

Job Perceptions among Gig Workers: The Perspective of Online Seller

SYUHAIIDA BT MOHAMED@JAAFAR, NIK HAZIMAH BT NIK MAT*

Faculty of Business, Economics, and Social Development,
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu,
21300 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu,
MALAYSIA

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: - The purpose of this paper is to explore the gig workers' performance over the job design in the gig economy. A qualitative research design is employed to achieve the research objective. Data for this study were collected from online sellers in Malaysia using online interviews. The phenomenology approach is adopted to analyze the interview data with online sellers who represent the role holder's perspectives. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview data. The exploration of gig works implementation results in different perspectives among gig workers. Based on the respondents' experiences, the findings suggest that the income and skills possessed by the gig workers are the main themes that differentiate job performance for online sellers in the gig economy. The generation of income with additional skills possession plays a vital role in attracting positive perceptions and performance measurement of the gig workers. In addition, gig workers also related their performance to other factors including flexible time, sales volume, fast interaction and transaction, knowledge skills, effort, and innovation throughout their involvement in the gig work. Theoretically, this study contributes to the job performance measurement among gig workers with different perspectives due to fewer employment relations occurring between employers and employees. Practically, the gig workers hold their own perceptions with regard to job performance to assist them in completing their jobs and adapting to the gig economy conditions. The findings provide insights to related players in the gig economy to formulate better work design and expectations in ensuring that the adaptation to this new kind of marketplace benefits both employers and employees.

Key-Words: - Gig economy, online job performance, income, skills, human resource management

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1 Introduction

The emergence of the gig economy in the labor market recently has created a new version of the work system and income earning for job seekers as gig workers. Business interaction and transaction today is mostly completed by using the technology platform which is become easier than the traditional method. The implementation of gig works using technology enables the task to be done through online communication, [1]. This situation offers a variety of work systems that may differ in terms of job expectations and job performance. Gig work is considered one of the alternative work arrangements that emphasize independent, flexible time with on-demand work, [2]. This work system has dominated business transactions, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The existence of gig works has since received a great deal of attention as it helps many

people to deal with financial difficulties during the shocking global crisis.

In the gig economy, the workers acted as freelancers that completed the task following the orders given by the organization. The gig workers used technological applications to receive and complete the task following the demand from the organization and customers. They are not bound to specific organizations and are able to serve more than one organization following their own time management arrangement. Recently, a variety of sectors and organizations use gig workers to deal with operational costs as most organizations are now seeking the best strategy to bounce back from the impact of Covid-19, [3]. Implementing a gig work system also allows the organization to reduce the permanent employment contract with the workers that vary in different types of job offerings in the business operation, [4]. Several examples of

gig work include e-hailing riding, e-commerce delivery, computer programming, and online sellers. In this paper, we aim to explore the job perceptions among gig workers, focusing on online sellers' perspectives.

2 Problem Formulation

In Malaysia, the higher cost and low wages of permanent jobs have attracted people to be gig workers. A report by New Strait Times stated that half of Malaysian earn below RM2500 per month with a median income of RM2250, [5]. This figure shows that the number of Bottom 40% (B40) of the Malaysian exceed the number of Middle 40% (M40) and Top 20% (T20). Meanwhile, the average cost of living in Malaysia for a single person was RM2046.28 and RM7258.62 for a family with four persons. The drastic increase in necessities forced the involvement of gig workers in gig work in order to survive the current needs with additional income. In addition, for the unemployed people gig work is a good option for them to generate income. Based on data in November 2022 by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, 600.9 thousand people were unemployed in Malaysia. Meanwhile, EMIR Research in 2020 reported that 26% of Malaysian which is equivalent to 4 million workers were involved as gig workers, [6]. In short, the main motivation of people involved with gig work was to fulfill the basic needs of high living costs today.

The involvement of the gig workers with various backgrounds and the independent work system raised the issue of the performance measurement implemented. The performance of the gig workers was crucial as they also became the image carrier of the organization, they involved such as the Grab driver and Foodpanda rider to have high satisfaction from the customers. The performance of the gig workers depended on the satisfaction gained from the customers with the service provided, [7]. Nevertheless, the gig workers have low control over service quality with low engagement of the standard operation procedure (SOP) of the organization, [8].

3 Literature Review

The gig economy is a flexible job structure using online applications as the main platform to interact and complete the work between employers, gig workers, and customers, [9]. The demand and supply in the gig economy are done by matching the availability of gig workers as suppliers with the

customer's demand, [10]. The industry that enters the gig economy mainly comes from several sectors such as transportation, services, selling, and leasing where the involvement of gig workers exists in many levels of jobs, [11]. The existing and continuous demand from customers for gig workers contributes to the gig economy establishment for the long term, [12]. The influence of digitalization that received positive responses from the users is also seen as the opportunity for society to optimize their income in the gig economy environment, [13].

Gig workers act as the main player in the gig economy comprised of both unskilled and skilled employees who can deliver the services demanded by the customers, [14]. Other than freelancers, gig workers are also known as contract workers, own account workers, portfolio workers, or contingent workers that will fulfill the freelance job without prior employment relationship with the organization as well as to the customers, [15]. Gig workers complete the job based on their income and are not bound to one specific organization only. The process of selection, hiring, and supervising the workers is made through an online platform with the compatibility of the time, workload, and income gains, [16]. Based on, [17], the gig workers that perform gig works as the primary income enjoy the work system offered by the gig economy. In addition, the communication is done through an online platform. However, job completion to a particular company engages them with a sense of belongingness towards the organization despite the low contract job status. This is because gig workers mostly have the freedom to choose the task that suits them based on the workload and expectation, [3].

The involvement of workers with different levels of skills and knowledge in the gig economy raised the issue of the quality of the task with the informality and precarious work conditions. The academic certificates owned by the gig workers give assurance to the organization and customers on the quality and productivity of the job in which the gig workers were passing the assessment test in technical and managerial view, [18].

Although the benefit of gig works is known, however in a study conducted by [17]. They found that gig workers who only focus on one job as their primary income are likely to have lower incomes. The benefit is greater if the workers have a variety of jobs at once. In the long term, the dependence of gig workers on a single job possibly provides low assurance for people to survive in times when the cost of living is steadily increasing, [19]. This requires gig workers to be more creative in

balancing the cost, time, and energy they spend on every job or task. An organization that uses gig workers' services to deliver their products and services mostly aims to achieve cost-effectiveness in human resource practices, [3]. The operational cost for gig workers is mostly lower as compared to the permanent job system, especially in terms of wages and job security, [20].

Reviews of past studies related to gig work demonstrate that this technology-based work system available in the gig economy provides both positive and negative impacts on workers. Based on, [21], the service delivery does have fragmented the use of mobile applications that disrupts the process of delivery with the miscommunication issue occurs. Therefore, gig workers require certain skills to be able for them to feel the benefit of the gig work system. The required skills such as self-presentation, mentoring program, and support also can be provided by the organization to ensure that the performance of the workers is appropriate for the employers as well, [22].

4 Methodology

Previous research reviews in online job platforms on methodological aspects found that most of them utilized content research, [23], [24]. The use of quantitative study is also being employed by a few studies, [25], [26]. The quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive analysis with the involvement of frequencies and correlation. Due to the number of users on the internet not being counted, the sampling for internet-based data collection is almost obsolete, [27]. In response to that, this study was influenced by the research objective and scope for the determination of research design and data analysis, [28]. Therefore, to the exploratory nature of this study, the research design was built based on qualitative data.

This study chooses online sellers as the respondents due to the accessibility and willingness of the respondents to participate. The online sellers' numbers increased during and after the pandemic which enabled them to offer services continuously online to the customers. Based on the record in 2022, Malaysia has 29.49 million active internet users with about 29.46 million mobile users and 14.43 million online shoppers. These numbers were the recorded version and there is probability that there are numbers of users that interact by direct transaction in social media between buyers and sellers. Most of the transactions in online selling used online platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, and Facebook. Therefore, they are able to manage the

availability of the product offering through the system built on the platform. Recently, online sellers were varying that those that consider online selling as the main income and as a part-time job only. In this study, the online sellers chosen were those that mostly become the middlemen between suppliers of the main company and the customers. The seller is also known as a dropship seller that has the minimum probability to keep stock as it depends on the demand from customers.

In the data gathering process, online interviews were conducted with the respondents based on respondents' preferences time. The contents of the interview questions focused on the respondent's experiences as gig workers in online selling in order to delve into the practical situation of the work process in the gig work system. This study used snowball sampling to reach the next respondents that related to the group of friends in the same circle of online selling. The respondents willingly suggest their friends will be broadened up until data was saturated. Therefore, the focus of the respondents does not deviate from the actual target respondents. The data gained from the interview process will be prepared on the transcripts and translated well into one language before being interpreted. This study applied thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke's Six Step Thematic Analysis to identify the results. Themes are gathered through the Braun & Clarke thematic analysis framework involving six steps; familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and lastly writing up. Based on the analysis, several themes were found to answer the research questions. Table 1 shows the thematic analysis of the research data.

Table 1. Braun & Clarke's six-step thematic Analysis

Step	Process
Data familiarization	The audio of the interviews was listened to repeatedly to prepare for the transcript. After the completion of the transcript, the researcher familiarized the information through several readings. All information was translated into English to ensure the consistency of the terms and concepts to form the themes from the transcript.
Coding	The respondent's answers were analyzed to ensure that the same interpretation is illustrated in each word uttered. After that, the data was coded and extracted.
Themes searching	The answers from the coding process were identified based on the similarities in meaning.
Themes reviewing	The answers will check which irrelevant data will be removed.
Themes defining and naming	Each theme will be explained in detail. Each theme will be identified with informative names.
Writing	Writing process to answer research questions.

5 Findings

Several themes were identified through the data analysis. After all stages were complete, the highest number of themes fall under two factors: income and skills.

5.1 Skills

Interviews data revealed that most respondents spoke about skills required by gig workers due to their job structure. In this regard, respondents believed that gig workers need to equip themselves with marketing and promotion skills and proficiency in using social media. This is explained in relation to the need to sell their products online and differentiate their product from other sellers. While product comparison can easily be made under an online platform, both skills are considered important for the respondent to perform their job as online sellers. Respondents perceived that marketing and promotion skills can be learned through job experience as they will master their products from time to time. Based on the respondents, the communication skills, writing skills, technology information, leader skills, and product knowledge was getting by the gig workers along their journey in the gig economy participants that learning directly and indirectly

When we always deal with many types of customers. So, we can learn how to manage and enhance our skills every day(R10)

Entrepreneurship programs such as programs to improve skills and autonomy skills are carried out in an integrated manner for each sales company because they want to train the autonomy of employees to have knowledge and knowledge that encourages entrepreneurship in each member(R22)

Consensus has arrived among respondents that the challenge to possess both skills is to catch up with technology. The fast-changing marketing strategy trend requires respondents to put effort to learn an updated skill. Some respondents take classes to learn more about the products and the suitable marketing strategy for a particular product. Too much-updated marketing strategy today somehow affects their level of understanding to catch up with the technology.

By doing online jobs, we also need to know knowledge of information technology such as the software or application that we need to use. We also must have skill expertise to use the software or business-related application (R9)

Besides that, as the gig workers were fully using media social as the platform for performing their job, the slow internet connection was disrupting the

work process. Some of the places among the gig workers not getting the convenience and fast internet connection due to the limitation in finances to buy the better package of the internet as well as the places where they stayed did not have the right connection. They also mention that in having consistency in the job, they need a support system in the form of material for promotion, finance, fast internet connection, and the support team as the coach.

Absolutely yes because it gives a lot of exposure to do the job anywhere whether we are at home or at the office and how our world today holds the internet as a major source to do online business (R14)

Provide assistance needed by online traders such as financial assistance, internet access, and others (R17)

Everything nowadays is on the internet, at your fingertips, this means that the internet is important for selling (R23)

Data gathered from the interviews also revealed that most gig workers begin their business on social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Other than that, the source of knowledge also comes from the online web such as Shopee and Lazada. Besides that, the involvement of the gig workers in doing side income mostly being influenced by the family as well as the exposure from their friends.

5.2 Income

Most gig workers were doing online business due to financial problems in response to the increasing level of necessity of households today. Besides that, the gig workers were doing the side job due to their passion for business and the products that they sell as some of them become consumers of that particular product and have good experience with the products.

Respondents relate the opportunity of getting the most out of the gig works benefit through the ability to deal with the competition and internet connectivity.

We have unlimited income if we go the extra mile and all out with our business (R8)

They compete to produce quality products and use the best online sales platforms to generate good income (R14)

Online selling is a huge field in the industry and economy. We can go further and higher if we keep committed to it. We can gain income, help others to have income, and even contribute to the economy (R24)

In order to ensure consistency in income generation, respondents spoke about a few

approaches they learned to increase revenue from time to time. Half of the respondents had the set target by the main company for the profit calculation. Others learn to calculate their revenue by themselves and count it manually on their own understanding. The ability to have a specific target influences the level of income they receive as well as getting appreciation from the supplier or organization of the products. However, after some time, most respondents agreed that they are able to set their own timeline for sales and revenue. Punctuality and commitment are also mentioned by gig workers as crucial criteria for performing gig work effectively.

I have my target to sell my scarf at least 20 pcs in a month. So basically, I just promote it via social media twice per day at least (R9)

Wages depend on the sales results if the sales obtained are few then the results are small if there are many then the results are many and if they reach the target every month, they will get a bonus as promised by the company while for salaried jobs their wages are parallel and fixed every month despite working hard and carelessly (R20)

Punctuality and continuous commitment to achieve the sales target, for example, every month the agent must spend sales at a certain rate (agents have to be diligent in selling their sales as well as possible and cooperate if other agents get customers from different locations can give or pass to the agent in the location involved because sustenance needs to be shared) (R21)

6 Discussions

The findings of the study showed that the work environment largely influenced the gig workers' perceptions of their job. This is mainly due to the differences between gig workers who use online platforms as compared to those permanent workers who interact through physical venues. The independent nature of gig workers' implementation leads to personal understanding and expectations of performance measurement and evaluation. The perception of gig workers is pertinent to understanding the implementation of gig work and its influence on their performance.

The main perception of respondents in this study is tailored towards the use of gig work as an income and additional skills generation.

Particularly, respondents are motivated to get involved in gig work mainly because of the purpose of getting income for their personal and family needs. Though, the flexible nature of gig works leads to uncertainty of the income gaining in which

the workers will have their own option in income generation level, [29]. The process of income generation gained through the involvement of online sellers becomes the main motivation of gig workers to enhance their productivity in jobs. This is because online sellers can put effort to gain their own target and ensure that their personal can be fulfilled.

Pushing aside the standard employment as the permanent workers, the entering of the gig workers into the job was not bounded to the specific requirement that enable them to perceive the job as the source of income with perception on measuring their own performance based on the income gaining. Gig work has been the best option for most respondents due to the flexibility to enter employment without strict rules. This situation started from the beginning of job involvement that did not emphasize specific criteria for them to become gig workers. Organizations that employ gig workers tend to hire as many as possible workers, [30]. The low requirement for job entering widens the opportunity for anyone to get involved as an online seller with their existing skills. The entering of gig workers into the gig work enables the opportunities to have additional skills that are learned indirectly on the job implementation. Gig workers become productive in emotions and activities viably by applying compatible job-related skills and enhancement of skills in response throughout the work process, [3]. Along the work journey, multiple skills can be possessed by time as it enables a smooth work process. Aside from the existing skills, online sellers are able to gain additional skills that can be gained directly and indirectly.

Performance evaluation among the online sellers was based on their own evaluation and expectation. This differs with those who work permanently in the organization where the expectations were set by the superior based on organizational expectations. Being gig workers allow online sellers to involve with more than one organization. The gig workers are able to increase their survival rate of the workers with the probability that unlimited and never end works demand in the gig economy, [14]. The chances to have a job in gig work were high with the various sources and organizations that used and crowdsourced the services of gig workers.

Online selling works through technological applications to respond to each other. Digitalization and technological advancement play an important role in employment matters as well, [13]. As the emergence of social media appears recently, the utilization of it was seen to help society in dealing

with the high cost of living impact as well. The agility of this work arrangement is discussed in terms of the potential of this flexible work structure to assist with the financial difficulties recently. This suggests that the differences between traditional employment and gig work are not the hindrance for the people to believe in the potential of gig work despite the unskilled and skilled workers involved, [14]. The gig workers in this study also found that skills in handling technological applications as the most crucial skills that enhance fast interaction and transaction by having the right track in business innovation for them.

The involvement of gig workers in online business is one of the signs of income contribution in the Malaysian economy as the business industry now takes many online traders as middlemen to convey the benefits of their products through social media. Further, workers that enjoy the gig economy identified it as a pull factor for them to reject permanent employment due to work and life satisfaction, [17]. The flexible time of work, [9], enables the gig workers to have their own strategy for gaining more income with high sales volume, [3]. Therefore, income was identified as gig workers' job performance measurement. This may enhance the agility of the gig work structure to reduce the unemployment rate in Malaysia.

7 Conclusions

The perceptions of the gig workers towards the workers in the gig economy as their savior in the economic problem were well implemented with various evidence. Despite the less employment relation with the organization in the gig economy, the gig workers are able to surround themselves with the positive sides of alliance with different organizations. As for the online sellers, various product features and functions were well identified by them along with the involvement in online selling due to the need for knowledge skills in product promotion. Directly and indirectly, the online seller is able to possess skills including communication skills, technology information skills, writing skills, leadership skills, and product knowledge.

The increased cost of living and higher uncertainties in the business environment, locally and globally, also push the labor market towards many changes. An effective work system for gig workers is important to ensure this new employment type could bring benefits to the community in the long run. The effectiveness of the system can be viewed through its sustainability in bringing the

potential to many related parties. This paper offers preliminary insights into the potential of a gig work system for sustainable employment for the community. Further empirical investigation is needed to examine the effectiveness of the proposed framework.

Theoretically, this study has contributed to the additional literature in the gig economy field focusing on online sellers' perspectives as one of the players in the gig economy. The opinion of the online sellers becomes the reference as one of the various gig workers in the gig economy.

Practically, this study has provided insights towards the online sellers on the value they perceived along the involvement in the gig economy as well as how the income generation in the gig economy contribute towards their skills additional and improvement. The facilitation of technology also along with the job involvement of online selling can be noted as it acted as the additional skills enhancement that also can be applied to their future career. As for the policymakers, the use of the broad internet and online transaction opens up broad sources of data privacy leakage and security that should be emphasized more with strict and proper guidelines. Therefore, the authorities should take preventive measures to ensure that the users' data was stored in a safe database.

This study has focused only on online sellers' perspectives to represent the gig workers in the chosen research context. This limitation can be improved by considering other types of gig works to compare the perception among gig works groups and enhance the understanding of gig works structure. For instance, the coverage can be expanded to recently popular gig workers jobs such as Grab and Foodpanda drivers, freelance designers, and others. Exploration of the impact of gig works on social sustainability may also be worth considering the financial difficulty facing many people in the current economic uncertainty.

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The authors equally contributed to the present research, at all stages from the formulation of the problem to the final findings and solution.

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Conflict of Interest

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