

EVALUATION OF GIG ECONOMY AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE MEDIA DESIGN STUDENTS: STUDY IN MALAYSIA

Amina Syarfina Abu Bakar

*School of Arts, Sunway University, Malaysia
College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi
MARA, Malaysia*

Noor Hafizah Hassan

*School of Engineering and Technology,
Sunway University, Malaysia*

Corresponding Author
aminasyarfina909@gmail.com

Abstract: The process of digitalization has had a profound impact on the business landscape. The realm of employment has transitioned from a traditional approach to a more adaptable and smooth manner. The emergence of a gig economy has facilitated the development of more design professional opportunities, resulting in an increase in overall designer employment. Opportunities that have subsequently enhanced the country's design economy. This alternative occupation is commonly known as "freelancing", which involves working on a project-by-project basis. In Malaysia, there is a deficiency in awareness and knowledge regarding this topic, necessitating further study and investigation. Prior research conducted in Malaysia has identified various obstacles that the gig economy encounters, including issues related to work stability, safety measures, protective policies, appropriate platforms, and effective distribution. Therefore, further research is necessary to investigate more effective strategies for the growth and execution of gig communities. numerous researchers about the topic. This study seeks to investigate awareness and knowledge among undergraduate creative media design students in Malaysia with Focus Group Discussion (FGD) methodology. The findings will expedite the creation of enhanced platforms and communities for a gig economy. They will offer valuable insights on the benefits of gig and enhance the existing data and information available to policymakers, employers, and design practitioners.

Keywords: gig economy, awareness, knowledge, undergraduate student, creative media design

1. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia setting, gig economy views as a progressive industry. This type of employment refers to the utilization of digital platforms for the execution of temporary tasks by freelancers or self-employed individuals in exchange for financial remuneration including designers. Propelled by technological progress and evolving patterns of employment the gig economy of design industry in Malaysia has been steadily expanding. The increase in the technology sector is mostly driven by the emergence of digital platforms such as Fiver, Grab, FoodPanda, and freelance websites, which have encouraged the expansion of gig employment. Due to Covid19 pandemic, there is a high need for flexibility in work arrangements, with both employers and workers desiring the ability to have flexible schedules. Employees value the independence and diverse prospects, while businesses gain advantages in terms of cost reduction and the flexibility to easily adjust to different scales of operation. The gig economy offers an alternate means of earning money for individuals impacted by economic recessions or seeking to augment their income. Nevertheless, the concerns over job security, safety protocols, protective regulations, suitable platforms, and efficient distribution persist. Gig workers frequently may not have access to the benefits and safeguards that are typically available to full-time employees, such as health insurance and retirement plans. Earnings may fluctuate and be uncertain, resulting in financial instability. The legal framework concerning gig work is now in a state of development, with ongoing discussions over the classification of workers and their rights. Gig workers face restricted availability of social security plans, unemployment benefits, and other types of social protection. To effectively address these difficulties, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the awareness and knowledge around the gig economy at all levels (Roy, 2020). The understanding and involvement of gig economy stakeholders are crucial in ensuring that gig economy initiatives and growth can benefit the Malaysian economy and its citizens. Thus, this study aims to address the following objectives: 1) to examine awareness of gig economy among Malaysian undergraduate, 2) to investigate knowledge of gig economy among Malaysian undergraduate and 3) to propose strategies on gig economy development

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gig Economy in Malaysia

The Malaysian government is implementing various measures, such as policy development, to enhance the regulation of the gig economy and safeguard the rights of workers. The Self-Employment Social Security Scheme implemented by SOCSO seeks to offer a certain degree of safeguard to gig workers in terms of Social Security.

Training and Development: Initiatives are being implemented to promote the employability and revenue potential of gig workers by providing them with various training programs to improve their skills (Herrmann, et al., 2023). The gig economy is thriving in various sectors in Malaysia. Ride-hailing and delivery services are dominated by companies such as Grab and Foodpanda, which provide employment opportunities to a large number of Malaysians. Freelancing platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr have empowered Malaysians to provide a wide range of skills, including graphic design, writing, and programming. E-commerce has led to a significant increase in gig opportunities for logistics and delivery services due to the growing popularity of online shopping (Anggarini, 2022) (Jacques, 2019)

The Ministry of Human Resource of Malaysia has adopted a proactive strategy on the Gig economy since 2019. This policy focuses on the endeavour of "Futurizing the Future of Work" (Uchiyama, et.al, 2022). Technological progress and innovation have a profound impact on every facet of human existence. In addition to individuals, changes in work patterns can have an impact. It is essential to comprehend the gig economy's environment in relation to the development of youth under the Twelve Malaysian Plan (RM12) (2021-2025). This plan aims to reset the economy, enhance security, promote well-being and inclusivity, and advance sustainability (Amirah, 2022) (Doshi, 2020). The Malaysia MADANI method focuses on promoting economic and financial initiatives, with a particular emphasis on youth, including raising awareness among students in higher education institutions. In contemporary times, students are increasingly inclined towards engaging in freelance work or project-based employment, such as designing, event crew, part-time modelling, or even becoming social media influencers (Anggarini, 2022) (Kaine, 2019).

2.2 Awareness of Gig economy amongst Designers

Research conducted in Malaysia has revealed a significant lack of awareness among Malaysians regarding the gig economy of design industry. This text lacks a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of the gig economy, the rights of gig workers, the expectations of both workers and employers, the role of platforms, the relevant legislation and regulations, and the methods involved (Basavaraj, 2021). Given the expansion of the gig economy, it is crucial for undergraduate creative media design students to be aware about the potential advantages and disadvantages it presents. Given the prevailing economic circumstances, there is a significant increase in the number of graduates who are currently unemployed (Bajwa, 2018). Graduates should seize every chance available in the gig economy to get valuable experience, whether it is as a supplementary source of income alongside a full-time employment or as their primary professional pursuit (Syarfina Abu Bakar, 2024).

2.3 Knowledge of Gig economy amongst Designers

The expansion of the gig economy has contributed to the overall growth of the national economy. The primary concerns revolve around the welfare considerations and financial safety nets pertaining to gig labour. There is a scarcity of literature regarding the current level of understanding and quantification of the growth of the gig economy. By identifying the essential characteristics that distinguish various types of non-employee labour, such as independent contractors, self-employed business owners, and on-call workers, we may better understand the defining qualities of professions that align closely with gig work (Speak, 2019). Studies conducted in Malaysia revealed that gig workers had a limited knowledge of employee protection measures such as provident funds, regulations, benefits, welfare, and the establishment and execution of these measures (Speak, 2019) (Ghazali, 2021).

It is critical for research and development to enhance public awareness of all relevant aspects of the gig economy and to acquire the knowledge necessary to stay updated on any developments (Ghazali, 2021) (Aziz & Rusli, 2023). Particularly within the art and design sector, both current and prospective gig workers are still in the phase of lacking expertise in many facets of the gig economy. This deficiency consists of a lack of awareness on the actual opportunities available to artists in the fields of freelance design work, customization, content creation, and so on (Aziz & Rusli, 2023). This study aims to examine the state of awareness and knowledge among undergraduate students regarding the gig economy. By doing so, it will identify any existing gaps and suggest strategies that can be used to enhance the gig economy among undergraduates. Additionally, the study will provide valuable insights for policymakers to develop effective policies and procedures (Syarifina Abu Bakar, 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative data collection strategy through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). FGD can be utilized to encompass four separate phases or stages of a scientific inquiry, each with its own specific purpose, role, and objective (Sujianto, & Sukarji, 2023). The perspectives gathered from undergraduate creative media design students of Faculty of Arts & Science, Universiti Malaya-Wales that located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. FGD chosen for its ability to yield comprehensive insights into participants' awareness, knowledge, experience, ideas, and perspectives, which are valuable to the researchers. It is crucial to acquire the most up-to-date knowledge on a certain matter or to explore a novel concept or further investigation. A focus group is a crucial instrument for comprehending the emergence of a specific issue and how it is seen within the context of group discourse. A total of 13 undergraduate students (n=13) were chosen to participate in the focus group discussion in Quarter 4 of year 2023. The

session lasted around 2 hours, starting at 11.00 am and ending at 1.00 pm. The data obtained from the focus group interviews were done in real-time at the laboratory and subsequently transcribed. The researchers initiated a process in which they employed codes to establish categories for the purpose of organizing the data into themes. The researchers analyzed the transcripts and extracted codes, which led to the identification of themes and sub-themes. Highlighted sections of the text in the transcripts were categorized into the relevant topics and sub-themes.

4. DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Theme 1: Awareness of gig economy

The discussion of “awareness” and “knowledge” in these findings were derived from Table 1 that consisted of the interview questions, theme and sub themes. From the overall discussions, the researchers identified six important sub themes of “awareness” highlighted by most of the participants. The sub themes are (a) recognizable (b) Internet search tool, digital networking site (c) web-based platform, mainstream media (d) flexible supplementary earnings (e) unrecognizable (f) uncertain.

Table 1: Awareness on Gig Economy

Theme 1: Awareness	
Question	Sub Theme
Have you heard about gig economy? Freelance Designers? Giggers? Remote/Contract Worker? When does this term occur?	Recognizable
Do you know about Gig economy on any platform?	Internet search tool, digital networking site
Have you come across in any media about gig economy?	web-based platform, mainstream media
Do you know the reason why citizens jump into the gig economy?	flexible supplementary earnings
Do you know that the government has implemented gig economy forces? (Guideline etc.)	Unrecognizable
If you are in gig economy, do you feel secure in this work pattern?	uncertain

4.1.1 Recognizable

Most of the participants were acquainted with the terms "freelance" and "part-timer," commonly used to describe non-traditional employment arrangements. However, they were not familiar with the concept of the "Gig Economy," which refers to a labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. The Gig Economy encompasses a wide range of activities and

roles, often facilitated by digital platforms, such as ride-sharing, delivery services, and freelance marketplaces.

4.1.2 Internet Search Tool, Digital Networking Site

The majority of participants acquire information about the gig economy through various internet search tools and digital networking sites. They frequently use platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to stay updated on trends and opportunities within the gig economy. These social media platforms serve as valuable resources for discovering insights, sharing experiences, and connecting with others involved in gig work. Additionally, participants reported utilizing job search platforms like Jobstreet and 'Fast Gig' to apply for gig opportunities.

4.1.3 Web-based Platform, Mainstream Media

Respondents mentioned, "I have come across information about the gig economy in various media sources. I frequently see discussions and posts about it on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as articles on job search websites like Jobstreet and 'Fast Gig'." Additionally, mainstream media such as television news, newspapers, and magazines often cover stories about the gig economy, providing insights into its growth and impact.

4.1.4 Flexible Supplementary Earnings

According to participants, one of the main reason's citizens jump into the gig economy is for the flexible supplementary earnings it offers. Many people appreciate the ability to work on their own schedule and supplement their primary income. This flexibility allows them to balance other responsibilities, such as family, education, or pursuing personal interests, while still earning additional money.

4.1.5 Unrecognizable

Participants mentioned that they are aware that the government has implemented guidelines and measures to support gig economy workers. These efforts include providing frameworks for fair treatment, ensuring worker rights, and offering resources to help gig workers navigate this type of employment. However, many people may not be fully familiar with these initiatives or how they are being enforced.

4.1.6 Uncertain

Honestly, "I'm not entirely sure" answered by majority of participants. On one hand, the flexibility and opportunities for supplementary earnings are great. On the other hand, the lack of job stability and benefits makes me feel a bit uncertain about the long-term security of this work.

4.2 Theme 2: Knowledge of gig economy

Eleven sub-themes have been highlighted under the “knowledge” of the gig economy (refer Table 2), which are (a) a different option or choice (b) available whenever needed or requested (c) easy Income (d) harmonious relationship between work and personal life, stability and protection in one’s financial situation (f) significant change, behavior (g) employment opportunity, economic growth (k) risk.

Table 2: Knowledge on Gig Economy

Theme 2: Awareness	
Question	Sub Theme
What do you understand about the gig economy?	A different option or choice
What types/examples of giggers that you know?	Available whenever needed or requested
Why do you think the gig economy is relevant in the current economic situation?	Easy Income
What are the differences between a permanent job and a freelance/gigger?	Harmonious relationship between work and personal life, stability and protection in one's financial situation
When do you notice the rapid transition of gig economy development? How big is the gap between the era of the 80s 90s and now?	Significant change, behavior
Does the gig economy have any impact on Malaysian work patterns?	Employment opportunity, economic growth
How about financial security for gig economy practitioners? (business setting, accounts, office documentation, etc.)	Risk

4.2.1 A Different Option or Choice

Most of participants give understand that the gig economy offers a different option or choice for work. It allows people to take on short-term, flexible jobs instead of traditional, long-term employment. This can be a great way for individuals to earn money on their own terms and schedules.

4.2.2 Available Whenever Needed or Requested

The participants know several types of gig workers who are available whenever needed or requested. For example, ride-share drivers, food delivery couriers, freelance writers, graphic designers, and virtual assistants. They all work on-demand and can take on jobs as they come up.

4.2.3 Easy Income

Participants mentioned that “I think the gig economy is relevant because it provides easy income opportunities. People can quickly find gig jobs to earn money without the

lengthy hiring processes associated with traditional employment”. This is especially important in times of economic uncertainty when many are looking for flexible and immediate ways to supplement their income.

4.2.4 Harmonious Relationship between Work and Personal Life, Stability and Protection in One's Financial Situation

Majority of participants mentioned in a permanent job, there's often a more structured balance between work and personal life, which can help maintain harmony. You also tend to have more stability and financial protections, like benefits and steady paychecks. On the other hand, as a freelancer or gig worker, you might enjoy more flexibility in your schedule, but there can be fluctuations in income and fewer traditional job protections.

4.2.5 Significant Change and Behavior

“I've noticed a significant change in the development of the gig economy recently. Back in the 80s and 90s, traditional employment was more common, with people seeking stable, long-term jobs. Now, there's been a notable shift in behavior towards more flexible, short-term gigs”. This change reflects a growing preference for independence and the ability to work on one's own terms, which has transformed how many people approach work today compared to several decades ago.

4.2.6 Employment Opportunity and Economic Growth

According to participants it is absolutely has significantly influenced Malaysian work patterns by providing increased employment opportunities across various sectors. It has enabled individuals to participate in flexible work arrangements tailored to their skills and preferences. Moreover, the growth of gig work has contributed to economic growth in Malaysia, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and expanding the overall job market.

4.2.7 Risk

Majority of participants mentioned on financial security in the gig economy can be a concern due to the inherent risks involved. Unlike traditional jobs with structured business settings, accounts, and office documentation, gig economy practitioners often manage their finances independently. This includes handling business transactions, maintaining records, and ensuring compliance with tax and regulatory requirements. The flexibility of gig work is attractive, but it also requires careful financial planning and risk management to maintain stability and security.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Awareness of gig economy

The discussion section of a research article is a critical component where the findings of the study are interpreted, contextualized, and compared with existing literature. In the discussion, participants demonstrated varying levels of familiarity with the gig economy, recognizing terms like "freelance" and "part-timer" but less so with the broader concept of gig work characterized by short-term contracts and facilitated by digital platforms. They rely heavily on internet search tools, social media platforms, and job search websites to stay informed about gig opportunities. Mainstream media also plays a significant role in shaping their understanding of the gig economy's impact and growth. The appeal of flexible supplementary earnings emerged as a key motivator for joining the gig economy, allowing individuals to manage their own schedules while balancing other commitments. Despite government efforts to support gig workers through guidelines, uncertainties persist among participants regarding job stability and benefits, reflecting a nuanced perspective on the potential benefits and risks associated with gig work.

5.2 Knowledge of gig economy

The discussion section of a research article is a critical component where the findings highlighted participants' recognition of the gig economy as a versatile alternative to traditional employment, offering opportunities for short-term, flexible work arrangements that suit individual schedules and preferences. They identified various types of gig workers, from ride-share drivers to freelance writers, who operate on-demand and respond to immediate job requests. Participants emphasized the gig economy's appeal in providing easy income, especially beneficial during economic uncertainty. They noted contrasts between the structured balance and financial protections of permanent jobs versus the flexibility and independence of gig work, acknowledging both advantages and risks associated with each. The evolution towards a preference for flexible gigs over stable, long-term employment was evident, reflecting changing behaviors and preferences in the modern workforce, particularly in Malaysia where gig work has significantly influenced employment patterns and contributed to economic growth through innovation and entrepreneurship.

5.3 Opportunities and Challenges for Arts and Design

The gig economy presents significant opportunities by offering flexible work arrangements that cater to individual preferences and schedules, facilitating easy income generation and expanding employment opportunities across sectors, particularly contributing to economic growth and fostering entrepreneurship. Exclusively for individuals involved in the fields of art and design. The prospects lie in

the fields of freelance design, customisation, working on various projects, building portfolios, and gaining exposure to a global market. Gig work's flexibility allows individuals to effectively manage several projects and actively pursue their creative pursuits.

On the other hand, it also brings challenges such as financial insecurity due to income variability and lack of traditional job benefits, concerns about job stability amidst temporary contracts, regulatory uncertainties impacting worker protections, and potential work-life balance issues. They may face obstacles such as uncertain client acquisition, pricing pressure, intellectual property issues, and market saturation. Balancing these opportunities and challenges is crucial for gig workers and policymakers alike to ensure sustainable and equitable participation in the evolving labor market landscape.

6. CONCLUSION

This research employed Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to explore the nuances of awareness and knowledge regarding the gig economy among undergraduate creative media design students of Faculty of Arts & Science, Universiti Malaya-Wales that located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Through rigorous thematic analysis of FGD transcripts, the study unveiled participants' varying levels of familiarity with terms such as "freelance" and "part-timer," contrasting with their limited understanding of the comprehensive scope of the gig economy, characterized by short-term contracts and facilitated by digital platforms. Participants demonstrated a heavy reliance on internet search tools, social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, and specialized job search websites such as Jobstreet and 'Fast Gig' to access information and opportunities within the gig economy. The influence of mainstream media in shaping perceptions was also evident, with television news and online articles further informing their views on gig work's growth and societal impact.

The findings underscored several opportunities and challenges inherent in the gig economy. On the one hand, participants valued the flexibility and autonomy offered by gig work, allowing them to manage their schedules and earn supplementary income swiftly, particularly appealing during economic uncertainties. However, concerns regarding job stability, financial security due to income variability, and the lack of traditional job benefits such as healthcare and retirement plans were prevalent among participants. Moreover, regulatory uncertainties surrounding gig work and its implications for worker protections emerged as critical concerns. Art and design gig workers should prioritise cultivating robust customer connections, consistently enhancing their abilities, and utilising web platforms and forums for assistance and prospects. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive policies that balance

the flexibility and entrepreneurial spirit of gig work with robust protections to ensure the well-being and stability of gig workers in Malaysia's evolving labor market landscape.

REFERENCES

- Amirah, W. (2022). *The Malaysian economy and COVID-19: Policies and responses from January 2020–April 2021*.
- Anggarini, D. T. (2022). Generation Z and millennial perspectives to become entrepreneurs in the era of the gig economy. *Jurnal Ekonomi dan Manajemen*, 16(1), 10–26.
- Aziz, N. A., & Rusli, R. (2023). Embracing Islamic values in governance: Reflecting the concept of “Madani” in the Holy Qur’an. *Research Studies*, 3(7), 1304–1312.
- Bajwa, U., Gastaldo, D., Di Ruggiero, E., & Knorr, L. (2018). The health of workers in the global gig economy. *Global Health*, 14(1), Article 124.
- Basavaraj, N., Foutz, N. Z., & Li, B. (2021). *Resilience of the U.S. gig economy during the COVID-19 pandemic: Insights from location big data*.
- Doshi, B. M., & Tikyani, H. (2020). A theoretical integration of gig economy: Advancing opportunity, challenges and growth. *International Journal of Management*, 11(12).
- Ghazali, A. J. B., & Aziz, N. A. B. (2021). *An overview of gigs economy in Malaysia*. Nasrul Aiman Bin Abd Aziz Web Designer.
- Herrmann, A. M., Zaal, P. M., Chappin, M. M., Schemmann, B., & Lühmann, A. (2023). “We don’t need no (higher) education”: How the gig economy challenges the education–income paradigm. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 186, Article 122136.
- Jacques, J. T., & Kristensson, P. O. (2019). Crowdsworker economics in the gig economy. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1–10).
- Kaine, S., & Josserand, E. (2019). The organisation and experience of work in the gig economy. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 61(4), 479–501.
- Roy, G., & Shrivastava, A. K. (2020). Future of gig economy: Opportunities and challenges. *IMI Konnect*, 9(1), 14–27.
- Speak, S. (2019, May). *The state of homelessness in developing countries*. Paper presented at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness,” May 22–24.
- Sujianto, A. E., & Sukarji, Z. (2023). Focus group discussion on finance literacy of

village-owned enterprises. *Saudi Journal of Economics and Finance*, 7(4), 204–208.

Syarfina Abu Bakar, A., & Hafizah Hassan, N. (2024). Awareness of gig economy in Malaysia: Study at International University of Malaya-Wales. *KnE Engineering*, 6(1), 455–461. <https://doi.org/10.18502/keg.v6i1.15416>

Syarfina Abu Bakar, A., Razeef Abd Razak, M., & Anwar, R. (2024). Evolution of digital platform for gig economy in design industry. *KnE Engineering*, 6(1), 448–454. <https://doi.org/10.18502/keg.v6i1.15414>

Uchiyama, Y., Furuoka, F., Akhir, M. N. M., & MN, M. (2022). Gig workers, social protection and labour market inequality: Lessons from Malaysia. *Jurnal Ekonomi Malaysia*, 56(3), 165–184.