

THE DRIVERS FORCE THE GIG WORKERS INTO GIG ECONOMY: THE CASE OF MALAYSIA

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Submitted final draft: 29 March 2023

Accepted: 10 June 2023

<http://doi.org/10.46754/jbsd.2023.03.001>

Abstract: The outbreak of COVID-19 has unleashed opportunities in the gig economy, especially for the young generation. Due to pandemic lockdowns, the demand for supplies and delivery services had soared, and many took the opportunity to earn a good income that helped them survive the challenging period. Therefore, this study aims to identify the motivational factors that drive people to join the gig economy. The qualitative method was utilised to determine the “push” and “pull” factors that influenced gig work. The data was collected from 235 respondents via Google Forms. The findings indicated that financial purpose was the main factor that motivated gig workers in Malaysia. The pull factors also showed greater influence compared with push factors. This study presents a holistic view of the gig economy in Malaysia based on motivational factors. Since the gig economy became a working trend, urban planners and policymakers should be aware of this work restructuring and include its workers in the nation’s social protection network. Besides that, the government may also develop special programmes to improve the welfare of gig workers.

Keywords: Gig workers, push factors, pull factors, gig economy, Malaysia.

Introduction

The Key Statistics of Labour Force Malaysia in May 2022 showed that the unemployment rate remained at 3.9% (Mohd Yusrizal Ab. Razak, 2022). The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic had led to a rapid increase of gig workers as people were forced to stay home to prevent the spread of the disease. This has caused a rise in demand for daily supplies and delivery services through online portals. As reported by financial services provider Mastercard, global transactions related to the gig economy is expected to rise by 17% per year (RM2.05 trillion) by 2023 (Pang, 2023). Although the Malaysian gig economy has been burgeoning since 2010, it only gained widespread prominence in 2017 because the number of fresh graduates had exceeded job opportunities in the market, which increased the demand for employment (Idris, 2017). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2020), the informal sector mainly consists of people who are self-employed and living in urban area such as Selangor (Lim, 2020). Majid, Jaffar,

Man, Vaziri and Sulemana (2016) found that low-income families facing high unemployment rates mostly lived in the Klang Valley. Hence, the gig economy has helped reduce urban poverty and improve the people’s welfare by creating job opportunities for this demographic (Ng’weno & Porteous, 2018). However, despite these benefits and opportunities, Malaysian gig workers are at risk of exploitation, precarity, and inequality. The biggest risk of exploitation is in wages and working hours, as there are no regulations or policies to protect the rights of workers (Loganathan, 2021). Therefore, many gig workers are forced to work long hours if they want to earn a salary that is enough to survive.

As most gig workers spend a lot of times outdoors, they are vulnerable to security and health risks. Despite high accident rates, they have to pay the hefty medical bills out of their own pockets as they are not entitled to social security (Kidd, 2020; Loganathan, 2021). This is in contradiction to the United Nation’s 8th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of

protecting workers' rights and promoting a safe working environment for all workers, particularly for gig workers (Nations, 2020; Loganathan, 2021). Gig workers should be entitled to various benefits and rights, including social security protection and fair wages (Makhtar, Ghadas & Haque, 2022). Multiple studies have examined various aspects of the gig economy such as the experiences of its workers (Keith, Harms & Tay, 2019; Sevilla, 2020), the characteristics of workers (Great Britain Department for Business, 2018), the merits and disadvantages (Ahmad Nursilah, 2021), the effects on workers (Ranjan & Chandra, 2021), the advantages and challenges (Kei, Siti, Mohamad & Tay, 2021) and its conceptualisation (Kidd, 2020). However, few studies have examined the factors motivating the participation of workers in the gig economy, particularly in a Malaysian context. As the economy becomes a lifeline for the urban poor, policymakers should take consider regulating the industry to make it more sustainable and create a conducive working environment that protects the welfare of its workers.

State-of-the-Art Economy

An individual who works in the gig economy is referred to as a gig worker. The industry's workforce ranges from highly skilled workers such as freelance professional programmers and designers to low-skilled drivers and food-delivery riders. During the pandemic, low-skilled gig workers were designated as "essential workers" and allowed to work outdoors as they were responsible for peoples' livelihoods (Ahmad Nursilah, 2021). Depending on their work contract, gig workers have many options. Furthermore, with the Internet serving as the intermediary, the gig economy has flourished as workers can now work and attend meetings remotely (Keith *et al.*, 2019; Ahmad Nursilah, 2021). The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) defines gig workers according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which states that the workers are those who work independently and in isolation over

geographically expansive areas. Apart from being in direct competition with each another, gig workers are often considered independent contractors who work short term in task-based jobs, and who have a big presence in online labour platforms.

The gig economy has been found to benefit various parties such as consumers who now have quick and easy access to many personalised services (Sherk, 2016). Gig workers often endeavour to improve their skills by working in different environments (McCarty, 2020). The gig economy provides them with advantages such as flexible work hours, a good salary, the freedom to choose their jobs and lower transportation costs (Ahmad Nursilah, 2021). Employees who have a permanent job may also earn an additional income through gig work. Some of them have also quit their jobs in favour of full-time gig work (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). The gig economy has been observed to provide youths with better employment opportunities and work experience. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that motivate people to work in the gig economy.

The Motivational Factors

The factors motivating Malaysian gig workers can be classified as "push" and "pull" factors, where one of the "push" factors is financial needs (Bajwa *et al.*, 2018; Karlsson & Wranne, 2019; Keith *et al.*, 2019; Angelucci, 2020; Sevilla, 2020). However, the views of gig workers in terms of financial needs may differ as some may view working in the gig economy as their main source of income while others may not (Sevilla, 2020). Apart from that, external economic, social and environmental factors may also serve as push factors (Angelucci, 2020). The economic context involves changes in the labour market as workers decide to reorganise their working preferences (Angelucci, 2020). The environmental context is evident in the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely tested the strength of the labour market. Meanwhile, the social context involves changes in social conditioning, where people enter the

gig economy because of indirect pressure from family, friends, or trends.

Job deprivation and limited alternatives are also push factors in doing gig work (Bajwa *et al.*, 2018; Angelucci, 2020; Sevilla, 2020). Job deprivation is the stress that a person faces in the gig economy and it implies that these workers view their work simply as side jobs (Angelucci, 2020). Workers are also pushed to join the gig economy due to a lack of other job opportunities, especially jobs that they prefer to do but could not as they lack the skills, education, and work experience.

According to multiple studies, the very nature of the gig economy such as job autonomy is the main pull factor (Bajwa *et al.*, 2018; Keith *et al.*, 2019; Angelucci, 2020; Sevilla, 2020). For instance, e-hailing drivers have a zero-hour contract that enables them to choose their working hours, days off, and working pace. They are also free to use any online transportation platforms that pay them more (Sevilla, 2020). Furthermore, jobs in the gig economy are also easily accessible than conventional jobs as they neither have complicated requirements nor necessitate preparations (Sevilla, 2020).

Furthermore, the gig economy is a global platform that connects workers whose skills may, otherwise, be underutilised in their local markets, and provides them with higher income than conventional jobs (Bajwa *et al.*, 2018; Sevilla, 2020). Networking opportunities is the main method of acquiring clients by way of recommendation from former colleagues, clients, and fellow gig workers (Karlsson & Wranne, 2019). Other than that, career development and learning opportunities are also pull factors as some gig workers opt to work on the side to acquire new skills and increase work experience (Karlsson & Wranne, 2019).

The theoretical framework of this present study was adapted from the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985) as

outlined in their book: *Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behaviour*. According to Cherry (2022), the SDT suggests that people are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated by a need to grow and gain fulfilment. Extrinsic motivation is defined as an external element that drives a person to behave a certain way while intrinsic motivation is an internal drive, which includes core values, morals, and interests (Ackerman, 2018). Therefore, this present study uses the SDT to explain the pull (extrinsic motivation) and push (intrinsic motivation) factors that influence the participation of workers in the Malaysian gig economy.

Workers undertake jobs in the gig economy solely for financial reasons (extrinsic motivation). However, it may also be due to intrinsic motivations such as the features of a particular job (Jabagi *et al.*, 2019). For instance, North American Uber and Lyft drivers said they used online transportation platforms because workers are in control of their own schedules and it provides them with opportunities for social connections (Jabagi *et al.*, 2019). The need for competence such as the need for freelancers to gain skills and knowledge is yet another pull factor. Apart from that, the need for relatedness, particularly as an avenue for socially networking with others is also a pull factor that the SDT identifies (Jabagi *et al.*, 2019).

The theoretical framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. Two types of motivation are outlined, which are pull (extrinsic motivation) and push (intrinsic motivation) factors. There are seven items identified as pull factors (i.e., autonomy, low barrier entry to start work, gain skills, gain experience, increase network, higher income compared to the previous job, and personal enjoyment). Meanwhile, the push factor comprised five items, which are financial purposes, social pressure, retrenchment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, previous job deprivation, and limited job alternatives.

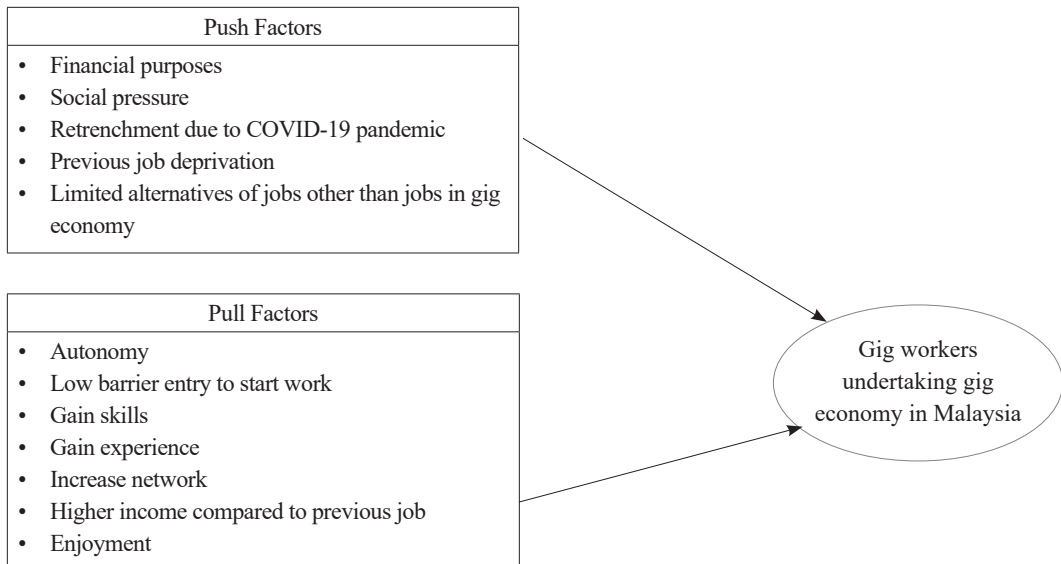


Figure 1: Theoretical framework adapted from the Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (1985)

Materials and Methods

A descriptive quantitative study was utilised to determine the push factors and pull factors of gig workers undertaking the gig economy in Malaysia. This quantitative research design was employed using an online survey. During the data collection, a questionnaire was presented to respondents via Google Forms, which were distributed on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Data collection focused only on respondents working in the gig economy such as freelancers (programmers, graphic designers, etc.), e-hailing drivers (Grab) and food-delivery riders (foodpanda). In this study, the sample size was estimated at 235 and the survey was conducted from April to June 2021. Descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and factor analysis were employed as statistical techniques. Once collected, the respondents' data were compiled using IBM SPSS version 26.0. The first stage involved data cleansing and cross-checking with the entry process. Next, the reliability analysis was performed to ensure internal consistency. Spearman's rho correlation was used to determine the relationship between data obtained in the second section and third questionnaire. Lastly, the factor analysis was

performed to categorise the items according to the push and pull factors.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Respondents

The respondent's profile was divided into two tables. Table 1 shows the age, gender, education, and work states of gig workers. Table 2 lists the details of their work such as period of involvement, income, and role. The results convey that there were more females (60%) than males (40%) working in the Malaysian gig economy. The results also showed that it was mostly young people aged 21 to 30 years old (77%) who chose to work in the industry, and most of the respondents had completed their tertiary education (88.5%). Besides that, most respondents were working in the central region of the country, which encompassed Selangor (30.6%) and Kuala Lumpur (13.7%). This indicated that both states were experiencing urban growth and commercialisation with better facilities, thus, supporting the fact that the gig workforce was mostly concentrated in urban areas due to high supply and demand.

Table 1: Respondent's background

Variables	Categories	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20 years old	7.2
	21-30 years old	77.0
	31-40 years old	10.6
	41-50 years old	2.1
	51-60 years old	2.1
	61 years old and above	0.9
Gender	Male	40.0
	Female	60.0
Education	Tertiary	88.5
	Secondary school	11.5
States	Pulau Pinang	8.5
	Kedah	3.4
	Perlis	0.4
	Perak	6.4
	Selangor	30.6
	Kuala Lumpur	13.7
	Negeri Sembilan	8.5
	Melaka	6.8
	Johor	7.7
	Pahang	1.3
	Kelantan	6.0
	Terengganu	3.0
	Sabah	3.0
	Sarawak	3.4

Table 2 shows that most respondents were part-time workers (66.8%) working as dropship agents (43%). They mostly worked for 6 months to 1 year (30.2%), followed by less than 6 months (29.8%). This was likely because most workers were trying to adapt and survive as job losses mounted when the pandemic began. Regarding the average monthly income, most respondents earned between RM1,000 and

RM3,000 (41.3%), which was in line with their part-time status. A majority total of respondents (30.2%) were probably students as they reported working for a source of income while studying. However, there was also a significant number of respondents who made gig work their primary income (25.1%). A fair number was doing gig work as a second job to supplement their main income (17.4%).

Table 2: Background of respondents' gig work

Variables	Categories	Percentages (%)
Gig work status	Full-time	33.2
	Part-time	66.8
Types of gig work	Freelancers (programmers, graphic artists, etc.)	21.3
	Food delivery and courier delivery	25.5
	E-hailing drivers	3.4
	Dropship agents	43.0
	YouTubers	6.8
Involvement period	Less than 6 months	29.8
	6 months to 1 year	30.2
	Over 1 year to 2 years	24.3
	Over 2 years to 3 years	5.1
	Over 3 years	10.6
Average monthly income (RM)	Less than 1,000	40.4
	1,000 – 3,000	41.3
	3,001 – 5,000	7.7
	5,001 – 7,000	2.1
	7,001 – 10,000	0.9
	More than 10,000	1.3
Role of gig income	Primary income	25.1
	Supplementary income	17.4
	Extra pocket money	14.9
	An income while I look for other work	12.3
	A source of income while studying	30.2

Push and Pull Factors

The push factors that influence gig workers are identified in Table 3, in which “financial purpose” had the highest agreement level. On the other hand, social pressure showed the lowest agreement. This indicated that the gig economy was strong and rewarding enough

for Malaysians to either make it a livelihood or generate a lucrative side income. These results were consistent with previous research that identified financial problems as a reason people had to work in gig economy (Bajwa *et al.*, 2018; Karlsson & Wranne, 2019; Keith *et al.*, 2019; Angelucci, 2020; Sevilla, 2020).

Table 3: Push factors influencing Malaysians in the gig economy

Items	Agreement Level	Percentage (%)	Mean
Financial purpose	Strongly agree	51.9	1.59
	Agree	40.4	
	Neutral	4.7	
	Disagree	3.0	
Social pressure	Strongly agree	9.8	3.23
	Agree	22.6	
	Neutral	21.7	
	Disagree	26.4	
	Strongly disagree	19.6	
Retrenchment due to COVID-19 pandemic	Strongly agree	14.5	3.22
	Agree	19.6	
	Neutral	18.7	
	Disagree	24.7	
	Strongly disagree	22.6	
Previous job deprivation	Strongly agree	5.1	3.54
	Agree	16.6	
	Neutral	22.6	
	Disagree	30.6	
	Strongly disagree	25.1	
Limited alternatives of jobs other than jobs in gig economy	Strongly agree	20.0	2.70
	Agree	32.3	
	Neutral	20.4	
	Disagree	11.9	
	Strongly disagree	15.3	

Meanwhile, pull factors (Table 4) showed that gaining more skills had the highest agreement level, whereas higher income than previous job was the lowest. By gaining more skills through working in the gig economy, they

could expand their knowledge, which would eventually help their career development. These results were consistent with previous research that mentioned gaining skills as one of the main pull factors of undertaking the gig economy (Karlsson & Wranne, 2019).

Table 4: Pull factors influencing Malaysians in the gig economy

Items	Agreement Level	Percentage (%)	Mean
Autonomy	Strongly agree	30.2	1.93
	Agree	47.2	
	Neutral	21.7	
	Disagree	0.9	
Low barrier entry to start work	Strongly agree	36.2	1.72
	Agree	55.7	
	Neutral	7.7	
	Disagree	0.4	

Gain skills	Strongly agree	40.9	1.67
	Agree	52.3	
	Neutral	6.0	
	Disagree	0.4	
	Strongly disagree	0.4	
Gain experience	Strongly agree	40.9	1.68
	Agree	52.3	
	Neutral	5.5	
	Disagree	0.9	
	Strongly disagree	0.4	
Increase network	Strongly agree	41.7	1.69
	Agree	48.1	
	Neutral	9.4	
	Disagree	0.9	
Higher income compared with previous job	Strongly agree	24.3	2.36
	Agree	33.6	
	Neutral	26.4	
	Disagree	13.2	
	Strongly disagree	2.6	
Enjoyment	Strongly agree	46.0	1.68
	Agree	44.7	
	Neutral	6.0	
	Disagree	2.6	
	Strongly disagree	0.9	

Perception of Gig Workers

Based on the results of Malaysian gig workers' perception towards the gig economy (Table 5), all respondents had a good perception and a majority agreed that it could help Malaysians by providing job opportunities as well as

reducing unemployment. Besides that, results also showed that majority of the respondents perceived that the gig economy would become a new trend of work, which might surpass the conventional workforce in future.

Table 5: Malaysian gig workers perception towards gig economy in Malaysia

Items	Value	Percentage (%)	Mean
The gig economy helps to provide job opportunities in Malaysia	Strongly agree	45.5	1.62
	Agree	47.7	
	Neutral	6.4	
	Disagree	0.4	
The gig economy helps to reduce unemployment due to pandemic	Strongly agree	48.9	1.63
	Agree	41.7	
	Neutral	8.1	
	Disagree	0.4	
	Strongly disagree	0.9	

Gig workforce will surpass conventional workforce in the future	Strongly agree	28.1	2.03
	Agree	44.7	
	Neutral	23.8	
	Disagree	3.4	
Duration to likely continue working in gig economy	Less than 6 months	12.8	-
	6 months to 1 year	24.7	
	More than 1 year	62.6	

Reliability and Correlation Analysis

Table 6 shows the reliability analysis among variables. The Cronbach's alpha values showed that all variables indicated good internal consistency. Spearman's correlation coefficients in Table 7 showed a weak positive association

between push and pull factors (0.297). However, a strong correlation at 0.611 was found between perception and pull factors, with a significance level of 0.000. It could be concluded that the respondents were pulled towards the gig economy because of a positive perception.

Table 6: Reliability analysis among variables

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha for All Items
Push factors	Financial purpose	0.744	
	Social pressure		
	Retrenchment due to COVID-19 pandemic		
	Previous job deprivation		
	Limited alternatives of jobs other than jobs in gig economy		
Pull factors	Autonomy	0.774	0.759
	Low barrier entry to start work in gig economy		
	Gain skills		
	Gain experience		
	Increase network		
	Higher income compared to previous job		
	Enjoyment		
Perception	Job opportunities	0.759	
	Reduce unemployment		
	Gig workforce		

Table 7: Spearman correlation between variables

	Variable	Correlation	Push Factor	Pull Factor
Spearman's rho	Push factor	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.297**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
		N	235	235
	Pull factor	Correlation Coefficient	0.297**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		N	235	235
	Perception	Correlation Coefficient	0.214**	0.611**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000
		N	235	235

**Correlation is significant at level of 0.01

Factor Analysis

In Table 8, factors with a loading of higher than 0.5 are indicated in bold. Based on the table, Factor 1 was considered a push factor as most of the items fell into the factor of gig workers. Meanwhile, Factor 2 was considered a pull factor as 4 items loading under it were pull

factors, where internal pressures could influence gig workers. Factor 3 had 2 items that reflected the option and ease of entering the gig economy. Factor 4 had 2 items. This factor indicated that gig workers chose their work because of good income and personal enjoyment.

Table 8: Rotated component matrix

Variables	Component			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Unhappy with previous job	0.843	0.005	0.123	- 0.150
Retrenchment	0.798	0.025	- 0.007	0.255
Social pressure	0.705	0.042	- 0.078	0.020
Limited job alternatives	0.648	0.086	0.286	0.342
Higher income	0.578	0.298	0.180	- 0.396
Gain experience	0.012	0.898	0.057	0.080
Gain skills	0.036	0.780	0.088	- 0.013
Networking	0.164	0.735	0.305	0.006
Autonomy	0.083	0.054	0.883	- 0.001
Easy accessibility	0.052	0.448	0.713	0.169
Financial	0.172	0.290	0.254	0.581
Enjoyment	0.033	0.426	0.488	0.558
Extraction method: Principal component analysis				

Conclusion

The burgeoning gig economy in Malaysia has birthed various job opportunities, especially for youths. As such, it is important to identify the factors that motivate them to enter this industry. A theoretical framework that lists the motivational was developed using the SDT that Deci and Ryan (2008) outlined. The developed theoretical framework supported the findings of this present study. The country's gig economy could provide jobs and career development opportunities as well as a good income. The provision of social protection and enacting laws to protect the rights of gig workers could help develop a safe and decent work environment which will, in turn, create sustainable urban economic growth. As few studies had examined the push and pull factors of gig workers, this present study recommends that future studies should be conducted on a larger scale. Other push and pull factors, such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn should also be examined in the Malaysian context. As the Malaysian gig economy continues to grow despite the long-term risks to gig workers, this present study endeavoured to identify the factors that motivated gig workers to continue working in the industry. An analysis of the push and pull variables revealed that the Malaysian gig economy had become the main alternative for income generation. However, there are also other pull factors that motivated gig workers to participate in economy.

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