases in the 'high-class establishments' or establishments with high levels of capital. It is this trend of the new economy which is unique and unlike compared to the services from earlier times (ibid, pg: 122). This focus on the individualised performance of the workers makes them vulnerable as the worker's personality comes in to play and undergoes modifications with the changing demands in the market.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to highlight the growing significance of interactive service work in an economy and to explore its conceptual understanding in the context of India and move it beyond the western centric definitions and dynamics. With increasing investment to global capital, organisations are playing a crucial role in shaping labour processes and in shaping one's life choices. The demand for luxury services and personalised services has been increasing more than ever, as social media, advertisements, television shows and pop culture have played a crucial role in creating or inducing aspirations of consumption which further creates a demand for this form of services. Sherman (2007) uses the term 'mass luxury' in this context. With the increasing disposable income of the new middle class and global linkages, the process of urbanization has redefined the middle class ambitions in terms of social practices, aspirations, tastes, consumption patterns and the demand for aesthetic urban spaces which mark the new cultural standards of the new middle class (Sanyal and Bhattacharya, 2011; Jodhka and Asheem, 2016). In fact, in certain situations, sometimes it is not even luxury in the true sense but the ability to make masses believe that they are consuming a luxury with the help of interactive workers is a trick the market comes to play.

There is a need to move beyond the western centric approach and explore the crucial issues related to this form of service work, which has immense potential as the consumer economy and is here to stay. Similarly, the data regarding ISW remains largely inefficient and does not help one to generate outcome and make estimations which could otherwise provide a clearer picture of the workforce involved in ISW. Today, a large proportion of the workforce in the metro cities are engaged in some sort of interactive service work, like retail stores salesperson, BPO employees, receptionists, front office workers, teachers, health workers, flight attendants, security personnel, social workers, cab drivers, delivery agents, domestic helpers, care givers etc. Hence the need to create data and knowledge regarding this area has become important. A study on smaller local enterprises which employ interactive service workers as a comparison to high-end establishments can provide some evidence on the importance of ISW and the changes workers have experienced in interactive positions over a period. This creates a potential for further research on the topic.

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