

Riding for a Living: An analysis of motivational factors, income conditions, and occupational challenges of delivery riders in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija

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Abstract

The delivery service industry in the Philippines has expanded rapidly alongside the growth of e-commerce and digital platforms, positioning delivery riders as a crucial component of urban economic systems. This study examined the motivations and challenges experienced by delivery riders in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, within the broader context of the gig economy. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to 60 delivery riders selected through convenience sampling. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distributions, percentages, and weighted mean scores were used to analyze the data. Results indicated that the majority of respondents were engaged in delivery work on a full-time basis and relied on it as a primary source of income. However, earnings were generally modest and significantly affected by operational expenses. Financial incentives, flexible work arrangements, and personal ambitions emerged as the strongest sources of motivation. Despite income instability and occupational risks, respondents reported relatively high levels of job satisfaction. On the other hand, delivery riders faced highly challenging working conditions, particularly during peak delivery hours, in congested traffic, on poorly maintained roads, and when dealing with safety risks and demanding customers. The findings underscore the complex relationship between economic necessity, motivation, and workplace challenges in app-based delivery work.

Keywords: Delivery Riders; Gig Economy; Job Motivation; Occupational Challenges; Work Flexibility

1. Introduction

The delivery service industry in the Philippines had evolved significantly, with its origins traced to horse-drawn carriages and foot couriers and its development shaped by advances in transportation and technology. What began as a modest means of transporting goods had transformed into a vital economic sector that supported commerce, employment, and daily life across the country. Contemporary delivery riders, operating motorcycles and bicycles, navigated both urban and rural areas to provide essential goods and services to Filipinos from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Guevarra, 2023).

The importance of delivery services became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when mobility restrictions and lockdown measures increased reliance on online purchasing and home deliveries. During this period, delivery riders emerged as indispensable workers who ensured the continuous flow of food, medicine, and other necessities despite heightened health risks and safety concerns (Guevarra, 2023). Their role highlighted the essential contribution of delivery work to economic continuity and social stability during times of crisis.

Technological advancements further transformed the delivery service industry through the widespread adoption of digital delivery platforms. Mobile applications enhanced convenience and accessibility for consumers by enabling real-time ordering and tracking, while also creating new income opportunities for delivery riders through flexible scheduling and expanded access to work (Guevarra, 2023). However, alongside these benefits, persistent challenges were evident,

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including high platform fees that reduced earnings for riders and small businesses, as well as service-related issues such as delivery delays, inaccurate tracking, and damaged or missing items.

The rapid expansion of e-commerce and app-based delivery services reshaped urban economies and employment structures, particularly in urban centers such as Cabanatuan City. Delivery riders served as a critical link between businesses and consumers and became integral to the daily routines of households and enterprises. Despite their central role, many riders experienced unstable income, limited job security, low wages, and unsafe working conditions, which contributed to financial uncertainty and adversely affected their overall well-being and that of their families (Guevarra, 2023).

As the demands of the delivery industry continued to intensify, concerns regarding the welfare, motivation, and sustainability of delivery work increased. Riders were routinely exposed to physical exhaustion, emotional stress, road hazards, and unpredictable earnings, prompting growing calls for improved working conditions and fairer compensation structures (Guevarra, 2023).

Within this context, the study examined the factors that influenced individuals' decisions to pursue work as delivery riders and the challenges they encountered in the course of their employment. By analyzing issues related to motivation, income instability, occupational risks, and work-related stress, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of delivery riders. The findings were intended to offer valuable insights for policymakers, platform-based companies, and future researchers, contributing to the development of more sustainable employment practices and improved working conditions within the gig economy.

2. Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research design to systematically examine the motivations and challenges experienced by delivery riders in Cabanatuan City. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire survey, which allowed for the measurement and comparison of respondents' perceptions across key variables. The survey focused on factors related to motivation—such as financial incentives, work flexibility, job satisfaction, career opportunities, and personal goals—as well as the daily challenges encountered by riders and the role of technology in shaping their work experience, particularly in navigation, communication, and task management. This design was appropriate given the study's objective of generating measurable and generalizable insights into the work conditions of delivery riders within the context of the growing gig economy.

The research was conducted in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, a rapidly developing urban center with a thriving delivery service sector driven by increasing population density and demand for food, parcel, and grocery deliveries. Respondents consisted of delivery riders operating across various platforms within the city's commercial districts, residential areas, and transport hubs. A convenience sampling technique was utilized, targeting at least 60 riders who were readily accessible during the data collection period. The respondents represented diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, income level, employment status, operational expenses, work experience, and vehicle ownership, allowing the study to capture a broad range of perspectives on the realities of delivery work in a mid-sized Philippine city.

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistical tools, including frequency distributions and percentages to describe the respondents' profiles. Weighted mean scores, together with corresponding scale interpretations, were applied to assess the level of motivation, the severity of daily challenges, and the influence of technology on riders' work experiences. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality and data privacy were ensured, and respondents' information was used solely for academic purposes. The study was conducted with transparency, respect, and sensitivity to the working conditions of delivery riders, ensuring that participation posed no harm and that ethical standards in data handling, analysis, and reporting were upheld.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Profile of Delivery Riders

Table 1 shows the employment status of delivery riders in Cabanatuan City. The majority (60%) were employed full-time, indicating that delivery riding serves as a primary source of income for most respondents. Part-time riders comprised 20%, while students represented 16.67%, and self-employed riders were the least represented at 3.33%. These results suggest that delivery services in Cabanatuan primarily provide full-time employment opportunities.

Platform work allows full-time riders to earn substantial income, while part-timers and students may use it as a supplemental or flexible source of earnings. Additionally, it can serve as a contingency livelihood for those whose primary employment is unstable (Mathews et al., 2022).

Table 1 Employment Status of Delivery Riders

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Employed full-time	36	60%
Employed part-time	12	20%
Self-employed	2	3.33%
Student	10	16.67%
Total	60	100%

Table 2 Average Monthly Income of Delivery Riders

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₱10,000	22	36.67%
₱10,000–₱20,000	14	23.33%
₱20,001–₱30,000	16	26.67%
₱30,001–₱40,000	6	10%
₱40,001–₱50,000	2	3.33%
Total	60	100%

Table 2 presents the average monthly income of delivery riders. Most respondents (36.67%) reported earnings below ₱10,000 per month, indicating that earnings for a significant portion of riders remain relatively low. Conversely, only 3.33% of riders reported earnings above ₱40,000, showing that higher income levels are uncommon. On average, delivery drivers in the Philippines earn approximately ₱17,216 per month, depending on factors such as experience, location, and the delivery platform. This data underscores the modest financial returns of delivery work despite its essential role in the local economy.

Table 3 Average Monthly Operational Expenses of Delivery Riders

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Below ₱10,000	54	90%
₱10,000–₱20,000	4	6.67%
₱20,001–₱30,000	2	3.33%
Total	60	100%

Table 3 shows the monthly operational expenses incurred by delivery riders. The majority of riders (90%) reported spending less than ₱10,000 monthly on operational costs, which include fuel, mobile data, maintenance, and amortization fees. A small proportion of riders reported higher operational expenses, with only 3.33% spending ₱20,001–₱30,000. On average, a two-wheel delivery rider in the Philippines earns about ₱22,500 per month but spends a significant portion on work-related expenses such as ₱150 for petrol, ₱20 for mobile load, ₱30 for maintenance, and ₱90 for motorcycle amortization daily (Banzuelo, 2023). This indicates that operational costs substantially affect riders' net earnings.

Table 4 Vehicle Ownership of Delivery Riders

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Motorcycle	44	73.33%
Scooter	16	26.67%
Total	60	100%

Table 4 presents the vehicle ownership of delivery riders in Cabanatuan City. Most riders (73.33%) used motorcycles, followed by scooters at 26.67%. The predominance of motorcycles reflects their practicality and efficiency for navigating congested streets, narrow roads, and urban-rural routes. Motorcycles are cost-effective, fuel-efficient, and suitable for the flexible and fast-paced nature of delivery services (Sufyan & Ahmed, 2012). This reliance on motorcycles also underscores the physical and operational demands placed on riders in their daily work.

2. Motivation of Delivery Riders

Table 5 Financial Incentives

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description
I am motivated to work as a delivery rider mainly because it provides opportunities to generate additional income.	3.50	Strongly Agree
The availability of bonuses and incentive schemes increases my motivation to perform effectively in my delivery work.	3.33	Strongly Agree
Financial rewards, including tips, significantly influence my decision to continue working as a delivery rider.	3.33	Strongly Agree
Competitive compensation is an important factor in sustaining my motivation in this line of work.	3.57	Strongly Agree
The level of financial stability offered by my delivery job greatly contributes to my overall job satisfaction.	3.57	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Mean	3.46	Strongly Agree

Table 5 presents the motivation of delivery riders in terms of financial incentives. The general weighted mean of 3.46 indicates strong agreement that financial considerations significantly motivated delivery riders in Cabanatuan City. Competitive pay rates and financial stability obtained the highest mean scores (3.57), emphasizing that consistent income and reliable earnings were central to sustaining riders' motivation and job satisfaction. This finding suggests that delivery work was largely perceived as a financially viable means of livelihood.

Meanwhile, the lowest-rated indicator—earning extra income (3.50)—still fell within the “strongly agree” range, indicating that while supplementary income was important, riders placed greater value on stable and competitive compensation rather than income alone. This aligns with the findings of *Pros and Cons of Being a Delivery Driver* (2024), which emphasized that earnings from tips, bonuses, and incentives enhanced overall income and served as motivation for performance. The article further highlighted that delivery drivers' income was directly influenced by effort and workload, reinforcing the importance of financial rewards in sustaining engagement and productivity.

Table 6 below illustrates the motivation of delivery riders in terms of work flexibility. The general weighted mean of 3.45 reflects strong agreement that flexible working arrangements played a substantial role in motivating riders. The highest mean scores were observed for balancing personal commitments and adjusting work schedules (both at 3.53), highlighting flexibility as a key contributor to job satisfaction and retention.

Table 6 Flexibility of Work

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description
The freedom to select my own working hours greatly influences my motivation to work as a delivery rider.	3.37	Strongly Agree
Flexible working hours enable me to balance my job with personal responsibilities, which enhances my job satisfaction.	3.53	Strongly Agree
I prefer delivery work because it allows me to work during schedules that best suit my needs.	3.43	Strongly Agree
The ability to choose my shifts helps me manage stress and maintain a positive outlook toward my work.	3.37	Strongly Agree
Having the option to extend working hours or adjust my schedule plays an important role in my decision to remain in this job.	3.53	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Mean	3.45	Strongly Agree

The lowest-rated indicators—choosing working hours and managing stress through shift flexibility (both at 3.37)—still reflected strong agreement, suggesting that flexibility was widely appreciated, even if it was not the sole determinant of motivation. These findings support the *Zypp Electric Blog* (2024), which emphasized that delivery jobs allowed workers to control their schedules and achieve work-life balance, particularly benefiting students, parents, and individuals seeking autonomy over their time.

Table 7 Job Satisfaction

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description
I am satisfied with my current position as a delivery rider.	3.43	Strongly Agree
The work environment and conditions contribute positively to my overall job satisfaction.	3.37	Strongly Agree
My job fulfills my expectations regarding compensation and benefits.	3.40	Strongly Agree
I feel acknowledged and valued for the work I contribute.	3.30	Strongly Agree
The level of support from my employer affects my satisfaction with my job.	3.13	Agree
General Weighted Mean	3.33	Strongly Agree

Table 7 indicates that delivery riders generally experienced high job satisfaction, with a general weighted mean of 3.33. Satisfaction with their role obtained the highest score (3.43), suggesting positive acceptance of delivery work despite its challenges. Compensation and work conditions also contributed positively to satisfaction levels.

The lowest-rated indicator—employer support (3.13)—fell within the “agree” range, implying that organizational backing was present but not consistently strong. This supports Baxi and Atre (2024), who emphasized that job satisfaction influenced employee motivation, commitment, and performance, and that insufficient organizational support could limit long-term engagement despite overall satisfaction.

Table 8 reveals that personal goals and ambition strongly motivated delivery riders, as reflected by the highest general weighted mean (3.53) among all motivation dimensions. Achieving milestones such as financial stability and skill development recorded the highest mean (3.47), highlighting the role of delivery work in supporting individual aspirations.

Table 8 Personal Goals and Ambition

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description
Personal goals play an important role in motivating me to work as a delivery rider.	3.40	Strongly Agree
Working as a delivery rider supports me in achieving both personal and professional objectives.	3.33	Strongly Agree
I consider this job a stepping stone toward my long-term career ambitions.	3.30	Strongly Agree
My role aligns with my personal values and long-term goals.	3.27	Strongly Agree
Reaching milestones, such as financial stability or skill development, motivates me to continue working.	3.47	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Mean	3.53	Strongly Agree

The lowest-rated indicator—viewing delivery work as a stepping stone (3.30)—still indicated strong agreement, suggesting that while riders recognized long-term ambitions, immediate practical benefits played a more dominant role in sustaining motivation. This finding aligns with Gammarano (2020), who emphasized that work motivation was multifaceted and influenced by personal goals, job characteristics, and broader contextual factors, reinforcing the complexity of motivation within gig-based employment.

4. Challenges of Delivery Riders

Table 9 Challenges of Delivery Riders

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description
Traffic congestion in Cabanatuan City greatly affects the efficiency of my deliveries.	3.37	Highly Challenging
Poor road conditions, such as potholes and poorly maintained streets, create challenges in my daily work.	3.47	Highly Challenging
Difficulty in locating specific addresses or destinations causes delays in completing deliveries.	3.43	Highly Challenging
Weather conditions, including heavy rain or extreme heat, reduce my ability to perform deliveries efficiently.	3.20	Moderately Challenging
Insufficient parking spaces make it difficult to complete deliveries promptly.	3.27	Highly Challenging
Dealing with aggressive or uncooperative customers negatively affects my work experience.	3.43	Highly Challenging
Limited access to vehicle maintenance and repair services hinders my delivery performance.	3.37	Highly Challenging
High delivery volumes during peak hours make time management challenging.	3.70	Highly Challenging
Inadequate safety measures, such as the lack of protective gear, increase the risk of accidents while delivering.	3.30	Highly Challenging
Navigating unfamiliar or poorly lit areas at night poses additional safety risks.	3.40	Highly Challenging
General Weighted Mean	3.37	Highly Challenging

Table 9 presents the weighted means and verbal descriptions of the daily challenges faced by delivery riders in Cabanatuan City. The general weighted mean of 3.37 indicates that riders generally experienced these challenges as highly demanding, affecting their efficiency, safety, and overall job performance. Among the indicators, high delivery volumes during peak hours obtained the highest mean score (3.70), suggesting that managing heavy workloads during lunch, dinner, or special events posed the most significant challenge. Riders often had to navigate crowded streets under pressure to meet deadlines, which increased both safety risks and stress levels.

Inadequate road conditions received the second-highest mean (3.47), emphasizing the difficulties riders faced due to poorly maintained streets, potholes, or uneven surfaces. These conditions not only slowed delivery times but also heightened vehicle wear and tear, adding financial burdens. Similarly, the challenge of locating specific addresses scored 3.43, highlighting that inaccurate or incomplete address information frequently caused delays, increased stress, and elevated the risk of errors in deliveries. Traffic congestion, with a mean of 3.37, further compounded these difficulties by prolonging travel times and raising safety concerns (*What Are the Pros and Cons of Being a Delivery Driver?*, 2024).

Weather conditions were considered moderately challenging (mean 3.20), as heavy rain or extreme heat affected riders' ability to perform efficiently and safely. Other significant challenges included limited access to vehicle maintenance (3.37), lack of proper parking spaces (3.27), encountering aggressive customers (3.43), inadequate safety measures (3.30), and navigating poorly lit or unfamiliar areas at night (3.40). These findings indicate that physical hazards, environmental conditions, and interpersonal factors collectively contributed to the complex challenges faced by delivery riders. According to *What Are the Pros and Cons of Being a Delivery Driver?* (2024), riders can reduce stress by planning routes in advance, using GPS navigation, delivering during non-peak hours, and communicating proactively with customers to overcome challenges related to traffic, parking, and unfamiliar locations.

5. Conclusion

This study found that delivery riders in Cabanatuan City are strongly motivated by financial incentives, work flexibility, and personal goals, while simultaneously facing significant challenges related to income instability, heavy workloads, traffic congestion, safety risks, and limited career advancement opportunities. Despite these challenges, riders generally reported positive job satisfaction, indicating the complex balance between economic necessity and occupational strain within app-based delivery work. Overall, the findings highlight the need for improved working conditions, fair compensation mechanisms, and stronger institutional support for delivery riders. This study benefits society by providing empirical evidence that can guide policymakers and platform-based companies in developing more equitable and sustainable gig work practices, while pointing toward future initiatives focused on labor protection, skills development, and long-term employment sustainability in the gig economy.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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