

The Mediating Role of Burnout Between Perceived Role Ambiguity, Work Performance, and Resilience Among Freelancers

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Abstract

The gig economy has transformed the workforce, as freelancers frequently operate without traditional supervision. While freelancing provides flexibility, uncertain roles can cause stress, affecting professional performance and resilience. This study examined how burnout influences the relationship between perceived role ambiguity, work performance, and resilience among 254 Filipino virtual service freelancers in Metro Manila aged 20 to 40 who had at least one year of experience in fields such as customer service, graphic design, virtual assistance, and IT development. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study discovered that higher perceived role ambiguity significantly increases burnout, which in turn reduces work performance and resilience, indicating that burnout mediates the relationship between role ambiguity and these outcomes. These findings emphasize the importance of clear role definitions, structured guidance, and balanced workloads to support freelancers' well-being and effectiveness.

Keywords: Role Ambiguity, Burnout, Work Performance, Resilience, Freelancers, Virtual Service Freelancers, Gig Economy, Job Demand-Resource Model Theory, Role Theory, Structural Equation Modeling

1. Introduction

The gig economy has significantly reshaped workforce dynamics, resulting in a growing number of freelancers in various fields, including the virtual services sector. These professionals work independently, without the structured guidance of traditional employment. While freelancing offers autonomy and flexibility, it also introduces job role ambiguity, as expectations, responsibilities, and performance evaluation criteria are often unclear. This lack of clarity can lead to burnout, as freelancers must interpret client expectations, balance multiple projects, and maintain consistent productivity without defined guidelines. According to Strebkov and Shevchuk (2019), freelancers benefit from flexible schedules and the ability to choose clients and workloads, but this independence also creates blurred work boundaries and inconsistent routines which may intensify role ambiguity and emotional strain. Research has shown

that role ambiguity is linked to cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and professional alienation, which in turn can reduce work performance and weaken resilience.

Freelancers often face irregular work hours and fluctuating workloads due to economic conditions, project cycles, and client demands. Beyond completing assigned tasks, they manage administrative duties, marketing, skill development, and self-promotion (Strebkov & Shevchuk, 2019). While this work offers a high degree of autonomy, it can also lead to the “autonomy paradox,” where increased independence results in intensified work efforts and decreased well-being. High levels of responsibility and independence are considered contributing factors to emotional burnout among freelancers (Zaitsev, Burdaeva & Letyagina, 2018).

In the gig economy, Human Resources (HR) plays a vital role in managing freelancer relationships by ensuring clear communication, legal compliance, and effective integration into organizational processes. HR’s responsibilities include onboarding freelancers, monitoring performance, facilitating feedback, and handling contracts to foster trust and fair treatment. These functions are essential for minimizing role ambiguity and supporting freelancers’ well-being and productivity.

Although previous research has explored challenges faced by freelancers, such as job satisfaction and work-life balance, few studies have investigated how burnout mediates the relationship between role ambiguity and key outcomes like work performance and resilience among virtual service freelancers. Findings suggest that while freelancers thrive in flexible environments, persistent uncertainty in role expectations is associated with increased stress, decreased motivation, and potential career instability. This study aims to address these gaps by examining the associations among perceived role ambiguity, burnout, work performance, and resilience among freelancers.

This correlational study focuses on Filipino virtual service freelancers engaged in a wide range of remote roles, including general virtual assistance, administrative support, customer service, marketing and social media, e-commerce, copywriting, graphic design, online tutorials, accounting and bookkeeping, IT and development, managerial roles, recruitment, and other specialized services. The scope is broad, reflecting the diverse tasks and responsibilities within virtual freelancing, which allows the study to examine how role ambiguity relates to burnout, work performance, and resilience across different service areas.

This study examines the relationships between perceived role ambiguity and outcomes such as work performance and resilience, with burnout considered as a mediating factor. Using a quantitative approach, it measures specific aspects of burnout and their links to performance and resilience strategies. By analyzing these relationships, the study aims to fill a gap in understanding how role ambiguity is associated with freelancers’ well-being and effectiveness, while providing practical insights for supporting sustainable freelance work.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the question: **To what extent does burnout serve as a mediator in the relationship between perceived role ambiguity, resilience and work performance among freelancers?**

Moreover, the research objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between perceived role ambiguity and burnout among freelancers.
- b. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between burnout and work performance among freelancers.
- c. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between burnout and resilience among freelancers.
- d. To determine whether burnout mediates between perceived role ambiguity and both work performance and resilience among freelancers.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, developed by Bakker et al. (2005), explains how high job demands and low job resources contribute to stress and burnout, while sufficient resources help maintain motivation and performance. The model categorizes job characteristics into two main components: job demands, which require sustained effort and can lead to strain, and job resources, which support employees in managing demands and fostering growth. In a study by Mwakyusa and Mcharo (2024), the JD-R model was applied to examine the effects of role ambiguity and role conflict on emotional exhaustion among healthcare workers in Tanzania. Their findings suggest that unclear job roles contribute to confusion, reduced accountability, and inefficiencies, leading to emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Freelancers often experience uncertainty in job roles, which may lead to stress, burnout, and decreased performance. From the JD-R model, the “job demands” are applied in the study to explore how burnout mediates the relationship between role ambiguity, work performance, and resilience.

2.1.2 Role Theory

Role theory explains how social roles influence an individual’s behavior. It defines a set of behavioral expectations that is associated with a specific position in a social structure. This theory explains how individuals adopt different roles based on their gender, occupation, status, etc., and these factors dictate how individuals behave and how others perceive their behavior. Some of the key aspects of role theory include *Roles and expectations*, *Behavioral Influence*, *Role conflict and Role enrichment*, and *Cultural and Social context*. (Anglin, Kincaid, et.al., 2022) Role theory suggests that establishing clear roles influences the behavior of an individual. However, when the responsibilities and expectations of these roles are unclear, it leads to role ambiguity (Mwakyusa & Mcharo, 2024). This theory also states that a high level of role ambiguity negatively correlates with job satisfaction. Hence, inconsistencies in behavior will more likely lead to stress and burnout, eventually making employees feel dissatisfied and lower work performance (Ntopi et al., 2020). These studies further claim that with role ambiguity, there is an increase in the possibility of job dissatisfaction, stress, burnout, and poor work performance.

2.2 Review of Related Literature

2.2.1 *Freelancers*

In the study by Markovic, Mirjana, et al. (2021), freelancers are defined as individuals who can choose the clients for whom they will work. However, once a project is accepted, they lose control over its execution and have no influence over the deadline for its completion. Freelance work, which was well paid, was also not available to professionals who wanted to leave the corporate world. However, times are changing, which has been reflected in a large increase in the number of freelancers in the world. Unlike people who are self-employed and often run their own business and can employ other people, a freelancer is a self-employed person who has no employees.

To get a better understanding of the gig economy, and particularly its true impact on individuals and organizations, it is necessary to examine the micro-level perspective of the individual freelancer and their attitude toward the hiring organization (Kuhn, 2016). Vadavi and Sharmiladevi (2024) have conducted a bibliometric analysis to examine the evolution and trends of the gig economy, providing a broader understanding of its development. Their analysis highlights the rapid expansion of gig work across various sectors, including technology, transportation, and creative industries.

Pakistan is the 4th fastest-growing freelance market worldwide, with an annual growth rate of 78%. The IT ministry reports that freelancers contributed over \$500 million to the economy last year. The country has an estimated 3 million freelancers, many under 30 years of age, reflecting a youth-driven movement in this sector (Hanif, 2022). While the IT services remained on top, the export remittances from non-IT services surged to \$131 million in 2022 from \$33 million reported in 2021. Content writing, translation, virtual assistantship, sales, marketing, accounting, finance, and customer service are the major areas of non-IT freelance services (Raza, 2023).

While Shkoler and Tziner (2022) defined freelancers as skilled independent contractors who supply labor temporarily in exchange for compensation to various business clients, the creative industry stands out as a thriving space for freelance work. This industry includes different fields such as design, architecture, arts and crafts, advertising, research and development, publishing, fashion, films, videos, photography, music, performing arts, software, and computer games (Sonobe, 2022), offering unique opportunities that attract a significant portion of freelancers, drawn by the flexibility and variety these fields provide. Creative Freelancers operate outside traditional employment structures, often navigating a mix of self-employment, short-term contracts, and agency work (Ashton, 2024). Unlike standard employees, they lack a fixed legal definition, leaving them in a gray area regarding labor protections and benefits. Many rely on a series of temporary contracts that range from a few hours to several months, with no guarantee of renewal. As a result, freelancers must take on additional responsibilities beyond their creative work, including securing future contracts, managing finances, and continuously updating their skills to remain competitive in an unpredictable job market. This flexibility can be both an opportunity and a challenge, as freelancers balance autonomy with financial and job insecurity.

2.2.1.2 *Virtual Service Freelancers*

Virtual assistants (VAs) are independent contractors who provide administrative, technical, or creative support remotely, often from their own homes (Karnik, 2023). They commonly handle tasks such as scheduling, content creation, social media management, and bookkeeping. As businesses seek cost-effective solutions, VAs have become a practical alternative to in-house staff, since employers are not required to provide office space, benefits, or equipment. Karnik adds that while formal education is not required, many virtual assistants undergo specialized training and are skilled in commonly used business tools.

The global demand for VAs has grown significantly, with the Philippines emerging as a key provider due to its large pool of English-proficient professionals (Veto et al., 2025). VAs now play a vital role in supporting companies of all sizes, helping improve efficiency by taking on routine or time-consuming tasks. Their flexibility and affordability make them a valuable resource in today's increasingly digital work environment.

Under virtual service freelancing, copywriting stands out as a key skill that combines persuasive writing with digital strategy to support marketing and sales efforts. Roldan et al. (2022) defined copywriting as persuasive writing aimed at prompting action, often in marketing and sales. With digital platforms on the rise, its scope now includes ads, emails, product descriptions, and web content. In their study of 292 copywriters, 54.11 percent or 158 individuals were freelancers, reflecting a shift driven by the pandemic and increased digital adoption. Asogwa and Madubuko (2023) described copywriting as a strategic, language-based tool for influencing audiences. Modern copywriters are expected to handle diverse formats and have SEO skills.

Online tutoring, another form under virtual service freelancing, plays a critical role in delivering personalized educational support in remote or digital settings. Tragodara (2021) highlighted that virtual tutoring extends beyond academic assistance by incorporating platform training, study habit development, and socio-emotional support through workshops and counseling. This comprehensive approach addresses both learning gaps and emotional well-being, making the service holistic and student-centered. Peel et al. (2022) further emphasized the complexity and importance of remote education tutors, noting their essential role in ensuring equitable access to quality education, especially in rural and remote areas. Their study also sheds light on the personal and professional challenges tutors face, calling for greater recognition of this undervalued yet vital occupation.

Chaffey & Ellis (2019); Kannan (2017) defined Digital marketing as using internet-based technologies such as search engines, social media, email, and mobile apps to promote products and services, has become indispensable for modern businesses. Strategies like search engine optimization (SEO) practice of optimizing websites to improve their visibility and rank in unpaid (organic) search engine results like Google. It involves refining content, keywords, and technical structure to align with search algorithms and user intent. Content marketing and pay-per-click advertising allow companies to engage target audiences precisely, leveraging data-driven insights to optimize reach and return on investment. In recent years, digital marketing and freelancing have surged as globally attractive professions, which have been marked

by exponential growth and significant evolution in freelancing and consultation services (Burtch et al., 2018). According to CNBC research, SEO, social media marketing, and marketing automation are among the top in-demand skills for freelancers in communication and marketing (Malinsky, 2023).

Social media marketing, a key virtual service freelancing role, has transformed how brands interact with audiences and drive business outcomes in the digital economy. Keegan (2016) emphasized that social media uniquely influences marketing by fostering user-generated content, which has a greater impact on profitability than firm-created content. Metrics from online engagement even serve as indicators of firm equity and performance. Dwivedi et al. (2015) further explained that social media marketing encourages viral, two-way communication across platforms like Facebook and Twitter, blending consumer dialogue with brand promotion. This interactive nature sets it apart from traditional marketing approaches.

According to the study of Alzhrani (2022), Graphic design is a combination of technological process and creative thinking to produce a visually appealing output for a client. Their work usually consists of creating logos, illustrations, web design, etc. Freelance graphic designers must have creative and technical expertise that would allow them to work independently to meet client needs while adapting to multiple projects. Hence, freelance graphic designers are responsible for managing their own workflow and business affairs. The study was also able to identify the challenges faced by graphic designers, and some of the most significant challenges that they experience are low budget, competition, and finding good customers. This implies that financial constraints and market dynamics are crucial when it comes to shaping the experience of graphic designers.

In relation to the professional development of the graphic design field, Davis (2015) commented that due to the roots of graphic design, graphic designers are trained primarily to master technical production skills to create visually appealing works for effective communication. However, practitioners are urged to develop new aspects or criteria to reflect the more recent status of graphic design as a profession due to the information age's development and the knowledge economy's growth (Davis, 2015).

Graphic designers have a different working environment from other business categories. They also have special work needs to meet their jobs' requirements. They also need to stay focused on their work for long hours in front of a computer screen. They might be freelancers and work remotely. This leads to many challenges faced by graphic designers. For example, unclear communication when working remotely or an absence of agreement between the client and graphic designer on the work nature.

Based on the results of Nicoletti Dziobczenski and Person (2017), their literature review showed that The most frequently requested competence areas for graphic designers in the advertisements were print and advertising and digital design, which were both referenced above the mean within their main themes. The most frequently requested knowledge and skills needed to work as a graphic designer were teamwork, project planning, presentation and communication, idea generation, business orientation, detailing and production, coding and platform management, visual coordination, layout and composition, and 2D software, which were all referenced above the mean within their respective themes. Finally, the most frequently referenced personal characteristics needed to work as a graphic designer were acumen, aesthetic

and creative sensitivity, and being self-driven, which were all referenced above the mean within their main themes.

Particularly for IT work, digital labor markets offer new opportunities to tackle the increasing need, the chronic skills shortage, high turnover rates, and the growing talent gap in IT (Apfel et al., 2020; Fuller et al., 2020; Wiesche et al., 2019). IT freelancers perform software development work online as independent contractors rather than as permanent company employees (Sison & Lavilles, 2018). IT freelancing must be distinguished from other freelancing areas because IT work exhibits specific characteristics that demand further investigation in digital labor markets.

As mentioned by Riemenschneider and Armstrong (2021), IT freelancers differ from other virtual freelancers in certain aspects as IT freelancers do require breadth of knowledge and skills for constant change and development when it comes to demanding work context. IT freelancers particularly respond to the threat of skill obsolescence, especially in the context of digital labor platforms, as they face a high level of personal responsibility for continuous training, updating, and learning (Graham et al., 2017; Kost et al., 2020; Spreitzer et al., 2017)

2.2.2 Role Ambiguity

The study of Zhang, Hong, and Smith (2022) defined ambiguity as the lack of job information, such as responsibilities, work performance expectations, and work goals that individuals can perceive. Lacking information about responsibilities and expectations usually results in individuals hesitating to take action and make an effort to excel in their work performance. There are several sources causing role ambiguity. As mentioned in the study of Purnomo, Lustono, and Tatik (2021), some sources of role ambiguity are insufficient information, which is absent in the individual's tasks and responsibilities. Next is Unclear Expectations, which occur when there is a lack of defined expectations of what individuals require. Lack of Direction is also a source of conflict, wherein individuals do not receive guidance or advice from their superiors or colleagues. Complex Organizational Structures are also a source of role ambiguity when individuals receive conflicting instructions and responsibilities, leading to role ambiguity.

Fitzpatrick and McCaughey (2023) highlighted the difference of role ambiguity between employees and freelancers. Their study revealed that employees have more clarity with their roles as they typically benefit from structured onboarding, community involvement, and more opportunities for learning and professional development. However, for freelancers, they often lack access to supportive structures which causes ambiguous roles in their work. Though they are expected to perform with presumed authority, they work outside their work community which leads to challenges in understanding their roles within their client's organization. This underscores the challenges experienced by freelancers in navigating their responsibilities and roles without the traditional framework that supports employees.

Blasing et al. (2021) highlighted the emotional and relational challenges faced by online freelancers, some of whom work in the creative field. Role ambiguity emerges as a significant stressor, particularly in the form of self-management stress and unclear client expectations. Freelancers must independently define their roles, juggle multiple projects, and manage their professional brand without the structure of traditional employment. The lack of clear guidance and social support exacerbates stress, leading to

burnout and frustration. Additionally, difficult client relations, such as vague project requirements and sudden communication breakdowns, contribute to uncertainty, forcing freelancers to constantly navigate shifting expectations. While these challenges are present across various industries, those in creative fields may encounter additional constraints due to the nature of platform-based freelance work, where balancing artistic integrity with client demands adds another layer of complexity.

Oshio et al. (2021) found that higher role ambiguity contributes to increased psychological distress and job dissatisfaction, not necessarily as a direct cause but as a key amplifier of other job stressors. This means that while role ambiguity itself negatively impacts workers, its primary role is in intensifying the harmful effects of adverse job conditions, making them more detrimental to mental health and job satisfaction. When job stressors were accounted for, the direct influence of role ambiguity on distress and dissatisfaction became less significant, reinforcing its role as an intensifier rather than a root cause. Additionally, its amplifying effect was not uniform across all stressors, as its influence on job control was weaker, likely because job control and role ambiguity are interconnected. These findings emphasize the need for organizations to minimize role ambiguity to prevent it from worsening the negative impact of workplace stressors.

Perception is essential in how people interpret their work environment, especially when it comes to comprehending job tasks and expectations. Individual cognitive filters influence the perceptual process, which includes selection, organization, and interpretation. Cultural, social, and psychological aspects also influence it (Ou, 2017). Employees frequently encounter perceived role ambiguity, which is characterized by a personal sense of uncertainty about responsibilities, performance requirements, and authority.

Role ambiguity is mostly caused by how people see and understand organizational cues, though it can sometimes result from structural problems with job design (Ou, 2017). For example, depending on their personal experiences or cultural backgrounds, employees may understand the same instruction differently.

Perceived role ambiguity significantly reduces job satisfaction, according to research on Brazilian controllers conducted by Nuñez Palomino and Frezatti (2016). According to their research, ambiguity increased when role descriptions were unclear and expectations changed without corresponding clarity. They showed that ambiguity had a more negative effect than role conflict using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Furthermore, Ou (2017) emphasized that cultural differences influence how people view roles, with values, norms, and communication styles all contributing to different perceptions of the same professional responsibilities. Even precise job descriptions can be interpreted as unclear if they contradict an individual's past assumptions or cultural background.

Lastly, perception serves as a significant mediator in how employees perceive job roles and ambiguity. To reduce perceived ambiguity and its impact on performance and well-being, firms could improve communication clarity, match job expectations, and address workers' cultural and psychological perspectives on their work (Ou, 2017; Nuñez Palomino & Frezatti, 2016).

2.2.3 Burnout

The study of Yunus and Mahajar (2015) defined burnout as a response to emotional and interpersonal burnout experiences. It is a psychological syndrome of emotional and personalized fatigue affecting an individual's work performance, enthusiasm, and self-confidence. In a work setting, burnout arises when disharmony is present in an individual's work performance and work pressures (Pratiwi, Ratnadi, et al., 2019). Moreover, Travis, Lizano, and Barak's (2016) study discussed two dimensions of burnout: Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Emotional exhaustion is a central focus of burnout and is defined as the feeling of exhaustion due to overwhelming demands, leading to depersonalization. Depersonalization is a stress response caused by spurs dissonance; it is considered a coping strategy for work demands and exhaustion in terms of burnout and resilience. The study of Murali, Macker, et al. (2018) claimed that resilience is identified as a protective factor from burnout. Resilience allows individuals to positively adapt to a new environment when faced with adversity. In effect, fostering resilience helps an individual face and mitigate burnout's adverse effects.

Occupational stress arises when employment expectations exceed an employee's capacity to cope, resulting in poor physical, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Research shows that stress lowers productivity and job performance and can lead to health problems like depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disorders (De Silva et al., 2017; George & Zakkariya, 2015). Fatigue, despair, and decreased professional efficacy are characteristics of burnout, which occurs in response to constant strain (Maslach et al., 2016). Work engagement and satisfaction are adversely affected by symptoms that can be behavioral (lack of motivation, absenteeism), emotional (anxiety, anger), or physical (fatigue, headaches) (Lu & Gursoy, 2016).

Role ambiguity has been associated with higher employee stress and lower work performance. Research shows that workers who are uncertain of their responsibilities feel more frustrated and emotionally exhausted, which might eventually make them less productive at work (Hill et al., 2015). It has been determined that role ambiguity and job performance are mediated by burnout, which is characterized as ongoing workplace stress that results in fatigue and diminished professional efficacy. According to Perez et al. (2016), workers who experience role ambiguity frequently struggle with decision-making and job satisfaction, which can result in burnout and further affect their productivity.

According to research, role ambiguity and work performance are greatly impacted by burnout. Employees are more prone to withdraw and perform below expectations when they endure ongoing stress as a result of ambiguous job roles (Shaukat et al., 2017). Emotional exhaustion, dehumanization, and a decreased sense of accomplishment are all signs of burnout that have a negative effect on productivity at work (Ozel & Hacıoglu, 2021). To lessen uncertainty and avoid burnout, organizations can lessen these consequences by establishing clear job descriptions, offering employee support networks, and encouraging open communication (Pretirose & Muafi, 2021). Resolving job ambiguity is essential to preserving worker wellbeing and ensuring ongoing workplace productivity.

2.2.4 Work Performance

In the study of Abun, Nicolas, et al. (2021), Human resources have been focusing on improving work performance, which is the key to improving the quality of education, and thus, the office is tasked to

analyze different factors that affect the employees' performance, also, in the research of Dziuba, Ingaldi, & Zhuravskaya (2020). The company assesses the employee's job satisfaction. Their job satisfaction results in their work safety. A happy and satisfied employee performs better in their duties, becomes more responsible, and feels part of their enterprise.

Masucci, Petermann, and Rajguru (2015) discovered that traditional economic indicators cannot accurately measure freelancers' well-being. They also recognized three major obstacles: finances, freelancing, and skills. Money-related barriers have a detrimental impact on business growth and performance, whereas freelancing challenges, such as delayed payments and a lack of benefits, apply to all freelancers. These challenges might lead to burnout, which is linked to poor work performance and overall productivity.

The work performance of freelancers is influenced by workload, job stress, work flexibility, and the evolving gig economy. Role ambiguity and financial instability can reduce efficiency and increase burnout, ultimately affecting productivity (Purnomo, Lustono, & Tatik, 2021). Excessive workload, combined with a lack of work-life boundaries, often leads to emotional exhaustion, while work flexibility can mitigate stress if managed effectively (Buruck et al., 2020). The study Junca and Rodrigues (2024) found that role ambiguity, lower engagement, and dissatisfaction at work directly lead to higher turnover intentions.

The gig economy offers freelancers with both opportunities and disadvantages. Flexibility and continuous skill improvement are becoming increasingly important for being competitive (Vadavi & Sharmiladevi, 2024). However, irregular income and limited legal protections contribute to job insecurity, which can lead to stress and burnout, eventually lowering work performance and motivation.

2.2.5 Resilience

In the study of Paul, Bamel, & Garg (2016) they said that there are several definitions for the term 'resilience,' which widen the scope of its meaning. A large number of studies have also considered different facets of resilience (personal resilience, trait resilience, psychological resilience, emotional resilience, career resilience, and ego resilience). In general, they agreed on resilience: (a) is a capacity that reflects in behaviour; (b) deals with change; and (c) relates to overcoming some unwanted situation.

The Study by Dukovic (2022) said that to survive in the business, freelancers must develop personal resilience, which means transforming challenges into valuable lessons that will help them improve their careers. Specifically, resilience results from a combination of factors, including planning, the ability to adapt to a new situation in progress, and the ability to respond quickly when the risk is realized. In other studies, there are other factors that boost your resilience. In the study of Markovic, Mirjana, et al. (2021), they said that Freelancers and remote workers develop resilience by balancing work and family responsibilities, making them more resistant to stress. However, highly educated individuals struggle more with maintaining this balance, which can impact their adaptability.

Freelancers often face significant uncertainty in their work roles, which can negatively impact their performance and creative output. However, resilience serves as a crucial resource in mitigating these challenges. De Clercq (2019) emphasized that resilience enables individuals to manage setbacks associated with ambiguous job roles by preventing the depletion of their energy and motivation. Resilient

freelancers are more likely to persist in creative activities despite unclear expectations, as their ability to recover from adversity allows them to maintain intrinsic motivation. Additionally, resilience helps freelancers navigate role ambiguity by reducing frustration and fostering a problem-solving mindset. When individuals possess higher resilience, they are less likely to let job-related stressors hinder their ability to contribute creative ideas, ultimately allowing them to sustain their engagement with their work. Beyond maintaining creativity, resilience also plays a vital role in career commitment among digital freelancers. Wong et al. (2021) highlighted that freelancers, particularly those in digital labor, often lack traditional organizational support systems, making resilience essential for adapting to job demands. Without structured HR-facilitated resources, freelancers must rely on personal resilience to manage uncertainty and align their work with career goals through job crafting. This adaptability is critical for sustaining commitment to freelancing, as stronger resilience enables individuals to endure the unpredictability of nonstandard work arrangements. Consequently, freelancers who exhibit high resilience are better equipped to handle the flexibility and self-management required in their careers, increasing their likelihood of remaining committed to their professional paths despite external challenges.

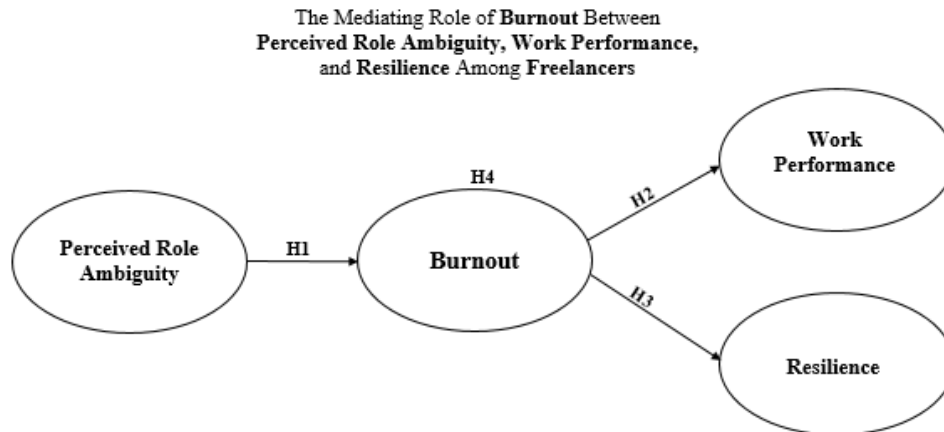
Fadli et al. (2024) highlighted that both role ambiguity and workload significantly contribute to employee burnout at PT. United Waru Biscuit Manufactory. Employees experiencing unclear job expectations or excessive responsibilities are more likely to face stress and exhaustion, with role ambiguity exhibiting a stronger correlation with burnout than workload. These findings align with previous research, emphasizing the necessity of clear job definitions and effective workload management to mitigate burnout. Without proper role clarity and balanced workloads, employees may struggle to meet expectations, leading to disengagement and decreased productivity.

Baminiwatta et al., 2025 found that resilience was negatively correlated with all burnout domains, personal, work-related, and client-related, as well as with depression, anxiety, and stress. Moderation analyses revealed that resilience buffered the effect of client-related burnout on anxiety, suggesting that individuals with higher resilience were less likely to experience anxiety when faced with this form of burnout. However, resilience amplified the effects of personal burnout on depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating that its influence varies across burnout dimensions. These findings parallel the experiences of freelancers in the present study, where the lack of organizational support structures and role clarity similarly depletes resilience reserves when burnout levels are elevated.

2.3 The Hypothesized Model

Figure 1.

Hypothesized Model of the Mediating Role of Burnout between Perceived Role Ambiguity, Work Performance, and Resilience among Freelancers



With the help of the Job Demand-Resource Model, the Hypothesized Model describes how *Job Demands* (Perceived Role Ambiguity) are associated with increased Burnout when *Job Resource* are limited. This model explains how freelancers face high demands such as unclear client expectations and self-managed workloads and how it correlates with high levels of burnout, which can possibly lead to low levels of both work performance and resilience. Moreover, the model visualizes how Role ambiguity does not directly affect work performance and resilience, but instead operates entirely through burnout as a mediator mechanism. The model shows that unclear job roles and expectations first increase burnout levels among freelancers, and this elevated burnout then subsequently reduces their work performance and resilience. The hypothesized model visualizes the full mediation which leads to the four hypotheses of the study:

H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived role ambiguity and burnout

H2: There is a significant relationship between burnout and work performance

H3: There is a significant relationship between burnout and resilience

H4: Burnout significantly mediates the relationship between perceived role ambiguity, work performance, and resilience.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative approach by adapting descriptive survey questionnaires. The descriptive quantitative approach focused on collecting and analyzing numerical data to test the relationship and correlation of the research variables. According to Purdy (2023), this approach aimed to describe behaviors or outcomes without delving into cause-and-effect relationships or theoretical predictions. Furthermore, the sampling methodology that was utilized in this research was purposive sampling, in which the researchers focused on a specific type of respondents based on predetermined

criteria of the study. The study used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in assessing the expected number of respondents and examining the collected data. The Structural Equation Modelling allowed researchers to identify the target respondents and determine an adequately sized sample to ensure reliable and valid results. Furthermore, its comprehensive statistical method allowed researchers to examine the strength and significance of correlations, particularly when testing relationships involving mediating variables (Kyriazos, 2018).

3.2 Subject and Study Site

The respondents of the study were virtual service freelancers residing within Metro Manila, selected through purposive sampling, as the study specifically targeted individuals engaged in freelance work. The sample size consisted of 254 respondents, following the rule of thumb for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to ensure more reliable and valid results (Kyriazos, 2018).

To be included in the study, respondents had to meet the following criteria: they are between 20 and 40 years old, of any gender, and had at least one year of experience as virtual services freelancers. This included, but was not limited to, the following field: *General Virtual Assistance; Administrative Tasks; Customer Service (Phone, Email, Chat Support); Marketing and Social Media Marketing (Facebook Ads, Google Ads, etc.); Sales and e-Commerce Management; Copywriting; Graphic Designing; Online Tutorial; Accounting and Bookkeeping; General IT and Web Development; Managerial (Project Team, Operations Management); Recruitment; Others*. These categories were adapted from the study by Campaner & Lipayo, "The Operational Efficiency Practices of Selected Virtual Service Freelancers in the Philippines."

3.3 Instrumentation

3.3.1 Role Ambiguity

The survey questions for the variable "Perceived Role Ambiguity" were adapted from a 2020 study by Ntopi, Chirwa, and Maluwa. It is composed of six questions based on the Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict Scale, and respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree), with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.822 affirming the tool's validity and reliability.

3.3.2 Burnout

The survey questions for the variable "Burnout" were adapted from a 2024 study by Murphy. It is composed of eight questions based on the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory Theory, and respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree), with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.840 affirming the tool's validity and reliability.

3.3.3 Work Performance

The survey questions for the variable "Work Performance" were adapted from a 2024 study by Ozkan, Belhan, and Koopman. It is composed of nine questions based on the Individual Work Performance, and respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree), with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.837 affirming the tool's validity and reliability.

3.3.4 Resilience

The survey questions for the variable "Resilience" were adapted from a 2014 study by Murphy. It is composed of nine questions based on the Nicholson McBride Resilience, and respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree), with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.884 affirming the tool's validity and reliability.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers first accomplished the manuscript and necessary forms, including the questionnaire and procedural details, for submission to the Commerce Research Ethics Committee for approval. Once approved, the survey questions were transferred to Google Forms as the chosen data collection method. A pilot test was then conducted with a small sample of freelancers to refine the questionnaire based on feedback. After finalizing the survey, data gathering commenced using purposive sampling, as the researchers intentionally targeted virtual service freelancers by distributing the survey through relevant social media platforms where these professionals were active and personal networks. A publication material with key study details, Google Forms link, a QR code, and an engaging caption was posted to attract respondents. The survey's title page outlined the study's purpose and eligibility criteria, specifying the required age range and type of freelance work. The next section contained an informed consent form, including a template link that respondents could download, sign, and then upload the signed document through the file upload option in the Google Forms questionnaire if they approved of the study's terms. A Data Privacy Act clause was also included to ensure ethical research practices. Participants then provided demographic information, followed by answering the main survey sections covering the study's key variables: role ambiguity, burnout, work performance, and resilience. The survey was expected to take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. Lastly, the data collection period took place from June 2025 to September 2025.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The survey questionnaires of this research were adapted from other studies. Hence, the researchers had sent emails to the respective authors requesting permission to use the questionnaires and providing them a brief explanation of the study and the intention of the researchers. Afterward, the researchers provided a manuscript of the study to the Research Ethics Committee for review and approval. Once approved, the researchers deployed their survey questionnaires, including the informed consent form, through Google Forms; this was done online or face-to-face, whichever was convenient for both the researchers and respondents. The provided form also informed the respondents about the description of the study, possible risks and benefits, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and withdrawal from participation. All collected data were stored in a secure Google Drive folder that was accessible only to the researchers.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data gathered from the survey were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22 and WarpPLS Version 8.0. The analysis involved descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for mediation and association testing.

Frequency and percentage were used to present the demographic profile of the respondents. These descriptive tools summarized categorical variables such as age, sex, and years working in the industry.

This allowed for a clear understanding of the distribution of participant characteristics and aided in contextualizing the sample.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the relationships among role ambiguity, burnout, work performance, and resilience. SEM was suitable for correlational studies, as it allowed the simultaneous examination of both direct and indirect associations. In particular, it was used to explore the mediating role of burnout in the relationship between role ambiguity and the two outcome variables: work performance and resilience.

4. Results

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Virtual Freelancers in NCR (n=254)

Profile	n	%	Profile	n	%
Age			Type of Freelance Work		
20-25	69	27.2	Accounting and Bookkeeping	13	5.1
26-30	139	54.7	Administrative Tasks	27	10.6
31-35	40	15.7	Copywriting	7	2.8
36-40	6	2.4	Customer Service	52	20.5
			General IT and Web Development	4	1.6
Gender			General Virtual Assistance	30	11.8
Female	161	63.4	Graphic Designing	31	12.2
Male	93	36.6	Managerial	31	12.2
			Marketing and Social Media Marketing	25	9.8
Years Working			Online Tutorial	7	2.8
1-2 Years	68	26.8	Others	2	0.8
3-5 Years	159	62.6	Recruitment	7	2.8
More than 5	27	10.6	Sales and e-commerce Management	18	7.1
Type of Client					
Local	102	40.2			
International	6	2.4			
Both local and international	146	57.5			

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of 254 virtual freelancers in the National Capital Region (NCR). The majority of respondents were aged 26–30 years (139 or 54.7%), followed by those aged 20-25 (69 or 27.2%), with smaller representations from the 31-35 age group (40 or 15.7%) and 36-40 age group (6 or 2.4%), indicating that virtual freelancing is predominantly pursued by younger professionals under 30. Female freelancers significantly outnumbered males, representing 161 respondents (63.4%) compared to 93 males (36.6%). In terms of experience, most freelancers had been working for 3–5 years (159 or 62.6%), followed by those with 1–2 years (68 or 26.8%), while only 27 respondents (10.6%) had more than 5 years of experience, suggesting a workforce with moderate professional maturity.

Regarding the nature of their work, Customer Service emerged as the most common freelance specialization with 52 respondents (20.5%), followed by Managerial roles and Graphic Designing (each with 31 or 12.2%), General Virtual Assistance (30 or 11.8%), Administrative Tasks (27 or 10.6%), and Marketing and Social Media Marketing (25 or 9.8%). Other specializations included Sales and e-commerce Management (18 or 7.1%), Accounting and Bookkeeping (13 or 5.1%), and smaller percentages in Copywriting, Online Tutorial, and Recruitment (each with 7 or 2.8%), General IT and Web Development (4 or 1.6%), and Others (2 or 0.8%). In terms of clientele, more than half of the respondents (146 or 57.5%) served both local and international clients. In comparison, 102 (40.2%) worked exclusively with local clients and only 6 (2.4%) with international clients alone, demonstrating that NCR virtual freelancers typically maintain diverse portfolios across different markets.

Table 2
Reliability Analysis of the Variables

Reliability Analysis of Role Ambiguity		Reliability Analysis of Work Performance	
Reliability Statistics		Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.822	6	0.837	9

Reliability Analysis of Burnout		Reliability Analysis of Resilience	
Reliability Statistics		Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.840	8	0.884	9

The reliability test confirmed that all scales used in the study demonstrated strong internal consistency, indicating that the items within each variable work well together and are appropriate for analysis. The role ambiguity scale, consisting of six items, produced a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.822, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.70 and indicating high reliability. The burnout scale, with eight

items, yielded an alpha of 0.840, showing good internal consistency and confirming that the items effectively measure burnout among freelancers. The nine-item work performance scale produced an alpha of 0.837, signifying strong reliability in assessing performance-related behaviors, while the nine-item resilience questionnaire achieved an alpha of 0.884, reflecting very strong reliability in measuring resilience. Overall, these results confirm that all instruments used in the study are dependable and suitable for producing credible findings.

Table 3
Model fit and quality indices

Indices	Value	Decision Criteria
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.886	p < 0.001
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.785	p < 0.001
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.784	p < 0.001
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	9.847	acceptable if ≤ 5, ideally ≤ 3.3
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.759	small ≥ 0.1, medium ≥ 0.25, large ≥ 0.36

Table 3 assesses whether the structural equation model is well-specified and appropriate for testing the hypothesized relationships among variables. With the help of WarpPLS, the results revealed that the model fit of the study demonstrated a strongly significant relationship among the variables. The average path coefficient of 0.886 and p < 0.001 indicated that the variables are highly correlated with each other, capturing the strong interconnections among the variables in the model. The Average R-squared of 0.784 and p < 0.001 reveal that the model explains approximately 78.5% of the shared variation between the variables. This demonstrates an excellent explanatory strength. The Average Adjusted R-squared of 0.784 and p < 0.001 also confirm that the relationships between the variables are stable and meaningful, indicating that they are not overfit. Though the average full collinearity VIF of 9.847 exceeds the ideal limit, the Goodness of Fit (0.759) indicated an excellent overall correlation structure. While elevated AFVIF suggests multicollinearity, this is expected in mediation models where variables are theoretically related. The excellent performance on all other fit indices confirms that despite multicollinearity, the model remains valid, and the relationships are genuine, supporting how role ambiguity, burnout, and outcomes are interconnected as hypothesized.

Figure 2.

Structural Equation Model of The Mediating Role of Burnout Between Perceived Role Ambiguity, Work Performance, and Resilience

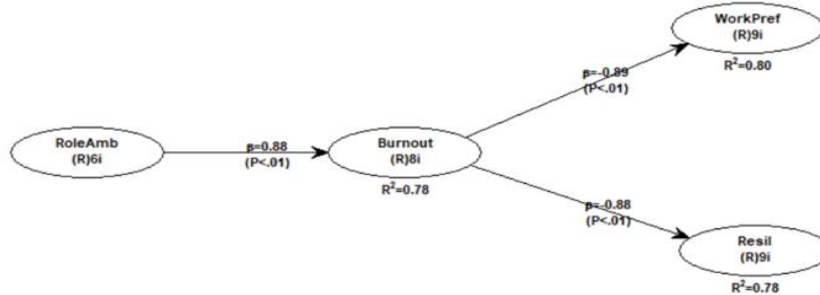


Figure 2 represents the structural equation model generated by WarpPLS. This model illustrates the mediating role of burnout between perceived role ambiguity, work performance, and resilience. As shown in the equation model, role ambiguity has a strong positive relationship with burnout as $\beta = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$ indicating that unclear job roles and expectations significantly increase burnout. For Burnout, it has a negative relationship with both work performance ($\beta = -0.89$, $p < 0.01$) and Resilience ($\beta = -0.88$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that when Burnout increases, both work performance and resilience decreases. Overall, the model implies that burnout serves as a mediator. Where role ambiguity indirectly lowers an individual’s work performance and resilience when there is a high level of burnout.

Table 4.
Indicator Weights

Indicator Weights		Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Work Performance	Resilience	Type (a)	SE	P value	VIF	WLS	ES
ITEM CODE	Questions										
RA1	I feel unsure about the limits of my responsibilities.	0.187				Reflect	0.6	0.001	2.64	1	0.16
RA2	Sometimes, the expectations of my role are not clear.	0.192				Reflect	0.6	<0.001	2.09	1	0.17
RA3	I receive inconsistent information about my tasks	0.192				Reflect	0.6	<0.001	2.97	1	0.17
RA4	It is not always clear how my job is evaluated.	0.188				Reflect	0.6	0.001	2.64	1	0.16
RA5	My job objectives often seem vague	0.197				Reflect	0.6	<0.001	3.4	1	0.18
RA6	Sometimes, I feel uncertain about what is expected from me at work.	0.195				Reflect	0.6	<0.001	3.2	1	0.17
B1	I feel emotionally or physically exhausted after work.		0.151			Reflect	0.6	0.007	2.21	1	0.12
B2	It usually takes effort to stay motivated during workdays.		0.135			Reflect	0.6	0.015	1.73	1	0.1
B3	I feel a decline in enthusiasm for my tasks at work over time.		0.161			Reflect	0.6	0.004	2.93	1	0.14
B4	I sometimes feel disconnected from my work.		0.145			Reflect	0.6	0.009	2.01	1	0.11
B5	I find it harder to concentrate on my tasks at work.		0.162			Reflect	0.6	0.004	2.98	1	0.14
B6	I feel a reduced sense of accomplishment in my work		0.158			Reflect	0.6	0.005	2.69	1	0.13
B7	It is difficult for me to recover quickly from work-related stress.		0.156			Reflect	0.6	0.006	2.48	1	0.13
B8	Sometimes, I already feel drained at the beginning of a work day.		0.157			Reflect	0.6	0.005	2.58	1	0.13
WP1	I manage my work so that I finish tasks on time.			0.124		Reflect	0.6	0.022	3.61	1	0.11
WP2	I am able to set priorities effectively.			0.125		Reflect	0.6	0.021	3.72	1	0.11
WP3	I carry out my work effectively.			0.128		Reflect	0.6	0.019	4.3	1	0.12
WP4	I take initiative to start new tasks when I complete previous ones.			0.123		Reflect	0.6	0.023	3.3	1	0.11
WP5	I come up with creative solutions to new problems.			0.129		Reflect	0.6	0.018	4.75	1	0.12
WP6	I actively seek new challenges in my work.			0.124		Reflect	0.6	0.022	3.72	1	0.11
WP7	I actively participate in meetings and consultations.			0.124		Reflect	0.6	0.023	3.45	1	0.11
WP8	I address work-related issues constructively when they arise.			0.125		Reflect	0.6	0.021	3.72	1	0.11
WP9	I focus on the positive aspects of situations at work.			0.128		Reflect	0.6	0.019	4.38	1	0.115
R1	In a difficult spot, I turn once to what can be done to put things right.				0.128	Reflect	0.6	0.019	2.91	1	0.11
R2	I focus on what I can control, rather than stress over what I cannot.				0.13	Reflect	0.6	0.018	3.06	1	0.11
R3	I generally manage to keep things in perspective.				0.136	Reflect	0.6	0.014	4.11	1	0.12
R4	I am calm in crisis.				0.129	Reflect	0.6	0.018	3.02	1	0.11
R5	I am good at finding solutions to problems.				0.14	Reflect	0.6	0.012	5.82	1	0.13
R6	I don't tend to avoid conflict.				0.111	Reflect	0.6	0.036	1.92	1	0.08
R7	I try to control events rather than being a victim of circumstances.				0.134	Reflect	0.6	0.015	3.69	1	0.12
R8	I manage my stress very well.				0.131	Reflect	0.6	0.017	3.52	1	0.11
R9	I feel confident and secure in my position				0.128	Reflect	0.6	0.019	2.9	1	0.11

Table 4 examines how well each survey item (indicator) measures its intended construct (Role Ambiguity, Burnout, Work Performance, and Resilience). It validates that each question significantly contributes to its scale and checks for acceptable multicollinearity levels, ensuring the measurement model is reliable and appropriate.

The indicator weights for the constructs demonstrate generally strong and significant contributions. Role Ambiguity indicators show consistently high weights (0.187–0.197, $p \leq 0.001$) with VIFs ranging from 2.635 to 3.396, indicating acceptable multicollinearity that does not threaten the validity of the scale. Effect sizes of 0.158–0.176 suggest that these indicators meaningfully contribute to the latent variable, supporting reliability. Burnout indicators also show moderate but significant weights (0.135–0.162, $p = 0.004$ –0.015) with VIFs of 1.731–2.977 and effect sizes of 0.096–0.139, confirming that each item contributes reasonably to the construct. Work Performance indicators demonstrate significant weights (0.123–0.129, $p < 0.05$) with slightly higher VIFs (3.304–4.752), but still within acceptable limits, and effect sizes of 0.106–0.118 indicate meaningful contributions.

Resilience indicators (RE1–RE9) show moderate to strong weights (0.111–0.140, $p = 0.012$ –0.036), with most VIFs within acceptable limits (1.919–3.690), although RE5 has a higher VIF of 5.819, suggesting some overlap with other indicators. Effect sizes (0.081–0.129) confirm meaningful contributions to the construct, supporting its reliability. Across all constructs, P values are below 0.05, and no Simpson’s paradox (reversed trends across groups) or suppression effects (distorted relationships due to hidden variables) were observed, indicating that the measurement model is stable, consistent, and well-specified.

Table 5.
Correlations among Latent Variables

Correlations among l.vs with sq.rts. of AVEs

	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Work Performance	Resilience
Role Ambiguity	0.868	0.873	-0.907	-0.901
Burnout	0.873	0.816	-0.862	-0.85
Work Performance	-0.907	-0.862	0.885	0.958
Resilience	-0.901	-0.85	0.958	0.856

P values for correlations

	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Work Performance	Resilience
Role Ambiguity	1	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Burnout	<0.001	1	<0.001	<0.001
Work Performance	<0.001	<0.001	1	<0.001
Resilience	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	1

Table 5 examines the strength and direction of relationships between the study’s primary constructs (Role Ambiguity, Burnout, Work Performance, and Resilience) and ensures each construct measures a

distinct concept rather than overlapping with others. Examining the p-values and correlation coefficients from the table of correlations among latent variables and errors reveals several important patterns in the relationships between the study's key constructs. The correlations of all pairs among the latent variables Role Ambiguity, Burnout, Work Performance, and Resilience are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), meaning that these constructs strongly interrelate with each other. The magnitudes of the correlation coefficients show that Role Ambiguity is positively related to Burnout, with $r = 0.873$, but is negatively related to Work Performance ($r = -0.907$) and Resilience ($r = -0.901$), which indicates that higher perceived role ambiguity tends to increase Burnout while reducing both Work Performance and Resilience. Similarly, there is a negative association between Burnout and Work Performance ($r = -0.862$) and Resilience ($r = -0.850$), supporting the notion that increased Burnout levels are associated with declining performance and Resilience, which aligns with theoretical expectations from occupational stress research. In contrast, the positive relationship between Work Performance and Resilience is very strong ($r = 0.958$), indicating that employees who reveal higher Resilience tend to have better work performance and vice versa.

To confirm that each factor measures something truly unique, the researchers checked whether each one captures different information. The researchers looked at a measure called the "square root of AVE" for each factor: Role Ambiguity (0.868), Burnout (0.816), Work Performance (0.885), and Resilience (0.856)—and compared it to how strongly each factor relates to the others. These values being higher than the relationships between factors suggests that Role Ambiguity, Burnout, Work Performance, and Resilience are genuinely separate ideas, even though they are related to each other. The measurement errors were also checked in the analysis. The VIF scores for Burnout (1.408), Work Performance (2.943), and Resilience (2.887) are all well below the warning level of 5, and the relationships between error terms are significant ($p < 0.001$). This confirms that there is no problematic overlap between factors and that the analysis measures variables accurately without duplication. In summary, the results indicate that Role Ambiguity and Burnout are highly interrelated sources of strain that have a negative impact on Work Performance and Resilience. In contrast, Work Performance and Resilience are mutually reinforcing. All the relationships are significant, thereby providing strong empirical support for the hypothesized model structure.

Table 6.
Causality Assessment Coefficient

Causality Assessment Coefficient							
Path-correlation Signs		Warp2 bivariate causal direction ratios			Warp3 bivariate causal direction ratios		
	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	
Burnout	1		Burnout	1.003	Burnout	1.003	
Work Performance		1	Work Performance		Work Performance		0.964
Resilience		1	Resilience		Resilience		0.968
R-squared contributions		P values for Warp2 bivariate causal direction differences			P values for Warp3 bivariate causal direction differences		
	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	Role Ambiguity	Burnout	
Burnout	0.777		Burnout	0.481	Burnout	0.485	
Work Performance		0.799	Work Performance		Work Performance		0.304
Resilience		0.779	Resilience		Resilience		0.325
Path-correlation Ratios							
	Role Ambiguity	Burnout					
Burnout	1						
Work Performance		1					
Resilience		1					

Table 6 assesses the causal direction and strength of the hypothesized relationships in the model, confirming whether the proposed paths from Role Ambiguity to Burnout, and from Burnout to Work Performance and Resilience are supported by the data and not reversed or spurious. The causality assessment indicates that all hypothesized relationships are supported by the data. All path–correlation signs are positive, confirming that Role Ambiguity is associated with higher Burnout, and that Burnout is related to lower Work Performance and Resilience. The R-squared values (0.774 for Burnout, 0.799 for Work Performance, and 0.779 for Resilience) demonstrate that the model accounts for a substantial portion of the variation in each outcome, indicating that the included factors are strong predictors. Path-correlation ratios equal to 1, with differences of 0 and p-values of 1, show that the estimated paths closely correspond to the observed data. In addition, causal direction ratios ranging from 0.964 to 1.003, with p-values above 0.30, confirm that the direction of influence among the variables is accurate and not reversed, and that the connections are genuine rather than the result of unrelated factors.

Overall, these results show that the model is statistically strong and theoretically consistent. The R-squared values demonstrate how well the predictors explain each variable, while the ratios and p-values show that the paths are stable and logically aligned. Although this study is correlational and does not prove causation, the causality assessment supports the proposed flow of influence among Role Ambiguity, Burnout, Work Performance, and Resilience, reinforcing the reliability of the model’s structure and the relationships it represents.

Table 7.
Indirect and Total Effects

Indirect and Total Effects					
Indirect effects for paths with 2 segments			Total effects		
	Role Ambiguity			Role Ambiguity	Burnout
Work Performance	-0.788		Burnout	0.881	
Resilience	-0.778		Work Performance	-0.788	-0.894
			Resilience	-0.778	-0.882
P values for total effects			Effect sizes for total effects		
	Role Ambiguity	Burnout		Role Ambiguity	Burnout
Burnout	<0.001		Burnout	0.777	
Work Performance	<0.001	<0.001	Work Performance	0.715	0.799
Resilience	<0.001	<0.001	Resilience	0.7	0.779

Table 7 examines the indirect effects of Role Ambiguity on Work Performance and Resilience through Burnout, determining whether burnout serves as a mediator. It also presents total effects to assess the overall strength of influence in the model.

The analysis of the Indirect and Total Effects reveals that Role Ambiguity significantly influences both Work Performance and Resilience through Burnout. Specifically, the indirect effect of Role Ambiguity on Work Performance through Burnout is -0.788 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that higher Role Ambiguity increases Burnout, which in turn substantially reduces Work Performance. This mediating effect is large, with an effect size of 0.715, suggesting it is both statistically and practically meaningful. Similarly, Role Ambiguity indirectly affects Resilience through Burnout, with an effect coefficient of -

0.778 ($p < 0.001$) and a large effect size of 0.700, emphasizing the substantial role of Burnout as a mediator. Each outcome, Work Performance and Resilience, has a single indirect path, confirming that Burnout serves as the primary channel through which Role Ambiguity exerts its influence. The standard errors for these estimates are low (0.039), reflecting precise measurement.

Examining total effects, Role Ambiguity strongly predicts higher Burnout, with a total effect of 0.881 ($p < 0.001$). Its total effects on Work Performance and Resilience are -0.788 ($p < 0.001$) and -0.778 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, indicating that the negative impacts on both outcomes are largely mediated by Burnout. Burnout itself exerts a strong negative influence on Work Performance (-0.894, $p < 0.001$) and Resilience (-0.882, $p < 0.001$). Effect sizes for total effects range between 0.7 and 0.8, demonstrating substantial impacts. Overall, these results confirm full mediation by Burnout, showing that the effects of Role Ambiguity on both Work Performance and Resilience operate entirely through Burnout.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the correlation between perceived role ambiguity, work performance, and resilience with burnout acting as the mediating variable among virtual freelancers. Using WarpPLS, the model showed all indicators significantly contribute to their constructs with strong correlation and minimal to no multicollinearity concerns. The results of the study were able to provide meaningful findings and answer all of the three hypotheses.

According to the findings, perceived role ambiguity has a strong positive relationship with burnout, indicating that greater uncertainty in job expectations is associated with higher burnout among virtual service freelancers. This pattern is reflected in Blaising et al. (2021), who found that unclear client expectations and limited guidance force freelancers to manage multiple responsibilities independently, creating stress and emotional strain. Zhang, Hong, and Smith (2022) further explained that insufficient information about responsibilities and performance standards can reduce confidence and cause hesitation in completing tasks, intensifying the pressure experienced by workers. Building on this, Dr. Oghene (2025) and Kuhn et al. (2021) highlighted that when directives are vague, schedules irregular, and guidance limited, freelancers struggle to prioritize tasks effectively, which leads to mental exhaustion and heightened burnout. Taken together, these studies illustrate a chain of effects in which role ambiguity increases cognitive load, reduces certainty, and amplifies stress, ultimately contributing to burnout. From what our findings show, these dynamics seem particularly pronounced in virtual freelance work, where instructions are often brief, online, and somewhat ambiguous. The autonomy that comes with freelancing may sometimes become overwhelming when expectations are unclear, as participants appear to spend extra effort interpreting tasks, making independent decisions, and self-managing priorities. This combination of freedom and uncertainty, as suggested by our data, may contribute to the higher burnout reported among those with greater perceived role ambiguity. This aligns with Wood et al. (2019), who found that online freelancers frequently face unpredictable instructions and shifting client demands that increase work-related strain. Similarly, Spinuzzi et al. (2019) found that freelancers frequently manage inconsistent workflows and ambiguous expectations, which increases psychological and emotional exhaustion.

This study found a strong relationship between burnout and work performance among freelancers, with a strong negative correlation of $r = -0.862$, suggesting that as burnout increases, work performance decreases. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that emotional weariness, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment significantly reduce task completion, efficiency, and overall work quality (Park & Kim, 2018; Li et al., 2021). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model explains that when job demands exceed available resources, psychological strain and exhaustion decline performance (Bakker & De Vries, 2020), with burnout acting as the primary stress response that limits task execution (Zhang et al., 2023). Insufficient feedback, peer support, or advice contributes to weariness and lower productivity (Suh & Lee, 2017). Younger freelancers, who are still learning coping techniques, are especially prone to stress and unreliable performance under uncertain workloads (Nguyen et al., 2022). While independent autonomy can boost productivity, blurring the line between work and personal life increases stress and exhaustion (Vadavi & Sharmiladevi, 2024).

Burnout lowers freelancers' work performance. In today's digital economy, when freelancers must manage several activities autonomously, heavy workloads and continual connectivity can cause emotional exhaustion and stress. Managing burnout through workload moderation, clear job definitions, and psychological support is critical for achieving consistent performance. This is supported by Stephany et al. (2020), who found that online freelancers experienced reduced productivity, heightened stress, and difficulty maintaining performance during periods of intense workload and unstable client communication, mirroring the decline in work performance observed in this study.

The findings reveal a strong negative correlation between burnout and resilience ($r = -0.850$), indicating that as burnout levels increase among freelancers, their resilience significantly decreases. The present findings align with the study of Abdulmohdi (2024), claiming that nurses experienced high levels of burnout. As a result of this study, it was determined that British nurses experienced a relatively high level of burnout, which may be influenced by how they felt their organisations supported them. Although nurses perceived being socially supported by their families, and this type of support had a positive correlation with their level of resilience, the workplace negatively impacted their social role towards their families, which was, in contrast, associated with increasing their level of burnout. The negative correlation between burnout and resilience observed in this study is further supported by recent empirical evidence from high-stress occupational contexts. Baminiwatta et al. (2025) found that resilience was negatively correlated with all burnout domains, personal, work-related, and client-related, as well as with depression, anxiety, and stress. Moderation analyses revealed that resilience buffered the effect of client-related burnout on anxiety, suggesting that individuals with higher resilience were less likely to experience anxiety when faced with this form of burnout.

Spurk and Straub (2020) noted that freelancers rely heavily on their own resilience to manage with irregular income, uneven workloads, and shifting client demands, but ongoing strain can gradually lower their resilience. These findings parallel the experiences of freelancers in the present study, where the lack of organizational support structures and role clarity similarly depletes resilience reserves when burnout levels are elevated.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the mediating role of burnout in the relationships between perceived role ambiguity, work performance, and resilience among virtual service freelancers. Data from 254 respondents analyzed using SPSS and WarpPLS SEM showed that burnout fully mediates the effect of role ambiguity on both performance and resilience. Higher role ambiguity increases burnout, which then reduces professional effectiveness and adaptive capacity, confirming the study's hypotheses and highlighting burnout as the key mechanism linking unclear job roles to declines in productivity and resilience. These findings are supported by Blaising et al. (2021), who discovered that freelancers experience high emotional strain when client expectations are unclear, and Fitzpatrick & McCaughey (2023), who emphasized that freelancers lack structured onboarding and guidance, making them more vulnerable to role ambiguity and burnout. Similarly, Markovic et al. (2021) found that freelancers experience irregular workloads and unclear boundaries, which increases stress and significantly influence work performance.

From an HR perspective, the results emphasize the importance of providing role clarity and structured guidance to support virtual workers in managing stress and sustaining performance and resilience. The study contributes to theory by applying JD-R and Role Theory to empirical data on freelance work, to research by revealing the mediating role of burnout between role ambiguity and work outcomes, and to practice by offering actionable insights for HR strategies in remote work settings. The literature on freelancers also supports this suggestion, as Ashton (2024) explained that freelancers must self-manage changing responsibilities in the absence of organizational structures, and De Clercq (2019) highlighted that unclear expectations exhaust personal capacity and weaken resilience, reflecting the mediating role of burnout found in this study. Overall, the study achieves a deeper understanding of psychological mechanisms in virtual labor, clarifies how burnout links role ambiguity to performance and resilience, and promises to guide future research and HR interventions that enhance well-being, productivity, and resilience among remote and freelance professionals.

After studying this topic, the researchers suggest future studies several topics that may support the findings of this study. First, the researchers suggest to extend its scope outside the National Capital Region to further assess if there are other factors that freelancers experience in their field. The researchers also suggest to examine how role ambiguity influences the quality of work and resilience of freelancers in the creative industry to see how often creative freelancers experience ambiguous roles and how this impacts their work performance and resilience. Lastly, it is also suggested to study the age-based differences in freelancer's resilience and how it is affected by both role ambiguity and resilience, noting that freelancers aged 20-30 with three to five years of experience revealed that the relationship between burnout and performance may be influenced by career stage. This way, future studies could provide a different point of view and examine how age can influence freelancers' adaptability and resilience in a freelance work set-up.

The researchers also recommend that future research explore into how HR practices and government policies might help freelancers manage role ambiguity. Because freelancers frequently work without formal structures or clear standards, it would be beneficial to examine how companies, platforms, and customers can provide more significant role clarity through improved onboarding, communication

protocols, and project management tools. Future research may also look into the potential involvement of labor organization in developing policies or support mechanisms to safeguard freelancers from ambiguous expectations and workload-related stress. Such research can help identify practical strategies for reducing role ambiguity, improving well-being, and promoting more sustainable freelancing work conditions. Future studies should also refine the Role Ambiguity Questionnaire to better capture the specific challenges that freelancers face. It could be improved by adding items that distinguish between different sources of ambiguity, such as unclear client expectations, inconsistent project specifications, and communication gaps. The questionnaire should also include items about client communication frequency, availability of written guidelines, and feedback mechanisms, particularly since 57.5% of respondents work with both local and international clients. Additionally, future research should validate the questionnaire separately for different freelance categories and incorporate items assessing how digital platforms influence role clarity, which would strengthen the instrument's practical application across diverse freelancing contexts. Similarly, the Burnout Questionnaire could be enhanced by incorporating items that specifically assess the unique burnout patterns experienced by freelancers, such as emotional exhaustion from client management, depersonalization in virtual work settings, and the impact of irregular income on stress levels.

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