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Serbian Gen Z and the Gig Economy: Unveiling Perceptions and Motivational Factors

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Abstract. *This study investigates the engagement of Serbian Generation Z individuals in the gig economy, focusing on perceptions and motivational factors. Through an examination of existing gig economy platforms in Serbia, as well as a survey conducted among University of Belgrade students, the research explores student participation in the gig economy. Findings reveal that a smaller percentage of surveyed students participate in platform work (only 6.8%) and that females dominate this group. Factors such as financial support for tuition fees are associated with increased participation. Students offering skills via platforms primarily engage in tasks such as online classes and social media management, with average hourly rates of around 16 EUR. The study suggests the need for educational initiatives to raise awareness among young individuals and highlights the importance of further research to generalize findings and understand workforce segmentation within the gig economy.*

Keywords. *Gig economy, platform work, GenZ, platform economy*

1 Introduction

The terms *sharing economy (SE)*, *collaborative consumption*, and *platform economy* are most commonly used to describe the peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing of access to underutilized goods and services, prioritizing utilization and accessibility over ownership (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). They expound the opportunity to transform a business model design and day-to-day decision-making, which has profound implications both as an opportunity and a challenge (Guttentag, 2015). SE is sector-specific: how sharing is done depends on what is being shared. According to Treľová (2021), there are three types of sharing economy: temporary provision of movable or immovable property (like Airbnb), service provision based on property (like Uber) and service provision based on one's knowledge, skills, and abilities (like TaskRabbit).

The domain of the sharing economy that involves non-traditional employment contracts appears under the *gig economy* and *freelancing* concepts. It focuses on specific forms of work on digital platforms associated with online outsourcing and crowdsourcing. This area of the SE is referred to as human resources or on-demand services. Digital platforms provide a P2P connection between those who possess the necessary knowledge or skills to perform tasks and occasional work and those who require these temporary agreements. In this domain, there are several types of stakeholders, such as service providers (contractors or taskers), users (clients), and intermediaries (platforms that connect them).

The paper is organized as follows: the second section offers an overview of existing gig economy platforms operating worldwide and in Serbia, as well as an exploration of the factors which impact participation in the gig economy. The third section delves into the case study setting, covering the survey and sampling approach. Subsequently, the following chapter presents the results, and the last section encompasses the discussion and concluding remarks.

2 Gig economy platforms

TaskRabbit is a recognizable global representative of gig economy platforms. Founded in 2008 under the name RunMyErrand, the primary idea of this platform was neighbourhood assistance. In 2011, it was rebranded as TaskRabbit and relocated to San Francisco, achieving great success as it was available in 20 countries, with 1.25 million users, 25 thousand taskers, and 37.5 million dollars in venture funding. According to findings from 2015 (Cullen & Farronato, 2021), the average revenue from one transaction was 37 dollars. Earnings could reach up to 7,000 dollars per month. TaskRabbit offered a variety of tasks, such as minor home repairs, painting, furniture assembly, gardening, yard work, grocery shopping, etc. In summary, taskers browse tasks in their city and submit offers, while users post task requests with details. The platform itself states that it does not deal with licensed professionals and professional services and that taskers are not TaskRabbit employees but independent contractors.

In Serbia, two gig platforms stand out: Uradi-zaradi and PetGuards. Based on the American TaskRabbit, Uradi-zaradi was the first gig platform in Serbia, established in 2015. Its primary idea is to connect people who require household cleaning and maintenance assistance with those who want to earn additional income. According to available data, in 2020, the platform had around 5000 users and 150 service providers. The tasks or jobs on Uradi-zaradi are divided into three categories: regular maintenance services for households, cleaning and ironing, and cooking. The most common users are households with children or employed individuals who lack time to perform these tasks. The most common taskers are homemakers, students, and unemployed individuals with more free time than users. The compensation rate was at least 4 Euros per work hour (in 2022). The amount of compensation depends on the volume of work, the required level of cleanliness, the availability of cleaning supplies, special client requests, and other factors.

The PetGuards platform was created to connect pet owners with individuals interested in caring for or walking pets as needed. The platform currently provides pet care services in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Interested candidates fill out the form on the website with basic information about themselves and their experience. As stated on the platform, only 10% of applicants pass the selection. Each accepted caregiver creates a profile and is listed on the website, with data about the type of pets they are responsible for, how long they have been on the platform, available dates for care and other relevant information. Unlike the Uradi-zaradi platform, Petguards typically does not provide information about the compensation rates for caregiving services, previous experiences, or ratings from other users. Users can submit a care request on the website, which includes all relevant information about the pet, duration of care, and the owner.

2.1 Factors impacting participation in the gig economy

This section briefly reviews previous research to elucidate the motivating factors driving user involvement in the gig economy. It synthesizes findings from five distinct studies, highlighting the diverse factors identified across various contexts. It is believed that this section will provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of motivations underlying participation in the gig economy.

The study by Bogatyreva et al. (2023) in Russia found that gig and sharing economy workers exhibit notably higher entrepreneurial intentions than the general population. Factors such as age, entrepreneurial social capital, previous entrepreneurial exit, and intrapreneurial experience similarly influence participation in the gig and sharing economies. Additionally, the authors found that engagement with digital platforms is linked to perceived self-efficacy, while experience in the gig and sharing economy positively influences the formation of entrepreneurial intentions.

The second study, which drew our attention, revealed distinct gender-based motivations driving participation in the gig economy, focusing on moonlighters (those holding a second job). Men were primarily motivated by time constraints on their primary job, covering ongoing expenses and saving for the future. In contrast, women were motivated by covering expenses and concerns about the security of their primary jobs. These motivations shed light on the nuanced differences in how men and women engage with gig work (Doucette & Bradford, 2019). The following study, performed in China by Wei and MacDonald (2022), proposed a 'work relationship model' for the gig economy based on three macro-level and twelve micro-level factors. Key findings highlight income, labour protections, voice, and client

behaviour as the most crucial factors influencing both work quality and work relations for gig workers, offering insights into the dynamics within the gig economy.

A study conducted in Malaysia, where the target population were undergraduate students from public universities, shows that students are likely to actively engage in the gig economy, driven by the perception of its usefulness in aligning with their goals, developing relevant skills, balancing academic and professional responsibilities, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit, and gaining financial independence. Their engagement is influenced by their positive impression of the gig economy's potential for financial gain, leading them to actively seek opportunities, sign up for platforms, and pursue gigs for monetary gain and skill development. Moreover, students recognized the gig economy as a pathway to improve employability and gain real-world experience, emphasizing the need for universities to adapt their curricula to prepare students for diverse job opportunities in the evolving gig economy landscape (Mahmud et al., 2023). Another Malaysian study revealed that the socio-economic sustainability of the bottom 40% and the middle 40% income groups in the gig economy is influenced by factors such as circumstances, earnings, risk, prospects, and workload. At the same time, flexibility does not show a significant impact. These factors collectively shape motivations, commitment, work-life balance, financial security, and career aspirations, affecting individuals' engagement and sustainability in gig work. Moreover, there is a notable difference in socio-economic sustainability between the two income groups, potentially influenced by income disparities, access to opportunities, financial stability, skills, networks, and policy environments (Ab Rashid et al., 2023).

3 Case study setting

We collected the perceptions and experiences of Serbia's Gen Z on participation in the gig economy through the survey conducted in May 2023. The survey was administered to University of Belgrade (UB) – Faculty of Organizational Sciences (FOS) students. The FOS is one of the leading institutions within the UB, educating students on information systems and technologies and business at BSc, MSc, and PhD levels (FOS, 2024). The anonymous survey was conducted online using Microsoft Forms. The conducted study was cross-sectional, which is an observational study designed to collect data from participants at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of a population's characteristics and variables of interest (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The questionnaire itself consisted of several segments. The first segment aimed to capture basic socio-demographic information on the respondents, such as gender, age, region of origin, amount of money at personal disposal at the monthly level, type of accommodation they live in, and similar. The next and final part was related to their participation in the gig economy and reasons for participation or absence. Questions used in the survey were modified from previous studies in the field of the sharing economy (Hamari et al., 2016; Yuan et al., 2021).

4 Results

We collected the responses of 325 students, 99 (30.5%) males and 226 (69.5%) females. A slight disproportion in gender can be detected, but that could have been expected, with a higher percentage of females enrolled in higher education at the UB in mind (University of Belgrade, 2016). Results show that most respondents grew up in Belgrade (37.5%) and cities of medium size, between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants (32.2%). Looking at the region of Serbia where the respondents grew up, most are from Belgrade and surrounding cities (42.8%) and West Serbia (15.4%). Slightly more than half of the respondents live with parents (52.9%) in a house or apartment the family owns (59.7%). Regarding the financial situation, most students have up to 150 EUR at their disposal, and 74.8% of students have their tuition fees covered by the Republic of Serbia.

Out of 305 respondents, only 22 (6.8%) offer their skills via the platform, while the remaining 93.2% do not. Since the two groups, those participating in the gig economy and those who do not, are pretty unequal, comparing the two groups is not advised, even with nonparametric tests. Therefore, the two groups will be observed more closely using descriptive statistics. Looking at the gender of those offering skills via online platforms, females are dominant (63.6%). Most of the students grew up in a city of medium size, with between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants (40.9%) and an amount between 150 EUR and 350 EUR (31.8%) at their disposal. Interestingly, almost 78% (77.3%) of the respondents who offer

their skills are students whose tuition fee is covered by the budget of the Republic of Serbia. This indicates that students with good grades and academic achievements are those sharing their skills and knowledge. Looking at how much they charge for 1 hour of online work, the mean amount is 16 EUR, with a standard deviation of 6.2 EUR. The highest requested amount is 25 EUR, while the minimum is 5 EUR. The mean number of hours per week the individuals are ready to work via the platform is 10.5, with a standard deviation of 10.1 hours. In the next stage, the students were asked which skill they offered via online platforms. The question was multiple choice, as students can provide different skills, especially digital ones. The most commonly shared skill was giving online classes (English, programming, mathematics), followed by social media management, marketing plan development, translation and text formatting, and web design.

Besides analyzing those who offer their skills on platforms, we more closely observed those who do not. If they participated in such a form of sharing, we wanted to know which skills they would consider sharing, at what price, and for how many hours a week. Looking at how much they would charge for 1 hour of online work, the mean amount is 16 EUR, with a standard deviation of 9.8 EUR. The highest requested amount is 65 EUR, while the minimum is 5 EUR. The mean number of hours per week the individuals were ready to work via the platform is 12, with a standard deviation of 10.13 hours. In the next stage, the students were asked which skill they would consider offering via online platforms. Most respondents from this group, 120, are not interested in providing their skills via platforms. On the other hand, looking at the skills they would offer, they are most interested in doing social media management (33.3% of answers), marketing plan development (32.0%), giving classes (31.4%), programming (20.1%), and babysitting (20.1%).

5 Discussion and conclusion

The study presented above aimed to observe young individuals' participation level in the Republic of Serbia's developing gig economy market. The study results indicate that currently, only 6.8% of the surveyed students offered their skills via the platform. Females dominate among students offering skills via online platforms (63.6%). About 78% are students whose tuition fees are covered by the budget of the Republic of Serbia, indicating that better students share their skills and knowledge more frequently. They are ready to work around 10.5 hours per week. On average, students charge 16 EUR per 1 hour of work, with the highest requested amount of 25 EUR and the minimal 5 EUR. Interestingly, the group of students who do not share their skills on the platform would highestly charge 65 EUR per hour of work. This shows that even if, on average, they would charge the same as students who already offer their skills (16 EUR), some of these students have unrealistically high expectations. Some policy and managerial implications of the study can be made. The results of our study show that students and young people in Serbia generally are not that acquainted with the concept of platform work. Therefore, a suggestion to stakeholders is to organize workshops, seminars, and presentations on the idea at universities, faculties, and youth gatherings. It is believed that such short presentations, education, and talks with those participating in platform work could also motivate others to participate. Also, platforms should support these events to provide more information on their security and privacy actions to protect providers and users. The results of this study should be interpreted in light of its limitations, the first of which is the sample. With the presented survey, we covered only students from one faculty at one university in Serbia. Therefore, to obtain more generalizable results, a large-scale survey is needed. However, the results of this study could act as valuable input for further studies on the topic. One of them could be segmenting workforce providers, which would provide an in-depth analysis of their behaviour patterns. Similar studies have been conducted in shared accommodation (Maricic et al., 2023) and carpooling (Salamanis et al., 2019).

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