AWARENESS TOWARDS SOCIAL SECURITY PROTECTION AMONG FOOD DELIVERY RIDERS IN SELANGOR AND KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

Online food delivery services (OFDS) which are commonly endeavored by food delivery workers have become revolutionary today. However, the alarming rates of road accidents among them resulted in the announcement of obligatory contributions towards the Social Security Protection scheme in Malaysia, starting 1st October 2021. The Self-Employment Social Security Scheme was introduced to provide protection for individuals who are self-employed under the provisions of the Self-Employment Social Security Act 2017. A survey was conducted among 50 food delivery riders around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor on awareness of the scheme, exploring delivery rider demographic characteristics, awareness on benefits of the protection scheme, importance, or willingness to commit with the contribution towards social security protection, along with issues of concern during work. The analysis showed that the riders realize the importance and benefits of the Social Security Protection scheme and are willing to commit to it. Various underlying issues on egregious riding act to ensure fast delivery were also elaborated. In conclusion, the above findings provide evidence that food delivery riders understand that positioning them under the self-employment security scheme could provide protection against employment injuries including occupational diseases and accidents during work-related activities. Potential measures for a sound working environment and alleviate risky practices are also discussed.

1.   Introduction

In concurrence with Malaysia's establishment of digitalization policy, the platform economy reinforced by digital technology is massively flourishing. The digital economy- in line with the Twelfth Malaysian Plan (RMKe-12) was selected as a key economic growth area (KEGA) in realizing Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama (WKB) 2030. This is a bold effort to brand Malaysia as a nation that expands sustainably with fair economic distribution as well as equitable and inclusive growth (EPU, 2020). In parallel, the modern digital "gig work" has evolved into a global economic driver. The terminology "gig/platform/sharing economy" does not have any standardized definitions, but generally refers to "nature of the small tasks/jobs (gigs) that individuals are contracted to carry out by companies adopting the service provision model" (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2019). Interestingly, the business models may have several characteristics, particularly in the case of delivery and transportation businesses (Moyer-Lee & Kountouris, 2021, Shuib & Ibrahim, 2021).

The online food delivery service has notably benefited from this condition worldwide. The OFDS industry is expected to grow to US$320 billion by 2029. In Malaysia alone, revenue in the online food delivery service (OFDS) segment is projected to reach US$312.20 million this year (Statista, 2022). It saw its largest increase in five years in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic (Curry, 2022). The concept of OFDS utilizes the digital sharing business model as detailed in (Hawlitschek, Teubner & Gimpel, 2016; Li, Hong & Zhang, 2017; Jais & Marzuki, 2020; Pouri & Hilty, 2020). Although OFDS offers sales and employment prospects, it has come under fire economically for dubious labour conditions it imposes on delivery workers (Li, Mirosa & Bremer, 2020).

Novitz (2021) argued that previously, commercial platforms were praised as a component of the sustainable "sharing economy" as proposed in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8: to 'promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all'. Today, it is widely believed that the short-termism associated with "gig work" is a barrier to sustainable development. This is due to a standpoint in which gig employment is merely a manifestation of the broader rise in precarious work, which also includes the casualisation and commodification of labour. Additionally, using ride-hailing services may result in additional "traffic congestion, which negatively impacts environmental sustainability" (Moyer-Lee & Kountouris, 2021).

As an introduction to this statement, Malaysia, under her Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) strives to address the wellbeing of food delivery workers by introducing the Self-Employment Social Security Scheme. This effort is parallel to the Global Commission's Report's proposals to offer comprehensive protection of people involved in precarious employment, including "the increasing phenomena of digitally mediated work in the platform economy," through a Universal Labor Guarantee. Ultimately, this scheme provides "protection for individuals who are self-employed under the provisions of the Self-Employment Social Security Act 2017" (ILO, 2019). As a start, this scheme was made compulsory for the self-employed in the Passenger Transportation Sector which are taxi, e-hailing and bus drivers under the provisions of the Self-Employment Social Security Act 2017, and then extended to 19 other sectors including goods and food transport, agriculture,

construction, forestry and hawkers, to name a few. On 1st October 2021, it was made mandatory particularly for all parcel hailers (p-hailers).

Moreover, there were 1,242 accidents involving food delivery drivers reported from 2018 to May 2022, involving 1,048 light injuries, 82 serious injuries and 112 deaths in Kuala Lumpur. The Ministry of Transport also disclosed the results of a study on the behaviours of p-hailing drivers using CCTV footage from the Transport Information System (ITIS) on 11 key routes in Kuala Lumpur, which involved 16,308 drivers. 62% of passengers stop at the pedestrian's walkway, 14% were texting while driving and running red lights, 7% were doing illegal u-turns, and 3% were driving against the flow of traffic (Thestar, 2022).

Egregious riding by some food delivery workers is abuzz and to resolve it, we have to analyze and examine the "gamified app-based systems" that demonstrate the central importance of datafication within the organisational strategies of food delivery companies operating under conditions of financialized platform capitalism in addition to being a salient form of "algorithmic management," as argued by Doorn & Chen (2021). Indeed, the highly financialized nature of the on-demand food delivery sector fosters an environment in which businesses experiment with data-driven gamification techniques to manage their flexible labour supply in an agile and economical manner—to thereby achieve higher productivity and satisfy the expectations of investors and shareholders (Doorn & Chen, 2021). In retrospect, this system should also address the pool of food delivery workers, to avoid jeopardizing their lives to deliver on time.

This paper would give an overview on awareness of the Self-Employment Social Security scheme and its benefits, and willingness of the food delivery riders to commit to it, along with related issues of concern when at work. Some suggestions on improving the p-hailing ecosystem, especially in light of reducing accidents among riders, are put forth.

2.   Methodology

2.1   Sample Selection and Procedure

The survey was conducted to 50 food delivery riders who participated in a Road Safety Vision Zero for P-hailers program. Typically, the riders were willing to participate in the study and the time needed to complete the questionnaire ranged from 5 to 8 minutes.

2.2   Material

A self-administered anonymous questionnaire was used, consisting of both closed and open questions at the end of the program. The questionnaire was developed through several stages of improvement. After fine-tuning in terms of wording and comprehensibility, the final questionnaire consisted of 21 selected items corresponding to the following topics: (i) demographic characteristics (12 items) i.e. rider's age, rider's gender, riding experience, work experience, marriage status, gross income, education level, and involvement in serious accident, status of contribution towards social protection scheme, claim towards social protection scheme, interest in contribution towards social protection scheme, willingness to stay committed towards social protection scheme (ii) awareness on social protection scheme (3 items), i.e., knowledge on SOCSO, knowledge of social protection scheme provided by SOCSO, knowledge on benefits of social protection scheme, knowledge on registration of social protection scheme, informed by the service platform towards social protection scheme

(iii) awareness on the importance of contribution towards social protection scheme (3 items), i.e., knowledge on self-employment social protection scheme and protection and benefits if contribute towards social protection scheme (iv) rider's concerns during work (open ended question) during discussion session and written (Papakostopoulos and Nathanael, 2021).

The Likert scale was used for the questionnaire (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree). The SPSS software version 26 was used for the statistical analyses.

3. Ethical Aspect

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and informed that the obtained data would be used only for statistical purposes, as per the operational guide of the Ethics Committee for Research, Universiti Teknologi MARA.

4. Results and Discussion

In total, 50 filled-in questionnaires were collected. Response quality was excellent with 49 questionnaires completed resulting in 49 samples.

4.1 Respondents' work and demographic characteristics

Descriptive statistics of food delivery riders' characteristics participating in the study is presented in Table 1, using descriptive measures, i.e. mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Regarding their demographic characteristics, 47 respondents were male, whereas two were female. This is rather expected because it is quite rare in Malaysia, a delivery rider to be female. Race distribution was 90% Malay, 2% Bumiputera (Sarawak), 2% Bumiputera (Peninsular), 4% Chinese and 1% Indian. Whereas the education level of the riders shows 96% riders completed high school, with 33% diploma and 20%-degree holders. This category of work is less-skilled, labor-intensive and most workers are dependent on a platform to survive with full-time involvement (Schor *et al.*, 2020) and regards food delivery work as their sole source of income. Although 43% engaged in this category of work on part-time basis for a supplementary income during lock-down (Huang, 2021), imposing the involvement of food delivery workers with higher level of education.

On the other hand, 86% of them hold a motorcycle license for more than five years, with 40% have worked more than two years in the business. This suggests that most riders obtained license way longer before joining the gig economy, that shows rise especially during the COVID 19 pandemic. The rest 60% might take up the gig work as an opportunity to serve as "frontliners" during lock-down whereby urban citizens compulsorily quarantined at home and ordering daily essentials online has become a safe alternative to shopping in-person (Huang, 2021). This is in correspondence to approximately 772,900 Malaysians lost their jobs by fourth quarter of 2020 (DOSM, 2020), due to the inconsistent unemployment rate especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ismail *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, there was a strong growth in gig economy employment in the same year, with up to four million individuals engaged (DOSM, 2022).

4.2   Awareness on SOCSO and Self Employment Scheme (SPS)

Regarding awareness on SOCSO, 96% knows SOCSO (M= 4.4, SD= 0.86) 98% are aware on SOCSO contribution (M= 4.4, SD, 0.54), 94% have knowledge on benefits of SOCSO (M= 4.3, SD= 0.75), 84% have knowledge on registration procedures of SOCSO (M= 4.1, SD= 0.86), while 47% were informed by the service provider on SOCSO's provisions (M= 3.3, SD= 1.16). On awareness on the importance of Self Employment Scheme (SPS), 96% are aware on SPS (M= 4.4, SD= 0.57), 98% have knowledge on protection of SPS (M= 4.4, SD= 0.53) and 96% have knowledge on benefits of SPS (M= 4.4, SD= 0.57).

Evidently, most food delivery riders have ample awareness and knowledge on the implementation of the Self-Employment Social Security scheme. This Scheme offers protection for self-employed insured individuals against work-related accidents, illnesses, and injuries, including occupational diseases. Personal injury to a self-employed insured person resulting from an accident or occupational sickness that occurs because of and during his or her self-employment activity, including while travelling for that reason, is referred to as a self-employment injury. Any illness brought on by or resulting from one of the occupations listed in the Fifth Schedule of the Employees' Social Security Act of 1969 is referred to as an occupational disease. In addition to medical care, physical therapy, and job training, this scheme offers monetary benefits to insured individuals and their dependents (SOCSO, 2022). With the high-risk job on the road, it is essential that all riders have some sort of social security protection for themselves as well as their loved ones.

Table 1: Work and demographic characteristics of the food delivery riders participated in this study (N = 49).

Variables	Values	%
Demographic characteristics Gender	Men	96
Rider's age	>20	98
Education level	Completed SPM	96
Marriage Status	Married	65
Riding experience	>5 years	86
Work experience	>2 years	40
P-hailing status	Full time	57
Income	>RM2001	40
Involvement in accident at work	Yes	31
Status of contribution to SPS	Yes	71
Claim towards SPS	Yes	8
Interest in contribution to SPS	Yes	69
Willingness to stay committed to SPS Awareness on SOCSO	Yes	57
Knowledge on SOCSO	Yes	96
Knowledge of SOCSO contribution	Yes	98
Knowledge on benefits of SOCSO	Yes	94
Knowledge on registration procedures of SOCSO	Yes	84
Informed by the service provider on SOCSO	Yes	47
Awareness on the importance of SPS	Yes	96
Knowledge on self-employment SPS	Yes	98
Knowledge on protection of SPS Knowledge on benefits of SPS	Yes	96

ᵃ·SPS=Social Protection Scheme

4.3 Factors of Egregious Riding

The rider's concerns during work were addressed by open-ended questions. Other than written surveys, the speakers engaged the respondents during talks to discuss this matter. Some of the related challenges pointed out are:

> *"The rates of order decreases and changes rapidly, hence riders tend to rush to achieve daily minimum orders"- Informant A*

> *"The actual distance of delivery portrays stark differences compared to the digital map employed by service providers. Sometimes there could be extra 100 km per day that the costs need to be absorbed by the riders" - Informant B*

> *"Rating drops when riders take a break during rainy days or for prayers" - Informant C*
> *"Upgrading of the digital map is not met to have better distance and real-time traffic" - Informant D*

> *"Different service providers applied different regulations, and usually changes without proper update to the riders" - Informant E*

> *"The need for government's involvement in delivery services platform for fair share of economy" – Informant F*

Riders as well as the third-party labour firms are unstable in this subcontracting employment model. Riders are also responsible for their production assets, such as motorcycles, helmets, and containers, which are compulsorily purchased from the platforms at a greater cost, since they lack employment-related benefits and rights. Piece-rate compensation and point-based incentives make up the salary of riders. To increase labour intensity, the platforms use an increasing rate for each delivery. This means that riders must make a specific number of deliveries each month in order to earn a substantially higher pay. Riders' wages are influenced by quantity as well as work quality as determined by client feedback. Riders receive additional benefits for good ratings and points, and vice versa (Huang, 2021).

In the area of algorithmic labour process control, platforms' algorithmic design tightly monitors and controls riders' working practices The algorithms that riders employ at work contain a number of regulations and guidelines (Lei, 2021). Particularly, a real-time dispatching system, a delivery assistant powered by artificial intelligence, and a performance management system based on algorithms, which are used by platforms to regulate the workflow of the food delivery process and performance management (Chen & Sun, 2020). Due to the severe and even unreasonable time restrictions imposed by this algorithmic system on delivery workers, a large percentage of accidents occur as riders rush to complete each delivery to avoid being penalised for late deliveries (Sun, 2019).

Therefore, to promote safer and a secure environment for Malaysian riders, we contend that 1) all riders to commit to self-employment security program, 2) the reorganization of the algorithmic labor process by platforms such as improvisation of digital map by the service providers, and 3) synchronizing the governments conflicting policies

towards riders to achieve the Goal 8 SDG 2030. Besides prioritizing the gig economy, working hand in hand could especially provide a safer environment on the road for all users.

5.   Conclusion

OFDS is an ever expanding and vital gig industry nowadays. However, the ecosystem was often linked to several issues including legal issues, road safety issues and most recently, social security issues, among others. The aforementioned results demonstrate that food delivery drivers are aware that being included in the self-employment security program may protect them against work-related accidents, occupational diseases, and other types of workplace injuries. Besides, this article has added to the body of literature on platform labour by highlighting how algorithmic labour process control affects the daily work schedules, leading to egregious riding. The involvement of various stakeholders should be emphasized to monitor and manage the platform works. Future studies on the likelihood of platform providers to adopt alternative platform strategies could provide fresh perspectives in this field.

Author's Contribution

Nina Naquiah Ahmad Nizar wrote and revised the article. Siti Zaharah Ishak conceptualised the central research idea. Adibah Shuib anchored the questionnaire, data gathering and data analysis. Siti Zaharah Ishak, Nina Naquiah Ahmad Nizar, Adibah Shuib, Wan Mazlina Wan Mohamed and Saiful Aman Sulaiman acquired the research fundings, prepared training modules and supervised research progress. Mohd Irwanhakin Zainal managed the training and grant for the purpose of this research. Mohd Nasir Taib anchored the review, revisions and approved the article submission.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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