



Between Precarity and Potential: Exploring the Impact of Egypt's Evolving Gig Economy on Students in the Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Sector

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ABSTRACT

The gig economy has significantly transformed the labor market, by offering a considerable number of workers the opportunity to work in a flexible work environment based on on-demand employment facilitated by digital platforms. The shift to gig work has become increasingly visible over the last decade, especially in the travel, tourism, and hospitality sector, where short-term, task-based jobs such as tour guiding, content creation, translation, ride-hailing, freelance hotel services, and online travel planning are being performed by a growing number of young people, retired seniors, and unemployed individuals.

The main objective of the research is to assess tourism college students' awareness, engagement, and perceptions of gig work, as well as to identify the skills required for success in these roles and to determine the extent to which students consider gig work as a viable employment option. The study also investigates the perceived challenges associated with gig work, such as job insecurity, lack of social protection, and income instability, in contrast to perceived benefits like flexibility, income generation, and skill development.

To examine the objectives, a quantitative approach was used. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed digitally to undergraduate and graduate students of the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality at Alexandria University, Egypt. The analysis of the data showed that 60% hadn't used any gig economy platforms, neither as workers nor customers. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents explained that they weren't engaged in any gig work, while over 20% planned to pursue gig work in the future. They highlighted

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that online selling and social media management were their main areas of interest. Additionally, the results indicated that the top-rated tourism, travel, and hospitality gigs among respondents were “freelance tour guides” and “travel planners/itinerary designers”.

The findings also highlighted several aspects motivating respondents to engage in gig work. The most highly rated challenges by the respondents were “irregular income”, “delay in getting paid”, and “difficulty in finding clients”.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Egyptian government implement targeted policies for legal reforms to mitigate the precarity of gig work. This would help secure the rights of gig workers and facilitate their integration into the formal labor market. Additionally, initiatives for digital skill development should be provided, along with efforts to integrate gig economy awareness into academic curricula.

KEYWORDS

Challenges, Gig Economy, Egypt, Hospitality, Opportunities, Tourism, Travel.

بين العوائق والإمكانات:

دراسة تطور اقتصاد العمل الحر في مصر في قطاع السفر والسياحة والضيافة

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الملخص

لقد أحدث اقتصاد العمل الحر تحولاً كبيراً في سوق العمل، من خلال توفيره لعدد كبير من العمال فرصة العمل في بيئة عمل مرنة قائمة على التوظيف عند الطلب الذي تيسره المنصات الرقمية. وقد أصبح التحول إلى العمل الحر امر واقع خلال العقد الماضي، وخاصة في قطاع السفر والسياحة والضيافة، حيث يقوم عدد متزايد من الشباب وكبار السن المتقاعدين والعاطلين عن العمل بوظائف قصيرة الأجل قائمة على المهام، مثل الإرشاد السياحي، وإنشاء المحتوى، والترجمة، وقيادة السيارات، وخدمات الفنادق، وتخطيط السفر عبر الإنترنت.

يعتبر الهدف الرئيسي من البحث هو تقييم وعي طلاب كليات السياحة ومشاركتهم وتصوراتهم للعمل الحر، بالإضافة إلى تحديد المهارات اللازمة للنجاح في هذه المهام، واخذ الطلاب بعين الاعتبار العمل الحر خياراً وظيفياً في المستقبل. كما تبحث الدراسة في التحديات المرتبطة بالعمل الحر، مثل انعدام الأمن الوظيفي، ونقص الحماية الاجتماعية، وعدم استقرار الدخل، على عكس الفوائد المحتملة منه مثل المرونة، وتحقيق دخل، وتنمية المهارات.

تم الاعتماد على منهج البحث الكمي وتم جمع البيانات من خلال استبيان وزّع رقمياً على طلاب البكالوريوس والدراسات العليا والخريجين في كلية السياحة والفنادق بجامعة الإسكندرية. وقد أظهر تحليل البيانات أن 60% لم يستخدموا أيًا من منصات العمل الحر، سواء كعمال أو كعملاء. علاوة على ذلك، أوضح ما يقرب من نصف المشاركين أنهم لم يشاركوا في أي عمل حر، بينما يخطط أكثر من 20% للمشاركة في عمل حر في المستقبل. وأكدوا أن البيع عبر الإنترنت وإدارة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كانتا مجالي اهتمامهم الرئيسيين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أشارت النتائج إلى أن وظائف العمل الحر الأعلى تقييمًا من حيث مستوي اهتمام المشاركين في مجال السياحة والسفر والضيافة كانت "مرشدين سياحيين مستقلين" و"مخططي رحلات/مصممي برامج سياحية". كما أبرزت النتائج عدة جوانب تحفز المشاركين على الانخراط في العمل الحر. وكانت التحديات الأكثر تقييمًا من قبل المشاركين هي "عدم انتظام الدخل"، و"تأخر الحصول على الأجر"، و"صعوبة العثور على عملاء". بناءً على النتائج، توصي الدراسة الحكومة المصرية بتطبيق سياسات مُستهدفة وإصلاحات قانونية بناءة للحد من مشكلات العمل الحر. مما يمكن أن يُسهم في ضمان حقوق العاملين في هذا المجال وتسهيل اندماجهم في سوق العمل الرسمي. إضافة إلى ذلك، ينبغي إطلاق مبادرات لتطوير المهارات الرقمية، إلى جانب جهود لدمج الوعي باقتصاد العمل الحر في المناهج الدراسية.

الكلمات الدالة : التحديات، اقتصاد العمل الحر، مصر، الضيافة، الفرص، السياحة، السفر.

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Introduction

De Stefano (2016) defines the gig economy as a workplace where short-term contracts and freelance jobs prevail compared to traditional employment relationships. This work relationship is typically mediated through digital platforms linking autonomous workers directly with consumers and employers. Digital platforms such as Uber, Fiverr, Upwork, and Deliveroo match demand for services with available workers in real-time. The gig economy is sometimes considered a part of the platform economy, as it primarily relies on digital platforms.

Some researchers have introduced terms to describe specific segments of the gig economy, such as "crowd work" and "microwork." These terms refer to online work that can be broken down into smaller tasks (Kässi et al., 2019). Woodcock (2020) uses the term "gig work" to describe tasks that are facilitated through digital platforms, where payments are tied to the completion of tasks or are based on hourly work.

According to Wood et al. (2018), the gig economy is a system based on temporary, on-demand activities, facilitated through online platforms, where primarily short-term or project-based tasks known as "gigs" are performed rather than traditional full-time employment

The sharing economy is an economic system in which owners share their assets with others through a digital platform, typically conducted Peer-to-Peer (P2P). The difference between the sharing economy and the gig economy is that the gig economy focuses on labor and the provision of services. Workers engage in task-based projects, earning income by accomplishing specific tasks. In contrast, the sharing economy emphasizes asset sharing where owners offer their resources directly or through a third party, and earnings are derived from sharing these assets. Platforms in the gig economy concentrate on job-matching, while those in the sharing economy focus on facilitating the sharing of assets (Hamari, et al., 2016).

The term "gig", commonly used today, originated from jazz music (De Stefano, 2016). In 1995, eBay was founded as the first peer-to-peer marketplace (eBay Inc., 2023). Between 2000 and 2010, digital platforms began to emerge, with the rise of Airbnb in 2008 marking the actual rise in sharing economy platforms (Airbnb, 2023). The launch of Uber represented a major leap in ride-hailing and sharing transportation (Uber, 2023). By 2020, there had been a rapid growth in gig platforms and the gig economy, highlighted by the introduction of Fiverr and Upwork in 2011 (Upwork, 2023; Fiverr, 2023). In 2012, the emergence of Lyft, Instacart, and DoorDash expanded gig work into delivery and shopping services (Forbes, 2022). Since 2020, major changes have transformed the gig economy. The COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for gig work, especially in delivery apps (ILO, 2021). Since 2021, many attempts from several countries have been made to establish a legal framework for gig workers and to integrate the gig workers into the formal economy.

The dynamics of gig work and traditional work differ significantly. In gig work, digital platforms exert full control over recruitment and task assignments, yet they lack direct supervision over workers. This lack of oversight is partially overcome through ratings and reviews (Duggan et al., 2020).

In the gig economy, workers perform tasks as independent contractors or freelancers, accomplishing short-term tasks with non-traditional long-term contracts. Gig tasks are

typically characterized by short-term, rather flexible tasks that are facilitated through digital platforms. This major shift in the labor market was facilitated by technological progress linking service providers directly with customers (Bateyo, 2025).

Some examples of gig jobs include a student designing logos on Freelancer.com, a young graduate driving for Uber, a writer submitting articles via Fiverr, or a tutor giving lessons on Zoom or through an app.

There are many perspectives to define the gig economy. Some researchers defined it, focusing on the mode of intermediation, distinguishing between online and offline methods. Others highlighted the flexibility associated with gig work, while some looked at it based on the type of compensation or yield (Koutsimpogiorgos et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the gig economy has caused serious legal and labor protection challenges. The undefined framework that gig workers operate within, along with an obscure legal status, leads to a loss of rights, benefits, and welfare (Hsieh et al., 2023)

The rapid growth of the gig economy is forcing human resources to adapt to this new employment model. New practices should address and effectively integrate this emerging segment into the workforce. It is essential to consider adaptive measures for recruitment, assessment, and retention. These practices should address this transformative evolution and change of workforce preferences in a way that is adequate to all stakeholders (Bateyo, 2025)

The rise of the gig economy can be traced back to several factors, such as the advancements in digital technology, the shift in work preferences, and the radical change in demand following the COVID-19 pandemic. This new employment model characterizes the new employee-employer relationship as one marked by ad-hoc, project-based tasks (Malik et al., 2021; Boto & Brameshuber, 2022).

Although this temporary model of employment has existed in the past, marked by day workers, seasonal laborers, and project-type jobs, it has begun to take on a more defined structure in the past decade. Several attempts in various countries are gaining momentum to establish a legal framework for this employment arrangement, with the intention of integrating it into the formal economy to maintain workers' rights (Zhidkova, 2022).

The research aims to explore the rise of the gig economy as an emerging employment model in the Egyptian labor market, focusing on travel, tourism, and hospitality students as the driving force for the sector. The study examined students' level of engagement, awareness, prospects, areas of engagement, benefits, challenges, and legal awareness. The research hypothesized the following:

- **H1:** The challenges of gig work positively influence benefits.
- **H2:** The challenges of gig work stimulate skill development.
- **H3:** Skill development positively reinforces benefits.
- **H4:** There is a positive relationship between different areas of gig work and motivations.
- **H5:** There is a positive relationship between different areas of gig work and challenges.
- **H6:** There is a positive relationship between different areas of gig work and skill development.

- **H7:** There is a gender difference concerning gig economy engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Structure of the gig work

According to Kalleberg & Dunn (2016), gig work is characterized by its distinct nature compared to traditional employment. Gig workers are compensated per task, and often lack access to standard employee benefits, pay, job security, protection, and social welfare. Moreover, participants are responsible for their taxes, skills development, and retirement planning. While this structure provides flexibility in terms of work schedules, chosen tasks, and choice of employers, it also encompasses significant instability related to compensation, career development, and the establishment of a definite career path.

The gig work encompasses several areas, including transportation and distribution (such as ride-hailing and food delivery), digital services (like graphic design, coding, and content creation), writing services, tutoring, and some physical labor (such as cleaning). The ability to link workers with employees through digital platforms and mobile applications has made it possible for youth, retirees, and students to engage in gig work, increasing their income (De Stefano, 2016).

Table 1 illustrates a comparison between traditional work, gig work, and the sharing economy, covering several aspects like employment structure, ownership, value creation, technology use, and more. Gig work, if compared to traditional work and the sharing economy, is more flexible, remote, and task-based, with fewer legal and societal protections. Unlike traditional work, which is characterized by stability regarding income, work hours, insurance, and skill development. In the sharing economy, unlike traditional and gig work, the focus is on sharing personal assets, offering moderate flexibility and job security. While both gig work and the sharing economy operate in the realm of digital platforms and applications, traditional work does not necessarily rely on digital tools to complete tasks.

Table 1: Comparison between traditional work, sharing, and gig economy

Aspect	Traditional Business	Sharing Economy	Gig Economy
Ownership	Centralized (company owns assets), capital-intensive	Decentralized (users share/rent assets)	Decentralized (workers use their own tools/assets)
Employment Structure	Full-time long-term employees	Asset providers, Peer-to-peer with platform facilitation	Freelancers or independent contractors
Revenue Model	Sale of goods/services, direct control over the supply chain	Commission/transaction fees	Commission or task-based fees
Value Creation	Sales of products or services	Through asset utilization	Through task-based labor
Technology Use	Varies (not always digital)	Platform-based (digital marketplaces),	App/platform-based (job matching)
Example Companies	Toyota, Hilton, Thomas Cook	Airbnb, Couchsurfing	Uber, Upwork, Fiverr

Job Security	High	Moderate	Low
Platform Role	Not central	Intermediary marketplace	Job-matching & payment handler
Flexibility	Low	Moderate	High
Regulation	Fully regulated in most industries, well-established legal structures.	Often operates in regulatory gray areas	No structured, fully admitted legal framework
Taxation	Clear corporate tax structures	Ambiguous; taxation of peer income varies	Responsibility for taxes often shifted to workers

Source: Compiled by the researcher

Prassl & Risak (2016) stated that the classification of gig workers in the labor market poses several challenges due to the distinctive nature of their work relationships with employers. The fuzzy work relationship, which is characterized by short-term contracts, leaves workers vulnerable due to the absence of insurance, protections, and welfare guarantees. This indistinctness presses for the establishment of a clear regulatory framework that addresses the needs of these workers.

In response to these challenges, some countries have introduced hybrid classifications for gig workers with no clear promises of granting full employment protections. In 2025, the U.S. Department of Labor urged the establishment of new regulations to classify many independent contractors as employees, which would significantly impact the relationships in the gig economy. This turn in regulation aligns with California's adoption of stricter measures concerning gig workers' rights through Assembly Bill 5 (AB5). As of 2023, around 64 million Americans were engaged in the freelance or gig economy (Statista, 2024 b; U.S. Department of Labor, 2024).

In 2020, the UK Supreme Court ruled that Uber drivers are to be regarded as "workers", which can be seen as a significant legal breakthrough in the struggle to improve the working conditions of gig workers (Gupta, 2024).

Moreover, Berg (2016) stated that gig workers with developed skills benefit from gig work while low-skilled gig workers suffer from low pay and limited bargaining power. This emphasizes the need for individual efforts in skill development, which falls entirely on the gig worker, as there is an absence of a consistent training program, something typically provided by employers in traditional jobs.

Digital platforms utilize algorithms to govern supply and demand without societal consideration of the workers, which raises ethical concerns (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Gig workers manage their work similarly to self-employed individuals; hence, they define their schedules, fees, and tasks with flexibility. Since gig work is mainly facilitated through digital platforms, algorithmic management systems help align demand with worker supply, customize pay levels, and monitor worker performance (El Hajal & Rowson, 2021). Nevertheless, despite claims of autonomy, algorithmic control can reduce worker independence.

The flexibility and autonomy associated with gig work enable individuals to balance it with other obligations or primary jobs. Gig work is also marked by lower entry barriers, allowing participation from youth, undergraduates, college students, and

underemployed workers. Global access and virtual workspaces permit flexible opportunities for gig workers (Hsieh et al., 2023)

Despite its broad span and accessibility, the gig economy often lacks social security protection. For example, approximately half of the surveyed gig workers worldwide don't participate in retirement systems, while 73% of Venezuelan gig workers reported no savings, as stated by Datta et al. (2023). This situation reinforces ongoing concerns about worker insecurity and deficient labor rights.

According to Caza et al. (2021), gig workers encounter six types of challenges. The first challenge is instability in payments, which arises due to the blurry work relationship between workers and employers. The second challenge is related to the survival of the worker in the work environment, which is closely linked to coping with changing technology, fluctuations of demand, and workload. Another challenge can be referred to the lack of social identity within the work setting. Additionally, designing a clear career path that allows for career progression is difficult in the work environment of the gig economy. Lastly, emotional challenges and the lack of social interactions could be a concern for gig workers. evidence

According to Gramano (2020), the gig workers lack bargaining power, as digital platforms deprive them of the right to negotiate terms and conditions. Furthermore, these platforms sometimes terminate their contracts abruptly and without prior notification. The researcher also noted that gig workers spend their time either completing their tasks or searching for new ones, which prevents them from enhancing their skills or pursuing career advancement.

Over the last decade, many digital platforms have emerged supporting task-based gig work. These platforms covered areas like marketing, design, programming, content creation, writing projects, and media (Table 2).

Table 2: Examples of platforms offering gig work

Platform	Types of Gigs offered
General gig platforms	
Upwork	Offers gigs in writing, design, marketing, programming, and more.
Freelancer.com	Broad range of jobs, including tech, business, and creative work.
Fiverr	Lets gig workers sell services starting at \$5 (e.g., logo design, voiceover).
PeoplePerHour	Ideal for hourly or fixed-price gig projects
Guru	Offers gig work in programming, writing, design, and business
Tech & Development Focus	
Toptal	High-end platform for top developers, designers, and finance experts.
Codementor	Offers freelance gigs and mentoring for developers.
Gun.io	Focused on gig software developers.
Writing & Content	
ProBlogger Jobs	Gig writing jobs from blogs and companies.
Contena	Offers high-paying writing gigs for experienced writers.
Design	

99designs	Focused on graphic design gigs (logos, websites, etc.).
DesignCrowd	Crowdsourced platform for creative design work.
Dribbble (Jobs Board)	Offers gigs for designers and illustrators.
Media & Marketing	
Behance Job Board	Part-time and full-time gigs for creatives.
ClearVoice	Gig opportunities in content marketing and media, editing, and designing

Source: Compiled by the researcher

The Gig Economy Market is valued at USD 556.7 billion in 2024 and is forecasted to grow to USD 646.77 billion in 2025, reaching USD 2146.87 billion by 2033 (Business Research Insights, 2024). Over 50% of the U.S. workforce is engaged in freelance work (Forbes, 2023), while 30% of the global workforce participates in gig work (McKinsey, 2016), with 70% of these workers being Millennials & Gen Z (Statista, 2024b). Upwork (2023) reported a 24% increase in freelance postings. According to McKinsey (2016), 1 in 6 individuals in permanent jobs want to go independent. It is worth mentioning that 75% of firms use gig workers (Deloitte, 2019), with 25% achieving cost savings via outsourcing (McKinsey, 2016). By 2025, 40% of employers plan to expand their gig hiring (Statista, 2024a). However, gig workers face many challenges: 37% lack affordable healthcare (McKinsey, 2023), 25% experience income inconsistency (Zety, 2024), and 20% face payment disputes (Forbes, 2024). As reported by Upwork (2023), 15% of gig workers feel isolated working remotely.

Digital Platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and Toptal account for 80% of freelance work (SmallBizGenius, 2022). Furthermore, 70% of interactions are conducted via mobile apps (Zety, 2024) and matching algorithms improve success rates by 30% (Gartner, 2018).

Statistical evidence reflects the sector's rapid growth: in the U.S., gig workers reached over 51 million in 2021—a 34% rise from the previous year (MBO Partners, 2021). Similarly, the European Union reports independent workers as the fastest-growing labor segment (Goudin, 2016), while India's 15 million freelancers account for nearly 40% of global freelance work (SPERA, 2016).

The rise of gig work worldwide has immensely impacted the Egyptian labor market to a great extent. Due to its flexible nature, a significant number of youths, unemployed individuals, and retirees are now engaged in gig work.

2.2 The gig economy in Egypt

Fairwork Egypt Ratings 2021 reported important statistics highlighting the characteristics of the gig economy in Egypt. Egypt's total population is 101.5 million (2021). The labour market size accounted for 29.3 million people. Youth under 30 make up 60% of the population. Youth NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) account for 27% of youth. In 2019, the unemployment rate among university graduates was estimated at 22.1%, while female unemployment was recorded at 21.3%.

Between 100,000 and 200,000 people participated in Egypt's gig economy between 2019 and 2021. Uber drivers were estimated to constitute 90,000 in 2019 and 200,000

in 2020. Registered Mrsool couriers in Egypt comprised 130,000 gig workers in 2021. Gig work in Egypt is dominated by ride-hailing and delivery platforms. The demand for services in the delivery sector was boosted by 230% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the minimum wage for gig work accounted for EGP 2,000/month (USD 127.31) while the 2021 living wage accounted for EGP 3,500/month (USD 222.81). Three of seven platforms (FilKhedma, Orcas, Swvl) ensured minimum wage compliance. Maintenance workers earned EGP 169/hour; cleaners earn EGP 61/hour according to the FilKhedma platform (Fairwork, 2021)

Only 5 of 7 platforms demonstrated awareness and some protection against work-related risks. No platform provided a comprehensive safety net for workers.

Only 3 platforms (FilKhedma, Orcas, Swvl) had transparent and accessible contract terms. Only Mrsool supported collective worker representation and union engagement. It is worth to mention that some factors contributed to the rise of the gig economy in Egypt, like Internet penetration, which rose from 21.6% in 2010 to 57.3% by 2020. Mobile phone penetration was reported to be 95% in June 2021, and Mobile internet subscriptions accounted for 55% of mobile users.

A survey by CAPMAS (2022) projected that around 40% of graduates spend around two years looking for a job after graduating, despite having adequate qualifications. The survey also uncovered that 60% of Egyptians under the age of 30 had accessed gig-based platforms like Uber and other freelancing sites to compensate for income gaps, demonstrating how the gig economy can play a significant role in absorbing some of the employment needs of young workers.

Egypt's Ride-hailing market is projected to grow significantly, with revenues expected to reach US\$309.20 million by 2025 and a 14.29% annual growth rate from 2025 to 2029, resulting in US\$527.52 million by 2029. User numbers are estimated to reach 43.32 million by that year, with penetration increasing from 24.5% to 34.5%. The average revenue per user (ARPU) is anticipated to reach US\$10.65 in 2029, with all revenue expected to come from online sales (Statista, 2025).

The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) launched in September 2020 and March 2021 the “Digital Egypt Innovation Centers and Digital Creativity Centers” (CreaTiva). These centers offer incubation programs for freelancers along with training and mentorship. In addition, the Freelancing and Remote Work Initiative was initiated to further support freelancers with training opportunities. The ministry aims to create a platform that allows freelancers to link to foreign companies, enables them to open bank accounts, and further allows them to use government digital services (ITIDA, 2024).

The gig economy significantly contributes to the tourism sector by engaging workers who assist tourists in their pre-planning phase and during their trips. In 2024, the tourism sector supported approximately 2.7 million jobs, exceeding the peak in 2019. Employment in the tourism sector is expected to grow to around 2.9 million jobs in 2025 (WTTC, 2025)

Self-employment in Egypt (including gig roles in tourism like self-employed tour guides, transporters, Airbnb hosts) reached 30% of the labor force by early 2023 (ERF&GIZ, 2023).

Uber's "app journeys" facilitate tourism by improving access to cultural landmarks, dining options, and events. In 2023, Uber is estimated to have generated around EGP 3.1 billion in additional value for Egyptian tourism through its ride services. This emphasizes how ride-hailing platforms are interconnected with the tourism ecosystem, linking travelers to local experiences and businesses (Uber, 2024).

There is currently no national dataset on freelance tour guides; however, platforms like Fiverr feature offerings such as licensed private tours, for example, "Tour Egypt with you" at \$65 per person (fiverr.com). This highlights the growing trend of gig-style tourism services, which include private guides, unique experiences, and personalized local offerings, often facilitated through digital transactions. Freelance tourism services are emerging, particularly through private guides and curated experiences arranged via online platforms (Fiverr, 2025b).

2.3 Defining gig work in Tourism, Travel, and Hospitality (TTH) sector

El Hajal and Rowson (2021) defined the gig economy in the hospitality industry as a work arrangement where workers engage in freelance, on-call, or part-time jobs, facilitated by online platforms. This model is particularly suited to the travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors due to the nature of the industry, which experiences fluctuations in demand throughout the seasons. Jin and Liu-Lastres (2024) noted that this flexible workplace enables workers and employers to connect directly, thereby redefining traditional work relationships.

It is worth mentioning that digital platforms and applications constituted a significant trigger for the gig economy. The advent of these platforms made it possible for workers to offer several services like transportation and accommodation in addition to other services without requiring traditional business structures (Kuhzady et al., 2021). Several Travel Tourism and Hospitality (TTH) gig roles have emerged over the last decade, particularly related to the pre-trip and during-trip phases, as illustrated in Table 3. Direct gig workers who interact directly with tourists or are essential in the planning phase include virtual travel planners and consultants, who tailor packages for tourists and assist them with all documentation and bookings related to traveling. During the trip, gig roles like freelance tour guides and experienced hosts who offer unique local experiences for travelers, like cooking classes or handicrafts, can be identified. Furthermore, ride-hailing services, freelance interpreters, photographers, and adventure guides who lead desert or mountain hikes and safaris support tourist experiences directly in the destinations. These roles are flexible, cost-effective, and short-term employment structures. Some gig roles also support the industry behind the scenes with indirect interaction with the tourists, but nevertheless contribute effectively to the overall tourist experience. Examples of these roles include property cleaners or maintainers, content creators who write travel blogs, video scripts, or promotional material, digital marketers who manage social media, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), and ads for travel businesses, and programmers who build websites for hotels, agencies, or tourism startups.

Table 3: Direct Gig roles related to TTH linked to post-and during trip phases

Job Title	Description	Platform Examples
Freelance Tour Guide	Offers guided tours of historical sites, cities, or cultural experiences.	ToursByLocals, Viator, Airbnb
Experience Host	Hosts unique activities like cooking classes, handicrafts, or traditional music.	Airbnb Experiences, GetYourGuide
Ride-hailing Driver	Provides local transportation services for travelers.	Uber, Careem, Bolt
Boat Tour Operator	Provides boat or ferry tours for sightseeing.	GetMyBoat
Local Interpreter	Assist tourists with language needs	Upwork, Freelancer
Travel Photographer/Videographer	Capturing memorable moments, offering mini photo shoots at landmarks.	Snapp, Airbnb, Instagram
Adventure Guide	Offers guided hikes, desert safaris, diving trips, etc.	Klook, TourRadar
Virtual Travel Planner / Consultant	Creating customized travel itineraries, booking support, and visa assistance.	Upwork, Freelancer.

Source: Compiled by the researcher

The study by Farooq et al. (2021) highlights the growth of digital labor platforms in the MENA region with a particular focus on Egypt. It examines the impact of these digital platforms on youth employment and models of the labor market. The research emphasizes the rise of the gig economy in Egypt, especially ride-hailing platforms, and discusses how technological developments and unemployment have supported the emergence of this new employment framework. The findings showed a lack of regulatory framework and laws governing gig work, which results, due to blurry work relationships, in inadequate pay, low job security, and insufficient insurance and worker welfare. The study recommends the implementation of regulations to ensure social security and protection for gig workers.

The aim of the research by Khan & Khan (2024) is to examine the use of ChatGPT by gig workers, their attitudes towards the tool, and its impact on their performance. The research is framed around the Task Technology Fit (TTF) theory, hypothesizing that matching ChatGPT capabilities with gig workers' tasks can increase performance. The findings indicate that workers' performance is enhanced significantly using ChatGPT, especially if they are responsive to using it. The research concludes that it is important to provide training to encourage innovative use of ChatGPT, thereby maximizing its benefits for gig workers.

According to Fiers (2024), many gig workers are engaged in gig work attracted by the idea of independence, flexibility, and global opportunities. However, they often face structural challenges, including unstable income, irregular contracts, and dependence on platforms. In response, gig workers develop adaptive strategies like diversifying income sources and adjusting working hours to accommodate fluctuations in demand. Additionally, the research highlighted the biases that gig workers face in the gig economy due to variability in digital literacy. These biases weaken their ability to find appropriate opportunities, result in lower pay, and limit career progression. To cope with these challenges, some workers try to control the instabilities and biases present in the gig economy by viewing it as a transitional phase for self-development or as an opportunity to pursue their passion for project-oriented tasks.

According to McKinsey (2016), independent workers could be clustered into four groups. Free agents are independent workers earning their income primarily from independent work, while casual earners are ones who supplement their income with independent work. Reluctants are independent workers who earn their primary income from independent work but would prefer to be engaged in traditional stable work. Financially strapped individuals are the type of independent workers who are forced to supplement their income with independent work to meet their financial needs but would prefer not to be engaged in this type of work.

The technological advancements in smart cities and the large network of interconnected devices, driven by blockchain, cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), and 5G, have significantly influenced gig workers. For instance, delivery workers are now able to use sophisticated GPSs and tracking systems powered by 5G technology to enhance speed, accuracy, and efficiency. The integration of high-end technology has fostered more flexible employment patterns, distinct task environments, and the ability to access and transfer real-time data instantly, thereby streamlining task completion for gig workers (Rahman et al., 2019; Yin, 2022).

El Hajal and Rowson (2021) conducted a literature review to examine the concept of the gig economy in the hospitality industry. They explored how the gig economy is reshaping employment in the sector, particularly as traditional full-time work models are being altered by technological, economic, and social forces. The results indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition by emphasizing labor shortages and disrupting conventional employment structures. The research concluded that the hospitality industry should embrace the model of gig work for certain positions to address labor market deficiencies and meet the needs of a new generation seeking flexible work opportunities.

The study conducted by Blanchard (2024) explores the recruitment strategies exercised by Canadian SMEs to attract skilled workers to adapt to the new labor market shift after the COVID-19 pandemic, that had witnessed a rise in gig and freelance work. The transition in labor market dynamics towards more flexible and independent work has been further intensified by the emergence of digital platforms such as Fiverr, Upwork, and Uber. The findings provide a roadmap for SMTs to adopt recruitment strategies that can assist in attracting and retaining skilled gig workers. Some of the aspects highlighted include possessing a strong corporate culture to attract skilled candidates, effective organizational branding, and Human Resource

Management (HRM) Strategies. The research also highlights the need to use technology in recruitment by creating online job boards and gig platforms and utilizing AI-assisted resume screening tools.

The study by Stryzhak et al. (2025) explores how digitalization and the gig economy are reshaping labor in the tourism sector. The research explains that gig work in the tourism field is characterized as being flexible, platform-mediated, and increasingly central. They noted that the benefits of gig work include autonomy and innovation; nevertheless, some challenges could also be identified, such as a lack of regulations that secure workers' rights. The statistical analysis illustrated that tourism and digitalisation are generally positively related, and self-employment is negatively associated with tourism globally, but positive in lower-development clusters. Additionally, self-employment is negatively associated with digitalisation overall, but weak within clusters. The study highlighted that countries with advanced digitalisation and tourism show lower rates of self-employment, while less developed countries show higher rates.

The research by Kurian and Madhavi (2024) investigates how motivations and challenges affect the well-being of younger generations engaged in gig work. The study examines that while gig work offers flexibility and autonomy, it also exposes workers to stress, job insecurity, and a lack of benefits, which can affect well-being. Using a quantitative survey of 347 Indian Gen Y and Gen Z gig workers in low-skilled platform-based jobs, the researchers applied structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses. The results showed that motivation improves quality of life and well-being, while challenges increase stress, which negatively affects well-being. Quality of life and stress play mediating roles, and attributes such as optimism, adaptability, and technological skills moderate the impact of challenges and motivation.

Pinedo et. al (2021) investigate the global rise of the gig economy and the challenges associated with this emerging employment model. Their research relies on secondary data, including a European gig economy survey (2017–2018) conducted by Ipsos MORI across seven countries, as well as a global ILO survey of crowdworkers (2017) that included 3,159 respondents from 75 countries. Using a mixed-method approach, the study concludes that while the gig economy offers flexibility and lowers barriers to labor entry, it suffers from significant issues such as a lack of social security, low payment rates, and insufficient recognition in the formal labor market. Additionally, the reports highlight gender disparities, revealing that women face payment inequalities despite similarities in age, education, qualifications, and working hours compared to their male counterparts.

The study by Skrzek-Lubasińska & Szban (2024) explored, through conducting a literature review, the external motivations that drive gig workers to perform gig work. The research categorizes these motivations, as identified in the literature, into several key areas: material (monetary and non-monetary), communication, bonds, social relations, social networks, education, skills acquisition, career advancement, work-based learning (WBL), flexible working arrangements, the autonomy of work, morality, and hedonic motivations such as fun and enjoyment.

The literature review revealed that research has primarily focused on the benefits, challenges, and characteristics of gig workers. Only a few studies were conducted to explore the engagement levels, awareness, and prospects of college students, especially those in Egypt's travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors. The following section presents the methodology utilized in the research to explore the concept of the gig economy, the level of engagement, and prospects among TTH college students.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research applied a quantitative approach to test the hypotheses. An online questionnaire consisting of 21 questions was distributed electronically. The first part focused on demographic information. The second part examined the respondents' awareness of the term "gig economy", whether they are currently engaged in any gig work, the kind of gig work they would be interested in, and specifically, what travel, tourism, and hospitality gig work they would consider pursuing.

The questionnaire relied on the studies of Fiers (2024) and Ahmad (2021) in formulating the questions and defining variables. The following section addressed the motivations for engaging in gig work, as well as the associated benefits, challenges, the necessary skills required, and their awareness of gig workers' legal rights. The final part of the questions focused on future trends, like the interest in engaging in gig work long-term instead of pursuing a permanent job in their field. It also assessed whether they were interested in courses on freelancing, digital entrepreneurship, or platform-based work.

3.1 Reliability and Pilot Testing

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and clarity of the questions. 35 participants with similar characteristics to the main population were asked to complete the questionnaire. The pilot test aimed at identifying whether there were any problems related to wording, clarity of the questions, and internal consistency of the method used. After completing the pilot study, Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical measure used to evaluate the consistency of responses across items within a scale, was utilized to evaluate the reliability of each section of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the various sections of the questionnaire ranged from 0.76 to 0.89, signifying an acceptable to high level of internal consistency, as values above 0.70 are generally considered acceptable according to Taber (2018).

Based on the results from the pilot study and reliability test, some minor adjustments to the questionnaire were made to ensure it was as clear and relevant as possible. The finalized version was then utilized in the main study.

3.2 Data sampling and data collection

The questionnaire was distributed online during February 2024 through Google Form to students in the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Alexandria University, targeting the tourism studies department and the special program. The study adopted a convenience sampling technique, which was considered appropriate due to the ease of access to participants. After cleaning the data, 345 responses were considered valid. The results were then analyzed using statistical methods, including averages, Pearson's correlation to identify relationships, and testing hypotheses.

3.3 Descriptive analysis of the results

The findings revealed that 62.5% of the respondents were students of the special program, while 37.5% were from the tourism studies department.

The findings also revealed that most respondents (34%) were third-year students, followed by fourth-year, second-year, and first-year students successively (24.2%, 24.2%, 15.8%). Only 0.8% were graduates. The majority of the respondents were females, accounting for 70% while males represented 30%.

When the respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the term gig economy. 46.7% explained that they were “somewhat familiar” with the term, 21.7% stated they were “very familiar”, 17.2% had “Heard of it, but not sure what it is”, while 14.2% claimed to be “not familiar at all” with the term.

The majority of the respondents (60%) stated that they have not used any gig economy platforms. This suggests a low level of direct engagement with the gig economy among the surveyed population. 30.8% indicated they had used a gig platform as a customer, while 11.7% explained that they had used one as a worker. This indicates that the sample is almost three times more likely to utilize gig platforms for consumption than for generating income. Since the question allowed for multiple selections, there may be some individuals who selected both roles (Figure 1).

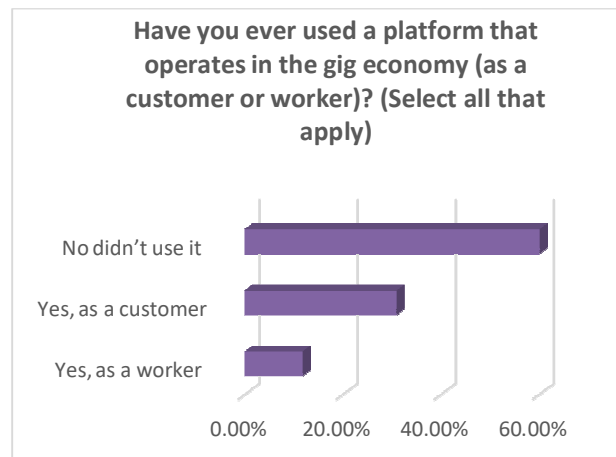


Figure 1: Gig platform usage

Source: By the researcher

The respondents were asked about the difficulty of getting a gig job. 70% reported feeling “neutral” about the ease of getting a gig job, 18.3% explained that the process was “hard”, while only 7.5% considered it to be “easy”. When evaluated on a scale of five, where “very hard” received a score of 1 and “very easy” received a score of 5, the calculated mean value was 2.80.

The respondents were then asked to state their current engagement in gig work. 49.2% explained that they “weren’t engaged in any gig work”, 28.3% “plan to do gig work in the future”, 9.2% “have worked in the gig economy in the past”, while 8.3% indicated that “it is hard to balance gig work and university studies”.

The respondents who engaged in gig work were asked to select their potential areas of interest regarding areas of gig work. The majority selected “online selling” (18.3%) as their main area of interest. This was followed by “social media management” (14.2%),

“freelance writing” (11.7%), and “translation” (11.7%). Additionally, “graphic design” received 10.8%, while “online tutoring” accounted for 9.2%. Other areas like “delivery services”, “programming and web development”, “ride sharing”, and “photography” attained scores of 5% or lower.

The participants were then asked to rate their potential interest in the previously mentioned areas of gig work on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated “least important” and 5 represented “most important”. The mean scores for each area were as follows: graphic design (3.58), photography and video production (3.2), selling online (3.14), translation (3.11), delivery services (3.08), online tutoring (3.08), freelance writing (2.80), programming or web development (2.60), ride sharing (2.55) and social media management (2.30). The scores suggest that respondents are mostly drawn to digital gigs, while social media management, ride sharing, and programming and web development were among the least preferred gigs by the students.

The results indicated that the top-rated tourism, travel, and hospitality gigs by respondents were freelance tour guides by mean score (3.28) and travel planners/itinerary designers with a mean score of (3.25), showing participants' preference for flexible and knowledge-based travel roles. Gig jobs like walking tour assistants, freelance chefs, on-demand travel assistants/interpreters, and photographers received moderate mean scores (around 3.1), suggesting some interest but not strong demand. On the contrary, airport meet and assist services, event setup, local experienced hosts, and on-call hospitality services scored lowest (2.74 to 2.90), indicating participants are less interested in these service-heavy, possibly more structured or physically demanding jobs.

The respondents were asked to rate the factors that could motivate them to engage in gig work, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “least important” and 5 indicates “most important.” The results indicated that the most significant factor was “No full-time jobs were available” with a mean score of 3.76, followed by “flexibility” with a mean score of 3.23, and “experience”, which scored 2.91. Finally, “income” was the least important factor, with a mean score of 2.68 (Figure 2).

The most highly rated challenges by the respondents using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “least important” and 5 indicates “most important”, were “irregular income” and “delay in getting paid” with mean scores of 3.83 and 3.80 respectively. Other Challenges like “finding clients”, “unfair treatment” and “balance with study” obtained scores around 3.4. The challenge of “No insurance” scored 3.36, while “no legal protection” scored 2.99.

Networking was considered the most highly rated benefit, with the majority of the respondents selecting it as the “most important”. There was a strong consensus (many rated 5) among participants about the benefits of personal satisfaction, portfolio building, and better time management, as many rated these aspects as “most important”. Nevertheless, although more confidence, financial independence, and skill development were also valued, they received moderate ratings, ranking slightly lower than the other benefits (Figure 3).

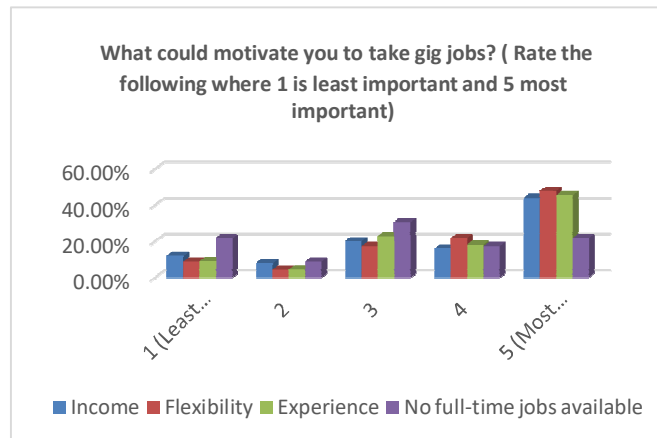


Figure 2: Gig work motivations
Source: The researcher



Figure 3: Benefits of gig work
Source: The researcher

The respondents were also asked about their opinion about the skills needed for gig work on a scale of 5, where 1 is considered “least important” and 5 represents “most important”. Most respondents rated the skills as most important or important. All the skills were valued by the respondents with mean scores of 3.64 and above (Figure 4). Key skills included digital literacy, problem solving, punctuality, financial management, time management and marketing, and self-promotion.

The results indicated that only 14% of the respondents had encountered legal problems when they were engaged in gig work. Around 18% explained that they didn’t face any legal issues, 12% were unsure, and approximately 62% hadn’t participated in gig work in any way.

The analysis showed that 50% of the respondents would consider gig work as a long-term option, rather than pursuing a permanent job in the field of Tourism, Travel, and Hospitality, after graduation. 32.5% of the respondents were “unsure”, while 9.2% considered it “unlikely”. The mean score was 3.75 (Figure 5).

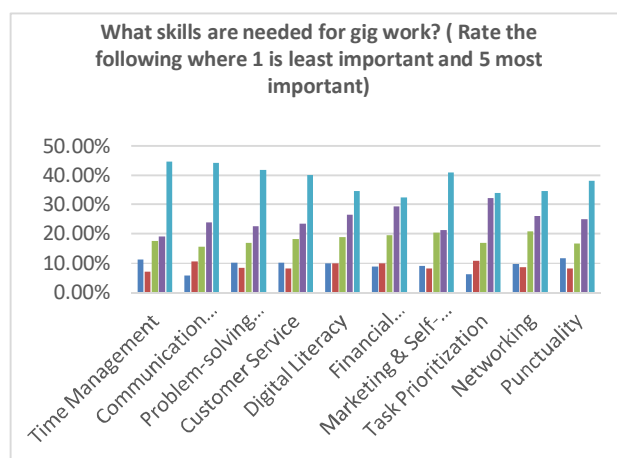


Figure 4: Required Skills for gig work
Source: The researcher

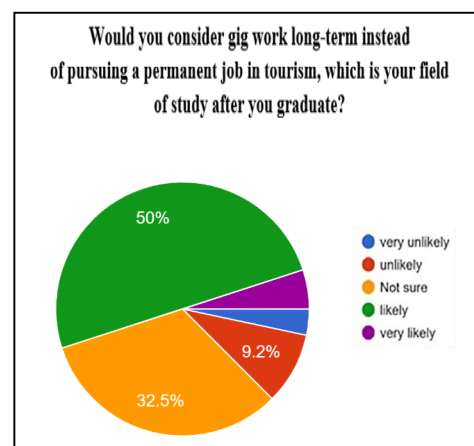


Figure 5: Potential of pursuing gig work long-term
Source: The researcher

The outcomes demonstrated that 56.7% of the respondents were unsure about whether Egyptian laws supported gig workers, 24.2% believed that the gig workers were supported, while 19.1% suggested that the laws don't back up gig workers.

The respondents were asked if they would be interested in a university course on freelancing, digital entrepreneurship, or platform-based work. The results indicated that 50.9% of the respondents were interested in such courses or workshops, 40.8% explained that they might be interested, while 8.3% stated they weren't ready to participate. On a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 represents "not interested" and 3 signifies "interested," the mean score was 2.55.

The analysis highlighted that only 5.8% of the respondents were completely aware of their legal rights as gig workers, while 14.2% were partially aware of them. In contrast, 21.7% were completely unaware, and 28.3% were somewhat aware. Furthermore, 37.5% of the respondents remained neutral. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "completely unaware" and 5 represented "completely aware", the mean score was 3.14.

3.4 Pearson's Correlation Analysis

In order to test the hypotheses, the research relied on Pearson's Correlation to test the existence, strength, and direction of relationships between variables. The significance level of $p < 0.05$ was established. If the correlation coefficient (r) falls between 0.1-0.3, it indicates a weak relationship between variables. If r ranges between 0.3 and 0.5, then a moderate relationship between variables can be identified, while a coefficient greater than 0.5 signifies a strong relationship (Patten & Newhart, 2017).

The correlation analysis revealed a relationship between variables challenges and benefits of the gig economy. The coefficient r ranged from 0.379 to 0.649, implying moderate to strong positive relationships between variables. The strongest correlation was observed between the variable "lack of legal protection" and "skill development" ($r=0.649$), indicating that uncertain legal work environments may lead to consistent skill development to face the challenge of precarity. Additionally, a strong positive relationship was found between variable "skill development" and challenges such as "irregular income", "finding clients", "unfair treatment" and "no insurance" with r equals to 0.523, 0.538, 0.545, and 0.539 successively, which verifies the importance of being skilled to face the challenges associated with the engagement in gig work. These findings suggest that greater involvement in gig work may at the same time expose gig workers to both increased challenges and benefits, highlighting the complex, dual impact of the gig economy (Table 4). Thus, *H1* can be substantiated.

Table 4: Pearson's Correlation between variable challenges and benefits

<i>Benefits</i> <i>Challenges</i>	<i>Delay or issues in getting paid</i>						<i>Balance with study</i> <i>no insurance</i>
	<i>Irregular income</i>	<i>no legal protection</i>	<i>Finding clients</i>	<i>unfair treatment</i>	<i>Balance with study</i>	<i>no insurance</i>	
Financial independence	0.53897	0.49913	0.593305	0.480716	0.52341	0.425522	0.529784
Skill development	0.523968	0.520234	0.649214	0.538819	0.545793	0.494825	0.539984
More	0.442813	0.415223	0.556945	0.512453	0.551091	0.497955	0.409953

confidence							
Better time							
management	0.511001	0.508871	0.606093	0.557491	0.584185	0.435317	0.451117
Networking	0.386506	0.425839	0.615593	0.461283	0.483083	0.497672	0.481041
Personal							
satisfaction	0.429895	0.414821	0.574238	0.503847	0.472859	0.458868	0.441478
Portfolio							
building	0.379702	0.428092	0.579383	0.507064	0.499768	0.464928	0.461307

Source: The researcher

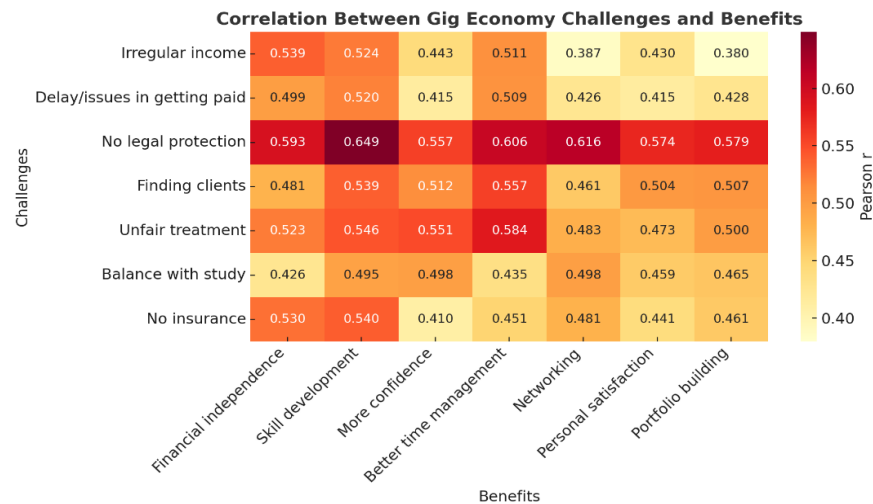


Figure 6: Heatmap of Pearson’s Correlation of variables, challenges, and benefits
Source: The researcher

The correlation heatmap illustrates that “No legal protection” has some of the strongest correlations with benefits like Skill development and Networking, while values like Irregular income and Portfolio building are weaker (Figure 6).

The analysis showed positive correlations between the variables challenges and skills, which indicates that respondents who experience more challenges also tend to show higher use of certain competencies. The strongest relationship observed was between "No legal protection" and "Communication skills" ($r = 0.659$), followed closely by "No legal protection" and "Punctuality" ($r = 0.618$), as well as "No legal protection" and "Task prioritization" ($r = 0.598$). Moderate positive relationships could be observed with "Balance with study" and "Digital literacy" ($r = 0.423$) (Table 5).

The findings illustrated that, in order to address challenges like “delays in payment” or “lack of legal protection”, self-management skills like communication, punctuality, and task prioritization skills are likely to be encouraged so workers can confront uncertainties and protect their income. Other skills like problem-solving, financial management, and marketing/self-promotion correlate moderately with challenges, suggesting that they may be adaptive responses to the uncertain conditions of gig work. This, in turn, fosters the development of professional and interpersonal skills necessary to succeed in such work environments. Thus, $H2$ can be substantiated.

Table 5: Pearson's Correlation between variables challenges and skills

<i>Skills</i> <i>Challenges</i>	Financial independence	Skill development	More confidence	Better time management	Networking	Personal satisfaction	Portfolio building
Time management	0.74121	0.772852	0.753121	0.773652	0.662631	0.691528	0.691416
Communication skills	0.721383	0.878276	0.755312	0.795433	0.770586	0.810354	0.782155
Problem-solving	0.647035	0.801574	0.781945	0.766397	0.646841	0.724474	0.731243
Customer service	0.657521	0.786277	0.728542	0.741389	0.665289	0.736262	0.720934
Digital literacy	0.551339	0.722352	0.632549	0.685389	0.664102	0.674885	0.697856
Financial management	0.653021	0.796668	0.663935	0.728385	0.684065	0.77879	0.732942
Marketing and self-promotion	0.663729	0.810886	0.671769	0.690299	0.712661	0.778177	0.759847
Task prioritization	0.695089	0.827637	0.771698	0.832099	0.735643	0.785936	0.752145
Networking	0.615587	0.751735	0.665579	0.717504	0.755786	0.744324	0.730733
Punctuality	0.631463	0.785754	0.728839	0.759997	0.703677	0.680013	0.702563

Source: The researcher

The findings suggest positive correlations between variables benefits and skills, highlighting that respondents who show higher levels of perceived benefits also tend to report higher levels of skills.

The strongest relationship could be observed between “Skill development” and “Communication skills” ($r=0.878$), followed by “Skill development” with “Task prioritization” ($r=0.828$). The lowest, while still strong, is “Financial independence” with “Digital literacy” ($r=0.551$).

The data analysis reveals a clear alignment between skills and benefits. Benefits like “Skill development”, “Better time management”, and “Personal satisfaction” show a notably strong correlation with core professional and interpersonal skills like “Communication”, “Task prioritization”, and “Financial management”. Additionally, a cyclic relationship is evident, where having strong skills enables workers to yield more benefits from gig work, and experiencing these benefits in turn enhances their skills. Furthermore, by developing skills, workers gain professional maturity and experience, making them better prepared to meet the demands of this new labor market model. Thus, $H3$ can be substantiated.

The findings indicated that students who are familiar with the term gig work are more likely to use gig economy platform, either as customers or as workers. The correlation coefficient r falls into the moderate positive range ($r=0.398$) according to Patten & Newhart, 2017.

Pearson's correlation analysis between variables related to the gig work area of interest and motivations, challenges, benefits, and skills showed that most correlations fall in the 0.2–0.49 range, which indicates weak to moderate to strong relationships between variables according to Patten & Newhart (2017).

Digital and creative gig work (Selling online, Translation, Graphic design, and Social media management) shows the strongest and most consistent associations. Ride-sharing showed very low correlations across most factors, implying that motivations and challenges for drivers are quite different from those of remote gig workers. Skills such as “communication”, “networking”, and “financial management” appear to be more fundamental to non-physical gig work, while benefits like skill development and personal satisfaction align more with creative and online-based roles.

For motivations, “income” was most strongly correlated with “selling online” ($r = 0.441$), “graphic design” ($r = 0.414$), and “social media management” ($r = 0.365$), while “flexibility” was most associated with “selling online” ($r = 0.468$) and “translation” ($r = 0.442$). Furthermore, “experience” was also notably linked to “translation” ($r = 0.459$) and “social media management” ($r = 0.416$). In contrast, ride-sharing exhibited minimal correlations with most motivations, challenges, benefits, and skills. Hence, *H4* is validated.

Regarding challenges, “irregular income” was most strongly related to “selling online” ($r = 0.374$) and “photography/videography” ($r = 0.364$), which reflects the unpredictable earnings in creative and sales-oriented gigs. “Payment delays” were highest for “selling online” ($r = 0.389$) and “translation” ($r = 0.349$). The absence of “legal protection” was most associated with “selling online” ($r = 0.420$), and “difficulties in finding clients” were strongest for “graphic design” ($r = 0.350$) and “translation” ($r = 0.330$). Hence, *H5* is validated.

Benefits such as “skill development” and “personal satisfaction” were mostly connected to “selling online” ($r = 0.429$, $r = 0.449$, respectively) and “translation” ($r = 0.440$, $r = 0.408$). “Portfolio building” showed its highest correlation with “translation” ($r = 0.407$). Thus, *H6* is validated.

Finally, concerning skills like “communication”, “networking”, and “financial management” indicated the strongest overall associations, especially with “selling online”, “translation”, and “graphic design”, with values ranging between 0.43 and 0.49. These findings suggest that although most gig economy activities share common motivations and skill requirements, digital and creative gig work shows a stronger connection with perceived benefits and necessary capabilities compared to more physically based roles, such as ride-sharing.

The Analysis of Pearson's correlation coefficients revealed that most travel-related gig economy jobs demonstrated moderate positive associations ($r \approx 0.30$ – 0.57) with respondents' motivations, challenges, benefits, and skills. “Freelance travel planners/itinerary designers” and “on-demand travel assistants/interpreters” indicated the highest correlations with both motivations and skills, particularly in relation to “experience” ($r = 0.538$ and $r = 0.467$, respectively) and “networking skills” ($r = 0.523$ and $r = 0.495$, respectively).

“Experience” as a variable for motivation emerged as the strongest driver for several roles, particularly for “destination photographers/videographers” ($r = 0.566$) and

“freelance travel planners” ($r = 0.539$). “Flexibility” was also a significant motivator for “on-demand travel assistants” ($r = 0.488$) and “airport meet-and-greet staff” ($r = 0.431$).

Challenges like lack of “legal protection” and “payment delays” showed strong correlations with “travel planners” ($r = 0.586$ and $r = 0.457$, respectively) and “local experience hosts” ($r = 0.522$ and $r = 0.526$, respectively). These findings suggest that while such roles offer autonomy and experiential benefits, they also come with notable risks concerning worker protection and payment consistency.

Benefits like “skill development” ($r = 0.552$) and “networking” ($r = 0.463$) were most associated with “travel planners”, while better “time management” showed strong links to “on-demand travel assistants” ($r = 0.469$) and “travel planners” ($r = 0.491$). “Portfolio building” and “personal satisfaction” also showed moderate-to-strong correlations across most roles, indicating that travel-based gig work often enhances personal and professional growth.

In terms of skills, “communication” ($r = 0.534$), “financial management” ($r = 0.520$), and “networking” ($r = 0.523$) were mostly prominent for “travel planners”, enforcing the personal connection aspect of the job. “Customer service” was highly correlated with “airport meet-and-greet roles” ($r = 0.502$) and “local experience hosts” ($r = 0.510$), reflecting the interpersonal nature of these jobs.

The correlation analysis explored the relationships between motivations for gig work (income, flexibility, experience, lack of full-time jobs) and various challenges, benefits, and skills associated with participation in the gig economy.

The analysis of variables, motivations, and challenges indicated that “income” as a motivation showed the strongest positive correlation with “irregular income” ($r = 0.599$), suggesting that those motivated by income are also more likely to report irregular income as a challenge. The correlation coefficient for “no legal protection” (0.586) indicates awareness of legal risks among income-driven workers.

“Flexibility” as a motivation factor correlates moderately with “irregular income” ($r = 0.558$), indicating that flexible workers may still face financial instability. “Experience” as a variable of motivation has moderate correlations with “no legal protection” ($r = 0.547$) and “unfair treatment” ($r = 0.537$).

“Income” as a variable of motivation is strongly correlated to “financial independence” ($r = 0.743$), “skill development” with r equals 0.697 , and “personal satisfaction” ($r = 0.697$). Additionally, “flexibility” as a motivation is also strongly linked to “better time management” ($r = 0.617$) and “personal satisfaction” ($r = 0.609$). Furthermore, “experience” as a motivation factor has a strong correlation score with “skill development” ($r = 0.727$) and “communication skills” ($r = 0.748$). “Experience” as a motivation is most strongly linked with “communication skills” ($r = 0.748$), “problem-solving” ($r = 0.667$), and “networking” ($r = 0.682$). Additionally, “income” as a variable for motivation also has high correlations with “communication skills” ($r = 0.714$) and “time management” ($r = 0.673$).

“Flexibility” as a variable for motivation maintains moderate-to-high correlations across most skills (0.50 – 0.61). “No full-time jobs available” as a factor of motivation shows weaker but still moderate correlations with “skills”, highest in “customer service” ($r = 0.379$).

3.5 Mann-Whitney test results:

The Mann-Whitney U test indicates a difference in knowledge of the term "gig economy" between the two gender groups. Based on the ranking patterns and U-values, it appears that females show greater knowledge than males, as shown by the mean rank for females of 138.8 compared to that of males (102.2).

The z-score of -4.08 is well beyond the typical threshold (± 1.96 for $p < 0.05$). The p-value is less than .00001, which is highly significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected, concluding that there is a statistically significant difference in the knowledge of the term "gig economy" between genders.

Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed a significant difference between students' study year and their knowledge of the term "gig economy," $U=5348.5$, $Z=3.44$, and $p<.001$. The mean rank for study year (135.93) was higher than for knowledge (105.07), indicating that students in higher study years differ in their knowledge levels of the gig economy. This suggests that progression through academic study is associated with deviation in awareness of the term gig economy.

The Mann-Whitney U test indicated a significant difference in engagement in the gig economy across gender, $U=5348.5$, $Z=3.44$, and $p<.001$. The mean rank of engagement was significantly higher for males (135.93) compared to females (105.07), indicating that male participants reported greater engagement in the gig economy than females. Thus, $H7$ can be validated.

The analysis of the Mann-Whitney U test revealed a highly significant difference in students' intentions to pursue gig economy work in the long term after graduation across gender, $U=870$, $Z=11.77$, and $p<.001$. The mean rank for males (173.25) was substantially higher than that for females (67.75), indicating that male students were significantly more likely than female students to report intentions of engaging in the gig economy in the future.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed that the phenomenon of the gig economy, which mainly gained momentum after the Covid 19 pandemic, has become a reality and is gradually stabilizing and absorbing a considerable number of workers in the labor market worldwide. The new emerging employment model is attracting a large sector of workers worldwide and in Egypt, as illustrated in the research by the statistics of Airbnb (2023), Forbes (2022), ILO (2021), Business Research Insights, (2024), Statista (2024b), CAPMAS (2020), and Fairwork (2021).

The respondents agreed that gig economy poses challenges and provides benefits which conforms with several studies, such as Kurian and Madhavi (2024) and Kalleberg & Dunn (2016), that stated several benefits of gig work, such as flexibility, hedonic motivations, satisfaction, networking, income creation, personal branding, and skill development. The researchers also highlighted challenges associated with precarity and the insecurity of the gig workplace.

More than half of the respondents were unsure whether the Egyptian laws support gig workers' rights. Several studies, like Hsieh et al. (2023), highlighted the precarious nature of the gig economy, which makes workers vulnerable to issues such as benefits, health insurance, and payment. They noted that this new work environment, with no distinct definition of employer-worker relationships, makes it necessary to intervene

with legal changes to protect workers' rights. Hajal and Rowson (2021) also noted that the hospitality industry should embrace the new model of employment to meet the needs of a new generation of workers with distinct needs. They emphasized that it is crucial to evaluate labor practices and regulatory frameworks in order to ensure sustainable and equitable practices for all stakeholders and to protect gig workers from fraud and exploitation, since they mostly work without formal contracts.

The findings showed that while the gig economy brings flexibility and short-term opportunities in travel, tourism, and hospitality, it also presents significant structural challenges. Issues of job insecurity, income instability, algorithmic exploitation, and digital exclusion raise concerns about the sustainability and fairness of platform-mediated work. Therefore, as highlighted by many reports like the U.S. Department of Labor (2024) and Gupta (2024), several countries have been taking serious measures to legitimize the status of gig workers in the labor market.

49.2% of the respondents explained that they “weren’t engaged in any gig work”, 28.3% “plan to do gig work in the future”. This highlights that gig work is not a prevalent option for TTH students, indicating a significant opportunity for exploration and support in this area. The low engagement of TTH students shows a discrepancy with some studies indicating that 30% of the global workforce participates in gig work (McKinsey, 2016), with 70% of these workers being Millennials & Gen Z (Statista, 2024b). This also disagrees with the study by Stryzhak et al. (2025), who studied gig work in the tourism sector in 112 countries, which highlighted that countries with advanced digitalisation and tourism show lower rates of self-employment, while less developed countries show higher rates.

The respondents also explained that it wasn’t very hard to get a gig job. This matches the results of several studies and statistical reports, which highlighted that the gig work model is expanding worldwide with numerous digital platforms offering a variety of gig tasks in different areas with different skill levels. Examples of these studies are the research by Farooq et al. (2021), ERF&GIZ (2023), and Upwork (2023), which demonstrated the growth of the gig economy and the rapid rise of the gig platforms in the last decade.

The primary area of gig engagement was online selling, followed by social media management and freelance writing. This conforms with the study by ILO (2018), which emphasized that most young people are engaged in crowdwork, which is large projects broken down into small manageable, low-paid tasks completed by a dispersed workforce.

The results demonstrated that the top-rated tourism, travel, and hospitality gigs by respondents were freelance tour guides and travel planners. The growth in gig work matches the shift in customer preferences, where clients seek curated, flexible, and unique travel experiences rather than standard package tours. Fiverr (2025a) illustrated that there are approximately 49,149 services (gigs) available under “travel planner”, around 3,911 gig listings are specifically labeled under “trip planning”, and about 10,595 gigs are offered for “travel guide” services.

The respondents explained that the most important aspects that could motivate them to engage in gig work were the lack of full-time jobs, followed by the flexibility offered by gig jobs and experience gained. This substantiates the motivations of the study by

Skrzek-Lubasińska & Szban (2024) that explored the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as presented in the literature, driving individuals to perform gig work. Skill development items had consistently strong correlations with benefits. This emphasizes the role of gig work as a training ground for essential employability skills. This was highlighted in the study of Berg (2016), who noted that gig workers with advanced skills benefit from gig work while low-skilled gig workers suffer from low pay.

The literature review and the field research highlighted several recommendations and the need for practical measures to be taken from both the government and practitioners in order to leverage this new employment model. Egypt's Labor Law No. 12/2003 (Riad & Riad, 2021), for instance, focused mainly on employees' physical presence in the workplace and lacks requirements for remote or flexible work models. It is essential to perform several reforms to be ready to cope with the changes of the digital era and the shift to virtual workplaces. These reforms could include the following: First, employment relationships in remote settings conducted through digital platforms should not be restricted to written contracts; the law should recognize agreements formed through digital arrangements. Second, while electronic signatures are already legally recognized under Law No. 15/2004 (Riad & Riad, 2021), the Labor Law should explicitly cover the legitimacy of digital communications, online records such as emails, and digital conversations if any disputes occur.

In order to support gig workers, a multifaceted approach must exist. This would need a quick and structured government intervention to provide legal protection, ensure fair pay, and specify working hours. Clear recognition of gig workers' rights and contributions by customers and employers is also necessary to improve their position. Programs focusing on skill development, self-promotion should be introduced by the Egyptian government to empower gig workers. Furthermore, providing access to insurance and other forms of social protection would enhance their economic security. Awareness campaigns can help educate both workers and the public about rights and responsibilities within the gig economy. It is also essential to define the relationship between gig workers and customers to prevent exploitation. The establishment of supervised legal platforms and the use of formal contracts can further ensure transparency and accountability in gig work arrangements.

Gig work as a new emerging employment model could be a solution to mitigate unemployment in developing countries, especially Egypt. It can also emphasize job decentralization and the relocation to urban centers like Cairo, the capital. Gig work opportunities also can enforce economic diversification, which could help distribute economic opportunities more fairly across the country, reducing the pressure on heavily populated areas.

It can also assist in absorbing a considerable number of youths who face challenges due to a mismatch between skills and qualifications and opportunities offered in the labor market. Additionally, gig work can mitigate the effect of brain drain by decreasing the need for relocation abroad and immigration to find suitable job opportunities.

The majority of the students highlighted that they lack legal awareness regarding the rights of gig workers. This reflects the need to raise awareness about these new

employment models and to explain how workers can protect their rights. The Egyptian government has initiated a platform to help gig workers in finding opportunities, providing training, and giving them the opportunity to open bank accounts. These initiatives should be promoted among young people so they can benefit from them.

In addition to regulations, some other aspects are recommended to stabilize the status of the gig economy in the marketplace. These aspects include digital upskilling, merging online and physical work into hybrid careers, where people combine full-time jobs with gig work, diversifying gig work opportunities, and encouraging gig-based entrepreneurship, where workers become formal micro-businesses. Finally, it is essential to take solid steps to make traditional employment and gig work coexist as a parallel mode of employment in order to absorb some unemployed youth and cope with the new paradigm of the new emerging digital workspace.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore platform-specific dynamics and evaluate employers' perspectives on hiring gig workers in the travel, tourism, and hospitality sector, as well as skill requirements for this emerging model of employment.

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