



A Communication Approach Towards Decent Work Measurement: The Case of Filipina Gig Workers Using Online Platforms

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Abstract

This paper proposes the use of a communication approach to decent work measurement, arguing on (1) the interdisciplinary nature of decent work, (2) the mediated aspect of gig work using platforms, and (3) the use of a communicative lens to center the experiences of women in the Global South. As a communication theory, Dutta's Culture-Centered Approach (CCA) tenets—culture, structure, and agency—were applied to the narratives on working aspirations (i.e., opportunities, social protection, adequate working time and workload, meaningful remuneration, and health and safety) of Filipina gig workers using online platforms. With the goal of empirical saturation, in-depth interviews were conducted among thirty-two informants, including those involved in transactional transfer work in major delivery services, local delivery services, and independent work through social media. The online platforms included applications by major transport and delivery service providers in the Philippines (i.e., Grab, Angkas, Joyride, Lalamove) and those that use social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Facebook Messenger. Findings reveal rich and gendered work experiences on working aspirations. These narratives were then translated into decent work measures.

Keywords: Filipina gig workers, decent work interventions, decent work measurement, decent work conceptualization, communication approach to decent work, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

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Introduction

What is Decent Work?

Decent work is the other half of the United Nations' (UN) eighth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) which focuses on Decent Work and Economic Growth, one of the goals that UN members aim to achieve by 2030 (United Nations, n.d.). But what is decent work? Literature shows that it is an analytically flexible construct that has roots in social justice (Blustein et al., 2016; Pouyad, 2016). Blustein et al. (2023) considered it as basic conditions concerned with pay, safety, and security. Meanwhile, Pereira and colleagues (2019) call it the “sum of people’s aspirations in their working lives” (p. 1). Conceptually, decent work has been understood from a plethora of perspectives: philosophical, judicial, economic, sociological, and psychological (Di Fabio & Maree, 2016). For instance, sociologically, decent work is viewed in connection with social movements and demographics (Klimczuk et al., 2024). Psychologically, it covers objective and subjective individual aspects (Saragih et al., 2024), focusing on a sense of fulfillment (Di Fabio & Maree, 2016). While approaches have different takes on decent work, overlaps are evident, such as the combination of the individual and the social, making the study of decent work interdisciplinary rather than diverging.

There is a growing agreement within the International Labor Organization (ILO) on decent work definitions, and it encompasses productive work characterized by freedom, equity, security, and human dignity (Blustein et al., 2023; Dobbins et al., 2024). More specifically, decent work entails fair income, workplace security, social protection, opportunities for personal growth and social integration, freedom of association and expression, and equal opportunities and treatment (Blustein et al., 2023; Heeks et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, the ILO conceptualization also has limitations, such as how it characterizes a specific notion of work as equal to employment, leading scholars to call for its expansion, extending to social aspects instead of being heavily economic (Di Ruggiero et al., 2015). One is through meaningful work that is grounded in psychology, where meaning is more akin to decent lives (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016). In Blustein et al. (2023), decent work is a precursor to meaningful work, arguing that the two are separate dimensions of work where decent work is the basic level that should be afforded to everyone. On the other hand, they noted that some countries combine these together, and it is

also implied that decent work remains the more established concept, as questions still arise on the meaning of meaningfulness.

Another expansion of decent work is fair work, which is less formally defined but can refer to fairness-oriented decent work that prioritizes justice and equality in employment relations. Examples include Scotland's Fair Work Convention and the Fair Work Framework for platforms (Geradine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; Graham et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021; Myhill et al., 2021). While closely related to decent work, fair work specifically emphasizes fairness in wages, treatment, and overall working conditions. Therefore, the concept of fair work aims to ensure equitable treatment and adequate working conditions for all workers, regardless of their employment type, often supported by specific frameworks. One such framework is the Fair Work Framework, which operationalizes fair work as decent work viewed through the lens of fairness and justice (The Fair Work Framework, 2016).

There is also just work that is usually framed through justice theory rather than an official policy framework. It focuses on whether work practices realize distributive justice, that is, the fair distribution of income, security, benefits, and contributive justice or having meaningful, dignified opportunities to contribute through work (Dobbins et al., 2024; Geraldine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; Schultz, 2020; Xue et al., 2025). In labor and human-rights traditions, just work implies alignment with basic human rights, including just and favorable conditions of work and just remuneration ensuring an existence worthy of human dignity, thus emphasizing just work as a site of social justice (Baxi, 2024).

Reflecting on the literature above, we see decent work as an umbrella term under which approaches and expansions may arise. It encompasses related concepts of meaningful, fair, and just work, considering their overlaps, such as in structural shifts, agentic practices, and marginality (Blustein et al., 2023). But while conceptualizations are plenty, their operationalization in different contexts remains difficult (Brill, 2021).

Decent Work, Women in the Global South, and Gig Work Using Platforms

By contextualization, we turn our attention broadly to women in the Global South who are involved in gig work using platforms. Specifically, we take the case of Filipina women involved in transport and delivery service using applications and social media platforms. In our study, Filipino women represent women in the Global South. Transport and

delivery services represent gig work. Applications and social media represent platforms.

Gender disparity in work has been documented in the Global South (Khairy & Ghonem, 2023). Furthermore, contemporary labor is increasingly characterized by the rise of the gig economy and the mediation of digital platforms (Grohmann, 2023). Studies have shown how the gig economy, while offering flexible, accessible work, often reproduces traditional gender inequalities, with women earning less than men and facing higher attrition (Bansal & De, 2024; Cook et al., 2020; Dokuka et al., 2022). Gilligan (1982) forwarded the ethics of care, which views care as socially necessary but undervalued labor. Instead of viewing gig workers as interchangeable, independent contractors, an ethics of care lens directs the focus on the relational aspects of work, such as mutuality and trust (between workers, platforms, and clients), balancing care-for-self and care-for-others, and valuing invisible labor (Khan et al., 2024; Rahul & Shaifali, 2025).

Long-held issues on gig work also reflect with digital labor, which are often deemed invisible, but frequently mask significant precarity, algorithmic discrimination, and safety risks (James, 2022; Kasliwal, 2020; MacLeavy & Pitts, 2024). Gender shapes how platform work is accessed, experienced, and valued (Fairwork, 2023). In the Global South, there has been a growing participation of women in platform work (Chibanda et al., 2022), including those that have been dominated by men (Bansal & Arora, 2023). Notably, the flexibility of platform work allows women to fulfil reproductive duties (Salvagni et al., 2022). However, studies reveal gendered constraints in this line of work as these platforms operate within existing social inequalities (Ferreira & Silva, 2025; Langworthy & Rodgers, 2025). Some examples are traditional gender inequalities, with women facing higher risks and greater career precarity (Minh, 2025; Langworthy & Rodgers, 2025). In the Philippines, for instance, women generally bear a disproportionate share of household chores and childcare. These tasks are repetitive, time-consuming, and physically demanding (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). The European Institute for Gender Equality (2024) affirms these barriers, having found that women platform workers face challenges balancing unpaid care with work despite the flexibility. The feminist lens on labor anchor on these experiences. A feminist approach interrogates structural inequalities that lead to calls for how to design platforms with a sense of justice (Bansal & Arora, 2023).

Overall, gender contributes to conceptualizing decent work as women's growing participation, and evidence of constraints should inform modifications in gig and platform work in the Global South (Aguilar et al., 2020; Koskiken et al., 2019). A feminist take on decent work should critique seemingly neutral structures as well as explore individual control and relational aspects of work. Without this perspective, our understanding of decent work remains incomplete and potentially misleading.

Decent Work from a Communication Approach

Based on the reviewed literature, we propose a communication approach to decent work measurement. We argue that this approach highlights the (1) interdisciplinary nature of decent work, (2) the mediated aspect of gig work using platforms, and (3) the communicative lens to center the experiences of women in the Global South. In other words, a communication approach to measurement is interdisciplinary, mediated, and communicative.

First, a communication approach can serve as an organizing lens for vast and multitheoretical conceptualizations of decent work (Della Lucia et al., 2025). We do not claim that a communication perspective diverges or replaces other approaches to decent work. Instead, communication as a field is highly interdisciplinary (Craig, 1999) and accommodates the different decent work approaches we have reviewed (e.g, psychological, justice, social).

Second, a communication approach to decent work is underexplored as compared to, say, economic and psychological approaches (Salter & Dutta, 2024). However, gig work is increasingly mediated by technologies, and one way to look at platform work is from a communication perspective, such as through mediatization. Grohmann (2023) discussed how platformization changes the work itself, such as in cases of datafication of labor, gamification, algorithmic management, and the use of social media. In the process of mediatization, technology functions as more than a simple medium; it actively annexes power from traditional institutions (Livingstone, 2009). Another example is Salter and Dutta's (2024) concept of communication inequalities that is brought by the gig economy. Similarly, in this study, we conceptualize communication as a technopolitical infrastructure of labor governance, particularly in gig work using platforms. Similar to the results discussed by Salter and Dutta (2024), we first argue that gig work in the platform economy centralizes information flows, structures

indirect management, and produces asymmetrical voice conditions. The imbalance is gendered as it is heavily felt, especially by women.

Third, while this paper sees the participatory foundations of decent work and the role of communication as a mechanism for consultation (Woodcock, 2021; Xue et al., 2025), we see exploring decent work as communicative. This means that we treat communication as the primary infrastructure through which work is organized and performed. Being communicative means that individuals are at the core of meaning production, where the “locus of knowledge production shifts from the outside expert to the community” (Dutta, 2007, p. 313). We hold this position applicable especially for women in the Global South, considering the challenges of voicing out concerns in platform work (Heeks et al., 2020; Schmalz et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework

We offer a conceptualization of decent work that is contextualized to women in the Global South who are involved in gig work using platforms. We also detail the implementation of a communication approach.

Defining Decent Work

We define decent work as the sum of working aspirations of women in the Global South who are involved in gig work using platforms. We follow Perreira and colleagues’ (2019) point that decent work is the sum of aspirations, as we found it to be an encompassing concept that includes interdisciplinary views. We then contextualize these working aspirations of women in the Global South who are involved in gig work using platforms, using literature.

From a measurement perspective, this implies decent work as a higher-order concept that can be scored through the sum of concepts (i.e., aspirations) that are each conceptually unique but are interrelated. In sum, we assume equal weight among aspirations and measures within them, considering decent work as a multidimensional construct (Avila et al., 2015).

Defining Working Aspirations

The working aspirations in this study are (1) opportunities, (2) social protection, (3) adequate working time and workload, (4) meaningful remuneration, and (5) health and safety, as adapted from the decent work dimensions of Khairy and Ghonem (2023). We chose these as

aspirations because of their roots in the ILO and adaptation of parts from the scale development work of Ferraro et al. (2018), who sought universal measurements for decent work. We agree that decent work has universal aspects and, therefore, its measurement is real in the sense that results can be acted upon through interventions (Blustein et al., 2023; Dobbins et al., 2024; Ferraro et al., 2018). Moreover, Khairy and Ghonem (2023) contextualized these dimensions from gender disparity literature and then applied them to a case of a developing country, which already covers our broader goals (i.e., decent work, women, and the Global South). However, these dimensions were mostly based on literature situated in formal workplace-based employment. We then refined these aspirations by synthesizing them with existing literature on gig and platform-based work. From a measurement perspective, the findings regarding these aspirations served as the indicators for decent work.

Opportunities. According to Khairy and Ghonem (2023), opportunities cover promotions, developing skills, and career advancements. Their review of literature showed how other aspirations link to missed opportunities, such as lacking experience and expertise (Okpara, 2006, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023), organizational hierarchy (Matthews et al., 2010, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023), and social norms that bound women to be in charge of familial duties (Wynn, 2017, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023). To add, we see that gig work using platforms presents opportunities for women in the global south (Khethisa et al., 2020) that also help with the country's issues with unemployment and economic difficulties (Johan et al., 2022). However, promotions and long-term career opportunities appear scarce in this line of work (Aguilar et al., 2020; Komarraju et al., 2022). Hence, gig work using platforms is more akin to earning opportunities than formal employment that has a clearer structure for promotions, developing skills, and career advancements. We then conceptualize opportunities as earning prospects for oneself and as a contribution to society.

Social protection. This was defined as a social security system that protects oneself against illness and unemployment, good pension and retirement, and extends to caring for families. This conceptualization was based on the types of social protection that are significant to women, particularly related to maternity protection and childcare (Floro & Meurs, 2009, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023). In our reviewed literature, women additionally struggle with a basic lack of

medical and health benefits and unemployment benefits due to them being considered as independent contractors (International Labor Organization, 2024; Namukasa, 2026). Therefore, we modify social protection as protection from illness, hazards, and loss of income despite independent work status. Adhering to literature, we highlight the need for fairness and justice in gig work using platforms regardless of employment type.

Adequate working time and workload. This covers an appropriate schedule and the achievement of work-life balance, as well as a balanced family time allocation. This dimension was based on how women struggle with work and unpaid work (Matthews et al., 2010, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023), work-family conflict (Wynn, 2017, in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023), and long hours affecting work-life balance (Balaji, 2014, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023), leading women tend to favor flexible work (Clerkin, 2017, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023). Research on platform-based gig work suggests that these roles provide women with the flexibility to balance childcare and other domestic obligations while simultaneously gaining professional experience (Aguilar et al 2020; Islam et al., 2025). However, issues presented in Khairy and Ghoneim (2023) also reflect in this line of work, such as on gender inequalities and double burden (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023; Oguns, 2025). For this, we directly adapt Khairy and Ghoneim's (2023) conceptualization.

Meaningful remuneration. This dimension links fair compensation and well-being and is highlighted by fairness and justice, as Khairy and Ghoneim (2023) noted how women in developing countries perceive remuneration as less fair and less procedurally just relative to men (Deepak, 2021, as cited in Khairy & Ghoneim, 2023). These are also reflected in our literature on how the gig economy favors men over women (Bansal & De, 2024; Cook et al., 2020; Dokuka et al., 2022). When specific to gig work using platforms, we also focus on fairness and justice as pay that is commensurate with working hours (Baxi, 2024; Geraldine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; Graham et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021) and expenses like fuel, vehicle maintenance, and platform commissions (Alturkey, 2024). Therefore, we conceptualize meaningful remuneration as fair and just remuneration that is commensurate with work and worker expenses.

Health and safety. This is defined as the perceived level of work environment safety and risk protection as linked to how occupational

safety and health procedures lean towards male-dominated professions and the existence of different forms of sexual harassment in the workplace with unresolved cases due to patriarchy and fear of job loss (Naveed et al., 2010, in Khairy & Ghomen, 2023). In the more specific case of women in transport work, experiences of sexual harassment and misogyny have also been recorded (Fairwork, 2023). For those in both transport and delivery work, there can be road risks, a lack of safe restrooms, and health risks of working long hours (Fairwork, 2025). Nonetheless, we concur that these additional examples are still encompassed in the conceptualization of work environment safety and risk protection. Table 1 summarizes the definitions of the working aspirations from Khairy and Ghoneim and our conceptual definition based on further engagement with literature on gig and platform-based work.

Defining a Communication Approach to Decent Work

After conceptualizing decent work and its aspirations, we now discuss how to implement a communication approach that considers decent work measurement as interdisciplinary, mediated, and communicative. We illustrate these features through a communication theory: Dutta's (2007) Culture-Centered Approach (CCA) and its three tenets: culture, structure, and agency.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, the concepts of culture, structure, and agency have served as essential heuristic tools in research (Sastry et al., 2021). As applied to this study, these tenets are used to surface the cultural, structural, and individual aspects of each work aspiration (Islam et al., 2025; Pouyad, 2016; Sharma, 2023; Soriano & Cabañes, 2020).

These aspects will be situated in gig work that is mediated through platforms that can both enable and propagate gendered work imbalance (Grohmann, 2023; Salter & Dutta, 2024). The grounded and critical roots of CCA tenets also complement the feminist lens of labor that explores relational aspects of work, critiques structural barriers, and surfaces ways that women practice self-care (Bansal & Arora, 2023; Gilligan, 1982). More broadly, we align the CCA tenets with calls for centering cultures (Komarraju et al., 2022), design justice within platforms (Bansal & Arora, 2023; Castel-Branco & Dawson, 2023; Hauf, 2015; Komarralu et al., 2022), and focus on underrepresented populations (Kekana et al., 2023).

Table 1

Conceptualization of Working Aspirations in Gig Work using Platforms

Working Aspirations	Theoretical Definition	Conceptual Definition	References
Opportunities	Promotions, developing skills, and career advancements	Earning prospects for oneself and as a contribution to society.	Aguilar et al., 2020; Johan et al., 2022; Komarraju et al., 2022; Khethisa et al., 2020
Social Protection	Social security system protection of one's self against illness and unemployment, good pension and retirement, and extends to caring for families.	Protection from illness, hazards, and loss of income despite independent work status.	International Labor Organization, 2024; Namukasa, 2026
Adequate Working Time and Workload	Appropriate schedule and time work-life balance, as well as balanced work and family time allocation	Appropriate schedule and time work-life balance, as well as balanced work and family time allocation.	Aguilar et al., 2020; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023; Islam et al., 2025; Oguns, 2025
Meaningful remuneration	Links fair compensation and well-being	Fair and just remuneration that is commensurate with work and worker expenses.	Alturkey, 2024; Bansal & De, 2024; Baxi, 2024; Cook et al., 2020; Dokuka et al., 2022; Geraldine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; Graham et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021
Health and safety	Perceived level of work environment safety and risk protection	Work environment safety and risk protection.	Fairwork, 2023; Fairwork, 2025

Lastly, by being communicative, we explore the CCA tenets through the experiences of women in the Global South involved in gig work using platforms. Theoretically, CCA centers the marginalized voices through the creation of discursive spaces. Our communicative lens can be comparable to the workerist approach to digital technology, with digital workers inquiry as discussed by Woodcock (2021). This tradition centers on resistance that includes both research and organizing and involves data from workers and customers in a combination of methods or ethnography. In accordance with the CCA, this study centers on lived experiences, elevating the perspectives of participants through a collaborative co-researching process. We see our communicative lens to help build towards different ways to do workers' inquiry.

Defining Culture, Structure, and Agency

We conceptualize that culture, structure, and agency exist in each working aspiration and shape them. In shaping aspirations, tenets can be both enabling or constraining. Theoretically, each tenet is conceptually unique, but together, they intersect to shape each other.

Culture. We define culture as shared values, practices, and meanings in gig work using platforms that can shape the work aspirations. According to Dutta et al. (2016), culture is the local context where values are shared, practices, and meanings are negotiated. Theoretically, we position culture as both static and dynamic, which may be passed on across generations but can be transformed through time (Dutta et al., 2016). Gig work using platforms simultaneously reflects inherited Filipino cultural norms surrounding women's labor while also producing new cultural meanings and practices. For Filipino laborers, particularly women workers, culture plays a vital role in shaping how work is organized, valued, and experienced. However, existing literature indicates that culture can hinder women's access to decent work, particularly through gendered norms that expect women to prioritize unpaid domestic labor while simultaneously contributing to the household's finances (Gilligan, 1982; Khan et al., 2024; Rahul & Shaifali, 2025; Salvagni et al., 2022). These culturally embedded values, practices, and meanings are critical considerations for digital labor platforms if they are to operate in the Global South. Meanwhile, literature shows that culture can contribute to working aspirations by shaping the platform itself through providing alternatives to dominant platform arrangements and the emergence of collectives that have the potential to instigate change (Castel-Branco & Dawson, 2023; Komarraju et al.,

2022; Schmalz et al., 2023; Soriano & Cabanes, 2020). Theoretically, this reflects how culture and structure can mutually shape each other (Dutta et al., 2016).

Structure. We define structure as systems in gig work using platforms that enable or constrain working aspirations. Theoretically, structure is defined as “systems of organizing that enable or constrain access to resources” (Dutta et al., 2016, p. 4). The system includes institutional roles, rules, and practices. In this study, institutions pertain to online platforms (applications and social media platforms) rather than the country’s labor system in general. We also focus on systems as contextualized to gig work rather than formal employment. First, we acknowledge literature on how gig work using platforms has enabled women in the Global South, especially due to its flexibility (Caboverde & Flaminiano, 2025; Khetisa et al., 2020). At the same time, we also acknowledge evidence constraints brought by this arrangement or platforms in various aspects of work (Alturkey, 2024; Ferreira & Silva, 2025; Gianan, 2023; Graham et al., 2020; Grohmann, 2023; Heeks et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2024; Langworthy & Rodgers, 2025; Minh, 2025; Novianto et al., 2023; Oluka, 2024; Salter & Dutta, 2024; Shafira et al., 2024; Utsumi et al., 2025). In the case of the Philippines, the claim is that gig workers are considered partners. However, this designation as partners obscures the power relations that structure the work of Filipino female gig workers as platforms mediate labor processes, remuneration, and access to opportunities, ultimately constraining working aspirations.

Agency. We define agency as an individual’s control over working aspirations as a response to enabling or constraining gig work using platforms. CCA defines agency as “enactment of everyday choices and decisions” (Dutta et al., 2016, p. 4). We argue, however, that these choices and decisions are only indicative of decent work if work is conducive for them to have a sense of freedom, autonomy, purposeful work, and find overall meaning in what they do, as pointed out in the literature (Bansal & Arora, 2023; Baxi, 2024; Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Dobbins et al., 2024; Geraldine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; James, 2022; Lyu et al., 2025; Pouyad, 2016; Schultz, 2020). We acknowledge that individual control to cope with system constraints should not compensate for decent work (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). Instead, these gendered insights should act as a critical structuring force in gig work using platforms.

Like in working aspirations, Table 2 plots the theoretical definition of the CCA tenets followed by our conceptual definition, as these tenets were contextualized from literature on decent work, women, and gig and platform work.

We have so far conceptualized decent work, working aspirations, and CCA tenets. While we have formed a conceptual framework for decent work measurement, the operationalized measures should arise from the participants' individual experiences. Taking all these inputs into account, this paper then asks: What are the decent work experiences of Filipina gig workers using online platforms? The objectives are to (1) describe the decent work aspirations in the experiences of informants and to (2) manifest culture, structure, and agency as measures of these aspirations.

Method

Empirical studies on decent work were mostly quantitative (Blustein et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2022; Nourafkan & Tanova, 2023), often treating decent work as a descriptive variable subject to descriptive statistics (Pereira et al., 2019). However, we found a need for more qualitative prework to inform decent work measurements (Boateng et al., 2018), especially considering calls to expand and contextualize the concept. Fairwork Philippines Ratings (Fairwork, 2023; Fairwork, 2025), for instance, utilized worker interviews to highlight nuanced concerns regarding the work. This helped inform their scoring of platforms in terms of principles of fair work. We then chose a qualitative design coming from the experiences of workers (Blustein et al., 2016; Woodcock, 2021; Xue et al., 2025). Practical considerations from our pre-test also informed this choice, as the geographic dispersion and varying schedules of platform workers made in-depth interviews the most viable approach for data collection.

The unit of analysis is individuals within the study locale of Filipina women doing physical gig transactional delivery work using online platforms. Our conceptualization of gig work intentionally departs from traditional definitions of formal employment (Komarraju et al., 2022). By platform work, we focus on transaction platforms, which include those found in social media and platforms (Koskinen et al., 2019). Following our prework, we centered our analysis on transport and delivery transactions. These services facilitate the movement of individuals or items from a point of origin to a destination and are

Table 2

CCA Tenets Conceptualization

CCA Tenets	Theoretical Definition	Conceptual Definition	References
Culture	Shared values, practices, and meanings	Shared values, practices, and meanings in gig work using platforms that can shape the work aspirations	Castel-Branco & Dawson, 2023; Gilligan, 1982; Khan et al., 2024; Komarraju et al., 2022; Rahul & Shaifali, 2025; Salvagni et al., 2022; Schmalz et al., 2023; Soriano & Cabanes, 2020
Structure	Systems that enable or constrain	Systems in gig work using platforms that enable or constrain working aspirations.	Alturkey, 2024; Caboverde & Flaminiano, 2025; Ferreira & Silva, 2025; Gianan, 2023; Graham et al., 2020; Grohmann, 2023; Heeks et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2024; Khetisa et al., 2020; Langworthy & Rodgers, 2025; Minh, 2025; Myhill et al., 2021; Novianto et al., 2023; Oluka, 2024; Salter & Dutta, 2024; Shafira et al., 2024; Utsumi et al., 2025
Agency	Individual control	Individual control over working aspirations as a response to enabling or constraining systems in gig work using platforms.	Bansal & Arora, 2023; Baxi, 2024; Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016; Dobbins et al., 2024; Geraldine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; James, 2022; Lyu et al., 2025; Pouyad, 2016; Schultz, 2000; Soriano & Cabañes, 2020.

inherently location-bound, regardless of whether they are facilitated by social media or specialized platforms (Heeks et al., 2021). We are using gig workers, platform workers, and women riders interchangeably, depending on the context. They are also referred to as app-based riders in contrast with community-based riders in more rural communities, where there is less app presence.

We acknowledge that application-mediated labor and informal work mediated via social media may differ structurally. Following Rafael Grohmann's (2023) notion of the platformization of labor, we approach these labor arrangements not as identical forms of digital labor, but as differentiated arrangements within a broader process. Including both arrangements, therefore, allows for an analysis of how decent work is experienced across varied modalities of platformization, rather than assuming a single, uniform digital labor condition.

As an exploratory study, the flexibility in platforms is also considered in consideration of the digital divide and literacy in the country (Heeks et al., 2021). Philippine transport and delivery workers connect with customers through various digital platforms, such as Grab, Angkas, and Lalamove. Others work for local delivery services that primarily depend on Facebook for marketing and advertising, with orders managed through Facebook Messenger by an administrator who assigns them to riders. There are also solo or independent delivery workers who are not employed by a company and instead use Facebook Messenger as their primary means of getting clients, as seen in our informants outside urban spaces. Some of these setups appear to be a hybrid of formal and informal economy features in some cases (e.g., Grab, Angkas), while others are predominantly informal (e.g., messaging via Facebook Messenger). Hence, we hope to provide insights into gendered work while also revealing nuances in platform arrangements that can be further explored.

In our review of decent work literature in the Global South, only a few have centered on experiences in the Philippines, like Soriano (2021) and Soriano and Cabañes (2020). Regarding measurement, we found no existing validation of decent work scales within the Philippine context comparable to the Decent Work Scale (DWS) developed by Duffy et al. (2017), which has been validated across various other nations (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019; Di Fabio & Kenney, 2019; Dodd et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2019; Nam & Kim, 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2019; Vignoli et al., 2020). Yet, many Filipinos have been working informally, whether

in the country or abroad. The country is also under compounded risks for this line of location-based physical work, ranking first in disaster risk according to the World Risk Report in 2024 (GMA Integrated News, 2024). Despite the specificities, we argue that our case study can provide insights into broader decent work operationalization as contextualized for women in the Global South involved in gig work using platforms. We saw this in other studies, such as that of Kekana and colleagues (2023), who studied blue collar workers by grouping individuals from different types of tasks like embroidery, screen printing, and laser engraving.

From there, we aim to develop measures for each working aspiration that are further aligned to culture, structure, or agency. Other researchers can adopt, adapt, or modify these measures according to their study locale or to a more specific kind of gig work using platforms. For the research instrument, we employed general semi-structured questions about informants' use of platforms and the challenges of gig work, which were then analytically processed first through the lens of working aspirations and then the CCA tenets.

After pretesting the questionnaire on one informant, we gathered a total of 32 informants, who were composed of Filipina gig workers, almost all of whom use motorcycles to do major delivery service, local delivery service, and independent work. Informants operated through both formal delivery apps (e.g., Grab, Angkas, Joyride, Lalamove) and informal social media channels, primarily Facebook and Messenger. As the target informants are niche, the authors initially reached out to social media groups for female gig workers doing transport and delivery services and communicated with women posting their gig work on Facebook. After conducting the first set of interviews, we asked interviewees if they knew other female gig workers engaged in the service who may be willing to share their stories, thereby applying combined purposive and snowball sampling.

With the goal of voice in CCA, we went for in-depth interviews for at least 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, online, or via Messenger call at the informants' convenience. Informants were also offered a monetary token of appreciation for their time. The interviews were held from April to June 2024. To uphold the principles of privacy and confidentiality, all informants were assigned numerical identifiers to ensure anonymity. Furthermore, this study was conducted in strict accordance with established ethical standards, and the researchers were asked to complete the Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE

2022). More specifically, we ensured that informants were aware of the study's purpose and objectives, that their participation was voluntary, and that they were free to withdraw at any point during the research. We ensured anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and maintained the confidentiality of their information. Before conducting the interviews, we allotted time for informants to read, hear, and fully understand the study and to provide informed consent to participate. During this time, we also introduced ourselves and our institutional affiliation, discussed the potential benefits and risks of participation, and explained how the data would be used and handled.

One key aspect of feminist methods is a commitment to reflexivity and self-awareness. This commitment involves acknowledging the researcher's positionality, values, and biases (Lather, 1991) and considering how these might shape the research process and findings. First, we are all women who have experienced forms of gig work in our working lives. This insider perspective inclined us toward a more nuanced analysis of the structural explanations for labor precarity. Second, we gained an insider perspective on transactional services through experience managing a delivery fleet. Specifically, one of us operated a Toktok franchise in 2021, which provided direct insight into the operational challenges faced by riders. This helped us understand where informants were coming from as they decided on their routes, platform utility choices, and customer engagements in the conduct of their work. Analytically, this study emerged from an intensive engagement with the Culture-Centered Approach (CCA), supported by direct collaboration with an author who worked with the theory's proponent. We recognize CCA as a robust framework with a foundational normative commitment to centering marginalized voices. While the research team's background includes expertise in CCA and measurement studies, we were careful to maintain a reflexive distance to avoid imposing our scholarly leanings on the participants. To safeguard the authenticity of the data, we utilized a non-leading, general questionnaire regarding their lived experiences. Furthermore, we employed dialogic validation, using follow-up conversations to ensure our interpretations accurately reflected the informants' perspectives.

We transcribed the interview data with assistance from professional transcribers and conducted the analysis using a systematic process of open, axial, memoing, and synthesis coding. We first coded the data based on working aspirations. We then analytically assessed culture,

structure, and agency within each aspiration based on saturation of evidence. We organized the findings according to evidence of culture, structure, and agency. Meanwhile, we do not suggest a definitive absence or weakness of a tenet within a component. Like in Fairwork's (2023) assessment of platforms, this only means that we have not found evidence despite our attempt for empirical saturation among our 32 informants. We also did not label levels such as high or low in terms of aspiration, as this is better suited for quantitative measurement.

Findings

Addressing the objectives of this study, the findings describe the decent work aspirations of Filipina gig workers using online platforms as manifested through culture, structure, and agency. We began each section with the conceptual definition of each aspiration, followed by a summary of observations. We then presented the findings according to culture, structure, and agency. Within these findings, we first show the enabling aspects of each tenet and then the constraints.

Opportunities

Opportunities are earning prospects for oneself and one's contribution to society. We found that cultural customs create a dual environment of support and resistance for female gig workers. Despite the systemic constraints of platform work, these women leverage available platform features and exercise agency to ensure their essential needs are met.

Culture. In a dominantly patriarchal society like the Philippines, women earning from jobs traditionally meant for men either garner applause or raised eyebrows. The informants claim that they take pride in the work they do and are even more empowered when customers acknowledge them as females. Informants 1, 2, 22, 29, and 30 expressed a sense of empowerment in challenging gender stereotypes, noting that they take pride in demonstrating to customers that women are equally capable of performing roles traditionally dominated by men. “Kung kaya ng lalaki, kaya rin ng babae” [Anything a man can do, a woman can do just as well], Informant 1 stresses. Informant 2, who happens to be a mototaxi rider, assures her clients that she can provide service as excellent as her male counterparts can. Informant 22 initially had qualms about being in the industry, but like Informant 30, realized that this field is leveled for men and women alike who want to earn a living. Informant 29, meanwhile, keeps her family in mind: “Sayang

naman kung kumikita ka naman para sa pamilya. Ang technique diyan ay tiyaga at paraan para tumagal sa trabaho” [It would be a waste if you are already earning for the family. The technique there is perseverance and finding ways to last in the job].

Solidarity among riders is also a thing in rider communities. Non-platform gig worker Informant 30 talks about how riders give excess bookings to other riders for earning opportunities, especially when they cannot cover the location. This practice has become a give-and-take practice of returning favors, which may potentially be a point of cultural discussion. Practices also arise in ways like how Informant 13 relies on social media group chats, where their president provides information on which areas are teeming with bookings. Still, it is important to note that competition still exists among workers, particularly as mediated through an app. Informant 29 confirms this by noting how riders would speed over other riders to get a client on the app, while Informant 3 would turn on auto-accept.

Unfortunately, discriminatory acts against female riders are still very much prevalent, to the point that it hinders their opportunity to earn. Informant 15 narrates how she broke down while on the road because a customer cancelled on her, just because she happened to be a woman. Due to some instances of discrimination, female riders independently come up with solutions addressing these, some of which manifest as agentic self-protection measures discussed in the section on safety practices. Furthermore, some instances of discrimination, although indirect, were shown to affect the disposition of the riders too; these are covered in the section on workload.

Structure. Platforms that allow gig work can be considered as systems that enable—using platforms for gig work has better mechanisms compared to other jobs. For instance, Informant 30 considers a platform rider’s work as something she can do more long-term work compared to being a security guard. This is also the case for Informant 5. As a mother of two, she has always been fond of side hustles, such as cooking and selling meryenda (snacks), or peddling trinkets near a public school. However, she realized that being a delivery rider offered more stability compared to her extra jobs. Several informants found this line of work a useful opportunity amidst their struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as salary cuts, being axed from work, and small businesses being shut down for some. One informant noted that

working via applications is more convenient than being a habal, or a rider who finds customers on their own at an agreed rate.

Meanwhile, systems can also constrain earning opportunities. This includes system limitations based on the license of motorcycles, where a license can be allowed for one app but not in another. Insights into long-term career opportunities are also scarce – reflecting views that this line of work is still differentiated from formal employment and still deemed inferior (Aguilar et al., 2020; Komarraju et al., 2022). The sustainability of this model is questionable, particularly since platform workers function as the frontline of the errand economy (Demir, 2024). While they are tasked with the most repetitive and trivial labor, their employment is characterized by precarity, as they are tapped only for immediate needs and easily dismissed when demand wanes.

Agency. The enabling aspect of systems shows agency. For example, an informant saw the pandemic as an opportunity to have additional earnings by taking on side jobs while working as a Barangay Health Worker (BHW). As a frontliner, she was permitted to travel during lockdowns, allowing her to accept requests for errands—a practice known in Filipino culture as *pagpapasuyo*—from individuals who were unable to leave their homes. This helped her mitigate their home situation since her husband lost his job. These insights align with the advantages of app-labor, which, according to Heiland (2020), includes the advantage of being a complementary source of income. For Informant 9, being a courier was a seamless addition to her day job as a public school teacher. The additional income she earned from these trips was very helpful in supporting her growing children’s needs.

Social Protection

We define social protection as protection from illness, hazards, and loss of income despite independent work status. Out of all the decent work components used to categorize the insights from the informants, it is the social protection that had the fewest categorized inputs, reflecting studies on their exclusion from essential social protections such as healthcare, unemployment benefits, and retirement plans (Anan, 2024). There also seems to be confusion about who should bear responsibility for insurance or accident coverage. For this component, informants would not automatically consider social protection as basic conditions in their work. This shows concerns with fairness: we found no consensus on basic and bare minimum social protection, making fair contracts an issue as they do not have specific standards at work

(Graham et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021). Some expectations include protection from illness, accident, and health insurance.

Culture. Shared practices manifest as how informants benefit greatly from creating connections with their fellow riders through face-to-face interactions and conversations in their online communities. These interactions, no matter how short, provide them with well-being support to help them thrive in their work. For example, Informants 2 and 3 share that they appreciate getting nods or being greeted by honks from fellow riders on the road, as these have become their means of acknowledgement. Moreover, riders prioritize collective solidarity over platform loyalty; regardless of the brand they represent, they provide mutual aid to fellow riders, particularly during emergencies such as motorcycle breakdowns.

Structure. A pressing system constraint to social protection is being under an independent contractor status. This is why Informant 1 is very cautious about falling ill, as being out for the day entails cuts from her take-home pay. The cases of Informants 6 and 7 also highlight this concern, as both were forced to stop riding after falling ill. These situations reveal how precarious work can be when health or physical capacity is compromised. So, while gig work using platforms may provide short-term income and flexibility, it lacks the long-term security and safety nets needed to make it a sustainable livelihood. What we have gathered is that informants had limited protection and had to find alternative sources for such. We found a lack of vague understanding of social protection among informants, which we infer to be a lack of clear working terms. When asked about social protection, Informants like 1, 2, 3, and 31 would infer about accident insurance provided by their applications, although there must be an active booking for them to be covered by such insurance. As business partners, moreover, they are expected to cover their medical expenses, since the platforms couldn't be expected to take care of this. Financial security also appeared to be an issue whenever informants talked about the times that they did not earn as expected. For Informant 31, this made her consider going back to being a security guard, if not only in consideration for the time to spend with her child. This situation shows how women riders, who are usually in their late 30s to 40s, could still have financial insecurities and instability at work.

Agency. In the case of Informants 6 and 7, they turned to their families for assistance. This shows that agency may help cope but

not contribute to decent work in this working aspiration. Informants take accountability for their social protection instead of holding apps responsible for it. When they fell ill, it was their relatives who shouldered the costs of their treatment. Although they received some assistance from their employer, it was only a one-time relief. This shows that, at the end of the day, riders still depend on familial aid. When asked about how they deal with health-related issues, Informant 1 shared how she immediately took paracetamol at the first signs of flu, while another informant consulted doctors on her own and warned her children to be ready in case she succumbs to her job's risks. This shows how female gig workers promptly address their sicknesses, knowing that other family members are dependent on them. Meanwhile, Informant 32 said that besides her insurance plans with two providers, she is also part of the government's Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), which provides her social protection.

Adequate Working Time and Workload

Concurring with Khairy and Ghoneim (2023), we define adequate working time and workload as an appropriate schedule and work-life balance, as well as balanced work and family time allocation. Regarding working time and workload, we found that flexible routines serve as a primary reason for participants' retention in gig work. However, this flexibility is a double-edged sword; while it is often negotiated around family responsibilities, it also presents significant challenges in maintaining a consistent work-life balance.

Culture. We found shared values, practices, and meanings around motherhood that, at times, help and at times negate working time and workload. Gig work is deemed as pro-choice labor because it allows for time with family and the capacity to attend to their needs. This is an affordance that gig work provides, particularly for single moms, as attested by Informants 5, 25, and 31. Other informants share that they benefit from their community as their relatives, neighbors, and even older children take charge at home and take care of their younger siblings.

In other cases, however, female gig workers' bodies are on the road, but their minds are at home. For instance, Informant 31 shares that as the primary caregiver, her daily rides are cut to shorter, varied times of the day because of her small child. Having a younger child is a huge factor in working mothers' job choices. In relation to what was mentioned above about the Philippines being a patriarchal society,

concerns about traditional roles factor into how women riders view work and life. One informant shared: “Sa mga subdivision. ‘Kababae mong tao.’ May one time pa po noong pandemic, sinabihan po ako, ‘Oh, bakit ikaw ang bumabiyahe? Nasaan ang asawa mo? Umuwi ka na nga’” [In the subdivisions. [They would say,] ‘A woman like you [doing this]: There was even one time during the pandemic, I was told: ‘Oh, why are you the one out on the road? Where is your husband? You should just go home].

Structure. Systems within gig work using platform systems enable adequate working time and workload through efficiency. Informant 9 shared that although she lives in the northernmost part of Metro Manila, her work requires her to be in the south for her daily classes. Her daily commute required five transfers between tricycle, bus, jeep, and train rides, and took two to three hours per way. This prompted her to utilize motorcycle-hailing services, which significantly reduced her transit time to a single hour between her origin and destination. Motivated by the efficiency and convenience of the platform, she acquired a motorcycle through an installment plan and registered as a courier. This allowed her to integrate delivery tasks into her daily commute, effectively monetizing her travel time between her home and primary workplace.

Meanwhile, constraints still arise despite the overarching theme of working time and workload flexibility in gig work using platforms, as manifested by off-peak hours and customers’ dominant time. As Informant 4 shared, we observed that riders must constantly negotiate their presence with customer availability. This often involves waiting for customers who are still in the process of ‘booking’ or managing requests to exceed the 60 kph speed limit. These pressures force riders to balance customer urgency against safety protocols, such as avoiding bike lanes and minimizing swerving.

Agency. Regarding the exercise of agency, the participants unanimously identified flexibility as the most significant affordance of freelance riding, allowing them to navigate the competing demands of labor and personal life. This allows them to create their schedule, be in different locations in a week, and manage their well-being. This also means they can juggle paid work with domestic responsibilities, as mentioned by Informant 5. If there is a sense of app control on working time and workload, this may be through gentle nudges of potential deactivation as mentioned by Informant 17, or perhaps a temporarily

lowered chance of getting a client right away. Some of those who commit to gig work in extended periods also venture into side hustles like selling ice, running a salon, being chief barangay tanod (a local peace and order deputy), motovlogging, and even selling hairnets and shower caps to their fellow riders. With a sense of fulfilment, Informant 26 proudly states: “Hindi lang ako basta estudyante lang, hindi ako basta nanay. All-around” [I am not just a student, not just a mother, I am all-around].

In terms of system constraints, downtimes push some informants to adjust their schedules, and therefore practice agency and use these windows to attend to their children and eat at home to save money. One informant revealed that she was both a hospital worker and a platform rider and that she did platform work during her downtime. This often leads to her not having enough time to sleep. She mentions having no sleep at all while working in the hospital, because she worked for the platform all night the previous night. While platform work is characterized by its flexibility and suitability for secondary income, these benefits are offset by significant trade-offs -- most notably the severe implications for workers' long-term health and well-being.

Meaningful Remuneration

We conceptualize meaningful remuneration as fair and just remuneration that is commensurate with work and worker expenses. Meaningful earnings appear to dominate workers' own assessments of decent work, particularly when compared to less visible expectations, such as social protection and long-term career opportunities. We found that the aspirations of our informants are heavily skewed toward economic survival. While the Decent Work agenda encompasses various qualitative indicators, the immediate need for livable wage functions as the primary driver for these women, often at the expense of other labor rights and standards. In this sense, meaningful earnings refer not only to the amount earned but to the capacity of income to meet household needs, support family obligations, and provide a sense of contentment and autonomy. As such, meaningful remuneration is relational -- more related to everyday responsibilities, rather than as a purely monetary measure. In the case of work opportunities, meaningful earnings are also mediated by family setup, with informants facing barriers, actively managing these earnings, and ascribing meaning to contentment with these.

Culture. From a cultural perspective, informants imbue their income with diverse symbolic meanings. In this context, earnings are not merely

a financial metric but are deeply intertwined with notions of maternal duty, domestic stability, and the fulfillment of familial aspirations. In the words of Informant 26, a good life means, “Sa akin ano yung magandang buhay? Magandang buhay marami kang pera” [What is a good life for me? A good life is when you have lots of money]. Their family setup has a lot to do with the way informants experience their earnings. The number of children, the spouse’s employment status, and the necessity of resource budgeting are the primary factors dictating the allocation of the informants’ income. Happiness with money is associated with familial bonds. Despite all the barriers involved in having meaningful earnings, some respondents still express contentment with what they get. However, it is also important to consider that contentment is factored in the context of the rider, ascribing to cultural practices. For example, a community-based informant would show contentment with whatever she earns from her service, ascribing the labor as help to others. In the case of Informants 5, 7, and 8, who work in a local delivery service without an app, what they value goes beyond financial gain. Trust, familiarity, personal connection, and care are also seen as forms of earning. They are called by name, sometimes given nicknames, teased by restaurant staff, and even requested by loyal customers. For Informant 8, her delivery tasks often feel less like work and more like running errands for a family member.

Structure. Systems in gig work using platforms shape remuneration. Some informants vented on how the structure (their app earning mechanisms) would affect their earning satisfaction. For example, an app’s rating system can also be a source of frustration for some, as the riders are concerned that this would affect their performance and the number of customers they get. Informant 3 shares that she still taps on the perfect rating score, be it out of spite, just to ensure the consistent flow of clients that are assigned to her by the platform. Informant 4, meanwhile, observed that her excellent ratings tend to drop when she cancels orders, even if she does so for valid reasons such as wrong drop-off pins and misdeclared parcel sizes. She feels that platforms always act in favor of the customers, even though they are being abusive and are pushing riders to desperation due to their need to earn. One informant also noted the challenges associated with abono (covering expenses), where riders are required to pay for items out-of-pocket before being reimbursed by the customer upon delivery. Platform capitalist industries also have a way of making riders lose hold of remuneration by

suspending them from the app when they are suspected of participating in rallies to air out labor concerns. Informant 4 noted: “Kasi may nakita nga po ako sa apps na ‘yun nga, sumama po sila sa rally, na-deactivate sila” [I saw something on the application. When they joined the rally, their work accounts were deactivated]. The suspension may last from 30 minutes to two to three days.

It is also important to note that the systems of earning may be different between app-based riders and community-based riders. For instance, an informant shared how an app would increase the prices of the ordered food based on its percentage for each food item. Community-based riders, on the other hand, would only rely on delivery fees with fixed store prices. The inability of riders to influence pricing, despite their central role in the service, underscores the power imbalances and technological inequalities embedded in the delivery infrastructure.

Agency. We found that a sense of contentment is an important measure of meaningful remuneration. A few, like Informant 3, are happy with the 80-20% profit-sharing scheme with an app. Others, like Informants 7 and 8, practiced agency in negotiating with their employers for a 70-30% scheme. Daily income also naturally varies in gig work, and the informants shared different ways in which they manage their earnings to show agency. Community-based rider, Informant 30, says managing earnings includes setting her own kilometer-based fee. While many riders established daily earning quotas to regulate their effort, others -- such as Informant 3 -- engaged in extreme labor stretching, remaining on the road for 24-hour periods when physically or circumstantially possible. Several informants talked about how they manage their earnings within their households: some are dissatisfied with their earnings, so they applied agentic practices of going around income barriers. One app-based delivery rider says she opts to get as many clients at a time to offset the very low delivery fees set by the platform, which she sees as an earning disadvantage. This may cause a delay and affect her client's satisfaction. This informant also shared how precarious earning setups lead to competition among riders to get customers.

Health and Safety

Adapting Khairy and Ghoneim's (2023) definition, health and safety is about work environment safety and risk protection. Most of the narratives from informants point to two health and safety concerns: road risk and crimes related to women. The former reflects risks in the work

in general, while the latter pertains to experiences specifically related to their vulnerabilities as women. In turn, these risks were addressed by shared and individual practices of caring for self and others.

Culture. There seems to be a unique culture within a culture that the riders exist as they perform their work duties. It has been described in the previous sections how female riders tend to support each other in this profession by sharing information with each other. Culture manifests in asking for help and accountability. Many riders, like Informants 1 to 4, converse with each other to flag places that they deem unsafe. Despite these strategies, a few informants would still believe in needed changes to the app. One informant, for instance, calls for them to know the identity of their customers. The experiences of Informants 5, 6, 7, and 8 present a different picture. Unlike platform riders in the metro who often navigate unfamiliar areas and anonymous transactions, local delivery riders in a rural area are anchored in community ties. Being *kilala* [known] and *kakilala* [acquaintance] from repeated orders and deliveries provides a sense of protection: customers look out for them, store staff recognize and trust them, and fellow riders form strong camaraderie. This sense of familiarity not only fosters belonging and job satisfaction but also serves as a safeguard against potential risks or crime, as riders are less exposed to the anonymity and precarity that often characterize platform-based delivery work in the metro. These measures help in the navigation of their environment, but other concerns, such as the nature of the job being commonly thought of as masculine, also contribute to how the practices of the female riders are shaped. For instance, Informant 2 shares that hugging is different and uncomfortable when it is a man hugging a lady rider instead of the other way around.

Structure. Informants linked their primary health and safety concerns to the intrinsic risks of road work and the structural demands of the delivery platforms. Participants acknowledged that road-based gig work entails significant exposure to accidents, a risk that persists regardless of the rider's personal safety measures. In many cases, they are concerned about the recklessness of other motorists. Using a motorcycle also means that they get to be exposed to extreme weather conditions, prompting informants with the dilemma of prioritizing their health needs (e.g., taking vitamins). Participants highlighted that passenger-related variables, such as body weight and unfamiliarity with motorcycle safety, present substantial challenges to manual balance

and overall road stability. Getting to deal with strangers daily with only app-mediated transactions poses safety threats to some informants in relation to crimes such as holdups. As one informant noted, while the details of their identity are well provided to the customer, riders do not get the same level of knowledge as their customer. At the same time, several informants shared experiences of unwanted sexual advances, being women, and with the physical proximity of the driver and customer when riding a motorcycle. Informant 31 shared how they already have an idea of how predators would use the app to look for victims.

Agency. While transport and delivery gig work typically involves a multitude of health hazards, such as heat exhaustion, headaches, body aches, sunburn, hunger, lack of sleep, lack of exercise, and period pains, informants have, in turn, found well-being opportunities in the form of self-regulation. Emotional self-regulation, which refers to a person's ability to manage their emotions and impulses or the emotional ability to repair emotional states (Delhom et al., 2021), involves behaviors such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm. The informants have learned to apply adaptive regulation strategies that allow them to maintain positive moods and modify or regulate negative ones. Some of the ways they do this are motivational self-talk, gratitude checks, self-care or beauty rituals, and communication with friends and loved ones. The strongest driver of all – love of family – enables the informants to deliberately find ways to self-soothe and care for their own well-being. Taking care of oneself emerged as the most common agency response to these health and safety risks. Like in social protection, it seems that the informants feel more accountable for themselves than they expect the platform to protect them. For example, Informant 31 would adjust her working time based on current weather situations whenever she feels that she is on the verge of getting heatstroke. Some would highlight the importance of regularly taking vitamins, while others would put priority on their well-being.

Several informants indicated stories concerning personal measures taken for self-protection, illustrating that while there seems to be a positive working environment between riders, this does not necessarily extend to platform management. Related to this is the need to exercise restraint while on the job, especially since it requires riders to be exposed to different elements on the road. In some cases, informants deal with aggressive individuals through uncomfortable and fearful pleadings,

ultimatums, and then confrontations with the customer during the very ride, before they decide to cut the trip and ask the customer to leave. As Informant 2 shared, they should be wise in these kinds of situations. Meanwhile, Informant 27 shared how she took it upon herself to have her bike set up in a way that would lessen physical contact with clients. This preventive measure was a way for her to avoid being groped or touched while riding. As for Informant 27, part of self-protection is ensuring that other riders would be aware that they were female riders. This stemmed from their previous experience of being harassed and chased on the road by another motorist, who backed down when they realized they were chasing a female rider. Both are manifestations of agency, but they also reflect the vulnerability of the female riders as they continue to work in a grey space of independence, while also being constrained by the platform in terms of the limited available protection mechanisms for them.

Discussion

Working Aspirations

The first objective of this study is to describe the decent work aspirations in the experiences of informants. Table 3 reflects our findings, translated as qualitative pre-work in developing measures for decent work. The measures are grouped according to work aspirations of opportunities, social protection, adequate working time and workload, meaningful remuneration, and health and safety.

The second objective is to manifest culture, structure, and agency as measures of these aspirations. Each statement is then further labeled as about culture (c), structure (s), or agency (a). Findings on constraining culture, structure, and agency were reversed phrased as measures. For example, statements that show discontent with profit sharing were translated positively as “I feel content with the profit-sharing scheme in this work.” In this way, lower ratings on such measures will be reflected accordingly. Further, some measures accommodate app-based, social-media-based, and general gig work using online platforms. Hence, respondents should be able to have a “Not Applicable” choice. We have tried to exhaustively translate our findings into measures, which resulted in an unbalanced number of measures and tenet representative items. Subsequent phases of testing these measures can identify redundant items through item analysis.

Table 3

Working Aspirations Measures

Work	Conceptual Definition	Measures from Key Findings
Opportunities	Earning prospects for oneself and as a contribution to society.	<p>Women are as capable as men in this line of work (c)</p> <p>Customers agree on women's capability in this line of work (c)</p> <p>I feel equal earning opportunities as men in this work (c)</p> <p>This line of work helps me provide for my family (c)</p> <p>Women workers give each other opportunities to earn (c)</p> <p>This work provides more earnings than other gig work (s)</p> <p>This work helps mitigate the socioeconomic difficulties of society (s)</p> <p>This work offers long-term career earning opportunities for me (s)</p> <p>I feel needed in this line of work (s)</p> <p>The requirements needed for this line of work are easy to get (s)</p> <p>I can manage multiple gig work to maximize earnings (a)</p> <p>This work is useful as complementary to formal employment (a)</p> <p>I manage this work according to my schedule (a)</p> <p>I allot my earnings from this work for my children's needs (a)</p>
Social Protection	Protection from illness, hazards, and loss of income despite independent work status.	<p>I get support from other women workers during work hazards (c)</p> <p>I feel secure in case of illness in this gig work (s)</p> <p>I find that this gig work is sustainable (s)</p> <p>Platforms provide adequate insurance in case of work accidents (s)</p> <p>I feel protected in this work despite being an independent partner (s)</p> <p>I do not need to shell out expenses of illness (a)</p> <p>My family does not need to aid me during illness or income loss (a)</p> <p>I do not need to rely on the government for social protection (a)</p>

Work	Conceptual Definition	Measures from Key Findings
Adequate Working Time and Workload	Appropriate schedule and time work-life balance, as well as balanced work and family time allocation.	<p>My work setup is conducive to fulfilling my household duties (c)</p> <p>I can separate my focus when it comes to work and childcare (c)</p> <p>I have a community to help me work and care for my family (c)</p> <p>Customers are supportive of women with families doing this work (c)</p> <p>This work saves me time (s)</p> <p>This work saves me on work-related expenses (s)</p> <p>Customers are considerate of my workload (s)</p> <p>Applications are considerate of my working time (s)</p> <p>I can easily work around my working time and workload in this work (a)</p> <p>I can strategize on my own schedule in this work (a)</p>
Meaningful remuneration	Fair and just remuneration that is commensurate with work and worker expenses.	<p>My remuneration in this work favors my family's needs (c)</p> <p>I get value from this work beyond financial gain (c)</p> <p>My expenses in doing this work are reasonable (s)</p> <p>My remuneration is based on reasonable measures (s)</p> <p>I feel content with the profit-sharing scheme in this work (s)</p> <p>My work has ways to ensure fair remuneration (s)</p> <p>I can freely voice out my concerns on remuneration (s)</p> <p>I negotiate my remuneration in this work (a)</p> <p>I do not sacrifice my working time and workload to earn sufficiently (a)</p>

Work	Conceptual Definition	Measures from Key Findings
Health and safety	Work environment safety and risk protection.	<p>Customers are respectful of women in this line of work (c)</p> <p>I feel safe with my body in this line of work (c)</p> <p>My community seeks accountability for safety in this work (c)</p> <p>This work allows me to build mutual trust with customers (c)</p> <p>Systems are in place to protect me from work hazards (s)</p> <p>I feel safe transacting with customers in this work (s)</p> <p>This work allows mutual accountability between me and the customer (s)</p> <p>I can practice self-regulation in this work (a)</p> <p>This work helps me understand how I can protect myself to be safe in this work (a)</p>

Ultimately, the sum of these measures pertains to decent work. We recommend Likert scale response options for each item, where high ratings on the combined measures point to decent work. Nonetheless, it is important to disaggregate scores per working aspiration and even per statement to see areas to improve on. Moreover, tests of reliability in terms of internal and external consistency can be done. Subsequent phases can determine construct validity (i.e., convergent and discriminant) through factor analysis. We also recommend criterion validity to see whether these measures are comparable to gold standard decent work measures and can predict related concepts, as evidenced from the literature.

Overall, we envision that our gendered measures can adhere to the gendered justice design calls (Komarraju et al., 2021; Bansal & Arora, 2023), as applied to decent work measurement. Experiences of women in our study reflect gendered constraints found in literature such as those related to motherhood duties, safety, and mobility restrictions (James, 2022; Kasliwal, 2020; Langworthy & Rodgers, 2025; MacLeavy & Pitts, 2024; Minh, 2025; Oguns, 2025), although we were not able to find evidence of gendered pay gaps or higher gendered attrition (Bansal & De, 2024; Cook et al., 2020; Dokuka et al., 2022; Ferreira & Silva, 2025). With the experiences of women, we have more specific stories that can translate into items or probing questions for the measurement of decent work and not just justice, but we call it ‘communicative justice’ as measurement should tell stories of its users (Labaw, 1980).

Culture, Structure, and Agency

This section analyzes the research findings through the tripartite lens of the CCA. For culture, we found that shared values and meanings were hampering working aspirations, such as those around motherhood and gender roles. Nevertheless, we also found instances of negotiations, such as in the case of resisting views on delivery and transport work as something women are capable of. Evidence also points to how this line of work, despite being dispersed (Heeks et al., 2021), can cultivate shared practices through caring for each other (Gilligan, 1982; Khan et al., 2024; Rahu & Shaifali, 2025). We relate culture findings to the concept of entrepreneurial solidarities of Soriano and Cabañes (2020) through a few of our business-minded informants, although we cannot yet say that there is a strong self-organized collective among them (Schmalz et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, our findings on structure reflect a lot of the literature we have reviewed on platform work (Ferreira & Silva, 2025; Langworthy &

Rodgers, 2025). Enabling systems in gig work using platforms highlight flexibility (Caboverde & Flaminiano, 2025; Khethisa et al., 2020) and earning opportunities for women. However, saturated evidence of constraints due to platform systems also aligns with related literature in the Global South, such as issues on pay, lack of social protection, risks, control of working hours, and job stability (Castel-Branco & Dawson, 2023; Heeks et al., 2020; Novianto et al., 2023; Shafira et al., 2024). We noticed many inputs pointing to structure, showing how informants point to system changes to improve working aspirations. Theoretically, our findings illustrate how technological structures mediatize work itself (Grohmann, 2023). We also found some evidence of communication inequality (Salter & Dutta, 2024), such as in cases of being suspended in an application for voicing out. Practically, we support initiatives on fair work to uphold fairness in platforms as technological infrastructures (Geradine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; Graham et al., 2020; Heeks et al., 2021; Myhill et al., 2021).

Lastly, on agency, our findings show instances of informants finding meaning, freedom, autonomy, purpose, and dignity in the work, like in existing conceptualizations of decent work (Blustein et al., 2016; Dobbins et al., 2024; Geraldine & McWha-Hermann, 2024; Lyu et al., 2025; Pouyad, 2016; Schultz, 2000). In the case of our informants, their individual agency arises as a response to structural barriers that reflect the experiences and perceptions of women in other parts of the world (Bansal & Arora, 2023; James, 2022; Kasliwal, 2020; Khairy & Ghonem, 2023; MacLeavy & Pitts, 2024; Sharma, 2023). Many agentic practices empower by illustrating subjective fulfillment of work aspirations, especially in terms of earning opportunities and work flexibility, which we cannot disregard (Saragih et al., 2024). However, we also acknowledge how some practices can potentially resist real change in objective structural barriers (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). For instance, relying on self-accountability for social protection does not offset the need for a systematically available one.

Given these, we propose that researchers can also explore quantitative measures according to each tenet, like in previous applications of CCA (Sastry et al., 2021). For example, a researcher can focus on structure measures to contribute to digital workerism if the focus is on how workers struggle under technologies (Woodcock, 2021). Table 4 maps the key qualitative findings for each CCA tenet. We also noted that these qualitative findings can be analyzed through other concepts, such as through entrepreneurial solidarities (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020), showing analytical possibilities.

Table 4*Summary of Findings per CCA Tenet*

CCA Tenet	Conceptual Definition	Key Findings
Culture	Shared values, practices, and meanings in gig work using platforms that can shape the work aspirations	Filipina transport and delivery gig workers using online platforms navigate and negotiate existing values and meanings ascribed to gender and motherhood while also cultivating shared practices by getting motivation and supporting fellow workers, seeking community to aid familial obligations, and using culture to ascribe meaning to work aspirations.
Structure	Systems in gig work using platforms that enable or constrain working aspirations.	Filipina transport and delivery gig workers using online platforms find work systems to be enabling in terms of flexibility and earning opportunities. Meanwhile, systems can also constrain through job insecurity, health hazards, a rating system, the requirement of capital, downturns, customer-oriented work, a lack of long-term work opportunities, a lack of grievance opportunities, a lack of social protection, a platform-dominated payment scheme, and anonymity of clients.
Agency	Individual control over working aspirations as a response to enabling or constraining systems in gig work using platforms.	Filipina transport and delivery gig workers using online platforms see that this work allows them to maximize mobility, apply self-regulation, craft their own routines, and practice negotiations. Meanwhile, they use individual control, such as taking accountability, self-protection measures, and navigating and gaming the system, to cope with system constraints.

Conclusion

Overall, we support the usefulness of a communication approach towards measurement. Using a communication theory to organize experiences on working aspirations illustrates decent work as an analytically flexible and polysemous construct with interdisciplinary views. By highlighting the mediated aspect of gig work using platforms, we were able to point out areas of improvement in work systems while also accounting for the social and individual aspects of work that can be both enabling and constraining. More importantly, we were able to apply a communicative lens where experiences of women in the Global South were translated into decent work measures, highlighting them as the ‘experts’ of operationalizing work aspirations.

Future studies can translate these measures into instruments for large-scale administration. Other researchers can also do a secondary analysis of findings using another analytical lens. Some may also consider applying the framework to other demographics. We conclude that decent work is much more than organizational policies, and this gendered analysis refines what the sum of working aspirations means in decent work.

Limitations of the Study

We find that our experiences, including limitations, contribute to doing a digital workers inquiry. A qualitative and narrative focus recommended by Blustein et al. (2016) proved to be instrumental in hearing the voices of women gig riders, which would be otherwise hampered by the dynamics of platform work (Heiland, 2020). However, the study was limited to the initial prework of a CCA cycle that may require subsequent explorations, such as in digital worker inquiry (Woodcock 2021). In CCA, the following steps of qualitative prework can include organizing an advisory board, and in our case, this may be through measurement workshops with select informants. We have also limited ourselves to in-depth interviews, as getting riders together to share their experiences may be needed to build trust, as it was noticeable how some potential informants would be wary if our intentions are legitimate. Such skepticism is understandable, as seen in the interviews where some informants find security issues with non-app rider work, such as those coursed through social media.

Secondly, having some informants who are community-based was helpful in delineating experiences that are particular to the experiences

of app-based work. In addition, in other studies that investigate decent work in terms of demographics (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2023; Osei Boakye et al., 2021; Palanca-Tan, 2021), there were some stratifying factors found despite all of them being women and riders. For example, some experiences seemed unique among those with children, and furthermore, the factor of the age of their children. This point implies that within the Filipina gig workers in the study are sub-groups that can be further explored on the nuances of their work experiences, considering the differences between those using applications and social media.

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