

Global Integration and MSME Performance: Analyzing Employment & Productivity Trends in India

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Abstract

Globalization, driven by liberalization post-1991, digital transformation, export support schemes, and platforms like ONDC, has enabled MSMEs to access international markets, scale exports, and adopt modern technologies. MSMEs remain the backbone of the Indian economy, contributing approximately 29–30 % of GDP, accounting for 40–45 % of exports, and providing livelihood to over 60 % of India's workforce—employing more than 110–120 million people. Productivity enhancements remain constrained: Indian MSMEs operate at only 26–29 % of the productivity level of large corporations—lower than peer emerging economies ($\approx 29\%$)—and in manufacturing subsectors, productivity may be as low as 14 % of large firms. McKinsey Global Institute estimates that narrowing this gap could boost GDP by up to 10.5 %, especially through enhanced linkages with large enterprises and focus in high-value sectors such as IT, chemicals, auto and electronics. Globalization has catalyzed expansion in MSME exports and significant job creation, but productivity lags remain a key impediment. Policy emphasis on digital adoption, quality certifications (like ZED), trade facilitation, credit access, and stronger ties between MSMEs and larger firms emerge as pivotal strategies to close productivity chasms and unlock inclusive growth. This paper mainly contributes on Identifies channels through which globalisation impacts productivity, Evaluates the influence of government schemes, proposes policy levers to reduce the productivity gap and boost employment.

Keywords: Globalisation, Indian MSMEs, Productivity gap in MSMEs, Employment trend in MSMEs

Introduction

Globalisation—via trade liberalisation, entry into global value chains (GVCs), and digital integration—has reshaped the opportunities and challenges for MSMEs since the early 2000s. Policymakers and researchers alike have highlighted that greater integration into export markets and global supply chains could generate up to four million additional manufacturing jobs by 2025, and yield sizeable productivity gains for participating firms

However, MSMEs remain structurally constrained by limited access to formal credit (less than 6 % of bank lending), pervasive informality, delayed payments, costly technology adaptation, and skill shortages—particularly in sectors demanding higher levels of digital and managerial capability.

Though recent government initiatives—including Make in India, Digital India, ONDC, and credit-guarantee schemes such as CGTMSE and Mudra Yojana—have sought to empower MSMEs, the extent to which they have translated into tangible gains in employment and efficiency remains under-explored. This research therefore aims to systematically quantify and analyze the transformational effects of globalisation on the MSME sector between 2000 and 2025, using both national-level data and firm-level trends. The objectives are:

1. Estimate changes in employment levels—both formal and informal—within Indian MSMEs attributable to globalisation during 2000–2025.
2. Determine the productivity differential between MSMEs and large enterprises in manufacturing, services, and digital sectors, and assess how it has evolved over the globalisation period.
3. Analyze how integration into GVCs and export linkages from 2010–2025 has influenced productivity and employment outcomes in MSMEs.
4. Investigate key barriers and enablers, such as access to credit, technology adoption, skills availability, and policy schemes, affecting MSME performance in a globalising environment.

Literature review

The impact of globalization on the Indian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector, particularly concerning employment and productivity, is a multifaceted issue. MSMEs are central to India's economic development, contributing significantly to job creation and economic progress (Prakash et al., 2023). However, in the era of globalization, these enterprises face various challenges and opportunities which directly affect employment rates and productivity levels.

One of the primary challenges for Indian MSMEs in the globalized market is maintaining export competitiveness. A significant reason for their lag compared to rivals is the lack of updated technologies. This technological gap can diminish the potential of these enterprises, reducing product demand and affecting sales and profits. Consequently, to enhance competitiveness, it is crucial for MSMEs to adopt new technologies through awareness, best practices, and technological collaborations.

Globalization also impacts employment within the MSME sector by altering the competitive landscape. As MSMEs globally face increased competition, there is a push towards adopting advanced technologies like artificial intelligence-powered workforce management. Such technologies can support MSMEs in workforce risk management and business marketing, potentially leading to revenue growth and improved employment conditions within these enterprises (Kumar et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the adoption of digital technology appears to be a promising avenue for MSMEs to enhance their productivity and address some of the global market's challenges. Studies indicate that benefits—both functional and symbolic—can significantly motivate MSMEs to adopt digital technologies, thereby boosting productivity and competitiveness (Raj et al., 2024). Besides technological adoption, financial literacy and access to finance stand as crucial elements that can empower MSMEs to make informed decisions, identify opportunities, and sustain growth, by addressing these training and financial gaps, there's potential for enhancing productivity and employment rates in the sector (Dwyanti, 2024; Rajamani et al., 2022).

Despite the challenges posed by globalization, MSMEs continue to play a vital role in India's inclusive growth. The sector offers substantial job opportunities and promotes entrepreneurship among underprivileged groups, playing an essential role in equitable distribution and socio-economic engagement (Prakash et al., 2023). Various governmental initiatives, such as 'Make in India' and 'Digital India,' are aimed at creating new opportunities for MSMEs to thrive and grow, thus potentially enhancing employment and productivity in this crucial sector (Prakash et al., 2023).

Objectives

- Estimate the changes in employment levels (formal and informal) within Indian MSMEs attributable to globalization between 2000 and 2025.
- Determine the productivity differential between MSMEs and large enterprises in key sectors (manufacturing, services, digital), and track its evolution over the globalization period.
- Analyze how integration into global value chains and export linkages influence productivity and employment outcomes of MSMEs from 2010–2025
- Investigate key barriers—such as access to credit, technology adoption, skill availability—and enablers like policy schemes affecting MSME performance in a globalizing economy.
- Evaluate the impact of key government initiatives—such as Make in India, Digital India, ONDC, MSME credit guarantee schemes—on employment and productivity gains among globalizing MSMEs between 2014 and 2025.
- Project potential scenarios for Indian MSME employment and productivity trends under different globalization pathways and policy frameworks up to 2035.

Material And Methodology

1. Study Objective

This study aims to assess the impact of globalization on India's Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), with a specific focus on employment generation and productivity trends. It seeks to analyze how globalization has influenced these parameters over time, particularly in the post-liberalization era.

2. Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The study utilizes secondary data sources to evaluate trends and impacts, complemented by a review of relevant literature to provide contextual understanding.

3. Data Sources

The study relies on the following secondary data sources:

- Government Reports: Data from the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), and the Reserve Bank of India.
- Academic Journals and Articles: Peer-reviewed studies and articles focusing on MSME performance, globalization effects, and economic analyses.
- International Organizations: Reports from organizations such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO) that provide insights into global trends affecting MSMEs.

4. Limitations

- Data Availability: Limited access to disaggregated data at the micro-level may affect the granularity of the analysis.
- Causality: While correlations can be identified, establishing direct causality between globalization and MSME performance is complex due to multifaceted influencing factors.
- Informal Sector: The study may not fully capture the dynamics of informal MSMEs, which constitute a significant portion of the sector.

1.1. Employment levels (formal and informal) within Indian MSMEs from 2000 to 2025, with consideration of the role of globalization and liberalization through the LPG era:

Formal Employment in MSMEs

- In formal manufacturing, the share of employment saw a significant rise—from around 16% in 2004–05 to 29% in 2018–19, nearly doubling. This reflects a structural shift toward formalization and enhanced integration with global value chains post-economic liberalization.
- Between 2005 and 2019, employment in organised manufacturing increased from approximately 47 million to 88 million, indicating an addition of ~41 million formal jobs, likely supported in part by global market access and export opportunities.

Informal Employment in MSMEs

- The informal sector—including unincorporated enterprises—remains dominant. Historically, informal workers comprised over 90% of India’s workforce, though this declined slightly to around 85–86% by 2022–23.
- Among unincorporated enterprises, total workers decreased marginally—from 11.13 crore in 2015-16 to 10.96 crore in 2022-23, a loss of roughly 16.5 lakh jobs—despite an increase in total enterprises.
- Informal manufacturing employment declined from 38.8 million in 2015-16 to 30.6 million in 2022-23, a fall of ~8.2 million jobs, suggestive of either displacement or formalization.

Fig1: Estimated Employment Trajectory (2000–2025)

Period	Formal MSME Employment Change	Informal MSME Employment Change
2000–2005	Modest growth; baseline formal share ~16%	Informal dominant, ~90 %+ workforce
2005–2019	Formal manufacturing jobs rose by ~41M (47→88 M)	Informal sector jobs stable or marginally declined
2015–2022	Continued modest formal growth	Informal non-farm jobs down by ~16.5 L (11.13→10.96 Cr)
2023–2025 (est.)	Limited formal growth due to structural limits	Informal sector still majority (~85 % of workforce)

1.2.The productivity differential between Indian MSMEs and large enterprises across key sectors—manufacturing, services, and digital/ICT—including its evolution during the globalization

Productivity Gap by Sector

Manufacturing

- Indian MSMEs in manufacturing operate at approximately 14 % of the productivity level of large enterprises—the widest gap among key sectors.

Digital / ICT Sector

- In the ICT sector, MSMEs reach only about 26–29 % productivity relative to their larger counterparts—a level broadly in line with average emerging-market outcomes.

Services (Professional and Administrative)

- In professional and administrative services, MSMEs perform closer to parity—with productivity reaching 32 % of large companies in administrative services. In other support/service sectors, gaps narrow further.

Fig2: Productivity Gap by Sector

Sector	MSME vs Large Firm Productivity	Evolution Trend (2000–2025)
Manufacturing	~14 %	Gradual improvement in export-linked sub-sectors; gap remains large
ICT / Digital	~26–29 %	Some narrowing via digitization; lag remains due to scale constraints
Administrative / Support Services	~32 % (administrative); ~60–70% in some services internationally	Smaller gap; less impacted by scale; more local competition

Evolution over Time

While granular time-series data at the subsector level is limited in public sources, general tendencies observed from **2000 to 2025** include:

- Post-1991 economic liberalization prompted strong growth in exports and global value chain participation—especially in manufacturing and ICT—which slowly enabled select MSMEs to adopt technology, export markets, and formal processes.
- Technology gaps, limited access to formal training, and constraints in finance and innovation continued to keep MSMEs behind. Large firms invested heavily in R&D, training, digital systems, and operational efficiency—creating a widening divergence in productivity growth rates. MSMEs without B2B linkages and digital adoption lagged further behind.
- Sector convergence within associations: In some sectors like automotive components and software development, collaboration with large firms (e.g. OEM suppliers) helped MSMEs improve operational proficiency and narrow productivity gaps by around 40 % compared to consumer-facing MSMEs.

1.3. Global Value Chains (GVCs) and export linkages have shaped productivity and employment outcomes of Indian MSMEs from 2010 to 2025:

1. Productivity Gains from GVC Participation

- Firms integrated into GVCs see a productivity premium of 13–22% compared to non-GVC firms—especially in automotive, electronics, and IT sectors. These benefits include higher total factor productivity, gross exports, domestic value-added, and employment growth.
- According to the Economic Survey, deeper GVC participation in manufacturing could generate up to 4 million jobs by 2025, accounting for around 25% of value-added growth toward India’s \$5 trillion economy goal.

2. Employment Impact of Export Integration

- In manufacturing-driven GVC sectors (e.g. engineering, automotive, electronics), participation led to measurable employment growth—both direct (factory hiring) and indirect (supplier networks), with positive spillovers for supporting MSMEs.
- However, forward linkages (where MSMEs supply to intermediates) have shown limited impact on employment growth, whereas backward linkages (engagement in assembly/export) delivered stronger employment and productivity outcomes.
- As per the NITI Aayog, medium enterprises (only 0.3% of total MSMEs) drive nearly 40% of MSME exports, implying that export-active MSMEs are concentrated and more productive/employment-intensive.

3. Sector-Specific Insights: 2010–2025

Manufacturing (Engineering, Automotive, Electronics)

- Government incentives (PLI schemes, cluster policies, Make in India, National Manufacturing Mission) have accelerated MSME integration into global electronics and auto value chains, boosting both job creation and productivity.
- MSMEs benefit from cost advantages and flexible operations, making them ideal suppliers in global value chains when supported by credit and tech upgrades.

Services and Digital

- Digital MSMEs, especially in IT-enabled services, gained from global contracts and integration via online platforms. Though GVC integration in services is less documented, those active internationally tend to exhibit higher productivity.
- Schemes like ONDC and export facilitation across states, trade missions, and digital payments have helped MSMEs scale internationally, improving incomes and employment quality.

4. Enablers and Constraints in GVC Integration

Key Enablers:

- Clusters, trade facilitation, export infrastructure, credit guarantees, and skill training help MSMEs plug into GVCs and export markets.
- Digital platforms and trade portals have expanded global reach and improved process efficiency for exporter MSMEs.

Persisting Constraints:

- Lack of backward linkages—India imports many intermediate inputs, limiting value-add opportunities.

- MSMEs face logistics inefficiencies (logistics cost at 14-18% of GDP vs global average ~8%), poor infrastructure, and financial exclusion—95% are informal, accessing less than 6% of bank credit.
- Delayed payments, limited managerial capacity, and digital literacy gaps further hinder effective export linkage and GVC participation.

1.4.Assessment of the impact of several key government initiatives on employment and productivity gains among globalizing MSMEs in India between 2014 and 2025:

Make in India (launched September 2014)

- Designed to drive manufacturing-led growth, Make in India aimed for a 25% manufacturing share of GDP by 2022. In reality, manufacturing's share fell from 16.7% in 2013–14 to 15.9% in 2023–24, indicating limited success at scale and hence modest productivity gains for MSMEs in the sector.
- While large firms benefited more from sectoral incentives and PLI schemes, MSME gains were indirect; many units continue to struggle with weak scalability and market linkages.

Digital India

- Facilitated digitization of government services—e-governance, licenses, loan applications—that helped MSMEs streamline operations, reduce transaction times, and access fileless processes.
- This digital transformation has gradually improved administrative efficiency for 98% MSME-dominated sectors—though quantifying productivity gains at the individual MSME level remains opaque.

ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce)

- ONDC has onboarded over 500,000 sellers as of early 2024, with more than 70% being MSMEs. In April 2024 alone, it facilitated around 7.2 million transactions; by mid-2025 transaction volume surpassed 68 million total.
- MSMEs in Tier II and III cities that joined ONDC reported an average 20% increase in revenue soon after onboarding, helping raise incomes, scale order volumes, and expand market reach beyond local confines.
- While direct employment metrics are not yet widely reported, increased sales often drive expansion in hiring—especially for logistics, order processing, and production support roles in small firms.

MSME Credit Guarantee Schemes (CGTMSE and related)

- The Credit Guarantee Trust for MSEs has enhanced formal credit access by around 20% for micro-enterprises, resulting in 12% higher five-year survival rates, and improved participation from women-led units (~28%).
- Access to collateral-free loans enabled many MSMEs—especially exporters and clusters—to invest in machinery, digital tools, and capacity expansion, indirectly boosting productivity and formal job creation.

Fig 3: Combined Impact on Employment & Productivity (2014–2025)

Initiative	Key Outcomes for MSMEs Analysis
Make in India	Limited impact on MSME productivity/employment; manufacturing share remained flat. Direct productivity improvements for MSMEs were marginal.
Digital India	Streamlined compliance and administrative processes boosted operational efficiency among MSMEs, helping indirectly reduce costs.
ONDC	Enabled ~70% MSME adoption; Tier II/III units saw ~20% revenue growth—a driver for expanded informal/formal employment.
CGTMSE Schemes	Formal credit access rose ~20%; improved survival and enabled investment in productivity-enhancing assets; fostered job formalization.

1.5. Indian MSME employment and productivity trajectories under different globalization pathways and policy frameworks through 2035. This outlines three plausible scenarios—Baseline, Accelerated Global Integration, and High Digital & Policy Push

Scenario 1: Baseline (Moderate Integration, Modest Reforms)

Pathway: Continuation of current macroeconomic trends (post-2025), moderate global engagement, stable but incremental reforms.

- MSME Employment: Growth aligns with historical trends (0.8–1% annually), adding ~0.4 million formal jobs/year → total MSME employment of ~28 crore by 2035 (from ~27 crore in 2025).
- Productivity: Average labor productivity improves slowly (~1% p.a.), expanding the MSME-to-large firm productivity ratio from ~26% (2025) to ~30% by 2035.

Scenario 2: Accelerated Global Integration

Pathway: India becomes a hub under the China+1 strategy; MSMEs integrate into global value chains via PLI, cluster reforms, export facilitation, and new FTAs.

- **MSME Employment:** Formal job growth accelerates to ~2% p.a.—driven by GVC-led manufacturing, electronics, auto components → ~30 crore total jobs by 2035. Productivity-linked hiring growth adds ~1 million jobs/year. Based on GVC premium of 13–22%.
- **Productivity:** Integration into global value chains drives annual productivity gains of ~3%–4% for export-linked MSMEs (per GVC premiums) → productivity ratio reaching 45–50% of large firms by 2035.

Scenario 3: High Digital & Policy Push

Pathway: Synergistic application of digital reforms (ONDC, AI/GenAI adoption), upskilling (Skill India), financial inclusion (CGTMSE, Mudra), and ESG-linked incentives (green MSMEs).

- **MSME Employment:** Projected formal job growth of ~2.5–3% p.a., driven by digital expansion (remote work, digital services) and rural-green value chains. MSME employment rises from ~27 crore (2025) to ~32 crore by 2035.
- **Productivity:** Digital transformation via GenAI, automation, and cross-sector digital tools potentially delivers ~2.6% boost per year, per EY estimates—especially in organized and unorganized sectors ([EY](#)). Coupled with cluster empowerment and export connectivity, productivity levels reach 60–65% of large-firm productivity by 2035.

Enablers

- **GVC Access:** Supported by PLI schemes, cluster policies, and export infrastructure.
- **Digital Upskilling:** Linked with Skill India, Digital MSME Scheme, ONDC expansion.
- **Finance Inclusion:** Credit schemes (CGTMSE, Mudra), enhanced Udyam classification, public procurement rule enforcement.
- **Sustainability Focus:** Green tech uptake via MSME ZED certification, RAMP schemes, and support for clean energy value chains.

Risks

- **Logistics and infrastructure inefficiencies** (India's logistic cost ~14–18% of GDP vs global ~8%) hurt competitiveness.
- **Talent scarcity:** Only ~3% of firms are AI-ready; ~47% of MSMEs report difficulty hiring skilled labour.
- **Overdependence on medium-size firms:** They contribute disproportionately to exports (only 0.3% MSMEs account for 40% of exports) suggesting concentration risk.

Strategic Suggestions for Policy & Practice

1. Revamp Credit Access & Financial Inclusion

- Expand CGTMSE to cover medium enterprises and innovative projects, introduce concessional loan products (like Medium Enterprise Credit Card), and integrate fintech-driven risk-based lending models for faster credit reach.
- Promote digital lending platforms and cross-border factoring to boost trade finance and global competitiveness.

2. Accelerate Technology Adoption & Innovation

- Develop regional “Industry 4.0 Competence Centres” offering plug-and-play digital tools (AI, IoT, automation), tech labs, and training under cluster-specific interventions.
- Enhance R&D capacity via public-private innovation hubs, strengthen Institute for Collaborations (IFCs), and fund sector-specific research.

3. Streamline Compliance & Foster Formalization

- Launch a unified digital MSME compliance portal, offering graded filing norms, chatbots, and real-time grievance resolution to reduce regulatory burden.
- Offer a 3-year incentivised transition package for informal firms registering on Udyam—include tax rebates, reduced inspections, and integration into credit and procurement systems.

4. Expand Market Access & Export Integration

- Strengthen export infrastructure via BharatTradeNet (BTN), enhance trade mission support, increase access to schemes like EPCG, RoDTEP, and PLI for export-oriented MSMEs.
- Provide charging access to international certifications (ISO, CE, FDA) and multilingual digital marketing training to support compliance and exports.

5. Boost Skilling & Workforce Alignment

- Establish demand-driven District Skill Labs and tightly align vocational programmes with cluster needs (e.g. textiles in Surat, auto in Coimbatore).
- Use Apprenticeship Hubs and incentives under Skill India to deepen skill resonance, particularly in Tier II/III clusters.

Future Discussion: Navigating the Next Frontier for Globalizing MSMEs

1. Harnessing Trade Agreements

Recent developments—such as the UK–India Comprehensive Economic & Trade Agreement (CETA)—signal deeper integration into advanced economy value chains, opening sectors like

textiles, pharmaceuticals, and auto components to higher-quality export opportunities. MSMEs poised to benefit most are likely those equipped with certifications, branding, and production capacity.

2. Data-Driven Governance & End-to-End Monitoring

Deploying integrated dashboards and platforms—linking Udyam, MSME-Champions, ONDC, GST, and TReDS—can unlock real-time tracking of employment growth, credit uptake, grievance resolution, and export activity. Such systems empower policymakers and ecosystem builders to respond dynamically to bottlenecks and opportunities.

3. Policy Evolution & Institutional Innovation

Recent reports underscore the need for a revamped institutional ecosystem—such as a KfW-style development bank to provide credit guarantees, technical assistance, and innovation support. Expanding CGTMSE, introducing an MSME credit card facility, and integrating AI-driven risk assessment are promising upgrades that reduce friction in capital access and empower exporters and growth-stage enterprises.

4. Digital Enablement and Smart Infrastructure

Digital readiness remains low, with only 6% of MSMEs using e-commerce and 45% adopting AI tools by 2024—well behind global peers. Platforms like DigiReady (launched in collaboration with ONDC and QCI) help assess and prepare MSMEs for digital commerce integration. Combined with smart industrial parks, automation, and real-time monitoring via Industry-4.0 tools, MSMEs can reduce costs and capture efficiency across production and logistics.

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed underscores the profound yet uneven impact of globalization on India's MSME sector, with significant implications for employment generation and productivity enhancement.

1. Sectoral centrality and labor intensity

As of FY 2021-22, MSMEs sustain over 60% of India's workforce and contribute approximately 29–30% of GDP, reaffirming their critical role in national economic stability.

2. Persistent productivity gap

In global comparison, Indian MSMEs operate at just 14% productivity in manufacturing and 32% in administrative services, relative to large firms—a productivity gap more pronounced than in most emerging economies. Narrowing even part of this gap could unlock GDP gains in the order of 10% by bridging global efficiency differentials.

3. Employment gains through global value chains

Integration into global supply chains, especially in textiles and pharmaceuticals, has created measurable job opportunities within MSMEs, facilitating firm scaling and technology diffusion.

4. Structural barriers limiting inclusive growth

Despite incremental formalization—evidenced by 6.2 crore Udyam registrations by March 2025—credit gaps (estimated at ₹30 lakh crore), skills shortages, and technology deficits continue to constrain MSME expansion and productivity.

5. Policy interventions with mixed outcomes

Flagship programs such as *Make in India* (launched in 2014) and the CGTMSE scheme (established in 2000) aim to enhance credit access and global competitiveness; yet empirical assessments show varying levels of uptake and impact, particularly for micro-enterprises and women-led firms

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