

# Saudi Gig Economy

Subjects: **Management**

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Gig labor in Saudi Arabia is consistent with the nation's Vision 2030 objectives. This strategic vision prioritizes equal opportunities for everyone, revamps the education system to match market needs, and acknowledges the pivotal role of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in driving economic growth.

HR practices

job satisfaction

career sustainability

global gig economy

demographic factors

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the emergence of gig work has profoundly reshaped the global employment landscape. For instance, US freelancers generated over USD 1.2 trillion in 2020 alone <sup>[1]</sup>. This trend is not exclusive to industrialized nations. In India, the gig economy accounts for over 30% of its non-agricultural labor force, contributing 1.25% to its GDP <sup>[2]</sup>. Similarly, the gig economy in Saudi Arabia, with platforms like Haraj and Mrsool that are gaining prominence, is projected to reach a valuation of around USD 2.7 trillion by 2025 <sup>[3]</sup>. These platforms, ranging from e-commerce marketplaces to ride-sharing services, exemplify gig labor's focus on individual tasks and flexible structure <sup>[4]</sup>. Gig labor, characterized by its focus on individual tasks and flexible structure, has individuals engaging in discrete activities for businesses not as permanent employees but via explicit contractual agreements <sup>[5][6]</sup>. The move away from conventional jobs symbolizes a significant shift, with regions having unique socio-cultural norms, like Saudi Arabia, experiencing this transition intensely.

Gandini <sup>[7]</sup> provides critical insights into the unique dynamics of digital platforms in the gig economy. The utilization of labor process theory (LPT) provides insight into the manner in which these platforms convert labor power into a commodity, namely by means of the facilitation of worker supply and the fulfillment of customer demand for gigs <sup>[8]</sup>. According to Gandini <sup>[7]</sup>, digital platforms fulfill two distinct functions in the gig economy: acting as market intermediaries and assuming the position of "shadow employers". This dual role has a profound influence on the characteristics of labor within this sector. This particular viewpoint plays a vital role in comprehending the functioning of gig labor within the distinctive socio-cultural and economic context of Saudi Arabia, hence matching with the objectives of the nation's Vision 2030 initiative.

Gig labor in Saudi Arabia is consistent with the nation's Vision 2030 objectives. This strategic vision prioritizes equal opportunities for everyone, revamps the education system to match market needs, and acknowledges the pivotal role of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in driving economic growth <sup>[9][10][11]</sup>. Gig labor

promotes economic diversification, broadens job opportunities, and encourages creativity and entrepreneurship, aligning with Vision 2030's core objectives.

While the gig economy shows potential in specific sectors in Saudi Arabia, such as healthcare and entrepreneurship [12][13][14], a holistic understanding is still evolving. The existing literature offers a mixed view, praising gig labor's independence but also highlighting challenges, including job security and mental well-being concerns [15][16][17][18]. Notably, there's a bias in studies, often concentrating on digital or traditional aspects of gig employment. A complete analysis requires integrating both elements, especially within Saudi Arabia's unique environment.

Satisfaction among gig workers is critical for several reasons. Firstly, satisfied workers are more likely to remain engaged and committed, contributing positively to the platform's overall performance and reputation [19]. Secondly, worker satisfaction can directly impact career sustainability, as gig workers who feel valued and supported are more likely to continue in their roles [20]. Finally, understanding and enhancing gig worker satisfaction aligns with broader economic and social goals [21], particularly within the evolving context of Saudi Arabia's gig economy.

## 2. Gig Works

The term "gig work" has gained significant attention in recent years, referring to a form of employment characterized by flexibility and a task-oriented nature [5][6]. It revolves around the completion of discrete "gigs" or individual tasks, with all aspects of the work contracts defined by the specific task, including its duration, mode of delivery, and compensation [16][22]. In the Saudi Arabian context, gig work enables individuals to work independently on specific gigs or tasks offered by organizations without formal employment mechanisms but relying on contractual agreements [13][14][23]. Cropanzano et al. [24] highlight how gig work alters the traditional psychological contract, affecting job security and necessitating adaptations such as job crafting and identity management. Gig workers experience diverse responses to their employment status influenced by whether gig work is their primary or supplementary income source [22].

Gig workers, therefore, do not hold the legal status of "regular" employees within a specific organization, nor do they identify as insider members of such organizations [16][24][25]. This emerging psychological contract between gig workers and organizations demands a reevaluation of traditional HR practices, as noted by Davidson et al. [26], who emphasize the role of gig workers as frontline service providers impacting customer satisfaction.

The literature has increasingly explored the potential of gig work in specific sectors in Saudi Arabia, particularly healthcare and entrepreneurship. Scholars such as AL-Dossary [23] and Alanzi [13] have emphasized the gig economy's potential within the healthcare sector, highlighting its ability to address challenges faced by the nursing workforce and facilitate the outsourcing of various online activities. Alanzi [14] further expands on the gig infrastructure, categorizing it into three areas of service: gig workers, clients, and intermediaries. In terms of entrepreneurship, Al-Mamary [27] asserts that gig work, as a significant aspect of entrepreneurship, plays a pivotal role in shaping a country's economic landscape. This perspective aligns with Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision, which

aims to provide opportunities for all, establish an education system that meets labor market demands <sup>[9][10]</sup>, and increase the contribution of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to the national economy <sup>[11][28]</sup>.

While gig work is often praised for its flexibility and independence, it is important to acknowledge that the literature also highlights significant challenges faced by gig workers. These challenges include viability concerns, organizational issues, identity-related complexities, relational dynamics, emotional strain, and uncertainty surrounding career progression <sup>[15][16][17][18][24]</sup>. Davidson et al. <sup>[26]</sup> and Cropanzano et al. <sup>[24]</sup> provide further insights into these challenges, emphasizing the role of psychological contracts, worker adaptations, and the impact on organizational job design and commitment in the gig economy. Additionally, studies have pointed out problems such as overqualification and inadequate working hours <sup>[22][29]</sup>. These challenges underscore the necessity for further research and policy development to ensure that the growth of the gig economy in Saudi Arabia is accompanied by appropriate support and protections for gig workers.

### **3. Theoretical Frameworks and Models**

The examination of theoretical frameworks and models pertaining to the achievement of professional goals and long-term viability, specifically within the realm of gig workers, uncovers highly intricate and diverse terrain. The existing body of literature offers a diverse array of theories, approaches, and discoveries that enhance our comprehension of this subject matter.

The studies conducted by Chin et al. <sup>[30]</sup> and Li et al. <sup>[31]</sup> examine the intricacies of career success. Chin et al. <sup>[30]</sup> primarily investigate the significance of social capital, while Li et al. <sup>[31]</sup> specifically explore the impact of organizational support. Chin et al. <sup>[30]</sup> underscore the significance of social networks and interpersonal connections in the context of achieving professional success. In contrast, Li et al. <sup>[31]</sup> draw attention to the pivotal function of organizational support in influencing career outcomes. Rajendran et al. <sup>[32]</sup> provide additional support for these ideas by examining the psychological determinants that impact one's job success, with a particular focus on the significance of self-efficacy and motivation. The confluence of these investigations highlights the intricate and diverse character of professional achievement, wherein social, organizational, and psychological elements interact. Nevertheless, the implementation of these theoretical frameworks in the context of gig workers poses distinct and specific obstacles. The influence of the gig economy on career success was examined by Spurr et al. <sup>[33]</sup> and Felix et al. <sup>[34]</sup>, who emphasize the absence of conventional organizational support and the significance of individual agency.

The existing body of research pertaining to sustainability models encompasses a wide array of views. Raitano and Subioli <sup>[35]</sup> investigate the significance of lifelong learning in maintaining career sustainability, with a particular focus on the ongoing enhancement of skills. The study conducted by Lo Presti et al. <sup>[36]</sup> places emphasis on the significance of achieving a work–life balance, while the research conducted by Herrmann et al. <sup>[37]</sup> delves into the topic of environmental sustainability in relation to various career paths. These works collectively underscore the diverse and intricate aspects of sustainability, which include personal, professional, and environmental elements. Martini et al. <sup>[38]</sup> examine the utilization of these models in the context of gig workers, shedding light on the

precariousness inherent in gig labor and the resultant obstacles to long-term career viability. The viewpoint presented is also supported by the research conducted by Banerjee et al. [39], wherein they investigate the negative impact on wages experienced by temporary employees with advanced education. This study challenges the prevailing belief that temporary employment is advantageous for those with high skill levels. These findings offer a significant perspective that challenges the existing body of knowledge on sustainability, highlighting the distinct obstacles encountered by those engaged in gig jobs.

The existing body of literature pertaining to theoretical frameworks and models concerning professional success and sustainability is characterized by its extensive and intricate nature. The conventional models place significant emphasis on the significance of social capital, organizational support, and psychological factors in determining career success. However, the distinct characteristics of the gig economy present a challenge to these frameworks, as they underscore the crucial role of individual agencies and the absence of conventional support structures [30][31][33][34]. Similarly, the sustainability literature emphasizes lifelong learning, work–life balance, and environmental considerations, but the precarious nature of gig work presents unique challenges to these models [35][36][37][38][39]. The distinct characteristics of gig work need a reassessment and adjustment of existing frameworks, emphasizing the importance of additional research to construct comprehensive models that effectively capture the intricacies of the contemporary work environment. The presence of both agreement and disagreement across sources contributes to the enhancement of our comprehension while also indicating areas of deficiency and potential avenues for further investigation, particularly in relation to the career prospects of gig workers.

## 4. Gig Work and HRM Practices in Saudi Arabia

The gig economy has been gaining traction globally, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. However, despite the burgeoning significance of this economic model, there is a conspicuous scarcity of research on the gig economy within the Saudi context. Alamoudi et al. [40] offer a comprehensive overview of the gig economy in Saudi Arabia, underscoring its potential benefits, such as increased flexibility and autonomy for workers. Nevertheless, they also delineate the challenges associated with gig work, such as job insecurity and the absence of benefits typically associated with traditional employment. This perspective is mirrored by AL-Dossary [12], who, in a study on the feasibility of applying the gig economy framework in the nursing profession, posited that the potential benefits of flexibility and independence may outweigh the drawbacks of inconsistent incomes and a lack of benefits for many nursing professionals. Intriguingly, AL-Dossary [23] also discovered that the gig economy could bolster the increase of the female workforce in the nursing profession, aligning with the objectives of Vision 2030 and Saudization. This finding is particularly salient given the cultural and societal context of Saudi Arabia, where augmenting female participation in the workforce is a key objective.

Alshahrani [41] provides a unique perspective on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on workplace dynamics in Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on the shift towards more flexible work arrangements. The study found that the pandemic-induced shift to remote work had a significant impact on employees, including changes in workload, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and the socioeconomic divide. Despite these challenges, many

interviewees felt that the flexible work arrangements brought positive changes to their lives, with some even reporting increased productivity and efficiency while working remotely.

Alanzi <sup>[13][14]</sup> explored the potential of integrating the gig economy into the Saudi Arabian healthcare system. They identify several prospects associated with the use of the gig economy in the healthcare system, such as regional development, the availability of high-demand and specialized skill sets, improved access to healthcare services, and effective healthcare service management. However, both studies underscore the need for further research in this area, particularly in designing and developing policy regulations for gig economy adoption in healthcare.

Alqudah <sup>[42]</sup> and Al Kuwaiti et al. <sup>[43]</sup> further emphasize the role of the gig economy in healthcare, allowing doctors and nurses from various regions to collaborate with hospitals that require medical professionals on a short-term, freelance basis. This approach expands operations into the world of telemedicine and virtual doctor visits, suggesting a potential direction for the future of healthcare in Saudi Arabia.

However, a common gap identified across all the studies is the lack of specific details on the HRM practices used in the gig economy. None of the studies explores the effects of these practices on gig workers in terms of job satisfaction, job security, work–life balance, earning potential, or other relevant outcomes. This represents a significant gap in the literature that future research could address.

## 5. Career Sustainability

The intricate dialogue surrounding career sustainability has been robustly addressed within the literature, extending across multiple employment paradigms from conventional careers to the burgeoning gig economy <sup>[44][45]</sup>. The diversity of perspectives yields a complex yet enlightening portrayal of career sustainability, underscoring the multifaceted nature of these constructs and the dynamic interplay of various determinants, such as individual traits, societal contexts, job satisfaction, skill acquisition, and work–life balance <sup>[46][47][48][49][50]</sup>. These themes, while complex, paint a rich picture of the challenges and opportunities associated with contemporary careers.

Substantial discourse has revolved around the exploration of career success through the lens of individual attributes and dispositions <sup>[51][52][53][54]</sup>. Mello et al. <sup>[53]</sup>, for example, proffered an individual-centric model, positing career success as largely contingent upon elements of personality, skills, and personal values. This perspective was substantiated by Benson et al. <sup>[54]</sup>, who underscored the pivotal role of self-efficacy and proactive personality in the manifestation of career success. However, this individualistic view has been contested by researchers like Choi and Kim <sup>[55]</sup>, who advocate for the crucial inclusion of social contexts, including mentorship, in the examination of career success.

In tandem with these analyses, the concept of “career sustainability” emerged as a vital aspect of long-term career success. Career sustainability, as defined by Rigotti et al. <sup>[56]</sup>, is the ability to uphold a satisfactory career longitudinally, emphasizing the dynamic and temporal dimensions of career success. This conceptualization is further advanced by Briscoe et al.’s <sup>[57]</sup> development of the Dual Aspect Importance and Achievement Career

Success Scale (DAIA-CSS), which evaluates subjective career success across a spectrum of seven dimensions. Extensions to this discourse, such as the introduction of resourcefulness by Chin et al. [30] as a component of a sustainable career and De Vos et al.'s [58] proposition of health, happiness, and productivity as integral indicators of a sustainable career, underscore the significance of individual adaptability and a holistic approach in the sustainment of a career.

In stark contrast to conventional career models, the gig economy offers distinct elements that enrich the discourse on career sustainability [44]. Research efforts by Wang and Gao [59], Gori and Topino [60], and Zaman et al. [61] illuminate the central role of job satisfaction, skill development, and work–life balance in determining gig workers' career trajectories. However, these potential advantages of gig work are juxtaposed with the precariousness of job insecurity, the dissolution of work–life boundaries, and the consequent stress-related outcomes [61][62]. Felix et al. [34] and Chin et al. [30] further complexify this landscape by spotlighting the interplay between gig workers' preferences for autonomy or security and its ensuing impact on their well-being and career outcomes.

The overarching synthesis of the literature unravels the dynamic and multifaceted conception of career sustainability, with individual and contextual factors wielding significant influence. While there is an academic consensus on the cardinality of these factors, the literature also illuminates notable points of contention, specifically concerning the relative weighting of individual versus contextual determinants and the efficacy of quantitative versus qualitative assessments [63]. This complexity is further compounded by exogenous factors such as the economic climate, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unique challenges introduced by gig work [16][33][64].

## 6. Mediator: Job Satisfaction

The evolution of the gig economy, typified by its transient, often technology-mediated employment contracts, has necessitated a rigorous examination of the pivotal role of job satisfaction as a mediator in comprehending the lived experiences of gig workers. The study conducted by Liu et al. [65] emphasized the importance of perceived organizational support and its direct relationship with job satisfaction among those working in the gig economy. This viewpoint aligns with the research conducted by Mousa and Chaouali [66], which explores the role of job satisfaction as an intermediate factor in the relationship between perceived support and turnover intentions. Nevertheless, there is a subtle divergence that arises when examining their works. Liu et al. [65] extensively discussed the direct connection, but Mousa and Chaouali [66] delved into the complexities, suggesting that job satisfaction might potentially operate as a mitigating element in reducing high turnover rates within the gig economy.

The significance of HR paradigms in influencing work satisfaction was emphasized by both Wiener et al. [67] and Pereira et al. [68]. The study conducted by Wiener et al. [67] focused on examining the effectiveness of HR initiatives in enhancing work satisfaction and reducing turnover tendencies. This perspective is consistent with the findings of Myhill et al. [69], who emphasized the crucial importance of strong HR frameworks in fostering job satisfaction among gig workers. On the other hand, Bunjak et al. [70] presented an alternative viewpoint, arguing that although

HR tactics have a significant role, personal factors such as resilience and flexibility are of utmost importance in influencing the trajectory of work satisfaction in the gig economy.

The recurring themes in academic conversations revolve around the instrumental roles of leadership and organizational culture in molding the lives of gig workers [21][24][61]. Thomas and Baddipudi [21] provided a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationship between leadership, corporate culture, and work happiness, with a specific focus on the rapidly expanding gig economy in India. The conceptual framework presented in Thomas and Baddipudi's [21] study is supported by the findings of Cropanzano et al. [24], who highlighted the significant impact of leadership on enhancing job satisfaction and loyalty among gig workers. However, Zaman et al. [61] presented a unique perspective by combining self-determination theory and job features to explain the sense of happiness linked to gig labor. They suggested that both internal and external motivating factors play mediating roles.

The study conducted by Seema et al. [71] examined the commonality of freelance work in the IT industry, with a particular emphasis on the role of organizational allegiance in the relationship between work satisfaction and freelance work tendencies. This viewpoint provides a detailed examination of the complex difficulties and potential opportunities associated with gig employment within distinct sectors.

In amalgamating the extant literature, it becomes palpable that while there exists a scholarly consensus on the centrality of job satisfaction and perceived support as mediators in the gig economy, the determinants shaping these mediators exhibit heterogeneity. The interplay of HR paradigms, leadership modalities, organizational ethos, and individualistic factors collectively sculpts the experiences of gig workers. Nevertheless, given the intended application of this research for a study situated in Saudi Arabia, it becomes imperative to cognize and integrate the region-specific cultural, socio-economic, and contextual nuances when extrapolating these findings.

## 7. Moderators: Demographics Factors

The experiences of gig workers are significantly influenced by demographic characteristics, which include age, gender, nationality, and educational achievement [26][65][67][72]. The study conducted by Liu et al. [65] emphasized the importance of age and gender in influencing job satisfaction and organizational commitment among individuals in the gig industry. Wiener et al. [67] proposed that younger gig workers may exhibit more adaptation to the fluctuations inherent in the gig economy, in contrast to their older counterparts, who may place a higher emphasis on professional stability. Nevertheless, Veldsman and van der Merwe [72] presented an alternative perspective, arguing that internal motivating factors may outweigh demographic determinants in the determination of work satisfaction. The debate is enhanced by the contribution of Davidson et al. [26], who proposed that in a culturally varied context such as Saudi Arabia, nationality plays a significant role as a moderator due to the presence of cultural and regulatory differences.

The categorization of gig employment, which may be divided into digital platforms (such as online platforms) and physical domains (such as ride-sharing services), plays a crucial role as a moderator [73][74][75][76][77]. Agarwal et al.



[73] delineated this division, highlighting the unique difficulties and prospects associated with each. According to Philip and Davis [74], there is a notable difference in job satisfaction and stress levels among digital gig workers, particularly those who demonstrate strong work volition on platforms like Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), as compared to their counterparts in the physical gig sector. Manelkar et al. [75] provide more insight into this perspective, emphasizing the distinctive difficulties inherent in digital gig employment, including the lack of physical interactions. In contrast, Sharma and Bray et al. [76] as well as Sharma and Mishra et al. [77], provide a more comprehensive viewpoint, asserting that although the inherent characteristics of gig labor undoubtedly have influence, broader elements like organizational support may moderate its effects.

The existing body of literature, while illuminating, has noticeable gaps and inconsistencies. For example, the significance of age and gender as influential factors [65][67] is sometimes eclipsed by the priority given to intrinsic motivation [72]. Moreover, it is evident that there exists a noticeable bias in the scholarly literature towards either digital or physical gig labor, frequently neglecting the other form [73][74]. One notable deficiency in the existing body of research is the lack of studies that are specifically designed for certain geographical contexts, such as Saudi Arabia. This region possesses a distinct socio-cultural and legislative framework that sets it apart from other areas.

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