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The Contingent Effect of Platform Dependency on the Job Crafting-Work Engagement Link: A Moderated Mediation Model in the Gig Economy

Abstract

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Keywords: Individual Crafting, Resilience, Meaningful Work, Affective Commitment, Cognitive Work Engagement.

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The fast-growing gig economy has increased work flexibility but has also raised concerns about sustaining work engagement among gig workers. Digital labor platforms increasingly manage workers through algorithmic control and performance systems, which may limit worker agency and psychological ownership. Although job crafting is often viewed as a useful proactive behavior, little is known about the conditions under which it is most effective. This study addresses this gap by examining whether platform dependency shapes the relationship between job crafting and work engagement. Using survey data from 400 gig workers working on online labor platforms, we tested a moderated mediation model using structural equation modeling. Results show that job crafting promotes work engagement through a psychological mechanism, but this positive effect weakens when workers are highly dependent on a single platform. These findings extend the job demands resources theory to the gig economy and offer guidance for platform design.

Keywords: [Individual Crafting](#), [Resilience](#), [Meaningful Work](#), [Affective Commitment](#), [Cognitive Work Engagement](#)

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List of Abbreviations

IC: Individual Crafting

MW: Meaningful Work

AC: Affective Communication

CWE: Cognitive Work Engagement

Introduction

The Evolution of the Gig Economy

The gig economy has rapidly emerged as transformative of the meaning of work today, where traditional job structures are being replaced by digital platform-mediated ones (Abun et al., [2021](#)). A



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new work model is beginning to take shape involving a variety of independent workers who perform various jobs via apps or online platforms in which algorithms assign work, evaluate their performance, and pay them (Jiang, 2017; Amabile et al., 2016). This scheduling situation has resulted in a distinctive working environment that is at once liberated and constrained (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). On the one hand, gig workers enjoy autonomy to select tasks, to design their work schedules, and to craft elements of jobs in ways that influence how aspects of the job are experienced through individual crafting behaviours such as changing job tasks, interactions, or perceptions (Berg & Dutton, 2008). On the other end of the spectrum, it compiles a sense of autonomy that is constrained by algorithmic management systems, which determine power and control related to visibility, task assignment, and the amount to earn that provides subjective processes for determining control feeling invisible or work uncertain about the future (Mousa & Chaouali, 2022; Amir & Bakrie, 2019).

Gig work was originally seen as a 'side hustle' to top up income from full-time work. But changes in global employment patterns, digital growth, and financial pressures have turned gig work into the main way many people make a living (Asif et al., 2019a; Leana et al., 2019). Freelancers in Pakistan and globally are relying on digital platforms as their prime source of earning, posing new challenges to financial stability, long-term sustainability, and psychological well-being (Wang et al., 2022). As the gig economy evolves beyond a transitory phenomenon and becomes its own ecosystem for careers, then "worker engagement/meaning/resilience" seems even more relevant (Avery et al., 2007; Binnewies et al., 2008).

This has another nice wrinkle, which reveals a basic paradox. Despite the impression of independent agency and flexible labor, life worlds for gig workers are also closely regulated in algorithmic control, task ratings, and platform policy. Workers calibrate their work, relations, and agency in order to keep motivated and productive – yet such agency is already embedded within the frameworks of closed digital essential conditions of opening up opportunities as well as constraints. This paradox provides an interesting backdrop to examine how gig workers continue to drive, plan, and manage the cognitive load while balancing between autonomy and precariousness.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

The extant literature also strongly indicates how IC is an antecedent of work satisfaction, meaning, performance, and well-being. IC indicates active

behaviors in which workers reconstruct tasks, relationships, and perceptions to enrich the work experience (Berg & Dutton, 2008; Lee et al., 2010). Research consistently finds that crafting may be useful to rebuild resources, boost well-being, and increase feelings of group inclusiveness at work (Gori et al., 2021; Leana et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2014; Connolly & Gallagher, 2006). In the digital setting, IC is perceived as particularly relevant since gig workers usually work remotely, feel isolated, and use self-motivation mechanisms to remain focused and perform (Mousa & Chaouali, 2022).

Similarly, CWE is a person's degree of focus, dedication, and mental engagement in the work. Prior research has revealed that CWE is negatively related to meaningful work, affective commitment, psychological resilience, and job autonomy (Wang et al., 2022; Ingusci et al., 2021). Despite the conceptual overlap between IC and IC, researchers have typically taken a 'shortcut' by assuming that proactive crafting behaviors inevitably translate into higher engagement. This assumption ignores the impact of structural contexts that could facilitate or constrain the effects of making (Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Detert & Edmondson, 2011).

This leads to a serious discrepancy. A large percentage of the job crafting literature deals with traditional employment environments in which job tasks, resources, and social interactions are relatively continuous. Yet, gig work is mediated by digital systems that constrict worker autonomy via algorithmic surveillance, variable day-to-day activity patterns, and designed platform constraints (Jiang 2017; Connolly & Gallagher, 2006; Decuypere & Schaufeli, 2020; Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Although the creation of digital labour has sparked growing attention among scholars on crafting, structural forces have been little explored in terms of the impact of IC on CWE. The thesis that making is uniquely enlivened by engagement doesn't apply in environments where workers are left with few protections and irregular income.

The unknown in this equation is Platform Dependency (PD). Given that gig work is not the only occupation for workers anymore, and they rely on this type of work as their main source of income, such high financial and psychological dependency on one platform (or a cluster of platforms) will be inevitable. This dependence shapes how much independence workers actually have, how intricately they can engage, and even how secure they feel in their creation of work roles. Stable platforms with fairness could weaken, reshape, or strengthen the impact of IC on CWE according to high PD. Without considering

PD, our comprehension of gig workers' engagement is partial, especially in countries like Pakistan, where freelancing work and the raters working on these platforms are growing fast (the main source of earnings).

Theoretical Contribution and Objectives

This study is grounded in the Job Demands Resources (JD R) model, which postulates that work engagement occurs when workers have the resources they need to deal with job demands (Tims et al., 2013; Grund & Titz, 2022; Haslam et al., 2000; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). In this conceptualization, personal crafting is understood as a tool to energize resources through reorganizing tasks, relations, and beliefs. Why is work engagement negatively related to TMT? In addition, meaningful work, resilience, and affective commitment reinforce these resources through supporting psychological health and motivation (Wang et al., 2022; Humphrey et al., 2007; Jabagi et al., 2019; Joo et al., 2017). Yet, the JD R model also recognizes that contextual forces can limit the potential resource-building process, and therefore, Platform Dependency represents an important boundary condition in gig settings.

The first significant contribution is the validation of crafting a meaningful engagement path in the context of digital labour. For IC to improve the experience of meaningful work and hence cognitive work engagement, this study also extends the JD R model to an online freelancing and remote gig environment. The second contribution is in identifying PD as a moderator that has the ability to influence the magnitude and direction of this process. This is particularly significant as gig work has few traditional organisational forms in it, rendering platform architectures as sites of control, opportunity, and dependence.

The specific objectives of this study are therefore as follows:

- To verify how individual crafting enhances meaningful work and thereby strengthens cognitive work engagement.
- To test whether Platform Dependency moderates the relationship between individual crafting and cognitive work engagement.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Underpinning: JD-R Theory and Self-Determination Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory offers a theoretical perspective on the process by which

employees maintain a balance between job demand and resources. Job demands are the physical, cognitive, and/or emotional efforts expended when carrying out work activities, while job resources are those aspects of work that facilitate goal achievement, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth. In the gig economy, Job Crafting (JC) is regarded as a proactive mechanism through which employees modify their work tasks, interactions, or cognitive perceptions to achieve this balance. Through adapting tasks (task crafting), moulding interactions (relational crafting), and changing their mindset of how they perceive the task (cognitive crafting), gig workers are able to promote resources, as well as buffer against hindrance demands, which enables engagement and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The psychological processes inspiring meaningful work (MW) are further explained by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT suggests that individuals experience optimal motivation and well-being when their basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are fulfilled. Meaningful work occurs when tasks are related to personal skill and interest (competence), workers have control over how they complete the work (autonomy), and workers feel connected to others through their roles (relatedness) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Michaelson et al., 2014; Licata et al., 2003; Luchak & Gellatly, 2007; Luthans et al., 2006). In the context of gig work, MW might develop as workers tailor their positions to fulfill these needs. Task crafting improves competence by providing application of skill; relational crafting fosters relatedness via clients or peers; and cognitive crafting facilitates autonomy in influencing perceptions of work importance. Relatively, JD-R and SDT, the study shows that Gig workers' proactive crafting behaviours do not simply mediate between demands and resources but also fulfil intrinsic psychological needs supporting cognitive engagement as well as sustained performance.

Individual Crafting and Meaningful Work

IC stands for individual crafting or self-initiated modifications or changes in the "Size of work tasks and scope, content or boundaries of work; social interactions and cognitive framing". In the world of the gig economy, IC empowers workers to form assignments, schedules, and client relationships around personal objectives and abilities. Literature suggests that IC enhances the perceptions of work-related significance as it empowers workers to

concentrate on what matters to them and minimize non-urgent or stressful activities (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Petrou et al., 2018). For instance, gig workers who choose projects that fit in line with their skills or redefine client engagements to learn more have been shown to experience higher MW.

Based on empirical evidence, IC functions to foster intrinsic motivation and engagement via perceiving autonomy, competence, and relational satisfaction, which directly impact MW (Tims et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2021; Maden-Eyiusta & Alten, 2021; Mangundjaya & Amir, 2021; Manzoor et al., 2019). Workers can transform routine or low-level tasks into personally meaningful experiences by transforming task boundaries and relational contexts. In other words, IC is a way for gig workers to meet their SDT needs by imbuing structural flexibility with meaning at work.

H1: Individual Crafting positively influences Meaningful Work.

Meaningful Work and Cognitive Work Engagement

Meaningful Work (MW): promotes Cognitive Work Engagement (CWE), which is absorption, focus, and mindengagement in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). MW energizes gig workers' cognitive investment by making them feel that what they do is important, meaningful, and consistent with their personal and professional values. Dedication describes employees who are willing to expend energy beyond organizational identification and retention, while absorption refers to immersion and rapt attention (Nguyen et al., 2019; Oprea et al., 2022; Petrou et al., 2012).

Research suggests that MW can be dynamic (Chiu & DeRond, 2003) and it not only exercises an activating function but also mediates the relationship between proactive behaviours (i.e., IC) and CWE. Employees who design their own work to meet competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs show better cognitive focus, resilience, and performance (Steger & Dik, 2009; Michaelson et al., 2014; Rizwan et al., 2016; Roczniewska & Bakker, 2016; Romeo et al., 2019). In the context of a gig economy, MW serves as a self-stabilizing psychological resource to maintaining attention and effort despite fluctuations in workload levels, promoting task effectiveness and goal attainment.

H2: Meaningful Work positively influences Cognitive Work Engagement.

H3: Meaningful Work mediates the relationship between Individual Crafting and Cognitive Work Engagement.

The Moderating Role of Platform Dependency

Platform Dependency (PD) refers to the degree of dependence that gig workers have on a particular digital platform for earning, career prospects, or client access. A high PD signifies economic lock-in, fewer alternatives, and lower independence, whereas a low PD indicates higher flexibility to switch platforms or sources of revenue. PD is especially important in algorithmically controlled gig platforms since control over the system can condition job assignment, pricing, and visibility.

Conceptual, in that the role of PD may influence whether IC is an effective MW resource. With low dependency, the gig workers perform voluntary crafting, orienting tasks and relations to their internal needs, resulting in high autonomy and MW. Conversely, high dependence discourages autonomy: workers may not choose to craft in the strategic sense, and algorithmic surveillance may neutralize crafting activities and perceived importance. This process is grounded on JD-R and SDT: similar crafting behaviors tend to lead to different psychological experiences in function of the constraints within which they are developed, notably economic and structural vulnerability.

The positive effects of proactive behaviours are enhanced by autonomy, and they are reduced by constraints in the environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Under high PD conditions, IC could still be related to MW, but this relationship might become attenuated because of platform controls and income dependence, which in turn diminishes the sensemaking value of crafting efforts. When crafting does not change the outcome or enhance performance, workers may feel distressed or disengaged, which underlines PD as a boundary condition in the relationship between IC and MW.

H4: Platform Dependency moderates the relationship between Individual Crafting and Meaningful Work, such that the relationship is weaker when dependency is high.

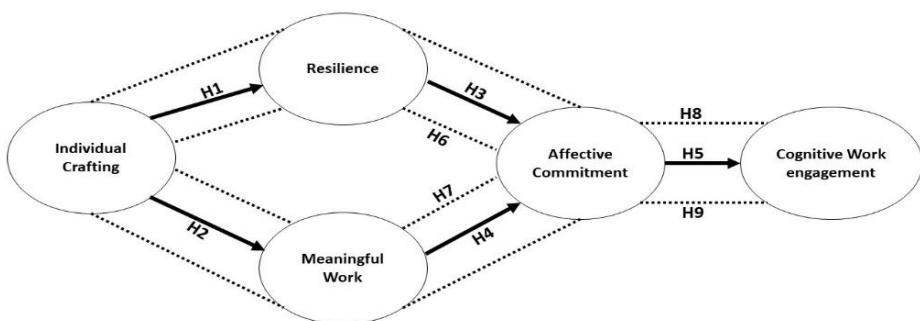
Furthermore, this moderation extends to indirect effects: the positive influence of IC on CWE via MW may be contingent on PD levels. In low PD environments, MW fully mediates the IC-CWE link, whereas in high PD contexts, the mediation weakens. This moderated mediation underscores the interactive impact of individual agency and platform constraints on engagement outcomes.

H5: The indirect effect of Individual Crafting on Cognitive Work Engagement via Meaningful Work is conditional upon the level of Platform Dependency.

In conclusion, PD is a pivotal contingency factor for the effectiveness of active job behavior in the gig context. Finally, the study aimed to fill a gap by investigating how algorithmic control and economic

dependence shape engagement pathways based on the IC, MW, CWE, and PD integration; it draws theoretical and practical implications for platform governance and employees' well-being.

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



The proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates the relationships among Individual Crafting (IC), Meaningful Work (MW), Cognitive Work Engagement (CWE), and Platform Dependency (PD). IC is positioned as the antecedent, directly influencing MW, which in turn affects CWE. MW also serves as a mediator linking IC to CWE. PD functions as a moderator of the IC → MW relationship and a conditional factor for the indirect IC → MW → CWE pathway.

Control variables of tenure, gig type, age, and gender are introduced to control for demographic context effects on engagement and crafting behaviors. Tenure might shape the experience and efficiency of task crafting; the type of gig work may set boundaries for autonomy; age and gender may influence the perceptions regarding meaningful work, and the amount of cognitive focus dedicated. Reconciling theoretical antecedents of JD-R, SDT with practical applications on platform dependence, this model offers systematic means for understanding cognitive engagement in the context of modern gig work.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Context

This study adopted a quantitative method to investigate the relationships among Individual Crafting, Meaningful Work, Cognitive Work Engagement, and Platform Dependency in gig workers. A cross-sectional survey approach was employed, which is capable of collecting data at one

specific moment for a diverse representative group of freelancers (Williams, 2007). Angles of analysis. The design is legitimate in seeking to unpack complex patterns and relationships between variables, as it allows one to capture a snapshot of behaviours, experiences, and perceptions in the gig economy efficiently (Apuke, 2017).

Gig workers from a variety of platforms, such as Fiverr, Upwork, and LinkedIn (full-time or part-time freelancers), were our population of interest. Participants were recruited from various geographical segments of Pakistan to ensure heterogeneity on platform dependence, work experience, income, and age, without which variance between the groups on autonomy, algorithmic control, and economic dependence would be difficult to investigate (Hewson, 2014). This strategy made the study more externally valid and meant that the results were representative of all gig workers, rather than one platform. Moreover, the design enabled testing of demographic factors (age, marital status, work experience, and income) to affect primary outcomes (Leon et al., 2011; Scroggins, 2008; Setiawati et al., 2021; Tugade & Arcinas, 2023).

Sampling and Data Collection

A self-selected sampling method, akin to convenience sampling, was employed in which participants elected to volunteer rather than chosen directly by the researcher (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2005). Questionnaires were distributed through online social

platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp freelancing groups, and LinkedIn in order to maximize participation from live, active freelancers who are currently earning. This procedure guaranteed that group members were able to contribute meaningfully toward job crafting and platform dependence (Slonje et al., 2012).

A pilot study of the survey tool was undertaken with 50 participants to test the feasibility, face validity, and credibility of its questions (Leon et al., 2011; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2005). The final sample size for the main study was 400 freelancers, satisfactory with Sekaran (2016) suggesting a sample size of over 30 and below 500 for the pilot study and main study.

Screening : The data were screened before analysis. Partial and inconsistent responses were excluded, and attention-check questions were used to screen inattentive subjects. Outliers were excluded by applying statistical checks to confirm data integrity and representativeness. Demographic information was obtained through the survey with reference to the respondent's gender, age, marital status, years of work experience, full-time/part-time status, and annual income (Apuke, 2017). Using structured online questionnaires to administer the study was instrumental in integrating a cost-effective, time-efficient, and less environmentally damaging (Hewson 2014) and procedurally biased solution(slot), which is particularly large for an antimicrobial research project type-related.

Instrumentation and Measures

Validated scales were used for all constructs, consistent with previous studies on gig workers (Mousa & Chaouali, 2022; C. Wang et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2021).

1. Individual Crafting (IC): Measured using items adapted from Tims et al. (2012) and Petrou et al.

Reliability and Convergent Validity Table

Table 1

Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Affective commitment	0.822	0.884	0.660
Individual Crafting	0.889	0.923	0.751
Meaningful Work	0.945	0.955	0.687
Resilience	0.799	0.851	0.490
Cognitive Work Engagement	0.815	0.876	0.644

(2012), capturing task, relational, and cognitive crafting. Respondents rated statements like "I try to optimize my tasks to fit my skills" on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The pilot study confirmed the scale's reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.889; composite reliability = 0.923; AVE = 0.751) (Mousa & Chaouali, 2022).

Meaningful Work (MW): It was measured using 11 items adapted from Mousa & Chaouali (2022), capturing significance, purpose, and alignment with personal values. Example items were "My work gives my life meaning." The reliability of the pilot measurement was high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.945; composite reliability = 0.955; AVE = 0.687).

Cognitive Work Engagement (CWE): Was measured with items from C. Wang et al. (2022) and Wong et al. (2021), by adaptation of the model to absorption and dedication. Items, for example, "I am completely focused when I work," were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Then this factor was also reliable ($\alpha = 0.815$, CR = 0.876, AVE = 0.644).

Platform Dependency (PD): Modified from Mousa & Chaouali (2022), not including the mediated dependency on platforms and perceived absence of suitable other options. Example items were "This platform is my main income source. The reliability of the scale was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.799; composite reliability = 0.851; AVE = 0.490).

The main constructs comprised 28 items, and the survey also accounted for demographic seven items, which is a broad coverage. All were close-ended using a 5-point Likert (Komorita, 1963). Convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs were verified with HTMT ratios below 0.9 and mitigating issues in multicollinearity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Pervan et al., 2018).

Table 2

Discriminant Validity

Construct	Affective commitment	Individual Crafting	Meaningful Work	Resilience	Cognitive Work Engagement
Affective commitment					
Individual Crafting	0.780				
Meaningful Work	0.927	0.850			
Resilience	0.666	0.494	0.671		
Cognitive Work Engagement	0.885	0.693	0.821	0.706	

Statistical Analysis Strategy

Data was analyzed using SmartPLS 3 and SPSS, which accommodate both normal and non-normal data distributions (Daniel, 2016). The analysis followed a multi-step approach:

1. Measurement Model Assessment: CFA was conducted to evaluate the reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability) and validity (AVE, discriminant validity) of all constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).
2. Common Method Bias Check: Harman's single-factor test and VIF analyses were applied to detect potential biases (Pervan et al., 2018).
3. Structural Model Assessment: PLS-SEM bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples tested hypothesized relationships among IC, MW, CWE, and PD (Wong et al., 2021).
4. Moderated Mediation Testing: Conditional indirect effects of IC on CWE via MW under varying levels of PD were examined using the PROCESS macro (Models 7 and 14) (Mousa & Chaouali, 2022).

Additional analyses included Pearson correlations, R² values, and effect sizes to evaluate explanatory power. This approach ensured robust testing of the conceptual framework and alignment with previous gig work studies (C. Wang et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2021).

Data Analysis and Results

Sample Characteristics

Survey responses were generated by freelancers who belong to various digital work categories in Pakistan through an online survey. It included 400 responses to be kept for analysis. Participation was voluntary and confidential, thus meeting ethical standards in interviewing (Sekaran & Bougie, 2003).

The majority of participants were male (78.8% vs 21.3%). All but one subject were young professionals, and 51% were aged 20–25; the next largest demographic (young professionals aged 26–30) amounted to only 20.8%. A significant number of the respondents were single (79.3%). Experience-wise, over half (51.7%) said they had been freelancing for less than two years, which suggests that freelancing is still a new trend for some of the respondents.

With respect to employment density, 60.3% freelanced part-time whilst 39.8% worked full-time. Monthly income ranged: 41.8% earned less than PKR 50,000, with some in higher groups. Business-related services were the most common service offered by respondents, followed by virtual assistance and digital marketing.

Table 3

Respondents Profile

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	315	78.8
	Female	85	21.3
Age Range	Less Than 20 years	81	20.3
	20-25 Years	204	51
	26-30 Years	83	20.8
	31-35 Years	18	4.5

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status	Above 35 Years	14	3.5
	Single	317	79.3
Work Experience	Married	83	20.8
	Less than 2 years	207	51.7
	3 years	90	22.5
	4 years	57	14.2
	5 years	21	5.2
Full-time/Part-time	More than 5 years	25	6.3
	Full-time	241	39.8
	Part-time	159	60.3
Earning	Bellow 50.000	167	41.8
	50,000 or above	89	22.3
	100,000 or above	56	14
	150,000 or above	43	10.8
	200,000 or above	45	11.3
Category	Business	146	36.5
	Graphics & Design	76	19
	Virtual Assistant	101	25.25
	Digital Marketing	58	14.5
	Web development	1	3.5
	Programming	1	6.25
	Supply Chain Expert	1	0.25
	Amazon Advertising	1	0.25
	QA analyst and data annotation specialist	1	0.25
	Teaching	1	0.25

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 3. Reflective measurement model assessment followed established guidelines, focusing on indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019a).

Indicator Reliability

Indicator reliability was assessed using outer loadings. All items demonstrated loadings above the recommended threshold of 0.708, indicating adequate representation of their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2019b). Consequently, no indicators were removed.

Table 4

Factor Loadings

Order Construct	Items	Loadings
Individual crafting	IC1	0.885
	IC2	0.920
	IC3	0.886
	IC4	0.902
Resilience	R1	0.779
	R2	0.821
	R3	0.833

Order Construct	Items	Loadings
Meaningful Work	R4	0.823
	R5	0.862
	R6	0.805
	MW1	0.823
	MW2	0.891
	MW3	0.894
	MW4	0.905
	MW5	0.892
	MW6	0.905
	MW7	0.879
Affective Commitment	MW8	0.645
	MW9	0.887
	MW10	0.882
	AC1	0.809
	AC2	0.906
Cognitive Work Engagement	AC3	0.896
	AC4	0.913
	CWE1	0.831
	CWE2	0.844
	CWE3	0.892
	CWE4	0.905

Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). All constructs

exceeded the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70 for both measures, confirming satisfactory reliability (Goh et al., 2016).

Table 5

Reliability of all constructs

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
AC	0.904	0.933
CWE	0.891	0.925
IC	0.920	0.944
MW	0.961	0.967
RS	0.903	0.925

IC = Individual Crafting, RS = Resilience, MW = Meaningful work, AC = Affective Commitment, CWE = Cognitive work engagement

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All AVE values exceeded

0.50, indicating that constructs explained more than half of the variance in their indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 6

AVE Values

Constructs	AVE
AC	0.778
CWE	0.754
IC	0.807
MW	0.746
RS	0.674

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other

constructs, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Additionally, all HTMT values were below 0.90, providing robust evidence of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 7*Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio*

Constructs	AC	CWE	IC	MW	RS
AC					
CWE	0.841				
IC	0.816	0.727			
MW	0.804	0.725	0.853		
RS	0.835	0.780	0.780	0.763	

Table 8*Fornell-Larcker Criterion*

Constructs	AC	CWE	IC	MW	RS
AC	0.882				
CWE	0.757	0.869			
IC	0.746	0.660	0.899		
MW	0.752	0.674	0.804	0.864	
RS	0.762	0.704	0.719	0.715	0.821

In line with the predictive nature of PLS-SEM, central goodness-of-fit indices (e.g., RMSEA, CFI, TLI) were not focused on. Reliability, validity, and predictive relevance were therefore more emphasized instead (Hair et al., 2019a).

Assessment of Common Method Bias

Considering the self-reported and cross-sectional nature of the data, common method bias (CMB) was taken into account. Procedural remedies were

available during questionnaire construction such that anonymity was guaranteed and item wording was developed with care (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The full collinearity diagnostics were used to statistically evaluate CMB. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values of all constructs were lower than the threshold value of 3.3, suggesting that a common method variance did not seriously compromise the results (Kock, 2015).

Table 9*VIF Values*

Constructs	AC	CWE	IC	MW	RS
AC					
CWE					
IC					
MW	2.043				
RS	2.043			1.000	1.000

Structural Model Evaluation and Hypotheses Testing

Following measurement model validation, the structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping procedures in SmartPLS. Path coefficients, t-values, p-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect sizes (f^2) were examined (Hair et al., 2019a).

The R^2 values indicated moderate to substantial explanatory power for endogenous constructs: affective commitment (0.669), meaningful work (0.647), resilience (0.516), and cognitive work engagement (0.572).

Table 10

Coefficient of Determination

Constructs	R Square	R Square Adjusted
AC	0.669	0.667
CWE	0.572	0.571
MW	0.647	0.646
RS	0.516	0.515

Direct path results showed that individual crafting significantly and positively influenced resilience and meaningful work. Both resilience and meaningful work had significant positive effects on affective

commitment, which in turn exerted a strong positive effect on cognitive work engagement. All direct hypotheses (H1–H5) were supported.

Table 11

Direct Effects

	Hypothesis	β value	T-value	p-value
H_1	IC \rightarrow R	0.719	24.494	0.000
H_2	IC \rightarrow MW	0.804	35.607	0.000
H_3	R \rightarrow AC	0.458	8.281	0.000
H_4	MW \rightarrow AC	0.425	7.812	0.000
H_5	AC \rightarrow CW	0.757	28.152	0.000

Mediation analysis was performed using bias-corrected bootstrapping. Findings provided supportive evidence that resilience and meaningful work mediated the link between individual crafting and affective commitment. Sequential mediation via

resilience or meaningful work and affective commitment was also demonstrated to be significantly associated with individual crafting to cognitive work engagement. All mediated hypotheses (H6–H9) were confirmed.

Table 12

Indirect Effects

	Hypothesis	β value	T-value	p-value
H_6	IC \rightarrow R \rightarrow AC	0.329	7.278	0.000
H_7	IC \rightarrow MW \rightarrow AC	0.342	7.382	0.000
H_8	IC \rightarrow R \rightarrow AC \rightarrow CW	0.249	6.619	0.000
H_9	IC \rightarrow MW \rightarrow AC \rightarrow CW	0.259	7.134	0.000

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The study tested the association between personal crafting and cognitive work engagement, as moderated by platform dependency, among freelancers, with mediational roles played by resilience, meaningful work, and affective commitment. The results lend partial support to the person–crafting perspective, which posits that self- or individual crafting of work increases engagement because it enables freelancers to tailor their work to personal skills, interests, and values. According to previous literature, the task of crafting allows for mastery, autonomy, and achievement opportunities, which subsequently foster a sense of meaningful work

and emotional connection, thereby enhancing cognitive work engagement (Lee et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2021).

The research validates the proposed relationship between crafting and engagement, indicating that engagement is more than just the completion of an activity but that it entails a psychological process. Crafting serves as a proactive for freelancers to experience resilience, meaningfulness and affect carryover in one's job. By far, resilience is a dominant mediator in the relationship between flow and engagement through crafting. By promoting the sense of mastery, relaxation and mindfulness, crafting helps develop tools for coping with stressful situations and facilitate effortful attention to increase emotional attachment and engagement (Zhang et al., 2021).

Also, the distinctive mediating role of meaningful work cannot be ignored. In line with task-person-fit theory, freelancers experience greater purpose, fulfillment, and motivation if their work process is consistent with activities that are meaningful to them (Lee et al., 2010), which in turn enhances cognitive absorption at work.

One notable contribution of the current study is the discovery of a negative moderation effect of platform dependency. Having a strong dependence on one platform reduces the positive influence of craft on engagement (trap of necessity). Freelancers who are dependent, having no other choice as economic compulsion, feel compelled to pursue short-term financial gains in preference over autonomy, which undermines the psychological gain provided by crafting. In contrast, freelancers with lower dependence retain their flexibility and are therefore able to fully benefit from crafting activities in terms of resilience, meaningful work, and affective commitment. This result supports the idea that individual crafting is not always beneficial as its effectiveness depends on structural and economic conditions, especially the level of reliance on platform income (Zhang et al., 2021).

The bigger-picture urban implications I take from this research are that more making does not equal more engagement. It operates through the combination of resources of oneself (resilience, meaningful work) and societal barriers (platform dependence). These results provide a rich understanding of why freelancers engage in engagement, and show the contingency of job crafting in gig work (Lee et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2021).

Theoretical Implications

This study offers several significant theoretical contributions to the literature on job crafting, engagement, and the gig economy.

Contribution 1: Extending JD-R Theory with Structural Moderators

The study contributes to JD-R theory in the gig work context by introducing platform dependence as a structural moderator. Classical JD-R theory underlines the role of personal and job resources to spur engagement. However, this study suggests some of these resources may not be as useful given structural conditions such as economic dependence. By examining how high dependence on the extent that crafting contributes to resilience, meaningful work, and affective commitment structures the relationships relative to engagement outcomes (Lee et al., 2010).

Contribution 2: Differentiating Voluntary vs. Dependent Gig Work

The results distinguish between "voluntary" gig work, centred on autonomy and resource deployment, and "involuntary" gig work driven by economic necessity. Crafting can increase engagement among voluntary freelancers, whereas among dependent freelancers, there are limited advantages due to financial pressures. This distinction is theoretically relevant as it underlines that psychological consequences are dependent on the economic situation and degree of freedom (autonomy) of the worker, providing a lens through which heterogeneity in gig worker experiences can be understood (Zhang et al., 2021).

Contribution 3: Nuancing Job Crafting Literature

The research shows that job crafting is "not a cure-all." And though the existing literature highlights its universally positive impact on engagement and well-being, this research identifies contingencies in which crafting is not as effective. The negative moderation effect of platform dependency implies that cultivated benefits depend on the freelancer's autonomy and economic independence. This distinction further develops job crafting theory by situating the concept of individual crafting in relation to contextual and structural considerations, and demonstrates that crafting should be analysed through a dualistic perspective of what is required for 'optimal' levels of behaviour (Lee et al., 2010).

Contribution 4: Elucidating Psychological Mechanisms in Freelance Work

The research contributes that resilience, meaningful work, and affective commitment are key mediators of the crafting–cognitive engagement relationship. Skill, attachment, and purpose are all aspects of passion that contribute to engagement.³¹⁴ The making of things fosters mastery, emotional connection, and meaning,³¹⁵ and together these can raise levels of motivation. Through unpacking these mechanisms, this study contributes to the explanation of how freelancers translate resource inputs into desirable psychological outcomes when being dependent on platforms with different power. This revelation is consistent with the resource-based approach, referring to engagement as arising from the interaction between individual resources and structural barriers (Zhang et al., 2021; Zeglat & Janbeik, [2019](#); Zhai et al., [2023](#); Azinga et al., [2023](#)).

Altogether, the theoretical contributions of this study contribute to the secrecy in three ways by (1)

enriching JD-R theory with structural aspects, (2) distinguishing between gig work types based on dependency, and (3) unraveling the boundary conditions of job crafting. Overall, these contributions contribute to a more enriched understanding of the engagement mechanism in the gig economy by emphasizing the complex interaction between personal resources, meaningful work, affective commitment, and platform reliance (Lee et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2021; Kismono & Wulandari, [2022](#); Maqbool & Nazir, [2023](#); Putri et al., [2023](#)).

Practical Implications For Platform Developers

Platforms need to create algorithms that allow for autonomy even among dependent freelancers. Some features, including flexible task assignment, freedom in task choice, and the potential to match tasks with skills, can reduce these negative effects of dependency and allow freelancers to enjoy advantages related to crafting (Zhang et al., 2021). Integration of digital tools to enable development, customisation, and mastery skills may increase meaningful work and engagement for all types of freelancers.

For Gig Workers

Freelancers need to understand the psychological effects of overdependence on a single platform. Must risk losing the long-term health and participation of people for short-term benefits. Skills, such as income diversification, self-setting goals, and resilient coping, could enhance the effects of crafting. Task-based self-regulation: Connecting tasks with desires and values may also lead to meaningful work, employee commitment (affective), and cognitive engagement (Lee et al., 2010).

For Policymakers

Results emphasize the need for labor protection of dependent contractors. Policies that create income stability and social protections, as well as provide professional development, can reduce the “trap of necessity,” so freelancers can use crafting for engagement. Policies to incentivize platforms to support independence and flexible work can also improve the psychological results for dependent gig workers (Zhang et al., 2021).

More broadly, these practical implications underline the need for concerted efforts by platforms, freelancers, and regulators to promote participation in the gig economy. Autonomy-supportive design,

strategic diversification, and labor rights could help to magnify the benefits of crafting while minimising its pitfalls associated with platform-dependence.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional nature limits causal inferences; therefore, a future longitudinal approach is needed to confirm the temporal process of crafting and engagement. Second, self-reports might have response bias given that they were used to assess engagement, resilience, and affective commitment (Lee et al., 2010). Third, the study was limited to freelancers in Pakistan and, therefore, may not be generalisable across cultural and economic contexts. Third, only a few mediators and moderators were checked; other relationships, such as cognitive versus behavioral crafting, environmental mechanism, or organizational support, weren't present (Zhang et al., 2021).

Future Research Directions

Future studies could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to determine causality and the reciprocal processes of crafting, platform dependency, and engagement. Examining forms of implementation intention, for example, cognitive versus behavioral, may help to answer the question of which strategy is more effective depending on varying levels of dependence. Generalizability and cultural or structural variation in engagement processes can be examined by extending the research to sectors, countries, and gig platforms. Moreover, investigating the interaction between crafting, autonomy, organizational support, and technological tools may yield a more nuanced picture regarding engagement in gig-working.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of person crafting on cognitive work engagement for freelancers, as mediated by resilience, meaningful work, and affective commitment, and moderated by platform dependency. These findings support the role of crafting in opportunities for mastery, autonomy, and purpose that are related to engagement and well-being (Lee et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2021).

But the latter model is much more restricted in the case of dependent freelancers who put financial need over autonomy at first place. The “trap of necessity, which delimits the psychological effects of crafting, shows that participation depends on

resources not only at the individual but also at the structural and economic level. Less platform-dependent freelancers can work crafting to increase resilience, meaningful work, and affective commitment and therefore boost cognitive engagement.

Theoretically, this study broadens JD-R theory by including structural moderators, makes a fine-grained distinction between voluntary and dependent gig work, and contributes to job crafting literature by showing boundary conditions. In practical terms, the results highlight the significance of platform designs that promote autonomy, freelancer strategies to

reduce dependence, and policies safeguarding dependent contractors.

In conclusion, job crafting promotes engagement through meaningful work and resilience, with the latter only the case when employees maintain high flexibility and economic security. Balancing autonomy and security: not just a fad. How we balance these two seems important to the future of work, if we want sustainable engagement and well-being from our freelancers. "Structural barriers need to be reduced for the realisation of benefits of crafting and supporting high performing, engaged, psychologically healthy gig workers" (Lee et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2021).

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