



Bridging the gap between external criticism and the perception of gig workers

By

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Abstract

This study explores gig workers' perceptions and experiences regarding the characteristics of the gig economy, examining if occupational stigmatization may influence these perceptions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with gig workers aged sixteen to thirty, who stated never having perceived any stigmatization and generally viewed gig work as a convenient means to earn relatively high wages and maintain autonomy during irregular periods. A SWOT analysis was used to structure gig workers' perceptions of the characteristics and substantiate the absence of perceived stigmatization. Revealing that no significant stigmatization was perceived due to expectations set by the workers. The findings suggest that gig workers reframe their expectations to a low standard or agree with the stigmas imposed, creating no sense of perceived stigmatization. Gig workers thus shape their expectations, creating shifts in the importance of different aspects within the SWOT framework, leading to not perceiving criticism from the outset as stigmatization.

Key words: Gig-economy, gig work, gig work characteristics, occupational stigmatization, perceived stigmatization

Introduction

The notion of gig employment may appear contemporary and modern, but its roots extend back several decades. The idea of alternative, often flexible, project-based employment has roots dating back to the 1900s and gained significant traction during the financial crisis in 2008 (Riverflex, 2019). In the face of surging unemployment rates, many individuals sought alternative means of employment, and gig work emerged as the most accessible option. The increasing prevalence of innovative technology further facilitated the externalization of paid work organized around "gigs", defined as projects or tasks that workers engage in on a term-limited basis (Caza et al., 2022). This approach became more accessible for employees and a more straightforward and viable option for organizations to adopt. The fact that there are currently 435 million active gig workers globally (Lung et al., 2024) is evidence of the continuously expanding demand for such workers, and according to Roy and Shrivastava (2020), this demand is anticipated to persist.

While traditional work is organized around roles, gig work is organized around tasks and projects (Caza et al., 2022). Due to its unconventional nature, gig work faces criticism as the labor standards for gig workers are compared with those of full-time traditional positions. Critics argue that, despite the emphasis on flexibility and autonomy in gig work marketing, it lacks the safety nets typically associated with formal employment (Warren, 2021). De Stefano (2015) even goes as far as arguing that, due to its deviation from traditional employment, gig work cannot be classified as genuine "work."

Stigmas surrounding the gig economy thus often emerge due to gig employment deviating from the conventional framework for regulating the workforce. Unions and consumers emphasize that as the platform matures, the gig economy should not just comply with current

employment laws but also implement sustainable labor practices that treat workers as an integral rather than an incidental part of the organization (Healy et al., 2020).

The negative stereotype imposed on the gig economy by external entities can be perceived as a type of occupational stigmatization (Xiang et al., 2022). Occupational stigmatization entails the imposition of negative stereotypes on particular occupations by the public, and therefore, the public impression affects the impression of workers in those occupations (Liu et al., 2022). Liu et al. (2022) demonstrated that stigmatizing specific occupations within the gig economy could lead to adverse experiences among gig workers. This stigma perceived by gig workers could evoke negative sentiments about their work, subsequently impacting the physical and psychological health and well-being of these individuals.

Internalizing the imposed stigma, also known as self-stigmatization, refers to the subjective negative perception or opinion of gig workers toward themselves (Boyd et al., 2014). Given that employees desire consistency in how they view themselves and how others view them (Swann, 1987), internalized stigmatization has the potential to significantly shape the future of the expanding gig economy, as it could negatively influence the appeal of gig work.

In contrast to the opinions created by a substantial number of external entities, the perception of gig workers themselves remains insufficiently explored. Donovan et al. (2016) highlight that the criticism voiced by gig workers towards the gig economy primarily centers on the absence of labor protections and the precarious nature of gig work. However, eight in ten gig workers rate their experiences within the gig economy positively (Anderson et al., 2021) and would prefer gig work over traditional employment in the upcoming five years (Roy & Shrivastava, 2020). They often feel grateful as gig work serves as a safety net for those facing

job loss or extra income for individuals lacking support from state unemployment systems (Ravenelle et al., 2021).

The discrepancy between the statistics and the prevailing perspective on gig work, created by externalities, could thus arise because of ignoring the perceptions and experiences of gig workers themselves. It is therefore important to emphasize the importance of adopting a lived experience lens for a comprehensive understanding of gig employment (Myhill et al., 2021). Healy et al. (2020) add to this by advocating moving beyond polarized assessments that characterize the gig economy as exclusively good or bad and examining under what conditions and for whom gig work might be beneficial. An insight into how the gig economy is perceived by gig workers themselves will, therefore, provide a more in-depth understanding of the discrepancy between the overarching negative assumptions made and the actual experiences.

RQ: How do gig workers perceive the characteristics of the gig economy?

Theoretical framework

Gig Economy

The concept of the "gig economy" draws its inspiration from short-term arrangements similar to musical gigs, where a musician might secure a one-time performance in the back room of a venue (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). In contrast to traditional organizational structures centered around roles, gig work is task-oriented, emphasizing the completion of specific projects or tasks (Kalleberg, 2009). Access to more opportunities depend on performance and reputation, yet the gig economy often lacks avenues for significant career advancement.

Commonly categorized into two forms of work, "crowdwork" and "on-demand work via applications", the gig economy encompasses a diverse range of activities (De Stefano, 2015;

Smith & Leberstein, 2015; Cohen & Sundarajan, 2014). Crowdwork involves tasks executed through online platforms that link numerous organizations, businesses, and individuals globally. These platforms offer a wide range of jobs, often including "microtasks" that demand judgment beyond artificial intelligence capabilities. Examples range from tagging photos to assessing emotions and completing surveys (Howe, 2006; Irani, 2019), but also larger projects, such as creating a logo or developing a website. In "work on-demand via applications", traditional job activities like transport, cleaning, errand-running, and administrative work are offered and assigned through mobile applications. Platforms such as Young Capital, Randstad, or Tempo-Team provide application-based solutions for discovering your "gig", with the common practice of setting minimum quality standards and actively intervening in workforce selection and management. The significance of these two forms of gig work is growing, as labor platforms of this kind increasingly position themselves as major players in both domestic and global labor markets (Vallas & Schor, 2020).

Challenges inherent in working within the gig economy primarily arise from the absence of formal organizational structures. To clarify the challenges and opportunities of gig work, Keith et al. (2020) utilize the Job Demand Resources model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). Key job demands identified include job insecurity, precarious work situations, and a sense of alienation from both society and the product or organization. In terms of resources, autonomy and task variety emerge as pivotal factors controlling how these demands can be effectively addressed. Personal adaptation factors such as human, social, and psychological capital combined with a tolerance for ambiguity are characteristics that are asked of gig workers, as they should perceive unfamiliar and uncertain situations positively rather than stressfully (Keith et al., 2020).

The gig economy, characterized as "externalized" labor by Davis-Blake and Uzzi (1993), denotes that gig workers are not legally recognized as regular employees of a particular organization and do not identify as insider members within these entities. They frequently deal with irregular work schedules that are influenced by shifts in the demand for their services (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Companies using the gig economy often provide either all or some of the equipment needed to carry out their jobs, ranging from simple bicycles for food delivery to more expensive and complex transportation or computer equipment in other fields. Many gig workers also set up their own workspace, which can be anywhere—at home, in their car, or elsewhere.

The dimensions of variance within gig work encompass several key aspects. The duration of gig work is contingent upon the nature and complexity of the task or project, ranging from minutes to months or even to years. Compensation for gig work diverges from the regular, predictable wages and benefits associated with traditional organizational membership, adopting a piece-work basis tied to the delivery of a product or service (De Stefano, 2015; Goods et al., 2019). Consequently, compensation varies widely among gig workers. The skill level required for gig work is diverse, spanning low-skilled tasks to high-skilled work (Garrett et al., 2017). Autonomy in gig work is also a variable factor, with some gig workers enjoying significant freedom in determining aspects of their work, such as when and how they work, while others experience limitations in these determinations (Ashford et al., 2018; Lehdonvirta, 2018). Moreover, the power dynamics among gig workers display variability, with recent literature discerning ways in which gig workers may feel powerful or powerless (Kalleberg, 2011; Veen et al., 2020).

Gig work faces criticism from external entities due to its deviation from traditional employment models. Questions persist regarding its legitimacy as serious work (Healy et al., 2017) and whether gig economy labor agreements meet the traditional corporate responsibilities expected of employers (Lobel, 2016). These negative stereotypes and allegations can foster a negative stigma among the public towards the gig economy, also called occupational stigmatization (Liu et al., 2022).

Occupational Stigmatization

Occupational stigmatization refers to negative stereotypes imposed on certain occupations by the public that affect the impression of workers in these occupations negatively (Liu et al., 2022). Occupations that are not protected by, for example, laws or social determinants are prone to occupational stigmatization and have to pass society's judgment (Benoit et al., 2015), often leading to loss of social status, discrimination, and exclusion (Fan et al., 2022).

Occupational stigma is divided into three forms: physically tainted, socially tainted, and morally tainted, and it influences personal experiences to the degree to which the stigma is internalized. Internalized occupational stigma threatens perceptions and evaluations of occupations and is associated with adverse outcomes such as job burnout, feelings of disrespect, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and mental health levels (Fan et al., 2022). These adverse outcomes arise when people with high levels of core self-evaluations consciously attend to the occupational stereotype status because they desire consistency in how they view themselves and how others see them (Shantz & Booth, 2014).

Coping strategies for internalized occupational stigma are ideological techniques and boundary management. The ideological techniques involve amending the meaning of something by reframing, recalibrating, or refocusing (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Reframing entails

changing the meaning of the work, recalibrating the standard with which the jobs are assessed, and refocusing shifts the attention to features of the occupation that are not stigmatized.

Boundary management entails configuring the boundaries of who is considered in-group and out-group in order to create social buffers and draw self-enhancing comparisons (Zhang et al., 2021; Kreiner et al., 2022).

Stigmatization of Gig Workers

The stigmatization of the gig economy has led to adverse experiences among gig workers, as the stigma leads to negative sentiments about their work, subsequently impacting the health and well-being of the employees (Liu et al., 2022). One of the reasons for the negative external view can stem from the fear of "share-washing". Share-washing is a concept that states that platform companies rely on the romantic notion of a "sharing economy"; however, it masks their avoidance of corporate responsibilities and liabilities towards gig workers (Lobel, 2016).

Share-washing stems from the idea that the gig economy primarily focuses on the aspect of "freedom", making it an attractive option for many seeking flexible jobs. However, a republican political view argues that this form of employment fails to enhance the freedom of gig workers. They emphasize how the precarity of gig work exposes individuals to extraordinary forms of interpersonal and structural domination (Hickson, 2023). Because of the employees' insecure status and diminished access to legal rights and protections, they could be considered less free than typical employees employed within the traditional labor market.

In addition to concerns about safe working conditions, skeptics also highlight the issues of low career advancement opportunities and financial security (Healy et al., 2020). There is a notion that after several years of gig work, workers do not build a substantial resume, leaving them with limited options to create a career for themselves post-gig work. Within the gig

economy, opportunities for growth or development are also very limited, creating a ceiling for those who might want to or could advance into higher roles. Additionally, if the platforms do not offer work or if workers do not have time during available slots, no income can be generated. This can be particularly challenging for individuals who need to support their families.

The reasons behind the stigma imposed on the gig economy thus mainly stem from external factors that shift seemingly positive aspects into negatives. This critical perspective on the gig economy tends to foster skepticism among externalities. However, the perception of gig workers remains most important, as they are the consumers and, therefore, the experts by experience.

Perception of Gig Workers

Central to this study is understanding the perception of gig workers, as prevailing assumptions often stem from external viewpoints regarding the nature of gig employment. Perception can be described as an individual's or group's unique way of viewing a phenomenon (Walker & Avant, 2005), influencing the intrinsic component of job satisfaction (Wong et al., 1998). Job satisfaction, in turn, implies happiness and enthusiasm with one's work, serving as the key ingredient that leads to recognition, promotion, and achieving goals that lead to fulfillment (Aziri, 2011). However, negative environmental influences can also adversely affect job satisfaction (Sharma & Chaudhary, 2011), reducing motivation to remain active as a gig worker.

Wright and Nishii (2006) also demonstrate that perception significantly influences performance, acting as a predictive factor for successful outcomes. They argue that performance is realized when individuals perceive practices as intended. Clear communication is crucial to ensure this alignment. Similarly, Furlich's expectancy-valence theory (2016) emphasizes the importance of communication in aligning employee expectations with intended objectives. They

highlight that clear communication of task requirements motivates employees to achieve successful outcomes by ensuring they understand and align with organizational goals.

Understanding gig workers' perceptions is thus essential for fostering job satisfaction, which motivates individuals to remain active in the gig economy. Clear communication can mitigate negative environmental influences and align worker expectations with organizational goals, leading to better performance outcomes. The perception of gig workers thus reflects how they experience and manage possible negative external assumptions, impacting their overall view of the gig economy.

Methods

The objective of this study is to gain an understanding of how gig workers perceive gig work. A qualitative research approach was used to obtain this understanding, involving twelve semi-structured interviews with individuals actively engaged in the gig economy to gather relevant data. With the use of the qualitative approach, the experiences and interpretations of the respondents can be transmitted to valuable and usable data (Sofaer, 1999). By combining the data, a more comprehensive understanding of experiences within the gig economy will be attained, shedding light on how gig workers perceive its characteristics.

Research Design

The exploratory qualitative approach was chosen as it could provide a more comprehensive insight into variables concerning complex human behavior (Black, 1994). This approach allowed for exploring emotions, perspectives, and meanings, providing detailed and inductive descriptions that contribute to a thorough understanding of the complex and subjective experience (Cypress, 2015) defining the concept of gig workers' perceptions. The qualitative

exploratory approach sought to uncover and understand the multifaceted aspects of gig work to generate insights into gig workers' unique challenges, motivations, and experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were held in the form of a random cross-sectional study, as all interviews were conducted at a single point in time with no specific order (Kesmodel, 2018). All interviews were held during the same time period and were conducted online.

Sample and Procedure

Data collection involved conducting interviews with twelve participants who actively participate in the gig economy. To ensure that enough respondents were gathered, a combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used, as multiple in-group contacts were approached and asked to reach out to more possible respondents in the industry (Robinson, 2013).

Participants that were approached operated in Dutch companies in the gig economy, with the requirement that they had completed at least two gigs in the last six months. This approach ensures vivid work experiences in the gig economy, with responses based on recent involvements.

A group of twenty-seven respondents between the ages of sixteen and thirty were open to participate in the research, of which twelve were chosen based on their engagement within the gig industry. A deviation was made between respondents who took a gig at least once every month and respondents who participated in gig work at least two times in the last half year. By interviewing both sets of gig workers, the study aims to capture a breadth of experiences within the gig economy. This approach was chosen to acknowledge and explore potential variations among users, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the gig economy was achieved.

To ensure ethical conduct and compliance, a standardized procedure guided by Kang and Hwang's (2021) principles was consistently applied, minimizing interviewer bias and

maintaining consistency. First, participants were personally contacted via short calls or WhatsApp to introduce the subject and get to know each other. Second, informed consent was obtained through pre-interview emails detailing the subject, procedure, and participants' rights, with reminders sent before the interview (see Appendix B and C). Third, confidentiality and privacy were ensured by anonymizing personal details and respecting participants' preferences for omitted information (Kaiser, 2009). Fourth, beneficence was upheld by protecting participants from harm and respecting their autonomy. Participants were asked about their comfort with the objectives and any topics they preferred not to discuss, and they were invited to share concerns post-interview (Varkey, 2020). Lastly, honesty and integrity were maintained by avoiding deception and offering interviewees the opportunity to review transcripts and the final thesis, thereby ensuring transparency and preventing data misuse.

Data Collection

Data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews with actively engaged gig workers, utilizing a designed interview protocol (see Appendix D) to extract detailed responses regarding their perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to gig work. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes, adopting a one-on-one format to encourage open and honest communication. This approach entailed selecting a pre-prepared list of topics designed to present and discuss the theoretical framework in diverse ways, enhancing flexibility, responsiveness, and openness among respondents (Adeoye-Olatunde et al., 2021). It also allowed for in-depth questions and spontaneity during the interview, leaving room for non-prepared topics or subjects to arise (Ritchie et al., 2003). This method guaranteed focused interviews that adapted to individual perspectives and facilitated a natural interaction between

interviewer and interviewee, allowing the interviewee to express their experiences, perspectives, and emotions freely.

To avoid influencing the perceptions of respondents, the questions were drawn up based on the three guidelines of Rosenthal (2016): they were open-ended and neutral, asking singular questions about one topic, and clear for non-expert respondents. Additionally, the questions were organized coherently to ensure the interview maintained a particular focus. To ensure the usability of the interviews, they were sent to multiple test respondents, discussed with experts, and approved by the ethical review board.

All interviews were conducted via Windows Teams to maintain consistency in the research context. To facilitate data collection from interviews, each session was recorded solely on the audio level, converted, and then transcribed using the Word transcription program. The accuracy of transcriptions was ensured through a precise process involving thoroughly relistening the recordings and simultaneously reading the recorded content for mistakes. After the transcription check, all interviews were translated from Dutch to English, followed by a reread of the English version to check for potential spelling or grammar errors.

After completing six interviews, the data collection process was refined to ensure relevance to the research question. It was observed that initial responses were often superficial, leading to the introduction of additional questions to encourage deeper reflection. Questions unrelated to gig work were incorporated to prompt participants to consider their broader job preferences and values. This adjustment facilitated more comprehensive discussions within the interviews.

Additionally, a structured approach was adopted with double questions at the beginning and end of each interview. This format aimed to track shifts in participants' perceptions by comparing their initial experiences with their post-discussion reflections.

Data Analysis

An abductive approach was adopted in this study, combining elements of both deductive and inductive methodologies (Awuzie & McDermott, 2017). Deductively, the research involves comparing findings with existing knowledge on gig work, aiming to systematically test, validate, or improve these established frameworks relevant to the research question through the analysis of the interviews (Soiferman, 2010). Simultaneously, this research takes an inductive stance, seeking to unveil underexplored aspects of gig workers' perceptions by directly extracting insights from the interviews (Azungah, 2018). This abductive approach allows for the inclusion of expert knowledge, providing theoretical guidance while simultaneously investigating the views, ideas, and perceptions beyond known stances (Hurley et al., 2021).

After conducting the interviews, all interviews were transcribed, reread, and analyzed by using a coding scheme. In open, semi-structured interviews, it is important to grasp that not all important answers are directly found in the questions asked; aspects that are questioned before can often take a more explicit form later in the interview (Flick et al., 2005). Notes were therefore taken during the interviews, as they helped structure the interview, helped re-examining earlier asked questions, and also aided in the creation of categories. Besides the notes, after every interview, a logbook was updated, consisting of short summaries of the interviews, making sure the general notion of each interview could be found. The use of ATLAS.ti software facilitated the coding of interview fragments, leading to the identification of sub-themes and overarching themes.

A thematic analysis was carried out, as it served as a flexible qualitative research method capable of integrating inductive and deductive approaches. It is an iterative approach, implying that adjustments are possible, which could lead to deeper insights into the subject studied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Jason and Glenwick (2015) further underscored the importance of thematic analyses in providing a voice to "the other", making sure the viewpoints of the interviewees are represented. Given that this research is centered on the perceptions of the interviewees, this approach ensured that their answers remained central to the outcome.

The thematic analysis involves a series of six steps that focus on identifying recurring themes in the data (Jason & Glenwick, 2015). Initially, the process began with immersing oneself in the data by reading and becoming familiar with the transcripts. The transcripts were read multiple times to check for grammar and translation and to ensure a thorough understanding before proceeding to the coding phase.

A deductive approach was then employed to identify and categorize important subjects using notes and existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial readings, along with comments from the notebook and logbook, helped generate initial codes such as "*Quick money motivation*" and "*Difficulties with tax returns.*" These codes were further refined using ATLAS.IT software, which assisted in developing a preliminary codebook by organizing the subjects into categories and sub-categories (Pearse, 2019).

Following this, themes were searched for by grouping similar codes into higher-order subthemes and themes. All codes were converted into an Excel file to ensure clear organization. During this process, overlapping codes and sub-themes were identified, created, and organized accordingly. Additions to the initial codebook can lead to a more in-depth understanding of the subject. However, it was important that the first stage of analyzing and creating codes focused on

depicting the respondents' understandings and experiences of gig work. This implied that respondents' experiences were portrayed in their terms rather than in the terms researchers might want to use or find (Magnani & Gioia, 2023).

The themes were then reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data, involving re-examination for coherence and consistency. First-order codes and subthemes were reviewed, ensuring all dimensions of the data were covered. This process provided a comprehensive view of the respondents' experiences. Afterward, a data structure was created to visualize the central themes and any opposing themes, offering a clear overview of the data (see Appendix F).

Results

Based on the participants' answers in the study, the following five themes were identified: initial reasons for choosing gig work, barriers for choosing gig work, opportunities during gig work, challenges during gig work, and the stigmatization within the gig economy. This provided an overview of how gig workers perceived the gig economy compared to their expectations and explored the potential impact of stigmatization on these perceptions.

Initial Reasons for Choosing Gig Work

Accessibility and Convenience

Accessibility and convenience were significant drivers when initially choosing gig work. Most gig platforms use an application through which users can easily sign up without any costs or difficulties. Respondent's statements, such as "*The accessibility makes it possible to be open to do it*" (respondent 9, part-time), showed that accessibility was an important driver in fostering openness towards solely downloading the app and seeking available gigs. The convenience of

being able to browse through gigs from their living room couch saves users of gig platforms the hassle of having to delve into different vacancies, send a CV, or actually go somewhere to get hired. The vast selection of gigs allows users to fill in the days they want to work; however, they have yet to plan. The possibility of seeing all open vacancies offers the opportunity to fill in these days with gig work on short notice. *"You just have to sign up in the app, see which day you want to work, for example Saturday, then you just look at open vacancies"* (respondent 9, part-time).

Besides the larger platforms containing thousands of gig workers, smaller platforms still use applications such as WhatsApp or open Excel files. The initial sign-up is completed by just sending a WhatsApp message or an email to the company with a brief overview of yourself. *"They send a message with dates, and if there is a date you can work, you send that to them via WhatsApp, and then they register you for that"* (respondent 7, part-time). Using these commonly available basic applications lowers the barrier to entry into gig work, making it easily accessible to everyone. Choosing gig work is thus often done out of convenience, where employees who want to work on their terms, when they have time, and towards the salary they want have the choice to determine this. *"I wanted something where I didn't have real obligations. So if I had time, I could work. That seemed very convenient to me"*. (respondent 10, part-time)

Autonomy

Autonomy, often recalled as freedom or flexibility by respondents, was perceived as a significant advantage when considering gig work. Unlike traditional employment, there are no obligations towards certain contractors; individuals can allocate their time as they see fit for each gig: *"What was particularly important for me was the freedom that comes with these jobs. Being*

able to schedule myself. If I feel busy one week, then I don't do it, and the following week, I schedule myself six times" (respondent 1, full-time).

This aspect of gig work was particularly significant for students during their initial consideration of gig employment. Not knowing what the next two weeks will bring does not allow them to plan far in advance, emphasizing the attractiveness of gig work's adaptable nature. *"My life during studies is very irregular with classes, parties, and other stuff, so I prefer to be flexible and manage my own work. If I have a day off during the week, I can take a gig, as fixed workdays don't suit me."* (respondent 5, part-time)

Having irregular schedules can thus influence the decision to choose gig work. For these individuals, it is crucial that no fixed arrangements are set for a certain period, as they need autonomy over their work to make their weekly schedules fit accordingly. This autonomy also allows them to pursue their activities whenever they desire. Multiple respondents indicated that simply having the feeling of being able to do what they want, when they want, significantly influenced their choice of the gig economy. *"I have to say that I don't really like being tied to a contract actually. I actually like being able to just do my own thing"* (respondent 1, full-time)

Task Variation

Task variation was a significant factor that influenced the decision to work in the gig economy. Gig work offers a variety of job types, allowing workers to choose different tasks each time. This variety not only adds an element of fun but also provides insights into multiple sectors and potential career paths. *"I found myself in many different situations and you just have to hold your own a bit. So, I think I learned a lot to that extent."* (respondent 6, part-time)

Monetary Rewards

Having the choice over which gig to choose also allows for determining earnings. The monetary rewards are essential and serve as one of the biggest stimulants for choosing gig work. Many individuals were drawn to gig work because existing gig workers showcased the potential financial benefits associated with gigs. *"Compared to fixed jobs, it often pays two or three euros more, and in some hospitality gigs, you might even get double what people in regular employment get."* (respondent 1, full-time)

The payment method was also of significant importance for the people working in the industry. Many respondents stated that they often looked into gig platforms when in urgent need of money. The platforms were, therefore, a way to earn instant money, as the applications allow the employees to look for jobs on short notice, with the added benefit of choosing quick payment methods. *"You paid three percent commission or so, but then you would get it four days later. I usually did that, and that was nice for me right away. Otherwise, I had to wait a month or so. I thought three percent was worth it then."* (respondent 11, part-time)

The higher wages in the gig industry stem from working as a freelancer under the platforms' service. However, this also comes with more responsibilities and challenges, as individuals must manage many aspects independently. Nonetheless, the potential earnings from gig work often outweigh the cautions mentioned on the sites or applications, as well as those expressed by outsiders, particularly regarding the lack of comprehensive secondary labor agreements. Factors such as the absence of insurance, tax regulation, or a pension plan when choosing the gig economy are thus viewed as less significant when weighed against the earning potential offered by the gig economy. *"I don't really need vacation pay and pension, that doesn't really bother me much"* (respondent 1, full-time)

Barriers for Choosing Gig Work

Secondary Labor Agreements

Despite the high monetary compensation, multiple respondents indicated that the limited additional compensations and benefits made them less inclined to work in the gig economy. Often, having to arrange their own transportation or lunch was seen as a hindering factor, as these aspects were typically uncompensated. *“Certain times that just fall around lunch or dinner, but then you don’t get offered a break, so no dinner either. That’s played a role sometimes.”* (respondent 4, part-time).

This led to a diminished final income due to the additional costs they would have to cover, which are often compensated or provided in traditional employment. Additionally, individuals would, for example, have to build up their pension or withhold their holiday pay. The absence of structural benefits and stability provided by traditional employment packages was perceived as a significant barrier to entry into the gig economy.

Application Process

Because of the magnitude of gig companies nowadays, it was seen as a barrier to join in on all the people who have already built up a status within these platforms. Investing time and effort into acquiring the necessary know-how and integrating gig work into one's routine can be challenging. Unlike traditional employment, where showing up and delivering work is the norm, gig work demands proactive engagement. While signing up and applying for gigs is straightforward, securing the desired gigs can be difficult. This challenge is reflected in the review system used for selecting gig employees. A star system allows employers to rate employees from one to five stars. Not having a five-star rating often nudges the employer to

choose a different applicant for the gig: *"There's no profile picture or personal information attached to your account, so multiple people can get accepted, and then they just look at who has the best reviews or who has worked the most often"* (respondent 5, part-time).

Many respondents noted frustration with the process, often being passed over for more experienced gig workers. This led to the stress of applying for multiple gigs simultaneously, wondering if any would pan out. *"So, I would apply for a job once a week or so; however, I didn't do a lot of gigs, so I wouldn't be chosen quickly. Usually, they have a few events spread out over a few weeks, and when someone applies and can attend any event, they choose that person over someone who can only come once."* (respondent 6, part-time).

The application for gigs thus often required a significant amount of effort. Respondents noted that this time could have been more wisely invested in pursuing traditional employment opportunities and enhancing their resumes for career advancement. *"In hindsight, I think it would have looked better on my CV, because I did have a bachelor's degree, so I could have just done something that would probably have benefited me more."* (respondent 6, part-time).

Attractiveness

Besides the time, effort, and challenges encountered when starting in the gig economy, some individuals simply do not find the work attractive enough. They feel that the options on the platforms do not meet their needs. The jobs are perceived as too basic, making them feel like just a number in a system and lacking the sense of community found in a traditional work environment. Many of the job offerings on the gig platforms are, namely, lower-skilled work without a lot of depth or communication with your colleagues. *"I find my fixed job much more satisfying, not necessarily because I like it more, but because I get more satisfaction from it. People there know me better, and because you have a fixed job, you can develop more in that*

work, while with flexible work, it's just too varied and never in the same place.” (respondent 7, part-time)

Opportunities During Gig Work

Enjoyment and Satisfaction

Gig work often involves performing relatively basic tasks within a team, often comprising fellow students, friends, or peers. The ability to schedule days where work requires minimal mental effort while being with peers was highlighted as enjoyable. This stems from the notion that during studies or full-time jobs, individuals often apply significant mental effort. Being able to simply focus on the task at hand without overthinking and enjoying time with friends was deemed highly satisfying for respondents. *“And the shifts I work with them are always enjoyable and fast-paced, because there's always a lot to do”* (respondent 7, part-time)

Besides the practical aspect, gig work was also perceived as a social occupation. Taking on gigs with friends or peers with vastly different interests often initiates engaging and diverse conversations, leading to new insights during work. Working with such a variety of people adds extra diversity to the job and sometimes even creates new bonds or friendships. *“I think it's fun to work with a fixed team, but also fun to work with many different people outside of that, with different backgrounds”* (respondent 8, full-time). This motivated gig workers to seek out social gigs where they could sign up with a group of friends or meet new people to form relationships with.

Meeting Set Expectations

To perceive gig work as a positive experience, expectations should be met or altered in a positive way. Respondents created expectations based on experiences from others, job descriptions, on-the-job training, and their expectations of gig work. Comparing the reality of gig work with expectations revealed that no huge differences were experienced. *“The times I worked were always just what they advertised.”* (respondent 2, part-time).

The reasons why the expectations aligned with the demands of a certain gig were based on multiple factors. The app offers gig workers the opportunity to read through a clear instruction manual for the job; therefore, a first impression of the work is always given before even applying for the gig. After being chosen for a certain job, gig workers often receive additional information and the phone number of the person in charge of the establishment they will be working at. If potential questions arise, they can be asked in advance or saved until the introductory training session typically provided by the company. *“I think there’s also a supervisor on location who says, guys, this is what we’re going to do at the beginning of the day; this is what we expect from you. This is what you can expect from us.”* (respondent 11, part-time). If difficulties arise during the work, regular employees are also often open to help and guide the way when necessary. The rare occasions showed cases of messy arrangements at companies or bad communication between supervisors and gig workers. This mainly arose at companies that gave no clear instructions, leaving the gig workers with many questions when starting: *“Perhaps a bit more guidance beforehand, like where you’ll be today and a brief explanation of what you’ll be doing. I got less of that.”* (respondent 10, part-time)

The most important expectations are, however, those set by the respondents themselves. These expectations mainly come from the idea that gig workers often expect little satisfaction

from gig work because they set low standards for the type of work. They typically use gig work as a way of earning quick money, flexibility, and the option to vary tasks, which in turn are, therefore, their expectations. While these expectations are usually met, they do hide some challenges.

Challenges during Gig Work

Administrative Challenges

Administrative tasks following the completion of a gig were initially viewed as a barrier to entry into the gig economy. However, upon experiencing them, they were met with mixed emotions. Several respondents criticized the platforms for not assisting gig workers, for example, helping them complete their tax filings: "*As for tax filing, you don't get assistance with that. You have to figure it out yourself.*" (respondent 4, part-time). Leaving them without any idea on how or when to fill out these forms, sometimes even resulting in huge fines for failing to file taxes on time.

Others indicated that all the platforms warn and explain how and when to file your taxes. They stated that it could not have been made easier and that people who forget have not paid attention or are sloppy in their administration. "*If you have questions about your taxes, you can actually turn to those platforms, and they have pretty clear guidelines.*" (respondent 9, part-time). The main takeaway, however, is that the high wage structure is based on a system where administrative costs still have to be deducted after receiving initial pay.

Remaining Relevant in the Application Process

Besides the higher wages, the flexibility and variety of jobs appear to be clear advantages of gig work. This, however, sometimes backfires considerably because the companies using the gig platform have significant control over who they select for each gig. While this may not initially appear to be a significant issue, it creates challenges for gig workers who are unable to work for the same company on the same day consistently.

This problem stems from the fact that even within so-called flexible platforms, certain patterns of regularity occur. Gig workers who are familiar with certain companies are often preferred because it saves the company time and effort: *“If you had a certain status within the company, you could sign up whenever you wanted, or even drop out a bit, the flexibility works both ways”* (respondent 2, part-time). As a result, the range of available jobs for gig workers with irregular schedules diminishes considerably. This often leaves them with less desirable tasks because other companies do not recommend them, given the absence of positive ratings.

Stigmatization within the Gig Economy

Absence of Occupational Stigmatization

The immediate response from all respondents indicated that they had never really felt stigmatized during gig work, nor had they encountered others imposing stigma on gig workers. The question even revealed that the majority of respondents never considered the possibility of someone leaving a negative impression on their occupation. Despite understanding the possible implications of such stigmatization and the possibility of internalizing it, no initial experiences of stigmatization were perceived. *“I’ve never personally experienced anything like that”* (respondent 8, full-time).

The topic of stigmatization did, however, evoke a more active thinking process, causing respondents to delve into their past experiences or the stories of others. This resulted in several minor criticisms, divided into on-the-job criticism from permanent co-workers, external criticism from skeptics of the gig economy, and, surprisingly, criticism from gig workers themselves.

On-the-job criticism was expressed by permanent workers who work for companies employing gig workers. They sometimes viewed gig workers as lazy and disconnected from the job, resulting in lower motivation and performance. This opinion often stemmed from the fact that sometimes gig workers did not show up or left without notice. On these rare occasions, permanent employees could, therefore, have a less positive attitude toward gig workers: *“But when I looked at the people working at Hanos who work there permanently, it was a bit of a different atmosphere”* (respondent 10, part-time).

Criticism from skeptics of the gig economy focused on questioning the intentions of those who chose gig work, suggesting it was an easy option for those unwilling to put effort into finding a job that would enhance their resume. These skeptics also often advocated for the contractual security and stability provided by traditional employment.

Individuals who had worked in the gig economy often, in hindsight, advised gaining more relevant experience instead of choosing gig work. The experience of going through job applications with gig work as the main occupation showed them that they had missed out on valuable job opportunities because of the lack of experience in their sectors. *“Of course, the pay can vary quite a bit, but in traditional work, you’re better rewarded in the long run. For example, now at CompanyX, having that on your CV is better than being a freelancer”* (respondent 9, part-time).

Despite these points of minor criticism, they were not perceived as stigmatizing because they were not experienced on a structural basis or internalized by the gig workers. This indicates that none of the criticisms led to sustained negative feelings towards gig work or negative self-perception among those working in the gig economy.

Gig work as Temporary

A particular form of stigmatization, surprisingly, consisted of the common opinion among gig employees that gig work was seen as temporary. The idea of pursuing gig work as a full-time job was often considered unrealistic and was never their intention when they first entered the gig economy. Respondents frequently mentioned that gig work was satisfactory and convenient during life phases marked by instability, and they held no negative feelings toward it in retrospect. However, the opportunities to fulfill the potential that traditional work has still lacked, according to the respondents: *“in terms of growth opportunities and the feeling that you’re contributing, that is, with the tasks I’ve done, virtually not the case”* (respondent 11, part-time)

Feeling of Guilt towards Permanent Employees

Despite not experiencing stigmas imposed on gig workers, a reversed form of stigmatization was surprisingly mentioned multiple times. Here, gig workers experienced self-stigmatization by internalizing a feeling of guilt because of their earnings compared to permanent employees. They perceived an unfairness in earning significantly more per hour despite being new to the organization and requiring the most attention. *“I deliberately don’t talk to those people about it because it doesn’t feel right to do the same work and actually get paid three times as much”* (respondent 1, full-time)

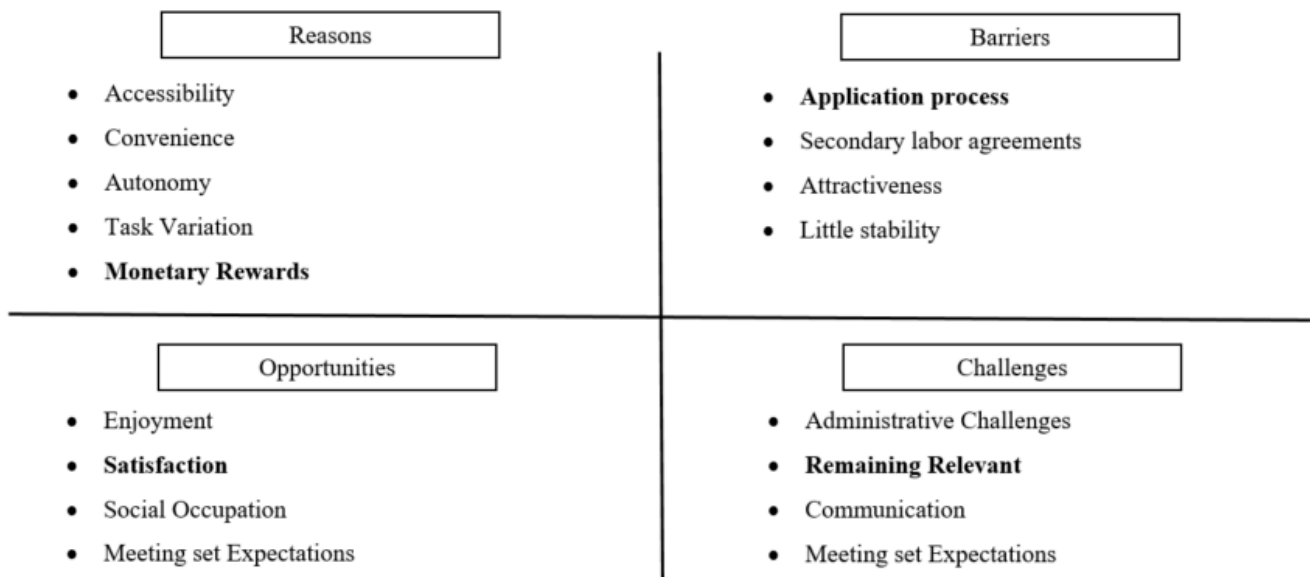
The stigmatization, however, didn't affect the way gig workers thought about their activities in the gig industry. They stated that gig work could be for everyone, and if others wanted to earn money through these platforms, they could. Additionally, gig workers acknowledged that they are the ones taking on the risk of earning money through less secure means: *“But I am aware of it myself, and I also know that the gigs I do are also temporary, and you do get a bit more paid because you take that risk”* (respondent 5, part-time)

Discussion

During discussions about potential stigmas, gig workers reported no awareness or perception of external stigmatization. They had rarely encountered negative opinions or sentiments toward their work in the gig economy, nor did they internalize such views. The absence of perceived stigmatization can be explained by using the four aspects of the SWOT framework (Figure 1), which depict the perception of the characteristics of the gig economy.

Figure 1

SWOT-Analysis: Perception of Characteristics of the Gig Economy



The aspects of the SWOT framework resemble the four themes that shape gig workers' perceptions of the gig economy's characteristics. The reasons and barriers indicate the initial reason respondents considered becoming active in the gig economy, playing a crucial role in understanding why gig workers perceive gig work as satisfactory. The opportunities and challenges reflect the experiences during gig work. Actively comparing these with the initial reasoning revealed confirmation, contrasts, and new elements experienced during gig work. Every aspect will be substantiated by highlighting the most significant outcomes, indicating why these aspects are important and how gig workers' perceptions alter because of adjusted expectations (Benzaghta et al., 2021).

Interpretations of the Findings

Perception of the Characteristics of the Gig Economy

Compared to traditional work, gig work encompasses multiple dimensions of variance that differ with each gig taken on (De Stefano, 2015; Goods et al., 2019). The most significant factor in choosing gig work was the monetary reward (Figure 1), which is gig-dependent and often considerably higher than wages received from traditional employment. High monetary rewards often have positive linkages with motivation (Mokhniuk, 2016) and serve as the most significant offset to the barriers or challenges in the gig economy. Additionally, the ability to decide when and how to earn adds to the attraction and retention power of the gig economy.

Contrary to the reasons for choosing to work in the gig economy, the application process emerged as the primary barrier (Figure 1). Since the process demands considerable effort and time, expectations increase accordingly. However, the apprehension of investing effort and time

without achieving a satisfactory outcome was identified as a significant barrier to choosing gig work (Mackay, 2007).

During gig work, opportunities to work with peers and engage in tasks requiring minimal mental effort were highly satisfactory (Figure 1). While performing low-demand tasks was initially seen as a barrier, it was experienced as a pleasant break, offering a chance to "turn off the brain" and engage in less mentally exerting work. This was particularly beneficial for students or individuals with mentally demanding occupations who often experience stress, which, while sometimes motivating, can negatively impact health and well-being when it becomes excessive (Khatun et al., 2022).

However, new challenges have arisen due to the changing nature of the gig economy. Although gig work was initially intended to be a flexible platform, respondents indicated that this flexibility was diminishing. Remaining relevant during gig work has become increasingly important (Figure 1), posing a significant challenge for those who cannot commit to the same organization or fixed days. For them it is difficult to secure gigs applied for, as employers often prefer others with more experience or constant availability.

Perceived Stigmatization in the Gig economy

Contradicting Liu et al.'s (2022) findings, gig workers did not perceive occupational stigmatization. Three main factors have contributed to the absence of negative stigmas perceived by gig workers. These factors all build on the importance of the gig employees' expectancy setting, influencing the four aspects of the SWOT framework, thereby shaping varied perceptions of the gig economy's characteristics.

Firstly, respondents simply did not experience any negative stigmatization during gig work. No negative stigmas were perceived, either from external entities or from within gig work

employers or platforms. Criticism from external sources was negligible, and internal dissent was addressed through clear job descriptions and on-the-job explanations, often creating a realistic view of the gig. Therefore, there were minimal disparities between the initial reasons and barriers of the gig economy and the experienced gig work. Clear communication before, during, and after gigs ensured alignment between intended and actual practices (Furlich, 2016).

Secondly, by reframing the importance of gig work, respondents were able to distance themselves from any criticism or stigmatization (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). By focusing solely on the high monetary rewards and flexibility while minimizing the barriers due to lowered standards, gig workers set cognitive boundaries aligned with their expectations. They attributed less importance to deriving satisfaction from gig work, perceiving little responsibility for the consequences of their work (Haggard & Tsakiris, 2009). This lack of responsibility and connection to the employer led to low levels of episodic loyalty (Laker, 2021), resulting in indifference toward criticism and stigmatization related to their involvement in the gig economy. By cognitively crafting these boundaries in advance, respondents were thus solely motivated to perform until they achieved their goals (Geldenhuis et al., 2020). Although this attitude might have attracted criticism or stigmatization, the reframing and crafting of boundaries prevented them from perceiving and internalizing it.

Thirdly, there is a notable relationship between satisfaction within the gig economy and the life stage. As people age, their expectations, goals, and priorities evolve, resulting in a shift in the perception of the characteristics of gig work. Younger individuals tend to prioritize monetary rewards and flexibility, whereas older workers derive satisfaction primarily from task content (Kollman et al., 2019). This aligned with respondents' views on the future, as they sought greater depth and stability in their employment. With this opinion, they acknowledged the prevailing

stigmas surrounding gig work, recognizing it as temporary and, for example, incompatible with taking care of a family. However, rather than feeling stigmatized, they often shared this perception, contributing to the broader narrative that gig work is inherently temporary. In doing so, arguments could be made that they inadvertently reinforce the existing stigmatization despite being active participants in the gig economy.

Despite the absence of occupational stigmatization in the gig economy, a form of self-stigmatization was experienced among gig workers concerning their perceived guilt toward permanent employees within a company. A sense of injustice emerged due to the substantial pay gap between gig workers, who may only work once or a few times, and permanent employees, who earn considerably less (Shantz & Booth, 2014). In some cases, the inconsistency in how they were rewarded compared to others led to uncomfortable working conditions, as the pay gap created division and reduced collaboration among colleagues (Tanjitpiyanond et al., 2022). However, this stigma was never confirmed by permanent workers and could be an assumption held by gig workers, potentially creating a psychological boundary between the two groups.

The influence of stigmatization on gig workers' perceptions of the gig economy is thus primarily shaped by their expectations of gig work. Individual goals and priorities drive these expectations, causing shifts in the importance of aspects within the SWOT framework (Figure 1). This means that, for example, because of set expectations, barriers can feel minor or diminished compared to the opportunities experienced during gig work. Creating emphasis on different aspects of the gig economy can lead to different experiences of what is perceived to be satisfactory, as well as indicate how individuals perceive and internalize stigmas imposed on the gig economy.

Theoretical Contributions

The study revealed that criticism or forms of stigmatization were not perceived or internalized by gig workers. The lack of internalization of these negative stigmas stemmed from the limited connection with the employer, which diminished the sense of responsibility and the need to perform well at a gig (Haggard & Tsakiris, 2019). The reduced motivation to perform decreases the intention to create a pleasant working sphere and a bond with colleagues, resulting in a lack of external episodic loyalty (Laker, 2021). Respondents thus crafted their jobs to meet their primary goals, focusing on the potential to earn relatively high wages without engaging with the organization itself. The cognitive process of creating boundaries forms a mechanism that deals with the criticism or stigmatization as insignificant (Geldenhuys et al., 2020), resulting in not perceiving potential occupational stigmatization. Reversed occupational stigmatization, however, was perceived by the gig workers, creating a feeling of guilt toward permanent employees because of the inconsistency in the pay disparity (Shantz & Booth, 2014).

Besides external stigmas, gig workers often label gig work as temporary, confirming and imposing certain stigmas upon themselves. Given the continuous need for personal development throughout life, goals are regularly reevaluated, also adjusting pathways (Heckhausen et al., 2010). Respondents indicated that gig work is frequently associated with a stage of life characterized by freedom and instability rather than being seen as a viable pathway to their long-term goals. The lack of connection and loyalty within gig work environments reduces motivation to remain active in the gig economy. As a result, securing a traditional job is perceived as the logical next step, as gig work does not seem like a sustainable option for meeting expectations.

While the stigmas associated with the gig economy arise from its inherent variability, these aspects are changing, leading to the loss of some of its original features. Because of the increased control of employers, availability on fixed days or having worked multiple times for the same employer is becoming increasingly important. The employers now have the power to control whom to hire when posting a gig, leading to a preference for known gig workers. In some cases, employers even offer work guarantees if these workers remain available for specific periods on the gig platform.

Limitations

In addition to the valuable findings of this study, there are limitations to consider with this research. Firstly, it is important to mention that these findings are based on a sample of twelve in-group collected respondents. Despite the primary goal of creating a deeper understanding of the perception of gig employees, this does harm the generalizability of the findings (Gheondea-Eladi, 2014). Additionally, relying on in-group respondents led to the sample being mainly students or young professionals. This created a relatively homogeneous sample, leading to a lower chance of variance in the answers, making it difficult to generalize to all gig workers.

Secondly, the data was created by asking self-created questions and analyzed via self-created codes. Despite trying to avoid influencing respondents' perceptions by drawing up open-ended, singular, clear, and neutral questions (Rosenthal, 2016), self-created questions can entail a particular form of interviewer bias. Trying to seek a specific confirmation that justifies the research question or explanation could have influenced the question creation and coding process (McSweeney, 2021). Opinions or stances could have affected objectivity, particularly

when assigning codes to themes and developing conclusions based on the collected data (Sandbergh, 1997).

Thirdly, due to the unfamiliarity with occupational stigmatization in the gig economy, a brief introduction was provided about what the research entailed. Despite the diversity of interview questions aimed at capturing various viewpoints, respondents frequently had preconceived responses prepared for questions related to the gig economy. This led to interviews that were sensitive to response bias, as respondents relied on the pre-received knowledge (Grimm, 2010). As a result, respondents may have had more time to craft their answers, potentially resulting in socially desirable responses or leaving out certain experiences encountered during their time as gig workers.

Future Research

Building on the implications, there are valuable avenues for future research. Firstly, besides a larger group, a more diverse age group of respondents could have provided insights into the significance of life phases in the perception of gig work (Dolnicar et al., 2016). While gig work appears appealing to younger generations, its suitability for those with, for example, family responsibilities remains challenging. Understanding this dynamic could benefit platforms, aiding retention and attracting a more diverse and new pool of gig workers.

Secondly, creating a questionnaire out of existing questions from existing sources would decrease the possibility of interviewer bias and increase the reliability and validity (Kallio et al., 2016). Although the interviewer would still select the questions, thus retaining some subjectivity, these questions would have been previously utilized in the literature. This approach would enhance the questionnaire's usability due to its prior use and provide guidance on analyzing the results. Additionally, having a small sample of professionals and non-professionals review the

interview beforehand could provide valuable insights into the quality of the questions (Aslam, 2022; Barriball & While, 1994).

Thirdly, an interview protocol should be created wherein the questions shape the respondents' understanding of the subject matter. If the respondent does not directly understand the question, create a set of follow-up questions, making the intended question more clear (Turner, 2014). Besides limiting preconceived responses, this approach has the potential to uncover new insights that neither the interviewer nor the respondent may have initially considered. This could result in less standardized answers, creating a more diverse dataset.

Practical Implications

The findings revealed that work in the gig economy is predominantly taken up by people between the ages of sixteen and thirty. This trend is due to their life stage and the availability of work. Adjusting to changes in life stages, such as family situations or relocation, is challenging when working in the gig economy. However, increasing the variety of job levels within gigs could encourage older and more highly educated individuals to remain active in gig work. This could lead to more full-time gig employment for individuals who enjoy and thrive in diverse work environments.

During gig work, gig workers reported experiencing almost no stigmatization. Instead, they felt a sense of guilt toward permanent employees who earned significantly less. The permanent workers did not typically instigate this feeling, but it was a self-instigated perception among gig workers. As a result, a misconception developed that permanent workers looked down on them. This issue could be mitigated by fostering better communication and understanding (Bittner & Leimeister, 2014). Introducing a brief introduction of the colleagues and an explanation of the work can create a more inclusive climate (Dresdow, 2022). This can

reduce perceptions of psychological boundaries, as an initial introduction is provided among colleagues and gig workers are informed about the basics of the work.

This increased sense of connection and responsibility to the job might encourage gig workers to invest more energy into the gig. Creating a reciprocal relationship between gig workers and employers, where effort is recognized and rewarded, can cultivate a more enjoyable work environment.

Conclusion

This study highlights the influence of stigmas imposed on the experiences of gig workers and their evolving perceptions of the gig economy's characteristics. Gig work was seen as a convenient way to earn during irregular periods, offering high wages and autonomy. Despite facing potential barriers and experiencing challenges, the benefits of gig work outweighed them, creating an overall sense of satisfaction. During gig work, gig workers noted certain forms of criticism; however, they never perceived them as stigmatization. The main factor that led to the absence of perceived stigmatization is the significant role of expectancy setting. Reframing gig work as less important or agreeing with and contributing to the existing stigmas surrounding its temporary nature nullified the criticism or stigmas imposed. A continuous shift in the perception of the characteristics of the gig economy thus occurs because of the expectancy setting by gig employees themselves. Creating overall satisfaction and the ability to avoid perceiving or internalizing criticism or stigmas.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Time Schedule

Date:	Phase:	Duration:
13/11/23 - 16/12/23	Discovering and reading into subject	4-8 hours
17/11/23 - 23/11/23	Finding necessary literature and articles to start IRP + handing in first research question	8 hours
23/11/23 - 29/11/23	Writing introduction + theoretical framework (developing research design)	30 hours
8/12/23 - 22/12/23	Adjusting introduction + theoretical framework based on feedback + writing methods	20 hours
23/12/23 - 08/01/24	Adjusting feedback IRP	14 hours
08/01/24-15/01/24	Fine Tuning full IRP	16 hours
01/02/24 - 10/02/24	Reaching out to organizations/respondents	
15/02/24 - 10/03/24	Conducting interviews + transcribing interviews	50 hours
10/03/24 - 30/03/24	Transcribing + coding interviews	50 hours
1/04/24 - 14/04/24	Examining and cleaning the gathered data + writing first parts of findings	30 hours
15/04/24 - 30/04/24	Finishing data collection, fully writing	20 hours
01/05/24 - 19/06/24	Finishing writing Master Thesis	50 hours

Appendix B

Consent Form

Self-initiated Proactive Work Behavior Among Employees Working in Unconventional Work Settings/Arrangements

Researchers

Rawan Ghazzawi, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Fleur de Beer, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Niels Stockman, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Jeanine Reeuwijk, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Manon van de Velde, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Karlijn van Vredendaal, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies
Department, Tilburg University

Signature

With your signature on the back of this consent statement, you voluntarily and consciously give permission to participate in this research. This does not waive your legal rights to withdraw your participation at any time.

With your signature you also indicate that you have read the information letter associated with this study in its entirety and that you agree with the following points:

- I have read and understood the information letter associated with this study in its entirety.
- I could ask additional questions about the research and these questions were answered sufficiently.
- I have had sufficient time to decide whether I want to participate in this study.
- I know that participation in this study is completely voluntary.
- I know that the investigation [to be completed] will continue.
- I know that I can decide to withdraw from participation at any time, without negative consequences, and that I do not have to give a reason for this.
- I know that I have the right to access, rectify, forget, restrict or prevent processing of my personal data.
- I know that my data will be processed as indicated in the information letter and that only the research team can view my data.
- I give permission to use my research data for the purposes stated in the information letter.
- I give permission to store my anonymized research data for the legal period of 10 years.

I hereby give voluntary and conscious consent to participate in the research:

Self-initiated Proactive Work Behavior Among Employees Working in Unconventional Work Settings/Arrangements.

Name contestant:

Signature: Date: ____ / ____ / _____

To be completed by researcher(s):

I hereby declare that I have fully informed the above participant about the above-mentioned research.

Name of researcher:

Signature: Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Appendix C

Information Letter

Self-initiated Proactive Work Behavior Among Employees Working in Unconventional Work Settings/Arrangements

Researchers

Rawan Ghazzawi, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Fleur de Beer, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Niels Stockman, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
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Jeanine Reeuwijk, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
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Manon van de Velde, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies Department,
Tilburg University

Karlijn van Vredendaal, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: HR Studies
Department, Tilburg University

Introduction

This letter contains important information about this investigation and associated rules. Please read this letter carefully and ask any questions before agreeing to participate.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

Goal

The present research aims to investigate the self-initiated proactive work Behavior among employees working in unconventional work settings/arrangements and such behaviors might influence their work environment, wellbeing, and the way they perceive their work. In the context of this study, unconventional work settings/arrangements include working as gig workers or as interim HR managers where the chances of you not remaining in the organization after the end of your project/gig are high.

Background

Proactive work behavior refers to actions taken by individuals within an organization to anticipate, prevent, or initiate change in response to emerging opportunities or challenges. It involves taking initiative, being forward-thinking, and actively seeking ways to improve work processes, solve problems, or achieve goals without necessarily being prompted by others. Organizations are increasingly prompting such behaviors among employees as they know that are driven by urges to satisfy basic needs at work and to make work better matching with preferences, abilities, and strengths. There are several types of proactive work behavior and we know a lot already about this behavior in different professional contexts, however our knowledge about it in the context of Unconventional Work Settings/Arrangements is limited.

Nature and duration

We will conduct an interview with you. During this interview, we will ask you various questions about the general tasks that you do and some of the behaviors and consequent feelings and effects that you experience at work. Please read the listen to the questions carefully and answer them as you see fit. The interview will take up to 60 minutes.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

Contents

Participation in this research involves being in an interview and answering some questions about your behavior at work, what you think, and how you feel about it. The interview is divided into parts and each part will address an aspect related to the main research question.

Disadvantages/consequences

Our research involves no physical or psychological harm. Yet, if you may find any of the questions disturbing, or feel uncomfortable to answer them you are free to leave them unanswered or to terminate your participation. There will be no negative consequences from this.

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION

Voluntary participation

We ask for your permission to participate in the study during the duration of this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate in this study. If you decide to stop participating during the study, you can do so at any time without any negative consequences and without giving a reason. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer.

The researchers can end the study at any time. The decision to end the experiment may be made to protect your health and safety, or because the research plan requires that people who do not meet certain conditions or do not strictly follow the instructions cannot participate.

What are my rights? [For personal data]

As a participant you have the right to inspect, rectify, forget, restrict or prevent processing of your personal data. For more information, see: <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/nl/privacy>

Processing results and confidentiality of data

All information collected about you will be treated confidentially. You will be identified in the investigation by a code name, or number. Information that personally identifies you will not be released without your written permission.

Storage period of the research data

The anonymized research data will be stored securely for a period of 10 years and only the researchers will have access to it. When the results of this research are published or presented at conferences, no information that could reveal your identity will be included. The anonymized data can be used for follow-up research or other studies and will be made available anonymously for this purpose.

Data processing

The first part of the interview, which contains the demographic information will be deleted permanently as it is only required for descriptive purposes and will be used in aggregate format.

The rest of the data collected from these interviews will be checked and information about the jobs or the organizations in which the participants work (names, sizes, sectors, etc.) will be de-identified. None of the data stored will include any identifying information or any information that can link any answer to any participant.

Compensation

Participation in this study will not be reimbursed.

Approval from the Ethical Review Committee

This study has been approved by the ethics review board (ERB) of Tilburg University under file number TSB_RP1429 .

Participation

If you would like to participate in this study, you can give your consent by signing the [attached consent statement. / click 'agree' on the next page and continue with the research.]

Contact

For questions about this research, please contact:

Rawan Ghazzawi

r.ghazzawi@tilburguniversity.edu

Appendix

Declaration of Consent

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Confidentiality:

Before we proceed, I want to assure you that your responses will be treated confidentially. How do you feel about sharing your experiences, and do you have any concerns or preferences about the interview process? (consent form)

Opening:

Introducing myself + the thesis subject

- Can you please introduce yourself? (name, age, educational background, situation at home, career path and current job)
- Can you provide some background on how you entered the gig economy? (why did you enter the gig economy?)
- How would you describe your overall experiences of working in the gig economy?

Nature of gig work:

- Can you please describe your job and the main tasks that you do?
- How does gig work differ from traditional employment structures?
- Can you provide an example of a specific gig task or project you've worked on and how it was structured? (from finding the gig, to finishing the gig)
- What are the main resources that you encounter at the gigs you have taken on?
- What are the main demands that you encounter at the gigs you have taken on?

Challenges and opportunities

- What challenges have you encountered in the gig economy? (for example regarding job insecurity or precarious situations?)

- What opportunities are there for employees working in the gig economy? (compared to traditional labor)
- Reflecting on your own experiences, how have you personally addressed job demands within the gig economy? (Job insecurity, labor standards, precarious situations)
- Which aspects of gig work and the gig industry do you find attractive? (keep you committed to keep on working within the gig economy: autonomy, task variety, compensation, duration etc.)
- Have you encountered any differences between what you expected of the “gig” and what you had to do in reality?
- What are critical factors for the suppliers of gig work to make sure the expectations align with the job that you have taken on? (critical factors to make expectations by the employee as close as possible to reality?)
- Do you think certain factors impede the attractiveness of the gig economy? (What factors contribute to you NOT choosing a gig?)
- When defining your ideal job, what specific aspects do you prioritize to feel fulfilled?
- Which elements of your desired job criteria are met by gig work?
- In what aspects does the gig economy fall short in fulfilling your job preferences?

Occupational Stigmatization:

Explanation occupational stigmatization!

- Moving on to occupational stigmatization, have you personally felt or observed stigmatization associated with your occupation as a gig worker? (How does this compare with external assumptions?)

- Do you feel any pressure from the opinions of outsiders? (social media, articles, committees)
- Do you feel the pressures of the outsiders impact the overall view onto the gig economy?
- In your opinion, how much of the negative stereotypes surrounding gig work are internalized by gig workers?
- Reflecting on your experiences, how does internalized occupational stigma impact you at work? (satisfaction, health, safety, overall enjoyment)
- Do you want to proceed with gig employment over traditional employment? (now or the upcoming 5 years)
- What are the main reasons for this opinion?
- Thinking about your experience with gig work, what skills do you think they helped you develop individually?
- Thinking about your experiences with gig work, what skills do you think they helped you develop as a team?

Closing:

- Thank you for sharing your insights today. How do you feel about the discussion we've had, and is there anything you found particularly interesting or noteworthy?
- Your input is very helpful for a more thorough understanding of the gig economy from the perspective of those actively engaged in it. Thank you for your time and openness during this interview. If there's anything that comes to mind later or if you have additional thoughts, feel free to reach out.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol (Dutch)

Vertrouwelijkheid:

Voordat we verder gaan, wil ik u verzekeren dat uw antwoorden vertrouwelijk zullen worden behandeld. Hoe staat u tegenover het delen van uw ervaringen, en heeft u bezwaren of voorkeuren met betrekking tot het interview proces? (toestemmingsformulier)

Opening:

- Zichzelf voorstellen + het onderwerp van het proefschrift
- Kunt u zich voorstellen? (naam, leeftijd, onderwijsachtergrond, thuissituatie, loopbaantraject en huidige baan)
- Kunt u wat achtergrond geven over hoe u in de zogenoemde gig economy terecht bent gekomen? (Waarom bent u in de gig economy gestapt?)
- Hoe zou u uw algehele ervaringen met werken in de gig economy beschrijven?

Aard van gig work:

- Kunt u alstublieft uw baan en de belangrijkste taken die u uitvoert beschrijven?
- Hoe verschilt gig work van traditionele arbeidsstructuren?
- Kunt u een voorbeeld geven van een specifieke taak of project waar u aan hebt gewerkt en hoe het was gestructureerd? (van het vinden van de klus tot het afronden ervan)
- Wat zijn de belangrijkste middelen waarmee u te maken krijgt bij de klussen die u hebt aangenomen?
- Wat zijn de belangrijkste eisen waarmee u te maken krijgt bij de klussen die u hebt aangenomen?

Uitdagingen en kansen:

- Welke uitdagingen heeft u ondervonden in de gig economy? (bijvoorbeeld met betrekking tot baanzekerheid of preciaire situaties?)
- Welke kansen zijn er voor werknemers die in de gig economy werken? (vergeleken met traditionele arbeid)
- Terugkijkend op uw eigen ervaringen, hoe bent u persoonlijk omgegaan met de eisen van werk in de gig economy? (baanzekerheid, arbeidsnormen, preciaire situaties)
- Welke aspecten van gig work en de gig-industrie vindt u aantrekkelijk? (Wat houdt u gemotiveerd om in de gig economy te blijven werken: autonomie, taakvariatie, compensatie, duur, enz.)
- Heeft u verschillen ervaren tussen wat u verwachtte van de "gig" en wat u in werkelijkheid moest doen?
- Wat zijn cruciale factoren voor de aanbieders van gig work om ervoor te zorgen dat de verwachtingen overeenkomen met het werk dat u hebt aangenomen? (essentiële factoren om ervoor te zorgen dat de verwachtingen van de werknemer zo dicht mogelijk bij de realiteit liggen?)
- Denkt u dat bepaalde factoren de aantrekkelijkheid van de gig economy belemmeren? (Welke factoren dragen ertoe bij dat u GEEN gig kiest?)
- Bij het definiëren van jouw ideale baan, welke specifieke aspecten geef je prioriteit om voldoening te voelen?
- Welke elementen van jouw gewenste baan criteria worden vervuld door flexwerk?

- Op welke gebieden schiet de gig economie tekort in het vervullen van jouw baan/voorkeuren?

Occupational stigmatization:

- Heeft u persoonlijk stigmatisering ervaren of waargenomen in verband met uw beroep als gig worker? (Hoe verhoudt dit zich tot externe aannames?)
- Voelt u enige druk van de meningen van buitenstaanders? (sociale media, artikelen, committees)
- Denkt u dat de druk van buitenstaanders invloed heeft op het algehele beeld van de gig economy?
- Naar uw mening, hoeveel van de negatieve stereotypen rond gig work worden geïnternaliseerd door gig workers?
- Terugkijkend op uw ervaringen, hoe beïnvloedt de geïnternaliseerde Occupational stigmatisatie u op het werk? (tevredenheid, gezondheid, veiligheid, geheel plezier)
- Zou u doorgaan met gig work boven traditioneel werk? (nu of in de komende 5 jaar)
- Wat zijn de belangrijkste redenen voor deze mening?
- Denkend aan uw ervaring met gig work, welke vaardigheden denkt u dat het u individueel heeft helpen ontwikkelen?
- Denkend aan uw ervaringen met gig work, welke vaardigheden denkt u dat het u heeft helpen ontwikkelen als team?
- Hoe zou u uw algehele ervaringen met werken in de gig economy beschrijven?

Afsluiting:

Bedankt voor het delen van uw inzichten vandaag. Hoe voelt u zich over het gesprek dat we hebben gehad, en is er iets dat u bijzonder interessant of opmerkelijk vond?

Uw input is zeer nuttig voor een grondig begrip van de gig economy vanuit het perspectief van degenen die er actief bij betrokken zijn. Bedankt voor uw tijd en openheid tijdens dit interview.

Als er later nog iets in u opkomt of als u aanvullende gedachten hebt, voel u dan vrij om contact op te nemen.

Appendix F

Data Structure

