

RIGHT SPOT

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MR JOHAN KOK, who does research at the Grab-NUS AI Lab under the Singapore Economic Development Board's Industrial Postgraduate Programme.



Mr Johan Kok, 29, is pursuing a doctorate in computer science at the National University of Singapore while working as a data scientist at ride-hailing and food delivery giant Grab.
PHOTO: GRAB

Berkeley stint sparked PhD student's interest in working in tech

Studying for a PhD and holding down a full-time job can be challenging but tech whizz Johan Kok deems it a unique opportunity to do research that is relevant to both the academic world and his company.

Mr Kok, a 29-year-old Singaporean, is pursuing a doctorate in computer science at the National University of Singapore (NUS) while working as a data scientist at ride-hailing giant Grab.

He has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and a mas-

ter's in technology management from Nanyang Technological University.

A year-long stint as an exchange student and research intern at the University of California, Berkeley sparked his interest in working in tech.

"Tech start-ups were abundant in Berkeley and the people there were passionate about using tech to materialise all sorts of ideas they had in mind," said Mr Kok.

He started working at Grab in 2018 as a data engineer and be-

came a data scientist the next year.

It was a "natural transition", given how artificial intelligence and machine learning are becoming more prevalent in the industry, he said.

Mr Kok does research at the Grab-NUS AI Lab under the Singapore Economic Development Board's Industrial Postgraduate Programme.

He noted that data scientists need both foundation knowledge in model design and skills to perform large data wrangling.

"I was confident in the latter and am now building my knowledge in the former."

He added: "I have always wanted to be in an industry where learning is perpetual, where I get to share ideas with people who are equally passionate about them, and where critical problem-solving skills are well remunerated materially and intellectually."

Prisca Ang