

# The art of gamifying digital gig workers: a theoretical assessment of evaluating engagement and motivation

Vijay Pereira<sup>a</sup> , Abhishek Behl<sup>b</sup> , Nirma Jayawardena<sup>c</sup>, Benjamin Laker<sup>d</sup>, Yogesh K Dwivedi<sup>e,f</sup>  and Shikha Bhardwaj<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup>People and Organizations, NEOMA Business School, Mont-Saint-Aignan, France; <sup>b</sup>Management Development Institute, Gurgaon, India;

<sup>c</sup>Department of Marketing, Griffith University, Nathan, Australia; <sup>d</sup>Henley Business School, University of Reading, Reading, UK; <sup>e</sup>Emerging Markets Research Centre (EMaRC), School of Management, Swansea University, Swansea, UK; <sup>f</sup>Department of Management, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Pune & Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, Maharashtra, India; <sup>g</sup>Department of Human Resource Management, IIM Sambalpur, Sambalpur, India

## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 global pandemic has transformed work and employment patterns within organizations. Two key emerging trends visible at the organization level are as follows. First, employees being asked to leave (which has mostly been seen within the aviation, hospitality, and travel industries) and second, employees asking to work part-time or on a contractual basis (e.g. within the education and healthcare sectors). This so-called 'new normal' has also given rise to an unprecedented increase and diffusion of digital workforces being engaged either full or part time within organizations. Thus, through our study, we aimed to contribute from a theoretical standpoint by exploring this phenomenon through the lenses of swift trust theory (STT) and psychological contract theory (PCT). Our goal was to understand how firms use gamification to engage their digital gig workforce. We collected our data from organizations that used some form of gamification in the process of engaging their employees and extended our inquiry to understand whether they did the same in engaging their gig workforces. We restricted our data to only those firms that had engaged white-collar gig workers. Overall, our study contributes to the literature by extending the theoretical debate pertaining to the use of STT and PCT theory to understand the phenomenon of digital gig workforce engagement and productivity.

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## KEYWORDS

Digital workforce; gig workers; productivity; gamification; engagement; motivation

## 1. Introduction

Technology is bringing about dramatic global changes, affecting people's daily lives and employment opportunities (Cascio and Montealegre 2016). The emergence of gig workers is just an example of the radical changes affecting the labour market (Behl and Pereira 2021; Cascio and Montealegre 2016). We define a gig economy as the practice of hiring workers in response to a specific project or need (Behl et al. 2022; Behl and Pereira 2021; Cascio and Montealegre 2016). As organizations rapidly adapt to this new work culture, they increasingly rely on the employment of gig workers as the driving force behind such economy. Organizations are increasingly outsourcing short-term tasks in order to avoid hiring full-time employees (Huotari and Hamari 2017; Jayawardena et al. 2021). The rapid evolution of technology has motivated employers to recruit gig workers depending on the skills required by a project. Gig workers are explicitly classified as short-term employees with strict work schedules and are paid based on the tasks they complete (Behl, Sampat, et al. 2021; Huotari and Hamari 2017). There is a great deal of confusion surrounding what constitutes work in the growing gig economy, ranging from

independent contracting to other forms of contingent work (Behl, Sampat, et al. 2021). Meijerink and Keegan (2019) attributed the exponential growth of gig workers by investigating conceptually the concept of HRM in the gig economy, where platform firms that design and implement HRM activities attempt to avoid establishing employment relationships with gig workers. Unlike their contract counterparts, gig workers have no permanent connection to an organisation, and are recruited by way of crowdsourcing platforms (Behl et al. 2022). Furthermore, the employment of gig workers is gaining popularity due to the low labour costs, lack of job obligation, and the freedom to hire workers on an ad-hoc basis (Behl et al. 2022; Jabagi et al. 2019).

The idea underpinning crowdsourcing platforms involves the participation of multiple individuals in order to achieve a common objective (Bakici 2020; Behl et al. 2022; Behl and Pereira 2021; Li et al. 2021; Ribeiro-Navarrete et al. 2021). Technological advances have enabled people to connect virtually across geographical boundaries through the Internet (Bacigalupo and Lambe 2011). Concisely, crowdsourcing platforms act as intermediaries, connecting freelancers with those who need their services (Carvalho, Francisco, and Relvas 2015; Jayawardena 2021). Crowdsourcing platforms