Sanur as a Motivational Stage: Exploring the Dynamics of Freelancers in the Gig Economy of the Tourism Sector

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Abstract:

In an environment where many workers operate as freelancers or independent contractors, work motivation becomes the main driver for maintaining service quality and business sustainability. Motivation also plays an important role in promoting innovation and renewal in the tourism industry, as motivated workers tend to look for ways to improve the quality of their services. This research aims to determine the main motivational factors that influence freelancers in the tourism gig economy and the dynamics of the gig economy that influence the motivation and work experience of freelancers in Sanur. The Sanur Tourism Area, which is located on the southeast coast of Bali Island, which is one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in Indonesia, is the place used in this research. The researcher used a qualitative method. Data collection in this research was through observation, documentation, and interviews with informants who had been determined using purposive sampling techniques. The conclusion obtained is that the main motivating factor for freelancers in the Sanur tourism sector is income. Income becomes a central element that motivates them to engage in the dynamics of the gig economy, influencing their decisions to choose certain projects and determining their level of involvement in freelance work.

Keywords: *Motivation; Freelancers; Gig Economy*

1. Introduction

In the digital transformation era, the internet has revolutionized how people connect and conduct business, including the way labor markets operate. One of the most significant developments from this transformation is the rise of the gig economy—where individuals engage in freelance or short-term work arrangements facilitated by digital platforms (Kässi et al., 2021; Hsieh et al., 2023). This decentralized and technology-enabled work model offers new forms of employment, especially for the Millennial and Gen Z workforce who seek autonomy and flexibility (Perdana et al., 2025; Firdasanti et al., 2023). These shifts have been particularly impactful in regions like Bali, where the tourism sector has integrated freelance labor as a vital recovery strategy post-COVID-19 (Puspitarini & Basit, 2020; Fanaqi et al., 2020).

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The gig economy is not only growing rapidly but also evolving uniquely in tourism-dependent regions like Bali. The island's recovery after the pandemic relied heavily on digital labor platforms and flexible workforces to boost local businesses (Husin et al., 2022; Soebandrija et al., 2021). In this context, freelancers in the tourism industry are increasingly drawn to places like Sanur, which offers both a calming atmosphere and the infrastructure needed for productive remote work. Despite this, the literature has yet to deeply investigate how location-specific characteristics, such as the unique social and environmental setting of Sanur, motivate freelancers to engage and persist in gig work (Montanes-Del-Rio & Medina-Garrido, 2023; Faris et al., 2025).

Although many studies highlight the economic potential and labor market disruptions caused by the gig economy (Zelma, 2024; Noordin et al., 2025), there is limited research that delves into the psychological and contextual motivators—especially in the tourism sector. In particular, there is a gap in understanding how geographic environments like Sanur contribute to shaping freelancers' motivations, work-life balance, and productivity (Parman et al., 2023; Mahardika, 2020). This knowledge is crucial for developing sustainable labor strategies in tourism-centric economies that depend on gig work as a labor model.

The problem lies in the lack of location-specific studies that combine individual work motivation with the socio-spatial context of gig work in tourism destinations. While studies like Hu and Fu (2021) and Hsieh et al. (2023) examine systemic factors like digital platforms and policy design, few address the micro-level environmental and lifestyle factors that enhance freelancers' motivation in specific tourism zones. This research intends to bridge that gap by focusing on Sanur—one of Bali's oldest and most iconic tourism zones that has recently emerged as a hub for gig workers due to its serene setting and work-friendly infrastructure.

Sanur offers a unique case for study due to its balance between tranquility and accessibility. Unlike bustling areas such as Kuta, Sanur attracts more mature and long-term visitors, creating an environment that fosters deeper work engagement among freelancers (Mantu, 2019; Taruh, 2020). The availability of coworking spaces, reliable internet, and access to creative amenities support gig workers' entrepreneurial and freelance activities, reinforcing both income generation and motivation (Fransiska & Tupti, 2020; Mahardika, 2020). Furthermore, Sanur's proximity to Denpasar and Ngurah Rai Airport enhances freelancers' mobility, making it an ideal node in the broader gig economy network.

Beyond its infrastructural advantages, Sanur presents a psychologically stimulating setting for digital nomads and creative professionals. The scenic beaches, calm environment, and cultural richness not only improve well-being but also influence productivity and job satisfaction (Firdasanti et al., 2021; Hsieh et al., 2023). This aligns with studies suggesting that motivated gig workers are more likely to innovate and deliver high-quality service (Montanes-Del-Rio & Medina-Garrido, 2023; Perdana et al., 2025). Hence, motivation becomes a mediating factor between place-based experiences and performance outcomes in freelance tourism labor.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on spatial-motivational dynamics within the gig economy in tourism. Rather than examining digital labor in isolation, this study integrates motivational psychology and spatial analysis to explore why freelancers are drawn to Sanur and how this environment enhances their performance and satisfaction (Zelma, 2024; Noordin et al., 2025). It responds to the need for place-sensitive studies in gig economy literature, which often overlooks the role of environment and lifestyle in shaping freelance work patterns (Soebandrija et al., 2021; Kässi et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to explore Sanur as a motivational stage for freelancers operating in the gig economy of the tourism sector. The objective is to examine how spatial characteristics of Sanur influence freelancer motivation, work-life integration, and productivity. By doing so, it hopes to contribute new insights into the geography of freelance work in digital economies and inform policy and business strategies that support sustainable gig work models in tourism-centric regions (Hu & Fu, 2021; Parman et al., 2023).

2. Theoretical Background

Work Motivation
Work motivation is a psychological process that determines the direction and voluntary actions of individuals in achieving specific goals. In organizational contexts, motivation plays a vital role in encouraging employees to work enthusiastically and contribute positively to their responsibilities (Lashitew, 2023). It is also seen as a way to channel individuals' potential so they are willing to work productively and achieve predetermined objectives (McIntyre et al., 2021).

Motivation can also be defined as a process that drives individuals to behave in specific ways to fulfill fundamental human needs, including survival, security, recognition, achievement, power, growth, and self-esteem. This process may be internally or externally driven, and it engages an individual's skills and capabilities to carry out tasks effectively (Uzir et al., 2021). According to Utami et al. (2024), work motivation is the internal or external energy that influences effort, intensity, and persistence in completing work, ultimately affecting organizational performance and goal attainment.

Gig Economy
The gig economy is a flexible, contract-based labor system facilitated by digital platforms, allowing individuals to choose when and how they work. It emerged prominently after the 2009 financial crisis as an adaptive response to shifting labor market conditions (Wattoo et al., 2025). In the gig economy, workers can accept or decline tasks based on their preferences, without being bound by fixed working hours or direct supervision (Puspitarini & Basit, 2020).

Firdasanti et al. (2025) observed that while the gig economy offers flexibility, it also introduces vulnerability, especially for educated workers such as students. Meanwhile, Pramudita and Guslan (2025) emphasized the significance of digital support and work–life balance in improving the productivity of gig workers in

Indonesia. Therefore, while the gig economy opens up new employment opportunities, it also requires thoughtful policies and structured support to ensure long-term sustainability and well-being for its participants (Hu & Fu, 2021; Hsieh et al., 2023).

Tourism
Tourism has evolved from a recreational activity to a significant academic and economic domain. In Indonesia, tourism studies emerged in the early 1980s, reflecting growing awareness of the social and economic value of travel (Ma et al., 2024). Tourism includes all activities related to travel outside of one's daily residence for leisure, entertainment, or new experiences. Supporting facilities and infrastructure are typically available to meet the needs of travelers (Li et al., 2021).

According to Husin et al. (2022), tourism has become not only a means to fulfill human leisure needs but also a major contributor to national economic development. Alonso-Almeida (2022, as cited in Wu et al., 2025) highlighted the need for sustainable management practices among tourism workers, including freelancers in the gig economy. Tourism today is recognized as a strategic discipline that fosters sustainable regional and national development (Zakiyah et al., 2025; Radu, 2022).

3. Methodology

This research aims to determine the main motivational factors that influence freelancers in the tourism gig economy and the dynamics of the gig economy that influence the motivation and work experience of freelancers in Sanur. The Sanur Tourism Area, which is located on the southeast coast of Bali Island, which is one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in Indonesia, is the place used in this research. The researcher used a qualitative method. Data collection in this research was through observation, documentation, and interviews with informants who had been determined using purposive sampling techniques.

Quantitative data in this research includes data in the form of numbers, such as Freelancer rates, average income, number of projects undertaken, number of research informants, interview duration, Freelancer work period, dates, and numbers in addresses. Qualitative data in this research is descriptive information and does not involve numbers or numbers. This qualitative data consists of words and sentences conveyed orally and in writing, which describe patterns of human behavior that can be observed in the context of the tourism sector in the gig economy.

The primary data source is interviews with research subjects either through observation or direct observation. Data that is directly obtained from the source and given to data collectors or researchers. Freelancers such as tour guides, diving guides, tourist photographers, travel writers, hotel employees, and yoga instructors are the primary data sources needed for this research. Secondary data is data that other parties have collected. Researchers can find this data source through other data sources that are also related to the data they are looking for. The secondary data sources that

researchers used in this research were national journals from Google Scholar and books that support the theoretical basis used in this research.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

This research aimed to explore the main motivational factors influencing freelancers working in the tourism gig economy in Sanur, Bali, as well as the effects of gig economy dynamics on their motivation and work experiences.

Based on previous studies and data collected through interviews and observations, several key motivational factors were found to consistently support freelance workers in maintaining high motivation and adapting to the gig economy environment.
Firstly, financial motivation remains a central driver. Freelancers are motivated by the need for income stability and competitive project rates, which encourage them to actively seek and complete assignments. However, income fluctuation due to the irregularity of gig work also creates challenges in sustaining motivation over time (Lashitew, 2023; Uzir et al., 2021).

Secondly, the flexibility of work schedules and the autonomy to choose projects provide freelancers with a strong intrinsic motivation. This flexibility allows them to balance personal life and work, which increases job satisfaction and commitment. They value the freedom to manage their time independently without being bound by a traditional 9-to-5 work routine (Utami et al., 2024; McIntyre et al., 2021).

Thirdly, personal growth, creativity, and professional identity significantly influence motivation. Freelancers expressed that work which allows them to develop skills, learn new competencies, and express creativity enhances their enthusiasm and commitment to their roles (Wu et al., 2025; McIntyre et al., 2021).

Psychologically, the motivational factors align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, where freelancers seek to fulfill basic needs such as security (financial income), social needs (recognition and connection), and higher-level needs like self-actualization through their work. Intrinsic motivation, such as a sense of accomplishment and mastery, plays an important role in driving performance (Utami et al., 2024).

The gig economy dynamics further shape freelancers' experiences. Positively, digital platforms offer increased access to clients and enable flexible work arrangements, which freelancers consider vital to sustaining their livelihoods and enhancing professional diversity (Pramudita & Guslan, 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Freelancers also diversify their services by offering online classes, digital content, and translations to adapt to shifting market demands (Ma et al., 2024).

However, several challenges emerge from the gig economy structure. Income instability due to inconsistent project availability creates financial uncertainty, which can reduce motivation and increase stress (Firdasanti et al., 2023). Additionally,

freelancers lack social protections such as health insurance, unemployment benefits, or legal employment rights, which increases their vulnerability, especially during economic downturns or crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Wattoo et al., 2025).

To overcome these challenges, freelancers develop various adaptation strategies, including improving digital literacy, expanding online presence, and diversifying income sources. These strategies not only sustain their work motivation but also enhance resilience in a competitive gig economy environment (Zakiyah et al., 2025).

Table 1. Summary Table of Empirical Findings

Aspect	Findings	Supporting References
Financial Motivation	Income stability and competitive rates motivate freelancers to seek and complete work, though income fluctuation poses challenges to sustained motivation.	Lashitew (2023), Uzir et al. (2021)
Flexibility and Autonomy	Freedom to choose working hours and projects increases job satisfaction and commitment.	Utami et al. (2024), McIntyre et al. (2021)
Personal Growth and Creativity	Opportunities for skill development and creative expression enhance enthusiasm and professional identity.	Wu et al. (2025), McIntyre et al. (2021)
Psychological Needs (Maslow's Theory)	Fulfillment of safety, social, and self-actualization needs drives motivation.	Utami et al. (2024)
Positive Gig Economy Dynamics	Digital platforms provide client access and flexible work options; service diversification is a key adaptation strategy.	Pramudita & Guslan (2025), Wang et al. (2024), Ma et al. (2024)
Negative Gig Economy Dynamics	Income instability and lack of social protection reduce motivation and increase vulnerability, especially during crises.	Firdasanti et al. (2023), Wattoo et al. (2025)
Adaptation Strategies	Enhancing digital skills, diversifying services, and strengthening online presence help freelancers sustain motivation and resilience.	Zakiyah et al. (2025), Ma et al. (2024)

5. Discussion

Income as a Key Motivational Factor

Based on the findings, income emerges as one of the primary motivational factors that sustain freelancers in Sanur's tourism-based gig economy. Informants such as surf instructors, nail artists, and visual content creators revealed that income is more than a means of livelihood—it is a symbol of value and recognition. This aligns with

Lashitew (2023), who argued that in informal or freelance work, income is not merely transactional but also functions as a key signal of social and professional appreciation. This financial recognition reinforces the link between effort and reward, generating a cycle where higher income motivates better performance and increased commitment. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, income satisfies the most fundamental physiological needs, which is a prerequisite for further self-development. Wang et al. (2024) also support this view by asserting that gig workers' financial motivation is directly tied to the satisfaction of basic human needs and long-term security.

Moreover, McIntyre et al. (2021) found that in digital and service-based gig economies, consistent income serves as a validation of freelancers' professional identity. This perspective is evident in the way Sanur's freelancers interpret their earnings—not only as monetary gain but also as a form of acknowledgment for their unique skills and dedication.

Flexibility as a Motivational Factor
Equally significant in sustaining freelancer motivation is work schedule flexibility. Many informants cited flexibility as the primary reason for choosing freelance work. Freelancers emphasized that this flexibility provides them with control over their time, enabling them to balance work and personal responsibilities. This freedom fosters a sense of autonomy, which is vital for intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Utami et al., 2024).

Maslow's theory also provides a useful lens here, especially in the domain of self-actualization. The ability to choose when and how to work supports creative expression, career exploration, and professional growth—all components of self-actualization. Wu et al. (2025) affirmed that autonomy in scheduling enhances mental well-being and creative output among gig workers.

Furthermore, Talita (2022) and Uzir et al. (2021) emphasize that millennial freelancers particularly value flexibility over rigid work contracts. This generational preference aligns with the current findings, indicating that flexible scheduling plays a central role in enabling freelancers to thrive in dynamic work environments, particularly in the tourism sector, where client demands often vary in timing and intensity.

The Dynamics of the Gig Economy: Impacts on Motivation and Work Experience
The dynamics of the gig economy—marked by flexibility, short-term contracts, and performance-based recognition—significantly shape the motivational landscape and work experience of freelancers. Informants described how gig work provides variety, freedom, and opportunities for professional growth, although it also introduces challenges such as income instability and job insecurity.

Radu (2022) explains that the gig economy provides freelancers with mobility and diverse work engagements, which increase motivation through continuous learning. However, this freedom often comes with trade-offs, especially related to job permanence and access to long-term benefits.

The research supports that the gig economy allows for project diversity and client-based recognition, such as ratings and repeat bookings, which serve as powerful motivators (Li et al., 2021). This is particularly visible in Sanur's tourism sector, where freelancers often tailor services to specific tourist demands, requiring agility and adaptability—traits that boost intrinsic motivation.

However, the short-term nature of contracts introduces uncertainty, forcing freelancers to constantly seek new opportunities. Ma et al. (2024) found that this environment fosters resilience and market awareness but may also increase emotional strain. Despite this, many freelancers find satisfaction in the freedom and variety offered by gig work, reinforcing findings by Zakiyah et al. (2025), who noted that autonomy and non-routinized tasks significantly enhance work engagement among tourism gig workers.

Lastly, Pramudita & Guslan (2025) argue that a well-managed balance between freedom and structure in gig roles fosters sustainable careers. In Sanur, this balance appears evident as freelancers navigate fluctuating tourism patterns with adaptability and resilience, building rich and fulfilling work experiences that are uniquely tied to the rhythms of Bali's tourism ecosystem.

6. Conclusions

In the research "Sanur as a Stage for Motivation: Investigating the Dynamics of Freelancers in the Gig Economy in the Tourism Sector," the conclusion obtained is that the main motivational factor for freelancers in the Sanur tourism sector is income. Income becomes a central element that motivates them to engage in the dynamics of the gig economy, influencing their decisions to choose certain projects and determining their level of involvement in freelance work.

Freedom to manage working time and flexibility in carrying out tasks also emerge as important factors that support and strengthen the motivation of freelance workers. This flexibility allows them to adapt to fluctuations in traveler demand and changing environmental conditions, creating an adaptive work environment. Meanwhile, this freedom provides space for freelancers to explore various projects that suit their interests and preferences.

The continuation of the research findings shows that freedom in time management and work management not only has an impact on motivation and job satisfaction but also makes a significant contribution to the work-life balance of freelancers in the Sanur tourism sector. Freelancers can balance their personal and professional lives better because they have complete control over their work time. This creates a more relaxed work atmosphere without excessive pressure, which in turn increases overall life satisfaction.

In the context of the dynamics of the gig economy in the tourism sector, the role of freedom in choosing certain projects or jobs also creates diversity in freelancer work experiences. They can explore various projects that suit their interests and expertise, ultimately enriching their portfolio and enhancing their professional credibility. This diversity provides an additional dimension to work motivation because freelancers can continue to learn and grow through different experiences.

Overall, the findings of this research highlight the complexity of work motivation in the dynamics of the gig economy in Sanur's tourism sector, where income, freedom, and work-life balance are key interrelated elements. An in-depth understanding of these factors will not only benefit freelancers but also provide valuable insights for relevant parties in developing policies that support sustainable growth in the gig economy tourism sector.

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