

Empowering GIG Economy: Addressing the needs and well-being of delivery riders in Malaysia

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Abstract

The gig economy, originating in the music industry, has grown to include short-term, on-demand jobs, especially during and after the pandemic. Sectors like parcel delivery (P-hailing), E-hailing, and logistics have supported Malaysian households and provided income to delivery riders. To ensure a reliable workforce, fair wages, and benefits similar to traditional employees are crucial. Addressing delivery riders' needs, such as rest areas, healthcare, and upskill training, can improve their well-being and job satisfaction. This study suggests creating a comprehensive gig economy hub to meet these needs, supporting Malaysia's gig economy growth.

Keywords: Needs; GIG Economy; Delivery Riders; Well-Being

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1.0 Introduction

In the evolving gig economy, delivery riders play a crucial role in ensuring the seamless transport of goods and services. Yet, their daily work is often fraught with challenges that can impact their efficiency and well-being. Addressing a range of critical needs is essential to supporting and improving their daily operations. This study aims to enhance the working nature of delivery riders by investigating their essential needs and well-being.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Definition of GIG Economy and Delivery Riders

The gig economy represents a modern labor market characterized by flexible and unpredictable work, where tasks are organized through digital and algorithmic platforms (Graham & Woodcock, 2018). These platforms function as "ghost employers" (Gandini, 2018), connecting labor supply with demand and creating a distinct "capital-labor" relationship between workers and platforms. Unlike traditional job agencies, gig economy platforms utilize algorithms and rating systems driven by digital data from transactions and communications to manage work arrangements. Known as the "platform economy," this system covers a range of digitally mediated transactions, including temporary services provided by gig workers. The term "gig economy" was first introduced by Tina Brown in 2009

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to describe the trend of workers using digital platforms for short-term contracts (Brown, 2009). It is also called the on-demand or platform economy, where online platforms or mobile apps match labor supply with demand (De Stefano, 2016).

In 2018, the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) defined the gig economy as involving labor-for-money exchanges facilitated by digital platforms, which match providers with customers for short-term tasks. Gig work encompasses both crowd work—tasks sourced online—and on-demand jobs involving direct interaction (De Stefano, 2016). The 2021 World Economic Forum (WEF) report highlighted that the gig economy focuses on labor and income generation through individual projects or tasks, differing from traditional full-time employment. Key characteristics of the gig economy include short-term engagements, informal employment, reliance on online platforms, and classification of workers as self-employed or independent contractors (Health & Safety Report, 2019). Gig workers typically perform tasks through online platforms and often across borders, offering the flexibility to handle multiple projects simultaneously. Prominent sectors within the gig economy include transportation, services, and the creative industry (Sazali & Abdul Hamid, 2020).

This research focuses on gig workers involved in food and goods delivery, known as parcel hailing (p-hailing). P-hailing generally involves delivering food and packages using motorcycles, though it can also include deliveries made by bicycle or on foot (Ahmad et al., 2021; Morshes et al., 2021; Ravindran, 2021; TERAJU, 2021). According to the Ministry of Transportation Malaysia (MOT), p-hailing refers to goods transported via motorcycles, distinguishing it from e-hailing services involving passenger transport in vehicles with up to four seats, including the driver.

2.2 Contribution towards involvement in GIG Economy

Engaging in the gig economy provides distinct benefits for gig workers, such as selecting projects and clients, setting flexible pricing, managing their workloads, and switching between tasks or clients as needed. *Choice of Projects and Clients:* A major draw of the gig economy is the autonomy it offers workers. They can choose projects that match their skills, interests, and availability, enabling them to create a portfolio that aligns with their career goals. This autonomy helps workers collaborate with preferred clients, enhancing job satisfaction (Kuhn, 2016). This flexibility is particularly valuable in creative and technical fields, where workers aim to specialize or carve out a niche (Kässi & Lehdonvirta, 2018). *Flexible Price Rate:* Gig work also allows for flexible pricing, where workers can set or negotiate rates based on the value they provide and market conditions. This adaptability helps workers maximize their earnings potential, especially those with specialized skills who can command higher rates than in traditional jobs (Codagnone et al., 2016). *Defining Workloads:* Gig workers can control their workloads, choosing how many projects to undertake. This capability helps them balance their work and personal life more effectively, reducing the risk of burnout common in traditional jobs (Wood et al., 2019). By managing their workloads, gig workers can avoid overextension, leading to greater productivity and job satisfaction (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). *Option to Switch:* The gig economy also offers the flexibility to switch between various projects, clients, or even industries without the long-term commitment required by conventional employment. This flexibility benefits workers who wish to diversify their skills, explore new opportunities, or adapt to shifting market trends. It also allows workers to exit unfulfilling or low-paying projects more efficiently, maintaining job satisfaction and income stability (Sundararajan, 2016). In summary, the gig economy provides workers numerous advantages, including the freedom to choose projects and clients, flexible pricing, control over workloads, and switch tasks or clients. These features underscore the flexibility and autonomy that set gig work apart from traditional employment models.

2.3 The Needs of Delivery Riders

The needs of delivery riders are crucial for enhancing their daily work and overall well-being. This includes addressing their physical, logistical, and professional needs, which can significantly impact their efficiency and job satisfaction. Providing dedicated spaces for rest allows riders to recover from fatigue, reducing the risk of accidents and improving job satisfaction. Research indicates that inadequate rest facilities can lead to higher stress levels and burnout among gig workers (Zulkifly, 2023). *Gadget Charging and Service Areas:* Riders rely heavily on mobile devices for navigation and communication. Access to charging stations and service areas for gadget repairs is critical to ensure their equipment remains functional throughout their shifts. According to Zhang (2022), the availability of such facilities can significantly enhance operational efficiency and reduce downtime. *Dual Phone Facilities:* Many delivery riders use two phones for personal and work-related tasks. Access to facilities accommodating and charging multiple devices can streamline their work process. This need is supported by research indicating that efficient device management is crucial for maintaining high levels of service and productivity (Rusli, 2022). *Healthcare Facilities:* Access to essential healthcare services is vital due to the physical demands and potential accidents associated with delivery work. Establishing on-site or nearby healthcare facilities can help promptly address injuries and health issues. Studies show that integrating healthcare services into the support systems for gig workers can reduce absenteeism and improve overall health outcomes (Morshes et al., 2021). *Childcare Facilities:* For riders who are parents, having access to childcare services can alleviate the burden of balancing work and family responsibilities. Research by Ravindran (2021) highlights that childcare support can increase job retention and satisfaction among working parents in the gig economy. *Motorcycle Workshops:* Regular maintenance and repair of motorcycles are essential for the safety and reliability of delivery services. On-site workshops or partnerships with repair services can minimize downtime and ensure that vehicles are in good condition. Literature suggests that proactive vehicle maintenance contributes to higher efficiency and fewer service interruptions (Ahmad et al., 2021). *Professional Development Upskill Training:* Offering training programs in motorcycle mechanics, gadget servicing, and IT can allow delivery riders to expand their skill sets and generate additional revenue. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses are particularly beneficial. According to Codagnone, Abadie, and Biagi (2016), upskilling is a key factor in improving job prospects and earning potential for gig workers. *Career Development:* Providing career development resources can help riders navigate their career paths within the gig economy. This includes access to workshops, mentorship programs, and industry-specific training. Research by Stewart and Stanford (2017)

underscores the importance of career support in enhancing job satisfaction and long-term career sustainability. In summary, addressing the needs of delivery riders involves providing essential facilities and support systems that cater to their physical, logistical, and professional requirements. Ensuring proper resting areas, gadget charging facilities, healthcare services, childcare options, motorcycle maintenance, and offering to upskill training can significantly enhance their daily work experience and overall well-being.

3.0 Methodology

Data collection methods include a collection of both qualitative and quantitative data before determining the findings through analysis through literature review and conducting an interview with the delivery riders specifically, in Seksyen 7, Shah Alam. The researcher employed a comprehensive methodology to investigate the multifaceted needs of gig workers in the delivery sector, primarily relying on semi-structured interviews to delve deeply into their experiences and challenges. The methodology began with a rigorous literature review to establish a foundational understanding of the gig economy and the specific context of delivery work. Following this, a purposive sampling technique was utilized to select diverse participants, ensuring representation across various demographics and experience levels within the gig economy. The semi-structured interviews were carefully designed to incorporate open-ended questions, allowing participants the flexibility to articulate their needs and concerns in their own words. Before the primary data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted to refine the interview protocol and ensure its effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the interview, with measures in place to protect participant confidentiality and ensure informed consent. Data analysis involved a rigorous thematic approach whereby interview transcripts were used.

4.0 Findings

4.1 The Essential Needs for Delivery Riders

4.1.1 The needs of Proper Resting Area

Delivery riders often face long hours on the road, with waiting periods between orders. Unfortunately, many lack access to proper resting areas during these waiting times, forcing them to seek shelter under trees, at street vendors, or in petrol stations. This situation highlights the critical need for dedicated resting spaces for delivery riders to take breaks in a safe and comfortable environment. Proper resting areas would protect them from harsh weather conditions and help reduce physical fatigue and stress, improving their overall well-being and job performance. With such facilities, riders are able to cope with adequate and sometimes unsafe resting spots, contributing to long-term health issues and lower job satisfaction. Ensuring delivery riders have access to proper resting areas is essential for supporting their health, safety, and productivity in the demanding nature of their work.

4.1.2 The needs of Gadget Charging and Services Area

Delivery riders rely heavily on mobile phones for navigation, communication, and managing orders, making these devices essential in daily work. Given this dependency, riders must have access to dedicated gadget charging areas and service centers. These facilities would ensure that their phones are always charged and ready for use, reducing the risk of downtime due to low battery. Additionally, a specialized service area exclusively for delivery riders would allow them to get swift repairs without the delays typically associated with public service centers. This separation from general public users means faster service, enabling riders to return to tasks without prolonged interruptions quickly. By addressing these needs, delivery riders can maintain the efficiency and reliability that their work demands, leading to smoother operations and increased job satisfaction.

4.1.3 The needs of Dual Phones Facilities

Delivery riders often use two mobile phones—one for personal communication and another for work-related tasks. Having dual mobile phone facilities is essential to ensure uninterrupted service. If one phone encounters an issue or becomes faulty, the second phone is a backup, allowing the rider to continue working without delays. This redundancy is crucial in maintaining efficiency, mainly since their work heavily depends on timely communication and real-time updates. Dual phone facilities also help manage work-life balance by keeping personal and professional communications separate. Access to facilities that can charge and maintain both devices simultaneously ensures that riders are always equipped and ready, enhancing their overall productivity and reliability.

4.1.4 The needs of Childcare Facilities

Childcare Facilities

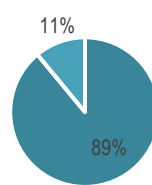


Fig. 1: Facilities for Childcare Services
(Source: Author, 2024)

Delivery riders face significant challenges balancing work and family responsibilities, particularly childcare. The rising cost of childcare services often forces riders to rely on their parents or other family members as caretakers for their children. While sometimes necessary, this arrangement can strain family dynamics and limit the riders' ability to focus on their work. In many cases, both partners must work to meet the household's daily income requirements, leaving little room for proper child supervision. Providing childcare service facilities designed for delivery riders would alleviate this burden, allowing them to work peacefully, knowing their children are in a safe, supportive environment. Such facilities would support the riders' financial stability and contribute to their overall well-being and job satisfaction, enabling them to maintain a better work-life balance.

4.1.5 The needs of Healthcare Facilities

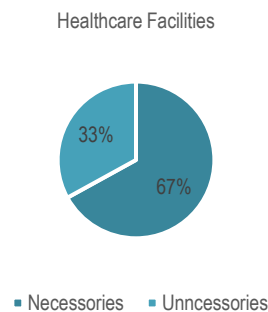


Fig. 2: Facilities for Healthcare Services
(Source: Author, 2024)

Delivery riders often face physical risks due to the demanding nature of their work, which can lead to minor injuries or health issues that require prompt attention. However, seeking treatment at public clinics can be time-consuming, as riders may have to wait in long queues alongside other patients. This delay can affect their ability to continue working efficiently. To address this, there is a crucial need for dedicated healthcare services tailored explicitly for delivery riders. Establishing rider-only clinics would ensure that they receive quick and focused care for minor injuries or health concerns without the lengthy wait times typically experienced in public healthcare facilities. These specialized clinics would help riders get back on the road swiftly, minimizing downtime and ensuring that the pressures of their job do not compromise their health. By providing such targeted healthcare support, delivery riders' overall well-being and productivity can be significantly enhanced.

4.1.6 The needs of Workshop Facilities

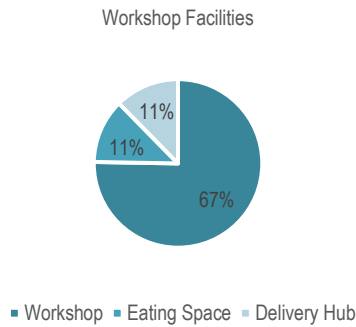


Fig. 3: Facilities for Workshop Services
(Source: Author, 2024)

Motorcycle workshop facilities are crucial for delivery riders as their motorcycles are essential for daily operations. These workshops provide necessary services such as routine maintenance and minor repairs, ensuring that the motorcycles remain in optimal condition and reducing the risk of breakdowns. Quick and efficient service is vital, as any delay in maintenance can lead to interruptions in delivery schedules, affecting both productivity and income. Access to dedicated motorcycle workshops allows riders to address issues promptly, minimizing downtime and ensuring that their primary mode of transport remains reliable. By facilitating swift service and upkeep, these workshops play a key role in supporting the smooth functioning of delivery operations and contributing to the riders' overall efficiency and job satisfaction.

4.2 The Physical Needs for Delivery Riders

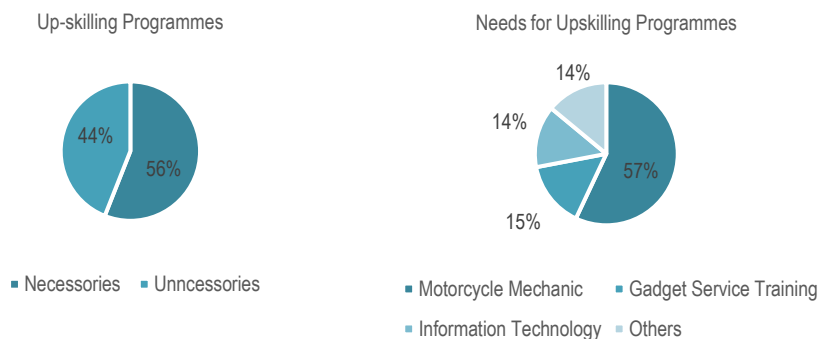


Fig. 4: Physical Needs
(Source: Author, 2024)

Delivery riders in the gig economy face demanding physical tasks and require skills that enhance their ability to maintain and repair the tools and technology they rely on daily. An up-skilling program that includes training in motorcycle mechanics, gadget services, and information technology (IT) is essential to meet these needs. Knowledge of motorcycle mechanics equips riders with the skills to perform essential maintenance and repairs, reducing downtime and reliance on external workshops, which can be costly and time-consuming. Gadget servicing training is equally essential, as delivery riders depend heavily on smartphones and other devices for navigation, communication, and order management. Being able to troubleshoot and repair these gadgets minimizes disruptions and ensures they can stay connected and operational. Additionally, IT skills can help riders better manage the digital platforms they work on, optimize their routes, and even explore other income-generating opportunities within the tech field. This combination of skills improves their efficiency and productivity in their current roles. It allows them to diversify their income streams and enhance job security in an increasingly digital world.

5.0 Discussion for Delivery Riders Needs

Delivery riders, as identified through respondent-collected interview questions, express a multifaceted set of needs crucial to their well-being and productivity. These identified needs underscore the multifaceted support required to enhance the welfare and effectiveness of delivery riders in their professional endeavors. In accordance with the needs of delivery riders, most of the respondents emphasize the need for a resting and charging area due to the lack of proper resting facilities in Section 7, Shah Alam, forcing riders to seek shelter under trees or in restaurant areas. Charging facilities are crucial, with riders carrying multiple power banks. The absence of charging options leads to spending money for access, hindering income targets. Some consider a dual mobile phone essential to address personal phone issues affecting work. Additionally, they express the need for a new motorcycle. Respondents highlighted the demand

for workshop and gadget service facilities essential for motorcycle and phone maintenance. Healthcare facilities are vital due to riders' contributions to motorcycle-related accidents. Challenges include limited workshops, disruptions from repair processes, and the inability to contribute to the Employee Provident Fund. There is a call for specialized treatment centers and childcare facilities, emphasizing the need for subsidies and considerations regarding pricing. The upskilling program leans towards motorcycle mechanics, influenced by the predominantly male demographic. Daily motorcycle inspections are mandated to prevent damages during deliveries. Gadget servicing skills are seen as beneficial, aligning with the IT sector's demand influenced by domestic and international job markets. Childcare services are deemed imperative, with optimal solutions envisioned through centrally located facilities. Some respondents, however, consider childcare centers unnecessary, relying on grandparents.

5.1 Important Essential Needs for Delivery Riders

Respondents emphasize that the most critical need for delivery riders is a designated resting and charging area. In Section 7, Shah Alam, the lack of such facilities forces riders to seek shelter under trees or in restaurants, where they must spend money on food and drinks to take a break. When it rains, they resort to petrol stations, complicating their situation further. Provide proper charging facilities so riders can carry multiple power banks, which can run out during peak hours, disrupting their work and affecting their income. Additionally, many riders highlight the necessity of dual mobile phones. When their phones are damaged or busy, they risk missing orders, leading to penalties and lost earnings. Mobile phones and motorcycles are essential for their livelihood, and any failure can severely impact their income. Workshop facilities are also vital, as riders often face long repair waits, further disrupting their work. Specialized workshops exclusively for delivery riders would ensure quicker service, avoiding delays caused by general customers. Similarly, access to healthcare facilities is crucial, given the high risk of accidents. Delivery riders often face long waits at clinics and hospitals, which dedicated treatment centers could mitigate. Finally, respondents stress the importance of affordable childcare facilities, especially for dual-income households. Proximity to their workplace would allow riders to monitor their children closely, reducing the need to rely on grandparents or travel long distances to private centers. These facilities are essential for easing their daily work and ensuring their livelihoods.

5.2 The Physical Needs for Delivery Riders.

The upskilling program reveals a strong preference for motorcycle mechanics, which stands out among participants and is influenced mainly by the male-dominated demographic. This preference is not merely a matter of interest but a practical necessity. Riders must perform daily motorcycle inspections to prevent breakdowns during deliveries, underscoring the importance of mechanical knowledge. Many participants already possess basic skills in motorcycle maintenance, which empowers them to save money on service costs. This practical knowledge translates into direct financial benefits, enabling them to maintain their primary mode of transportation without incurring significant expenses. In the realm of gadget servicing, the necessity is even more pronounced. Every participant owns a mobile device that is essential to their daily work. Acquiring gadget repair skills reduces the financial burden associated with frequent malfunctions and saves valuable time. A malfunctioning device can halt a day's work, cutting off income and leading to potential penalties. By equipping themselves with the ability to address such issues quickly, riders can ensure a smoother, uninterrupted workflow. The IT sector, though sharing a smaller portion of the program's focus, is also pivotal. The demand in this field is driven by the evolving local and global job markets, making it an attractive option for the predominantly young demographic of delivery riders. This sector offers opportunities that extend beyond the immediate needs of delivery work, providing a pathway to more diverse and potentially lucrative career options in the future. Overall, the upskilling program is a training initiative and a vital tool for economic empowerment. Focusing on motorcycle mechanics, gadget servicing, and IT skills addresses the immediate needs of delivery riders while laying the groundwork for broader career opportunities, ensuring they are better equipped to handle the demands of their work and secure their livelihoods.

6.0 Conclusion

This study has several limitations that may affect the results. One of the main limitations is the small sample size, which could make it difficult to generalize the findings, as the limited time available for the research restricted the number of participants. Additionally, future research should aim for a more balanced demographic representation among participants to reflect Malaysia's diverse multiracial population better. It would also benefit future studies to expand data collection beyond the Klang Valley region and include participants from different areas across Malaysia. By covering various regions and including a broader range of food delivery platforms, the results could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and offer insights more representative of the entire country.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper offers a new perspective on how to empower these workers to sustain their current roles and expand their career opportunities. This research provides actionable insights that could inform policymakers, platform operators, and educational institutions about the importance of equipping gig workers.

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