



Psychological and Behavioural Science

Workplace Autonomy in the Gig Economy: A Lonely Ride?

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Background

The interaction between man and technology has always been a topic of great public interest. In his novel *Player Piano*, Vonnegut (1952) imagines a near future dystopian society where technology led unemployment has created massive inequality and class divide. More than two centuries on from the industrial revolution, we are still debating about its effects on human society (Albritton-Jonsson, 2012). In a similar way, the *gig economy*, which entails sharing of labour through online platforms (Van Doorn, 2015), has sparked debate among academics and policy-makers alike about its role in society (Kenny & Zysman, 2016).

Due to the usage of diverse methodologies and terminologies such as “platform economy” (Graham & Woodcock, 2018), “sharing economy” (Schiek & Gideon, 2018), “access-based economy” (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) and “on-demand economy” (Aloisi, 2015), it has been difficult to estimate the demographics and characteristics of those who participate in this kind of work (Balaram, Warden, Wallace, & Stephens, 2017). The United Kingdom (UK) Office for National Statistics ran a predictive survey in 2017 based on 2,184 individuals and estimated that around 4.4 percent of the population had worked in the gig economy in the preceding 12 months (Lepanjuuri, Wishart, & Cornick, 2018). Currently, estimates about the size of the workforce range from 1.1 million to 14 million (Balaram et al., 2017; Prassl, 2018; Sargeant, 2017). Even if interpreted with caution, the lower estimates reflect a significant number of people involved in this type of work.

Proponents of the gig economy claim that it empowers workers by making them micro-entrepreneurs (Martin, 2016; Prassl, 2018). It allows people to enter and leave the labour market without apparent difficulty and fit this type of work around other aspects of their lives. However, this autonomy often comes at the price of uncertainty, unpredictability, and economic insecurity (Aloisi, 2015; Ashford, Caza, & Reid, 2018; Prassl, 2018). The platforms represent a powerful “digital work intermediation” (Prassl, 2018, p. 14), enabling them to control their workers via sophisticated algorithms (Prassl, 2018). We aim to dissect these opposing views in our work.

Ambiguity in classification

Meanwhile, gig workers are either classified as self-employed or independent workers, sometimes working for several employers. However, a survey by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that more than 60 percent gig workers do not feel like “their own boss” (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, 2017, p. 48). They work on a “pay-as-you-go basis” (De Stefano, 2015, p. 476) and do not receive a guaranteed income (Balaram et al., 2017; Sargeant, 2017). Much ambiguity exists in the UK about their employment status. Employment tribunal cases in 2016 ruled in favour of recognition of worker

status for drivers associated with the taxi service provider *Uber* (Haines, 2017). However, in 2017, a claim against *Deliveroo*, the food services company, was rejected by the Central Arbitration Committee (Moore & Newsome, 2018). Freedland and Kountouris (2017) suggested that the actual substance of the economic transaction in the gig economy is the service provided in the form of labour – hinting at an employment relationship. Similarly, others chose to “use the term ‘worker’ ... to emphasise that all people involved in this kind of work should be afforded some basic work-related protections” (Graham & Woodcock, 2018, p. 244). Therefore, we use the term ‘worker’ throughout the essay.

These issues are presented further in the rest of the paper.

1. Introduction

It has been argued that the fourth industrial revolution, characterised by the rise of technology, will dramatically alter the labour market and human role in economic activity (Bonciu, 2017). Technology has altered not only the way we live but also how the economy operates, and the way we interact with our work (Sarina & Riley, 2018). Increasingly large number of people are turning to digital platforms to find work, and it is estimated that one-third of all labour transactions could be mediated through digital platforms as early as 2025 (Standing, 2016). Innovative usage of technology and communication have also formed the basis of the ‘gig economy’ (Schiek & Gideon, 2018, p. 275), one of several terms used to define an emerging market which enables the provision of labour through online platforms (Van Doorn, 2017). The gig economy has been defined as “the exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment-by task basis” (Lepanjuuri, Wishart, & Cornick, 2018, p.4).

Scope

Firstly, our work mainly concentrates on gig workers in the UK transport and logistics sector, such as *Uber* and *Deliveroo*; and excluding platforms where capital rather than labour is the main source of revenue, such as *Airbnb*. However, some of the features highlighted may apply to other gig workers as individuals’ experiences vary according to their situation (Ashford et al., 2018). Secondly, many workers in the gig economy are satisfied with their self-employed classification (Sargeant, 2017). These mostly include people who use gig work as a continual supplementary form of income, and those who use it for achieving a short-term goal such as buying a car, or going on a holiday (CIPD, 2017). As such, we further limit our scope by excluding these groups and focusing only on the vulnerable group of ‘precarious’ workers within the gig economy.

Precarity in the gig economy

Precarious work was defined by Rodgers and Rodgers (1989) as a state of having the following four dimensions: concern about job security, limited control regarding the nature of the work, lack of employment protection through legal channels, and social and economic vulnerability. By distinguishing precarious workers, this paper aims to focus primarily on gig workers most at risk due to exploitation and dehumanisation (De Stefano, 2015; Sargeant, 2017). Many gig economy jobs are based on basic skills, such as services in the transport sector (Balaram et al., 2017; Prassl, 2018) which Sargeant (2017) linked to precarity. Besides the lack of freedom to regulate their working patterns and facing the challenge of unpredictable income (Aloisi, 2015; Prassl, 2018), “a significant proportion of on-demand workers find themselves trapped in

precarious, low-paid work” (Prassl, 2018, p. 8). Further, as Sargeant (2017) mentioned, characteristics of precarious work are evident in any gig work.

Research question and structure

This essay uses social psychological concepts to examine the gig economy as it relates to precarious workers. To begin with, we will introduce the stakeholders involved in the gig economy in the UK. Next, we will briefly review the legal status of gig workers and introduce the concept of psychological contract. After that, to consider the state of precarity among gig workers, we will use the theory of worker alienation which has gained renewed importance in contemporary thought (Musto, 2010). Thus, this paper will focus on answering the following research question: ***How can we analyse and reduce precarious gig workers’ feelings of alienation from a social psychological perspective?***

Finally, to answer the research question, we will give recommendations grounded in theory to improve the psychological well-being of precarious gig workers and alleviate their feelings of alienation.

2. Analysis

2.1. Stakeholder Analysis

Although stakeholder theory has been criticised in some circles for lacking scientific method (Key, 1999), it still remains a useful tool to identify roles of individuals, groups and organisations including their behaviours, intentions, interests, and influence (Brugha & Varvasovszky, 2000). **Table 1** identifies the stakeholders in the gig economy with a brief overview of their roles.

Table 1: *Stakeholder analysis for precarious gig workers in the UK*

<i>Stakeholder</i>	Type (Influencer/ Affected/ Involved)	Level of impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Current commitment (High / Medium / Low)	Main concerns	Actions required
<i>Precarious gig workers and their unions</i>	Affected/ Influencer	Medium	Medium	- Recognition as employee - Payment of minimum wage - Workplace alienation - Lack of information - Breach of psychological contract	- Collaborating with fellow workers for collective action - Social engagement - Addressing their need for self-development and training
<i>Government</i>	Influencer	High	Low	- Unemployment - Tax collection - Enforcement of law and providing conducive economic environment - Well-being of residents	- Providing new status for gig workers - Holding gig companies responsible for worker rights
<i>Platform companies</i>	Involved	Medium	Low	- Technological innovation - Business growth - Profit maximization and cost reduction - Avoiding legal repercussions and negative publicity - Employee welfare - Customer satisfaction	- Sustainable value chains - Providing fair work opportunities - Improve engagement with gig workers - Providing training and social engagement opportunities
<i>Consumers</i>	Involved	Low	Low	- Uninterrupted service - Variety in consumption choices - Expenditure on consumption - Labour rights	- Ethical consumption choices - Prosocial behaviour - Empathize with workers

2.2. Structural overview of the gig economy: legal versus psychological contract

While the focus of our work is on the social psychological aspects of the gig economy, we find it pertinent to include a brief overview of the current structural imbalance in the industry, and highlight the UK government's role in correcting the situation. Currently, workers in the gig economy are classified as self-employed, freelancers or independent contractors (De Stefano, 2016; Stewart & Stanford, 2017). Under UK law, this essentially means that they have no employment rights and do not have the protection afforded to 'workers', such as minimum wage or holiday pay (UK Parliament Work Pensions Committee, 2017). Appendix 1 shows the different types of employment status in the UK, while **Appendix 2** shows terms of service from a *Deliveroo* contract, emphasising the self-employed status and restrictive covenants about taking legal recourse. Due to the economic advantage of taking on independent workers versus employing them, the gig companies have been hesitant to move to a traditional employment model (UK Parliament Work Pensions Committee, 2017). The legal contract does not provide any employment rights to the gig workers (Aloisi, 2015); however, there is another implicit contract that exists in their relationship with platform companies: the *psychological contract*.

Psychological contract

"Promise is most given when least is said". George Chapman's statement, as quoted in Rousseau (1989), reflects the core meaning of the psychological contract that compared to a legal contract, it is an implicit contract underlying the employment relationship. While less tangible than a written contract, the psychological contract is more complex and captures the expectations, needs and mutual sets of obligations between the parties (Coyle-Shapiro, Parzefall, 2008; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). In the gig economy, even though the legal contract does not contain an employment relationship, scholars have found that there is evidence of an implicit employment relationship (Graham & Woodcock, 2018; Freedland and Kountouris, 2017).

Psychological contract breach has been defined as "the cognition that one's organisation has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions" (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230). Empirical studies indicate numerous negative implications of psychological contract breach on employees' feelings, attitudes and behaviour; a breach lowers both job satisfaction and performance, and also negatively impacts psychological well-being (Conway & Briner, 2009). Further, it can lead to experiences of acrimony and resentment (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008; Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Rousseau (2001) remarked that people often make unrealistic promises due to cognitive bias, and others may gather information about their intentions even if they are not explicit. In the

case of gig economy, companies have raised expectations of workers by referring to them as partners and micro-entrepreneurs (Mujtaba, 2018). The psychological contract breach occurs due to the mismatch between gig workers' perception of their roles and the dissatisfaction due to unmet expectations (Aloisi, 2015; De Stefano, 2015; Sargeant, 2017). The recent intermittent litigation involving platform companies and workers in the UK, ruling either in favour of gig workers or the employing platforms, (Körfer & Röthig, 2017; Moore & Newsome, 2018) demonstrates that the workers are dissatisfied with the existing terms of this relationship (CIPD, 2017).

How can the breach of psychological contract be repaired? Conway and Briner (1998) offered a useful framework of how employees can manage psychological contract breaches. They mentioned the following tactics: drawing attention to the value of the work performed; not aiming for a complete overhaul; highlighting the inconsistent treatment; and providing reassurances that the change would not negatively affect the organisation (Conway & Briner, 1998, p. 174-175). However, as earlier noted, the structure of the gig economy and lack of employment status means that this is difficult for gig workers (Stewart & Stanford, 2017), even if it constitutes a useful framework that they can use in other avenues.

Role of UK Government

Williams and Horodnic (2017) noted that, "bogus self-employment" is more common in the UK compared to other European countries. Several legal changes in the last few years have created further barriers for workers to take legal action (Newsome, Heyes, & Moore, 2018). Since the UK's employment regulation framework is largely based on a traditional employee-employer relationship, the legal framework in terms of employee classification and security has been unsuccessful to adapt appropriately to the changing face of work (De Stefano, 2015; Graham & Woodcock, 2018; Prassl, 2018). It has also been contended that people working in the gig economy should receive some basic worker rights (Graham & Woodcock, 2018), as the actual substance of their activity hints at employment relationship (Freedland & Kountouris, 2017). Companies should therefore not be allowed to hide behind legal loopholes to mask their employment relationship with self-employed workers.

As definitions of employment status determines the rights to which individuals are entitled, clarifications in the UK law should be made to protect precarious gig workers' rights. An example can be found in Romania, where the government has established a criterion for independent work: if certain conditions are not met upon government inspection, the work is considered as wage employment (Williams and Horodnic, 2017). This would entitle precarious gig workers to basic employment rights such as receiving minimum wage (Sargeant, 2017; Trades Union Congress, 2017) and set a basis for further negotiations between them and the

employing platforms, including the possibility of collective bargaining. As such, we note that the government should act to ensure that it honours the social contract between the individuals and the state.

2.3. Alienation in the gig economy

Karl Marx introduced his concept of worker *alienation* in response to James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* (Marx, Livingstone, Rodney, & Benton, 1975). Mill (1824) cited the existence of the wage relationship as a justification for the capitalist owners' privilege over the workers. Marx rejected these ideas, calling for a higher, intrinsic reward:

“In the framework of private property, my individuality is *alienated* to such a degree that this *activity* is instead *hateful* to me, a *torment*, and rather the *semblance* of an activity. Hence, too, it is only a *forced* activity and one imposed on me only through an *external* fortuitous need, not through an *inner, essential* one” (Marx et al., 1975, p. 278).

Though Marx's theory of alienation was neglected by western scholars due to its perceived connections to socialism (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, & Soane, 2015), the concept was revisited in postmodern thought by social psychologist Melvin Seeman. He drew from the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim to define five noticeable features of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). We will use an abridged version of Seeman's model to analyse gig workers' psychological well-being by emphasising on their feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation.

Powerlessness

Seeman (1959) defined powerlessness as “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks” (p. 784). In classical capitalist model, the wage system established an authority relationship between workers and the owners (Mill, 1824), contributing to a feeling of forced work and lack of intrinsic motivation in the work (Marx et al., 1975). Braverman (1974) argued that the division of labour was introduced as a means to exert control over the workers. Despite owning the means of production, workers in the gig economy have limited decision-making ability about the kind of work they do, the amount of pay, or timings of work (Woodcock & Waters, 2018). Even though workers have the right to quit performing the service when they choose, they nevertheless agree to unilateral conditions set by platform companies when they accept to join the service (De Stefano, 2015). These conditions include restrictions on collective action, and making detrimental remarks against the Company (Aloisi, 2015).

Power is further exerted by platforms through sophisticated technology which tracks the movements of the workers and provides specific guidance as to the required norms of behaviour (Woodcock & Waters, 2018). Sachs (2015) cited case history in the US where it was found that

Uber used the platform's customer rating service to dismiss drivers. *Uber* and *Lyft* also used the rating service to enforce work rules regarding cleanliness and type of music to be played in the car (Dzieza, 2015; Sachs, 2015), hinting at a hierarchical power relationship. Additionally, this results in putting a downward pressure on wages, further diluting their power (Graham, Hjorth & Lehdonvirta, 2017). Therefore, we conclude that alienation due to lack of power is a central issue curtailing worker well-being in the gig economy.

Meaninglessness

Meaninglessness refers to a situation where "the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision making are not met" (Seeman, 1959, p. 786). An alienated individual is unable to see a causal relationship between his actions and his environment (Dolan, 1971). In the gig economy, workers mostly carry out repetitive, fragmented tasks and are not provided upfront details about the exact nature of work (Aloisi, 2015). For example, food delivery service *Deliveroo* only reveals the location of the delivery once the driver has picked up the package; further, they have little interaction with their customers, motivated only by extrinsic reward (Woodcock & Waters, 2018). Shantz et al. (2015) found that alienation was negatively associated with task variety and task identity: workers felt less alienated when their jobs had more diversity. Again, it is noted that alienation due to meaningless work is central to gig economy. We note, however, that the issue of meaningless gig work is similar to other physical labour, and, as noted by Dolan (1971), not as distinct as in the case of powerlessness.

Isolation

Seeman's concept of isolation mainly concerned intellectual isolation, which closely relates to meaninglessness (Seeman, 1959). However, we use a modified version of this model to describe the physical isolation faced by gig workers. Workplace isolation results from a lack of support and interaction with co-workers (Marshall, Michaels, & Mulki, 2007). Though inherently psychological in nature, physical distance can exacerbate feelings of isolation (Marshall et al., 2007). In the modern workplace, employees greatly value group memberships and find isolation difficult and stressful (House, 1981). However, in the gig economy, workers engage with the platform technology in place of other co-workers (Graham & Woodcock, 2017). Graham and Shaw (2017) noted platform work as lacking in social integration and a sense of belonging. As such, we find that the gig workers are not only psychologically alienated, but also physically estranged.

Causal effect of alienation

Having established that precarious gig workers face workplace alienation, we briefly note its effects on psychological well-being and job performance. In their study of workplace alienation, Shantz et al. (2015) found that alienation decreased job performance ratings and

increased irregular behaviour patterns. Further, scholars found that alienation had negative effects on job satisfaction and involvement (Fedi, Pucci, Tartaglia, & Rollero, 2016) and led to behaviour change and counterproductive work (Chiaburu, Thundiyil, & Wang, 2014). It is important to note here that workplace alienation is not an issue specific to the gig workers. However, they are more vulnerable because of the lack of regulatory protection and transparency about the working conditions (Aloisi, 2015).

Marx introduced the concept of alienation amongst the backdrop of the industrial revolution, which facilitated the subordination of labour to the capital owner (Heller, 2011). We have shown the same control is now being exerted in the gig economy and that there is an imbalance of power in favour of the platform companies and against the workers (Silberman, 2017). The industrial revolution brought new forms of worker organisation and established a minimum wage (Webb, 1912), and a similar effort is required to ensure fair working conditions in the gig economy.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Strengthening Collective Action

Mancur Olson developed *Collective Action Theory* on the lines of economic concepts such as labour unions and Marxist class struggle which stress on groups of people acting together for their common interests (Olson, 1971). He noted that when people with common interests take ‘individual, unorganized action’, they are not able to achieve their collective goals (Olson, 1971). To date, it has been difficult for gig workers in the UK to take effective collective action. Different unions have been representing their interests including the GMB, who appealed against the delivery company *Hermes* and taxi service *Uber* (Moore & Newsome, 2018; see also Siddique, 2018); and Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain (IWGB), whose appeal against *Deliveroo* was rejected by the Central Arbitration Committee (Körfer & Röthig, 2017). However, so far a combined tactic that addresses the shared issues across this industry has not been adopted by the unions.

We use Klandermans’ (2004) framework of movement participation to provide recommendations for improving collective action among gig workers. He identified the following three key social psychological aspects which shape the effectiveness of movements: *Instrumentality*, *Identity* and *Ideology*.

Instrumentality

Instrumentality “presupposes an effective movement that is able to enforce some wanted changes or at least to mobilise substantial support” (Klandermans, 2004, p. 366). This means that movements that can show previous success are able to mobilise more effectively and so have more power to take effective action. As gig workers suffer from powerlessness (De Stefano, 2015), belonging to a strong union can help them in changing their social and political installations.

Identity

Collective identity refers to the identity of a member in a group and essentially “connects the individual and the social” (Simon, 2010, p. 139). Klandermans (2014) noted that movements are “most attractive if people identify strongly with their group” (p. 366). When individuals identify with other participants and want to act as part of a group for the sake of belonging, collective identity can hold a mobilising power (Klandermans, 2004; Reicher & Drury, 2010; Simon, 2010). Lack of identity in the gig economy needs to be addressed to create meaning, sense of belonging and reducing insecurity in the gig economy (Ashford et al., 2018; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2018).

Ideology

Ideology emphasises that individuals use “movement participation as a search for meaning and expression of one’s views” (Klandermans, 2004, p. 361). People who join movements seek to share their own unique situation with other participants and express their emotions. Since gig workers lack meaning in their work, participating in collective action will provide self-reflection and perspective by empathising with others in similar situations.

Recommendation for Unions

Körfer & Röthig (2017) noted the feelings of social exclusion and isolation in digital labour platforms and the importance of collective measures to redress the power dynamics. In this regard, we suggest that precarious gig workers’ alienation can be addressed by measures of collective action to empower them, and create a sense of community and collective identity amongst them. The unions can use examples of successful collective action to mobilise workers. For example, the strike by *Foodora* workers in Turin showed that workers in the gig economy are beginning to challenge their employment status (Mazali, 2018). According to Tassinari and Macarrone (2017) the strikes started as a reaction against changes in the terms of the *Foodora* riders’ contract, after the company failed to address workers’ demands. As the strikes captured public discourse in Italy, the company was forced to come to the negotiating table which resulted in an increase of 30 percent in the delivery fee paid to riders (Tassinari & Maccarone, 2017). Further, in Australia, Unions New South Wales (NSW) negotiated on behalf of workers providing everyday household services through the digital platform *AirTasker* in Australia. They published findings showing workers were dependent on the platform (Unions, 2016), and this led to negotiations and agreements recognising certain minimum labour standards including meeting the minimum wage standard for all jobs posted on the platform, and establishment of a dispute resolution mechanism (Minter, 2017).

The various unions representing the gig workers in the UK should work closely to address their common goals. Doing so will allow them to show their instrumentality, and mobilise more workers to participate in taking collective action. As the gig workers have so far been unable to come together as a strong force and continue involuntary employment (Graham & Woodcock, 2017), collective action can help alleviate their feelings of alienation due to powerlessness.

In the next section we address the other contributing factors to alienation by proposing an innovative approach based on technology, a prerequisite in the gig economy, for creating stronger communities to address the lack of meaning and social isolation.

3.2. Podcast as a means to create identity and communities

Sharing of personal narratives is not only an empowering experience, linking the personal to the political, but it also helps with building self-respect and dignity (Ledwith, 2005). In the digital age, sharing stories through social media has gained cultural significance with its ability to transcend social boundaries and connect people from different communities (Alexander, 2017; Koo, Chung, & Kim, 2015). Within this digital spectrum, podcasts have become a popular tool for storytelling at the intersection of art and journalism (McHugh, 2016), and providing an opportunity for close relationships between the broadcaster and the listener (Perez, 2012). Further, they have been shown as an effective political tool (Koo et al., 2015). Therefore, we propose the gig workers in the UK should start a podcast to help give a voice to the gig workers (empowerment), while also enabling them to create a strong sense of community and identity (meaning and inclusion).

While similar to radio programmes, podcasts enable the audience to download and listen when convenient, such as commutes, bike rides, or daily activities (Bauer, 2010). This flexibility is reflected in 67 percent of podcast listening time being consumed via smartphones (Radio Joint Audio Research, 2018). Podcasts are widely available through various online providers, including *Apple*, *Google*, and *Spotify*, along with major news outlets such as *BBC* and *Financial Times*. Further, they are socially accepted as source of information (Peoples & Tilley, 2011; Roberts, 2008) which cover a wide variety of topics, including personal and career development focused towards minority groups (McHugh, 2016). Lastly, podcasts have been shown to be accessible to a variety of demographics, requiring a low level of technological acumen (Gachago, Livingston, & Ivala, 2016).

In relation to precarious gig workers, these characteristics are important as the *Goal Giggers* podcast would be: widely available via smartphones, which is a prerequisite for the transport sector, free of charge and can cover a range of topics catering to the targeted group. As a result, a podcast would be an effective medium to reach out to precarious gig workers given the exclusion of financial, social or technological barriers.

“Goal Gigger” Podcast

Presently, there is no effective podcast specifically addressing precarious or gig workers, based on our search on *Spotify* and *Apple*. Therefore, the UK gig workers should start a new podcast called *Goal Gigger* to share their narratives with a wider audience. The *Goal Gigger* podcast would include a series of episodes entitled “Skill Up”, available for weekly download. The Skill Up series will cover personal and career development topics, such as cover letter writing, interviewing skills, and building self-confidence. In addition, the podcast would include panel discussions and interviews with entrepreneurs and business leaders. Finally, the podcast will

inform about industry news and invite the unions to speak on workers' rights. This content would provide precarious gig workers with on-demand informational support and meaningful guidance to help them identify or pursue their own personal intrinsic motivation and increase sense of power over their future (Petriglieri, 2018). Feeling well informed also fosters perceived sense of community (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010).

Initially, the podcast would be a virtual community of listeners, united by shared experience of listening to the same story (Gray & Host, 2015). In time, with a greater audience, the podcast can expand to in-person events or live tours. Following examples of other podcasts, such as *Happy*, which held a one-day event for listeners with activities, the podcast could work with the unions to hold live episodes and more interactive events across the UK. By providing virtual, then physical support to precarious gig workers, the *Goal Gigger* community would help reducing their sense of meaninglessness and physical isolation. These events would provide gig workers the opportunity to further develop positive interpersonal relationship, create collective identity and a sense of community outside of work (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497; Seeman, 1967). They could also be used for union activities to increase number of members or promote collective action.

Feasibility

From a business perspective, podcasts are often sponsored by companies aligned with either the subject matter, podcasting as technology, or seeking to reach more audiences (McHugh, 2016). Possible sponsors for the podcasts could include sports or related merchandise (Tokyo Bikes), commercial sponsors (Nivea), or educational sponsors (Open University). The financial barriers to enter and run a podcast are low (McHugh, 2016), as minimum equipment is needed and can be purchased for minimal cost (Gray & Host, 2015). Sponsorship funding can be used for administrative costs, as well as compensating any precarious gig workers interested in joining and developing media related skills. Administration and organisation of speakers could begin on volunteer basis with those precarious workers interested in developing media skills, and compensation could be provided through funds from the sponsorship given the low overall fixed and operating costs for podcast. Giving gig workers a means to influence the community and share their viewpoints will help create a collective identity and sense of community, while also achieving a wider audience and creating political awareness about the underlying challenges of the gig economy.

4. Conclusions and Limitations

This essay grounded its analysis, and resulting recommendations for actions, in the social sciences. In doing so, it proposed an alternative approach to conventional economic analysis. Considering the issue from a social psychological perspective, we suggested possible ways for reducing workers' feelings of alienation to deal with precarity in the UK's gig economy in a sensible and sustainable manner. Focusing on the causal effects of alienation derived from powerlessness, meaninglessness and physical isolation, we proposed the following recommendations:

- a) the UK government's role necessitates responding to the current structural imbalance in the gig economy by establishing an appropriate legal framework to protect precarious gig workers' rights (addressing powerlessness);
- b) unions should draw from the practical implications of Instrumentality, Identity and Ideology to improve collective action among gig workers (addressing powerlessness); and
- c) launching a targeted podcast to create stronger communities amongst gig workers (addressing powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation).

Limitations

We wish to acknowledge several limitations with regards to this essay. Foremost, to gain full comprehension of the underpinning challenges facing all gig workers, we recognise the need to draw knowledge from disciplines other than social psychology.

The ambiguity of gig work has become a political issue and caused larger debates about the role of the economic model based on "platform capitalism" (Murillo, Buckland, & Val, 2017; Prassl, 2018). However, we restricted our scope to social psychology rather than drawing into the larger economic debate as we intended to make the most vulnerable group of gig workers the target of our work. As we are interested in improving their precarious experience, improving psychological well-being remained our focus.

While we identified four groups of stakeholders, we focused on the two who are most likely to use their impact to alleviate the precarity of gig workers in the UK. From a holistic viewpoint, all stakeholders should be involved in reducing the feelings of alienation within the bounds of their control. As an overarching approach goes beyond the scope of this paper, we identified the key stakeholders who can have the most impact (government) and appear to be most intrinsically motivated to improve the situation (unions and gig workers). We acknowledge that consumers must likewise be confronted with assumption of responsibility and reflect on the role of their demand for inexpensive human services in the transport sector leading to commodification of human effort. Further, it would be naïve to expect effective changes

without involving the platform companies. While some might express reservations regarding increased legal regulations, we follow Prassl's (2018) notion that the perceived mismatch between flexibility and legal protection is "one of gig work's most pervasive – yet fundamentally misleading myths" (p.10).

We believe that there is a trendsetting demand and valid place for the gig economy, with gig work becoming a modern way of work reflecting features that will become increasingly apparent across many industries (Huws, Spencer, Syrdal, & Holts, 2017). Nevertheless, we note the importance of narrative building towards social action (Ledwith, 2005), and hope that our work will help in furthering the dialogue to deal with this emerging social issue.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Rights of self-employed people in the UK

Source: Work and pensions Committee, UK parliament

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmworpen/847/847.pdf>

Box 2: Employment status

Self-employed people are not covered by employment law. They have very few rights at work, limited to protection for health and safety purposes, and some protection against discrimination.

Workers have some employment rights. These include the right to the National Living Wage or National Minimum Wage, protection against unlawful deduction from wages, minimum levels of paid holiday and rest breaks, protection against discrimination, and the right not to be treated less favourably if they work part-time. They may be entitled to benefits such as Statutory Sick Pay and Statutory parental pay in some circumstances.

Employees have a full complement of employment rights. This includes everything that workers have, plus Statutory Sick Pay, parental pay, notice periods if their employment is ending, protection against unfair dismissal, the right to request flexible working, time off for emergencies and Statutory Redundancy Pay.

For HMRC purposes there are only two statuses: employed or self-employed. “Workers” can fall into either tax category depending on the nature of their employment. This does not affect their employment rights. For example, someone who has the employment law status “worker” but is self-employed for tax purposes would still be entitled to “worker” rights. Conversely, someone who is designated “employed” for tax purposes (for example, under IR35 legislation) but does not have an employment contract would not automatically be entitled to employee or worker rights.¹¹

Appendix 2

Gig economy standard contract terms: Deliveroo contract

Source: Work and pensions Committee, UK parliament

https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/work-and-pensions/Written_Evidence/Deliveroo-scooter-contract.pdf

2 STATUS

- 2.1 You are a self-employed supplier and therefore acknowledge that you are neither an employee of Deliveroo, nor a worker within the meaning of any employment rights legislation. For the avoidance of doubt, throughout the term of this Agreement you are free to work for such third parties as you choose provided always this does not prevent you from performing the Services in accordance with the Service Delivery Standards.
- 2.2 You further warrant that neither you nor anyone acting on your behalf will present any claim in the Employment Tribunal or any civil court in which it is contended that you are either an employee or a worker.

4 EQUIPMENT

- 4.1 You will supply either an iPhone or Android smartphone (or such other make of phone as may subsequently be notified to you by Deliveroo) and ensure that it is sufficiently charged and subject to a current mobile phone subscription which enables you to access voice and data services at all times while this Agreement is in force.
- 4.2 You will download and install, or permit Deliveroo to download and install, such applications as are required for you to be able to perform the Services and will also apply any and all new versions, revisions and fixes to such software as may be required by Deliveroo from time to time.
- 4.3 You will supply your own motorbike for the purposes of providing the Services. You will ensure that at all times your motorbike is clean, in a good state of repair, and roadworthy, covered by a current MOT certificate, and has up-to-date road tax.
- 4.4 You will not, at any time, ride the motorbike while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. You acknowledge that you are responsible for all and any charges, penalties and fines relating to your usage of the motorbike, including but not limited to parking charges, congestion charges and traffic offences.

6 WARRANTIES

- 6.1 As strict conditions of this Agreement you warrant that:
- (a) You are a self-employed independent contractor in business on your own account;
 - (b) You have the right to reside and work in the United Kingdom and have all necessary visas, licenses and permits allowing you to do so;

SERVICE DELIVERY STANDARDS

You will be expected to meet the following minimum Service Delivery Standards.

During a time period in which you have registered to perform Services, you will log into the rider app and will promptly accept any orders in your zone which you are available to perform.

You will promptly answer calls from members of the Operations team or, if you are unable to answer them for any reason (for example, because it would not be safe to do so), you will return them as soon as reasonably practicable.

Upon collecting an order from a Partner, you will click on the rider app to confirm that you have done so. You will then click again when you have successfully delivered the meal to the customer.

You will be expected to meet certain minimum delivery times from Partner to customer. These shall be as notified to you by a member of the Operations team. Persistent failure to meet these requirements shall be considered a serious breach of the Agreement.

You will be courteous in all of your dealings with Deliveroo staff, fellow drivers and cyclists, restaurant personnel, customers and any other third parties with whom you interact while performing Services for Deliveroo.

You will perform the Services with all due care, skill and ability and, in particular, will comply with all applicable laws regarding road safety and usage. You will ride and park your motorbike safely and considerately and in compliance in all respects with the law, the Highway Code, any applicable parking restrictions and with all health and safety policies and procedures imposed by Deliveroo or by any Partner restaurant with which you may have dealings.

You will comply with the requirements of Deliveroo's Health and Safety manual for riders as provided and explained to you during onboarding.

Dress code: When performing the Services you must dress presentably in a clean collared shirt, blouse or Company branded T-shirt, and full length trousers, or in accordance with such other Deliveroo dress code as may be notified to you from time to time. If you do not choose to wear a Deliveroo branded T-shirt, you must instead wear a Deliveroo branded jacket. You must keep your clothing clean and in a good state of repair, and for the avoidance of doubt at all times when performing the Services you must wear at least one piece of Company branded clothing. You must never wear clothing bearing any logo or mark of, or otherwise representative of, any competitor organisation while performing the Services.

