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## **JOY OF GIG WORK?! A STUDY OF MALAYSIAN GIG WORKERS**

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### **Abstract**

The gig economy is taking up a substantial portion of the workforce in recent years, be it globally or in Malaysia. The nature of gig work brought out the concern for gig workers' well-being whereby most of the gig work is interrupting their daily routine. Thus, the level of gig workers' happiness call for attention. The gig workers' happiness should receive equal attention as the conventional workers. With this set the significance to study the joy of gig work. Also, at present, there is a knowledge gap of gig workers. This study aims to identify the determinant of the joy of gig work. Generally, the Joy of Gig Work is the intense pleasure or happiness brought on by something very satisfying or wonderful in a gig working environment. This study focused on low-skilled gig workers in Malaysia through judgmental sampling technique. A total of 212 survey responses were collected for analysis. The findings indicated that job autonomy has no significant relationship with the joy of gig work, while motivation and work-life balance does bring effect on joy of gig work. The findings of this study contribute to society especially to the economy, company platform and individuals that consider participating in gig economy.

**Keywords :** Gig Economy, Joy of Gig Work, Job Autonomy, Motivation, Work-Life Balance, Low-skilled Gig Workers, Malaysia

### **Introduction**

#### **The Gig Economy**

'Gig economy' has recently been more prominent due to the rising digitalization of the economy and the evolvement of technology, which has lowered the barrier to entry and allowed the gig economy broadly available. Besides, the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to high unemployment leading people to start paying greater attention to the gig economy. This effect persisted even after the pandemic was contained (Henderson, 2020). The "gig economy" is defined as "the

exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies through digital platforms that actively facilitate matches between services suppliers (gig workers) and customers on a short-term and pay-per-task basis.” (Lepanjuuri, et al., 2018; Woodcock & Graham, 2019). The gig economy platform allows service providers and consumers to break down traditional business barriers and connect with each other in an easily collaborative economy through platforms (Zaman et al., 2020). The gig economy also offers a virtual marketplace for on-demand peer-to-peer work, which is characterised using online applications and digital platforms (Mohsin et al., 2022). This has brought about a transformation of the workforce, which has led to short-lived, unstable, and fragmented work (Woodcock & Graham, 2019), and drives the rise of the gig economy.

### **The Trend of Gig Economy**

According to Statista (2021), there is a consistently growing trend in the gross volume of the gig economy from 2018 to 2023 in the United State. In fact, it is projected to continue in the coming years. The worldwide pandemic outbreak indirectly stimulated the development of the gig economy, which saw a rapid rise in growth trends in a brief amount of time (Henderson, 2020). Furthermore, in the last two years, the labour market in the U.S. has changed dramatically because of the pandemic but freelancing remained constant. It is predicted that 52% of the American workforce will participate in the gig economy (Kolmar, 2022). This demonstrates that the gig economy is gaining a foothold in the U.S. Zooming into Malaysia, “The Gig Economy in Malaysia, 2022” reported that nearly 30% (5 million) of employees reportedly are engaged in the gig economy and the numbers have been growing since then. The flexibility of gig work from working hours and locations to the choice of type of work are among the drivers for such an increase (Azahar, 2020). There are various reasons for the increase in the gig workforce. It was noted that besides of search for extra income, some are getting their main source of income from gig work (Azahar, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

As the gig economy gradually represents a larger portion of the workforce, the joy of gig workers may be a critical factor for company platforms to consider in terms of perpetuating their business and people to choose whether to engage in the gig economy. The nature of gig works, however, urges gig workers more vulnerable to mental health problems by excessive flexibility to have an impact on the development of the gig economy. Therefore, investigating the elements that influence the joy of gig work is worthwhile.

There are some concerns about gig work that must not be overlooked. First off, gig workers are frequently deprived of conventional workers’ benefits. Company platforms that operate in the gig economy do not offer benefits to these workers since gig workers are not engaging in a formal employment contract with the company. Additionally, working as a gig worker can lead to isolation and have a detrimental effect on individual’s mental health (Corporate Finance Institute, 2022). Furthermore, due to disruptions in daily routine, gig workers working non-standard shifts are more vulnerable to mental health concerns (Shahzadi et al., 2022). This has

been highlighted in a survey titled "What Percentage of Our Lives" 2020, whereby people spend at least 30% of their lives working, forming a major part of adult life, and some people equate happiness with the number of hours spent at work. As work is an activity that shapes individuals, it can be stressful or dull, taxing, uninteresting, overly complex, or meaningless, and even human beings may be dissatisfied with the time they are forced to spend at work (Bataineh, 2019). Besides, joy plays an important role in mental health. It is an engagement that provides increased satisfaction and personal pay-off at a deep level. It leads to a wholly favourable, even joyous, experience. It is crucial in the work environment because these experiences enable individuals to distance themselves from the more trying or frustrating facets of work life (Suzanne, 2017).

In addition, gig worker is an integral part in gig economy as they are the service provider. It has therefore become particularly important to study on the reason that effect joy at work in the context of the gig economy. The study by Jena and Pradhan (2017) demonstrates the significance of eudemonic features in behavioural science, particularly in working contexts, and it also invites researchers to investigate the potential causes, implications, and mediating and modifying variables of workplace joy. Therefore, we would like to propose this research to understand the phenomena of gig workers, especially the joy of gig work, by deeply studying the instruments that influence the joy of gig work. This demonstrates the reason and importance of why this study was conducted.

### **Significance of Study**

The rapid growth of the gig economy due to the pandemic has spurred research interest. The results of this study could provide some description of the current phenomenon of sharing economy workers as well as an understanding of the state of the joy of gig workers in Malaysia. The findings may help Malaysia companies to better understand the factors affecting gig workers' joy at work to attract workers. The current research shed light on the contributing factors to the joy of gig work to ensure the continued growth of the sharing economy. Furthermore, this study provides another perspective of the gig economy of what is supposed to be considered before individuals participate in the gig economy to achieve the joy of gig work.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Joy of Gig Work**

The joy at work concluded by Manion, J. (2003) is a strongly favourable, vivid, and expansive feeling that results from a circumstance or occurrence outside of oneself or from an internal condition in the workplace. De Neve and Ward (2017) indicated that joy will only occur when there are the required conditions or occasions. Hinchliffe, (2022) also mentioned that joy at work is related to the 'happiness of belonging to a career'. Then, the effect of feeling itself may last for a long time as the memory of pleasure is lasting and free to revisit (Harris, 2022).

Achieving one's performance and potential can be made simpler when one is having joy at work. The idea of joy at work has also been defined as taking pleasure in good working relationships and career advancement, as well as being appreciated and well-treated (Edmunds & Pryce-Jones, 2008). Previous studies mentioned that the joy of employees is correlated with their success at work, which also motivates workers to handle challenging tasks and increases job satisfaction. Therefore, joyful employees' turnover is lower than unjoyful ones (Oswald et al., 2009). As current research focuses on the gig economy, the joy of work will also focus on gig workers.

### **Job Autonomy**

Hackman and Oldham (1975) defined Job Autonomy as the extent to which the position offers significant flexibility, independence, and discretion in terms of how work is scheduled and how it is carried out such as the method or timing of the task completed (Marchese & Ryan, 2001; Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger & Hemingway, 2005; Parker, Axtell & Turner, 2001). It may also be described as the freedom and choice inherent in the work to carry out a variety of responsibilities (Brey, 1999). Autonomous individuals are free to choose their work speed, regulate their work processes, and decide how they will be evaluated. Individuals with high job autonomy are less restricted by environmental circumstances than those with low autonomy. (Gellatly & Irving, 2001). In addition, according to Hooks and Higgs (2000), a flexible working arrangement is a shift in the working environment, such as not being required to work the same or as many hours as established by the employer and without necessitating a reduction in total working hours. Farhana Hanim Moshin et al., (2022) also mentioned those gig workers involved in the gig economy have greater Job Autonomy. This is due to the gig economy encouraging workers to work as bosses, thus providing them with flexible and fully independent schedules and methods to perform their tasks as well as app-enabled employment that is pay-for-effort and dispersed income-based (Ravenelle, 2019).

### **Motivation**

Motivation is defined as the forces working on or within a person to initiate behaviour (Petri, 2022). It also refers to a decision-making process that allows individuals to choose their intended results and implement the necessary behaviours to achieve those desired objectives (Chen et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Motivation can be classified as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is most characterized as doing something solely for the purpose of doing it rather than for any other reason (Amabile et al., 1994; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Reiss, 2012), usually because the work itself is fascinating, engaging, or fulfilling in some manner. When a person is intrinsically motivated, he or she is motivated to perform because it is enjoyable or challenging. Employees can be intrinsically motivated by some components of their work, and they will display high-quality performance and happiness (Gagné & Deci, 2005). The extrinsic motivation was defined as a construct that occurs anytime an activity is accomplished to achieve a certain reward such as monetary incentives (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Strictly speaking, most of what people do is not driven by intrinsic motivation, especially in adulthood, when the freedom of intrinsic motivation is increasingly limited by social pressures to do activities that do not interest them and by the need to take on various new responsibilities

(Ryan & La Guardia). Thus, extrinsic motivation is important as it is a tool for an organization to encourage workers. They will feel motivated, continue to perform well, and contribute to the business when organisations recognise their performance and provide extrinsic motivation in financial and non-financial forms. Recognition and prizes also enable employees to remain dedicated to the organisation (Brun and Dugas, 2008).

### **Work-life Balance**

Work-life balance (WLB) is defined as a balance between personal life (varied facets of life) and work life (Karthik. 2013; Rashmi & Kataria, 2021; Otken & Erben, 2013). Almost everyone's daily life is separated into two parts which are time spent at work and time spent away from work such as family life or friend life. Thus, WLB is also defined by Kirchmeyer (2000) as having a satisfying experience in numerous facets of life. It also refers to a person's numerous life duties and the satisfaction or contentment gained from executing the work-family activity (Rao et al., 2018). Work-life balance is now recognised as a critical problem for both organisations and employees to address. As individuals play several roles in contemporary life such as wife, daughter, mother, father, employee, friend, and spouse. Thus, conflicts are unavoidably developed due to the demands of these various positions (Otken & Erben, 2013). The significance of work-life conflict has been extensively researched. According to Agarwal et al. (2009), organizations that place a greater emphasis on work-life balance should expect their employees to be more efficient both at work and at home. Today, many firms use organisational policies and human resource initiatives to assist their workers in reducing conflict and balancing work and life domains (Otken & Erben, 2013).

### **Underpinning Theories**

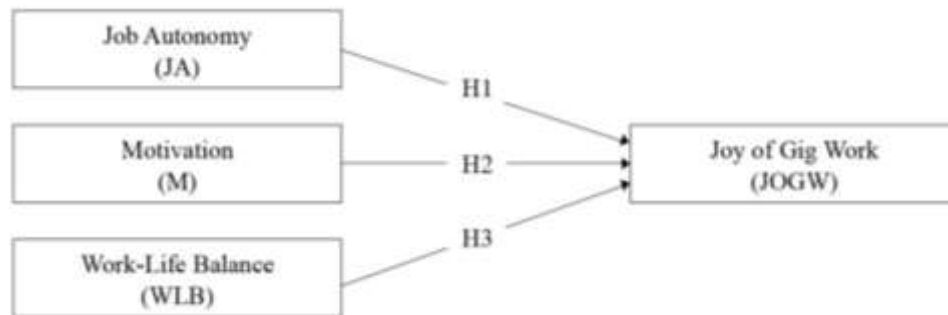
There are three underpinning theories that guided this study. First, Self-determination theory (SDT) is a general explanation of motivation, personality, and well-being in individuals proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). The theory mainly focuses on volitional or self-determined behaviour and the circumstances that support it, as well as several fundamental and universal psychological needs, namely those for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are thought to be crucial for vital, healthy human functioning (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Next, the Job Characteristic Model (JCM) by Hackman and Oldham (1975) is widely used as the basis for management techniques that increase motivation, improve job performance, and improve employee joy at work while lowering absenteeism and increasing commitment. Numerous working outcomes, including employee motivation and joy, are correlated with well-designed jobs (Ho et al., 2020). The research findings also revealed a favourable and significant relationship between job characteristics and employees' joy at work (Hermanto, 2018; Hamid Al Khalil, 2017). Also, Anbari et al. (2014) discovered a robust connection between job characteristics and joy at work. Lastly, Social exchange theory (SET). SET is one of the most significant conceptual models for explaining workplace behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It describes how employees attain task performance and commit to their companies, which is a prominent approach to the issue of work-life balance (Hoffmann-Burdzińska & Rutkowska, 2015). The SET is applied in this study proposed by Blau (1984) that social exchange happens when both parties value the exchange relationship based on mutual trust



and reciprocity, these engagements are typically viewed as interdependent and dependent on the actions of others (Blau, 1964). A previous study also discovered that employees with a work-life balance will increase their happiness at work by having organizational pride as a mediator (Mas-Machuca et al., 2016). Thus, SET is applied in the current study to explain the relationship between independent variables (WLB) and the dependent variable (JOGW).

**Proposed Conceptual Framework**

The afore-discussed theories led to the development of the proposed conceptual framework of this study as illustrated below. In this study, the self-determination theory is used to describe the relationship between JA, Motivation and JOGW respectively. Besides, the job characteristic model is used to explain the relationship between JA and JOGW. Lastly, the relationship between WLB and JOGW will explain by the social exchange theory.



**Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework.**

The hypotheses are developed:

- H1: Job Autonomy influences the Joy of Gig Work in Malaysia.*
- H2: Motivation influences the Joy of Gig Work in Malaysia.*
- H3: Work-Life Balance influences the Joy of Gig Work in Malaysia.*

**Research Methodology**

This study adopted the quantitative research and self-administered survey strategy. It is adopted in the present research because the objective is to gather new data relevant to the issue from sizable populations and analyze the data by applying study-relevant hypotheses and theories. Also, the self-administered survey approach is used in the present study to gather quantitative data since it can increase respondent rates as the identity would remain anonymous. Moreover, the survey instrument was developed by using online survey tools and distributed online and physically.

The target respondents of this study are low-skilled gig workers who live in Malaysia, specifically in the states of Selangor and W.P. KL as it is supported by DOSM (2021) that the economic activity mainly focuses in urban areas. The judgmental sampling technique is applied in this study. The judgement criteria are basically based on the respondent involved in work that low

skill in the gig, and also those gig workers that wearing a uniform while working. GPower software was used to calculate the required sample size for a significant result. It reveals that the ideal sample size is 119 while the actual number collected was 212 respondents.

## Data Analysis

### Descriptive Analysis

The demographic of the respondents is presented in the following Table 1.

**Table 1**

<b>Demographic</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Age	Below 20	26	12.26%
	21 – 25	96	45.28%
	26 – 30	37	17.45%
	31 – 35	26	12.26%
	36 – 40	10	4.72%
	41 – 45	8	3.77%
	46 – 50	3	1.42%
	51 and above	6	2.83%
Gender	Male	203	95.75%
	Female	9	4.25%
Education Level	Primary School	2	0.94%
	Secondary School	88	41.51%
	Foundation / STPM / A-level / UEC	23	10.85%
	Diploma	71	33.49%
	Undergraduate	26	12.26%
	Postgraduate	2	0.94%
Living State	Johor	11	5.19%
	Kedah	1	0.47%
	Kelantan	6	2.83%
	Kuala Lumpur	58	27.36%
	Melaka	26	12.26%
	Negeri Sembilan	23	10.85%
	Pahang	2	0.94%
	Perak	2	0.94%
	Pulau Pinang	1	0.47%
	Sarawak	1	0.47%
	Selangor	80	37.74%
	Terengganu	1	0.47%
Source of Income	Primary Source of Income	136	64.15%
	Secondary Source of Income	76	35.85%

	Yes, most of the time	153	72.17%
	Yes, rarely	58	27.36%
	No, never	1	0.47%
<hr/>			
<i>Spend Enough Time with Family</i>	Yes	103	48.58%
	No	18	8.49%
	Sometimes	91	42.92%

Source: Developed for the research

## Inferential Analysis

### Measurement Model

To assess the measurement model, indicator reliability, consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated. Figure 2 demonstrated the path model of the measurement model.

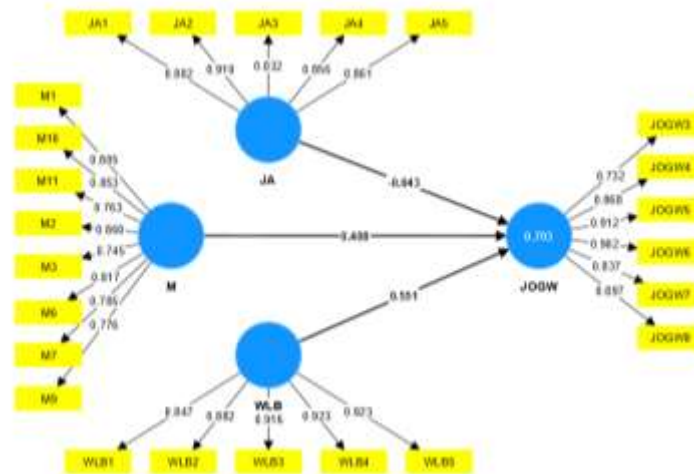


Figure 2: Measurement Model

Indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity are all examined, and results are presented in Table 2. The indicators' reliability is satisfactory with all indicators' outer loadings above the 0.708 criteria except for items M4, M5, M8, JOGW1, and JOGW2, thus being deleted. The internal consistency reliability is achieved since all constructs' composite reliability scored over the 0.7 level and all AVE values are above the 0.5 thresholds.

### Table 2



Construct Measurement	Items	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
<b>Job Autonomy (JA)</b>	JA1	0.802	0.914	0.728
	JA2	0.910		
	JA3	0.832		
	JA4	0.856		
	JA5	0.861		
<b>Motivation (M)</b>	M1	0.805	0.922	0.642
	M2	0.860		
	M3	0.745		
	M6	0.817		
	M7	0.785		
	M9	0.776		
	M10	0.853		
	M11	0.763		
<b>Work-Life Balance (WLB)</b>	WLB1	0.847	0.942	0.808
	WLB2	0.882		
	WLB3	0.916		
	WLB4	0.923		
	WLB5	0.923		
<b>Joy of Gig Work (JOGW)</b>	JOGW3	0.732	0.935	0.740
	JOGW4	0.868		
	JOGW5	0.912		
	JOGW6	0.902		
	JOGW7	0.837		
	JOGW8	0.897		

Source: Developed for the research

Table 3 outlined the discriminant validity with HTMT ratio, and it was fulfilled in this study since the HTMT ratios of correlations were lower than the suggested threshold level of 0.85 shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

	JA	JOGW	M	WLB
JA				
JOGW	0.628			
M	0.774	0.785		
WLB	0.655	0.833	0.682	

Source: Developed for the research

## Structural Model

The structural model was tested by collinearity, path coefficient, and coefficient of determinant. Table 4 outlines the result of the structural assessment and the result from H1 to H3. The collinearity is satisfactory since the value of each item is lower than 3. This indicates that there

are not collinearity issues occur. Furthermore,  $R^2$  denotes the percentage of variance in a model's construct. The  $R^2$  computed for the tested model is 0.703 (Adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.699). The finding almost met the 0.75 criterion for substantial explanatory power. Therefore, the finding implies that the model has a modest level of explanatory power. Moreover, the  $f^2$  computed for Job Autonomy is 0.003 which displays a small effect size on JOGW; 0.241 computed for Motivation represents a moderate effect size on JOGW; 0.558 computed for Work-Life Balance shows a large effect size on JOGW. The structural model's findings supported H2 and H3, implying that motivation and work-life balance significantly influence the joy of gig work. The results indicate that work-life balance ( $\beta=0.551$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) is the strongest predictor and motivation ( $\beta=0.408$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) is another predictor of joy of gig work. Meanwhile, H1 is not supported ( $\beta= -0.043$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), indicating that job autonomy has no impact on the joy of gig work.

**Table 4**

Relationship	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	LB (2.5%)	UB (97.5%)	VIF	Result
<b>H1: JA → JOGW</b>	-0.043	0.620	0.536	-0.215	0.073	2.203	Not Significant
<b>H2: M → JOGW</b>	0.408	4.136	0.000	0.219	0.600	2.325	Significant
<b>H3: WLB → JOGW</b>	0.551	6.585	0.000	0.381	0.701	1.831	Significant

Source: Developed for the research

## Discussion

Past studies conclude that job autonomy has an effect on the joy of gig work but not in the current study. This might be due to the fact that job autonomy exists more among high-skilled gig workers (Wheatley, 2017), but the scope of the current study only focuses on the low-skilled gig workers in Malaysia. Wheatley (2017) also mentioned that low-skilled workers report that they have no job autonomy. These findings are consistent with evidence from past research (Eustace, 2012; Sallaz, 2015). This can be proved as gig platforms frequently utilize algorithms and terms and conditions to exert some control over workers (Duggan et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019), and platform gig workers' autonomy and earning potential are frequently limited (Ravenelle, 2019).

In terms of the relationship between motivation and joy of gig work in Malaysia, this study uncovered that there is a significant relationship. According to Oerlemans and Bakker (2018), the findings revealed that the perceived availability of motivating job characteristics during work activities is related to joy during the work activity. The results that the relationship between motivation (including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) and joy of gig work is significant and consistent with previous findings (e.g.: Fishbach & Woolley, 2022; Gupta et al., 2020; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018; Steers & Sánchez-Runde, 2017; Abdullah Al Mamun & Nazmul Hasan, 2017). Therefore, motivation will affect the joy of gig work in Malaysia.

Lastly, the relationship between work-life balance and the joy of gig work in Malaysia, demonstrated a significant effect, which is consistent with the previous studies. (Fotiadis et al., 2019; Hoffmann-Burdzińska & Rutkowska, 2015; Mas-Machuca et al., 2016). Besides, Rao,

Vijaya Lakshmi & Goswami (2018) conclude that work-life balance is a factor, and it influences happiness at work. Work-life balance appears as a very predictive factor of people's happiness (Helliwell et al., 2017). There is the strongest relationship exists between work-life balance and the joy of gig work. Thus, gig workers that achieve work-life balance will enjoy the joy at work.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, motivation and work-life balance have a significant relationship with the joy of gig work. Nevertheless, there is no significant relationship between job autonomy and the joy of gig work. The findings are able to fill the previous research gap as it studies the factor of joy at work in the gig economy context, and the current study has contributed some valuable insights and implications to economy, society and individuals.

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