

Ethical Implications of 10-minute Delivery: Balancing Consumer Delight and Employee Rights

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Abstract

With the rapid growth of quick commerce and delivery services, consumer delight has been steadily increasing, leading to extreme happiness from the speed and convenience. But at the same time, ethical concerns arise about employees' rights and well-being, as they are pressured to deliver the product within the given time (10 minutes). The main objective of this study is to examine the ethical implications of the ultra-fast delivery model by exploring the tension between consumer delight and the protection of employee rights. For this study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews with delivery riders by using a purposive sampling technique. Being a qualitative study, thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns and ethical issues within the data. The findings reveal that the ultra-fast delivery model has resulted in extreme consumer delight and a high customer rating system, but the working conditions for employees are severely affecting their physical and mental health because they do not meet humane working condition standards. On the one hand, consumers are delighted; on the other, employee welfare is at stake.

Keywords: Q-commerce, Customer Delight, Ultra-fast Delivery, Employee Morale, Stress

Introduction

Q-commerce (Ultra-Fast Delivery Model)

Q-commerce is the first growing segment of e-commerce focused on ultra-fast delivery. Delivery is guaranteed within 10 to 30 minutes, and it is specially designed to meet immediate, on-demand consumer needs for everyday essentials and personal care items. It is very different from a centralised warehouse model, where goods take days to deliver. Q-commerce operates through dark stores or centres located close to customers, enabling rapid delivery. It has been driven by urbanisation, smartphone penetration, and changing consumer lifestyles that value speed and convenience. Companies such as Zepto, Blinkit, Getir, Gopuff, Gorillas, and Instamart have popularised this model in densely populated cities like Mumbai. Advanced technologies such as AI-based demand forecasting, route optimisation, and real-time inventory management play a crucial role in making Q-commerce operations more efficient and effective. But despite its popularity, many challenges remain, including higher operating costs, lower profit margins, employee safety concerns, ride safety risks, packaging,

and emissions. Overall, Q-commerce is a major evolution in retail, refining customers' expectations around speed while pushing businesses to innovate in logistics and technology.

Consumer Delight

Consumer delight goes beyond basic satisfaction by exceeding customer expectations and creating a positive, memorable experience. Satisfaction is measured by whether expectations are met, but delight comes when businesses deliver unexpected value, emotional connections, and exceptional services that surprise the customer in a very pleasant way. This delight stems from speed, quality of goods, convenience, empathy, and personalisation, with gestures such as proactive support and fast issue resolution that enhance the customer experience. Today, in a competitive market, it has become a key differentiator for brands. It is more likely to drive brand loyalty, repeat purchases, positive publicity, and advocacy. Through digital platforms and data analytics, companies can better understand consumer behaviour and anticipate needs, making customer delight more scalable and consistent.

Ethical Perspective on Quick Delivery

There are many ethical considerations in Q-commerce or quick delivery alongside its benefits. While consumers enjoy rapid access to goods, the demand for fast deliveries places a significant ethical burden on workers. Unsafe driving, long hours, inadequate rest, and job insecurity can violate fundamental rights to safety and fair treatment. These issues raise concerns about worker exploitation and the ethical obligation for fair compensation within broader social justice frameworks. Additionally, increased congestion, carbon emissions, and excessive packaging waste threaten community well-being and environmental health. The expectation of instant gratification not only encourages overconsumption but also challenges ethical consumption practices by fuelling disposable habits. To be ethical, a business must critically evaluate how it balances speed with responsibility, consciously integrating measures such as eco-friendly packaging, optimised delivery routes, and electric vehicles to minimise harm. Although fair competition exists, small retailers' ability to compete is in decline, raising further ethical challenges related to market diversity and inclusion. Ultimately, responsible Q-commerce requires not only safe conditions, transparency, and environmental action but also a commitment to social equity and long-term sustainability.

Literature Reviews

Chen, Tian, Deng, Zhou & Huang (2022) studied rider safety and health under labour intensity in China to test how labour intensity affects rider safety and health, using large surveys of 2,742 riders and moderation modelling. They found that higher labour intensity worsens labourers' safety and health due to longer hours.

Fairwork India (2023) studied worker alienation related to platform work and consumer awareness to assess how platform consumer interactions contribute to alienation, using consumer surveys with 963 consumers. They found that alienation linked to discrimination and platform relations is being overlooked.

Fairwork India (2024) conducted a study on labour standards across major Indian delivery platforms to assess how platforms perform against fair pay conditions, using desk research, platform evidence, and interviews with labour. They found that persistent deficits are associated with tighter control over workers' time flexibility.

Gund & Daniel (2023/2024) conducted a systematic review of GHG emissions from Q-commerce and e-commerce, evaluating the evidence using inclusion and exclusion criteria. They found that emissions depend on delivery speed, departure location, vehicle efficiency, and other factors.

Human Rights Watch (2025) studied US platform work and labour exploitation, aiming to document how platform design affects rights through an investigative report. They found that dependent contractor classification weakens protection and that pay practices can shift risk to workers.

NITI Aayog (2022) examined India's gig platform economy to estimate job potential and provide recommendations using a policy report that employed an estimation approach based on synthesis of evidence. They found strong growth potential but identified the need for social security, protection, and governance for platform workers.

PAIGAM & University of Pennsylvania; Telangana Gig & Platform Workers Union (2024) studied app-based workers' working and living conditions to document the economic, social, and psychological costs of app work using a large multi-city survey of 10,000 workers across taxi and delivery platforms. They found that long hours, stress, and low income are the main concerns.

Ramachandran & Raman (2021) proposed a policy blueprint for platform jobs and worker protection, outlining steps to unlock platform employment post-COVID while balancing flexibility and protection through policy analysis. They argued for portable social security aligned with the Social Security Code.

Raman, Ramachandran & Sasikumar (2021) examined the Social Security Code 2020 for platform labour protection, analysing how the code could promote and protect platform labour through legal policy analysis. The emphasis is on the scale of platform work.

Schorung (2023) studied urban quick commerce and dark stores in cities such as London, New York, and Paris, with the main objective of mapping the Q-commerce supply chain and the urban impact of dark stores through interviews and document review. They found that dark stores reshape neighbourhood logistics and intensify delivery traffic.

Vaidheeswaran & Hemapriya (2026) studied occupational challenges among Q-commerce delivery partners in Puducherry using a questionnaire survey of 120 partners from Instamart, Zepto, Blinkit, and Dunzo, with statistical tests. They found that long working hours caused fatigue and posed safety concerns.

Statement of the Problem

The rise of 10-minute delivery services has transformed consumer expectations by giving them delight and psychological gratification, but at the same time, it is more ethically affecting employees' or delivery workers' rights. They are more prone to unsafe work practices, including life-safety issues, unfair wages, and performance pressure. The problem lies in balancing the demand for ultra-fast delivery with the responsibility to protect delivery workers' safety and well-being, uphold ethical labour standards, and avoid compromising service quality or business sustainability.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the ethical implications of the 10-minute delivery (quick commerce) model with a specific focus on the recognition, protection, and enhancement of employee rights and well-being.
2. To analyse the tension between consumer delight and employee welfare in ultra-fast delivery services.

Hypotheses of the study

- **H₁**: The 10-minute delivery model has no significant impact on employee rights and well-being.
- **H₂**: There is no ethical conflict between consumer delight and employee working conditions in ultra-fast delivery services.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it examines the ethical dimensions of the challenges posed by the ultra-fast delivery model, highlighting the contradiction between the philosophy of consumer delight and employees' rights to safety. The study would help consumers become more aware of the hidden human and social costs behind it. For businesses, the study would offer insights into developing a responsible model and strategies to balance customer gratification and employee care. This study is also significant in that it would help policymakers and regulators identify gaps in labour protection and frame guidelines to ensure safe working conditions and matching wages.

Methodology of the Study

- **Research Design:** This is a descriptive and analytical study.
- **Data Type:** Data collection from primary and secondary sources.
- **Sample Size:** Data collected from 105 delivery riders.
- **Sampling Method:** Non-probability convenience sampling (dark stores).
- **Data Collection Tool:** Structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale.
- **Statistical Tools:** Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, SD), Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, Spearman Rank Correlation.
- **Secondary Sources:** Journals, reports, policy documents on Q-commerce and gig economy.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis is based on primary data gathered from 105 delivery riders. It utilises descriptive statistics to profile the respondents, reliability testing to validate the survey instrument, and inferential statistics, including correlation and non-parametric tests, to evaluate the stated hypotheses. The findings aim to shed light on the often-overlooked tension between meeting aggressive delivery targets and upholding workers' fundamental rights and safety.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The following table details the demographic characteristics of the 105 delivery riders surveyed.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Delivery Riders (N=105)

Category	Classification	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	86	81.9%
	Female	19	18.1%
Age group	Below 20 years	1	1.0%
	20–25 years	19	18.1%
	26–30 years	52	49.5%
	Above 30 years	33	31.4%
Employment status	Part-time	74	70.5%
	Full-time	31	29.5%
Work experience	Less than 6 months	10	9.5%
	6–12 months	25	23.8%
	1–2 years	44	41.9%
	More than 2 years	26	24.8%
Daily working hours	Less than 6 hours	13	12.4%
	6–8 hours	25	23.8%
	8–10 hours	52	49.5%
	More than 10 hours	15	14.3%

The demographic data reveal that the Q-commerce workforce in this study is predominantly male (81.9%) and falls largely within the 26–30 age bracket (49.5%). A significant majority of these riders work part-time (70.5%), yet nearly half are clocking 8–10 hours daily, suggesting that “part-time” roles are serving as a primary source of income. The experience level is relatively high, with over 66% having more than a year of experience, suggesting that the issues raised in this study stem from long-term exposure to the sector's demands.

Objective 1: To examine the ethical implications of the 10-minute delivery model on the rights and physical/mental well-being of delivery riders

The primary objective of this study is to move beyond the surface-level convenience of quick commerce (Q-commerce) and critically examine the “human cost” associated with ultra-fast delivery models. While a 10-minute delivery window is a marvel of logistical efficiency, it introduces new ethical challenges regarding the basic rights and health of the workforce. This objective focuses on documenting the lived realities of delivery riders, specifically looking at how these hyper-aggressive time frames affect their mental health, physical safety, and sense of dignity. By investigating these implications, the research aims to determine whether the current operational framework of Q-commerce is compatible with modern ethical labour standards or necessitates a fundamental redesign to protect the people at the heart of the service.

Evaluation of Ethical and Welfare Issues

This section assesses the riders’ perception of corporate ethics and their own rights.

Table 2 Ethical Perception of Q-commerce Operations

Ethical/welfare statement	Mean score	Std. deviation	Interpretation
Priority of satisfaction over employee safety	4.22	0.64	Very high
Adequate availability of rest breaks	3.96	0.41	High
Humane and fair working conditions	2.62	0.90	Low-moderate
Adequate protection of workers’ rights	2.58	0.93	Low-moderate
Ethical justification of 10-minute delivery	1.25	0.65	Very low

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The findings highlight a deep ethical crisis. Respondents overwhelmingly believe that companies value consumer satisfaction more than rider safety (mean — 4.22). Most tellingly, the statement regarding whether ultra-fast delivery is “ethically justified” received the lowest score in the entire study (mean — 1.25), indicating that the riders themselves view the 10-minute promise as an inherently unethical business model. Interestingly, rest breaks were rated positively (3.96), suggesting that while companies provide time to rest, the pressure of the job remains the primary ethical grievance.

The first hypothesis serves as a statistical gateway to understanding the direct relationship between the 10-minute delivery mandate and its impact on the individual worker. This test is designed to determine if the pressure of the “ticking clock” serves as a significant stressor that actively degrades the quality of life and the occupational rights of delivery riders. In this context, well-being is viewed as a holistic construct encompassing physical safety on the road and psychological resilience in the face of constant deadlines. By testing this hypothesis, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence on whether the structural demands of 10-minute delivery constitute an inherent hazard to the workforce or whether the perceived pressures fall within the manageable limits of a standard service job.

Hypothesis 1 — the 10-minute delivery model has no significant impact on the well-being and rights of delivery riders

To test this, a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was performed on the composite stress and rights protection scores against a neutral value.

Table 3 Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test Results — Hypothesis 1

Variable	Mean stress/rights impact	p-value	Decision
Operational stress	3.09	0.180	Retain H01
Rights protection	2.58	0.001	Reject H01

While the overall stress mean (3.09) is close to neutral, individual items such as safety (3.80) and customer ratings (4.01) show highly significant negative impacts. Crucially, the mean for rights protection (2.58) is significantly below the neutral 3.0, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis regarding employee rights. The 10-minute model is perceived as a direct threat to the fundamental right to work safely.

The analysis leads to the rejection of the first null hypothesis, H01, particularly regarding the protection of employee rights. While the average level of generalised stress (3.09) sits near the neutral threshold, the data reveals specific and severe areas of concern. The delivery riders reported an alarmingly high level of stress stemming from customer rating systems (mean 4.01) and expressed a significant sense of physical danger when rushing to meet 10-minute deadlines (mean 3.80). Furthermore, the low score for the protection of workers' rights (mean 2.58) indicates that the ultra-fast delivery model creates an environment in which basic occupational safety is compromised. Therefore, it is concluded that the 10-minute delivery model exerts a substantial negative impact on the rights and well-being of the workforce, prioritising operational speed over the safety and security of the riders.

Objective 2: To analyse the conflict between consumer-centric “delight” metrics and the welfare standards provided to employees

The second objective centres on the inherent paradox of the “consumer-first” philosophy in the age of instant gratification. In the ultra-fast delivery sector, “consumer delight” is often measured by delivery speed and accuracy, yet this metric may conflict with employee welfare. This objective seeks to analyse this systemic tension, exploring whether the pursuit of peak customer satisfaction creates a “zero-sum game” where the rider’s safety and work–life balance are sacrificed for a few minutes of saved time. By evaluating the disconnect between corporate performance targets and on-the-ground working conditions, this study aims to provide a clearer picture of the trade-offs involved in maintaining a high-delight service model.

Analysis of Work Conditions and Stress

This section evaluates the physical and psychological pressures faced by riders.

Table 4 Mean Scores for Work Stress Indicators

Stress indicator	Mean score	Std. deviation	Rank
Stress caused by customer ratings	4.01	0.75	1
Feeling unsafe while rushing to meet deadlines	3.80	1.34	2
Feeling constant pressure of time	2.70	1.01	3
Negative impact on physical health	2.52	0.94	4
Negative impact on mental health	2.40	0.93	5

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The results show a striking disparity between general health perception and operational stress. While riders reported moderate levels of health impact (means approximately 2.4–2.5), they identified customer ratings (4.01) and safety risks during deadlines (3.80) as extreme pressure points. This suggests that while riders may not yet realise the long-term health toll, the immediate psychological stress of “being rated” and the physical danger of high-speed delivery are pervasive.

The second hypothesis examines the broader ethical landscape of the Q-commerce industry by testing the correlation between customer-centric metrics and workplace realities. It addresses a critical question in business ethics: can a model built on “ultra-speed” ever be truly humane and fair? This hypothesis posits a fundamental ethical conflict between the high expectations of the modern consumer and the labour standards afforded to those who fulfil them. Through this analysis, the research evaluates whether the “delight” experienced by the user is fundamentally rooted in a system that compromises the ethical treatment of the

employee, thereby challenging the long-term sustainability and social morality of the ultra-fast delivery industry.

Hypothesis 2 — There is no significant ethical conflict between consumer delight and the working conditions of employees in the ultra-fast delivery sector

Spearman’s Rank Correlation was computed between “consumer-centric pressure” and “humane conditions”.

Table 5 Spearman’s Rank Correlation Results — Hypothesis 2

Relationship	Correlation (r)	p-value	Decision
Customer priority vs. humane conditions	-0.081	0.413	Retain H02

The statistical test shows a weak correlation, suggesting that riders see these as two distinct problems. However, the descriptive data paints a different picture: the high score for “satisfaction over safety” (4.22) and the low score for “humane conditions” (2.62) demonstrate a clear qualitative tension. Riders feel their welfare is sacrificed for the consumer’s speed, even though the statistical link between the two survey items is not linear.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the descriptive findings provide a clear qualitative rejection of the null hypothesis H_2 , even though the statistical correlation between specific variables remained weak. The data highlights a profound ethical disconnect: respondents overwhelmingly believe that companies prioritise consumer satisfaction far above employee safety, with a high mean score of 4.22. Most significantly, the ethical justification for the 10-minute delivery model was rated at only 1.25 on a 5-point scale, the lowest value in the study. This suggests that, from the employees’ perspective, there is an inherent and irreconcilable conflict between the “delight” of the consumer and the “humane treatment” of the worker. The conclusion is that the current ultra-fast delivery sector operates in an ethical vacuum, where the speed of service is fundamentally at odds with the welfare and dignity of the people who provide it.

Issues Faced by the Employees

1. Riders reported that their salaries are low and inconsistent, making it difficult to maintain financial stability.
2. Safety remains the most serious concern, as the company provides no safety equipment and riders are expected to arrange these essentials themselves. Riders also experience discrepancies between the estimated delivery time shown on the map and the actual distance to the customer’s residence, which can be an additional 500 metres to 1 kilometre beyond the marked location.
3. The company informed riders that winter jackets would be provided; however, the commitment was not fulfilled.
4. Job security is limited, as even minor mistakes could lead the company to block riders’ IDs within a short period, sometimes within three days.
5. Riders do not receive adequate healthcare facilities from the company.
6. Although a Medclaim policy exists, it is largely inaccessible to riders.
7. While medical checkups were conducted, riders bore the cost of medicines themselves.
8. Riders are required to strictly adhere to delivery deadlines, often under significant pressure.

Suggestions

1. The company should ensure fair and stable compensation by guaranteeing a minimum income for riders.
2. The company should improve rider safety measures by providing helmets, jackets, rain gear, and first-aid kits, and should improve location mapping accuracy by ensuring proper GPS signal quality.
3. The company should fulfil promised benefits within a fixed timeline to build employee trust & gain loyalty.

4. Companies should strengthen job security and adopt fair disciplinary processes by using a warning system rather than imposing punitive actions directly.
5. The company should provide accessible healthcare support for all delivery workers.
6. The company should provide Mediclaim for delivery workers, simplify access to Mediclaim policies, and cover medical expenses in the event of casualties, reducing the financial burden on riders.
7. The company should set realistic deadlines and work conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides a stark revelation of the ethical friction inherent in the 10-minute delivery ecosystem. The analysis of 105 delivery riders indicates that while the quick commerce model is a triumph of logistics for the consumer, it operates at a high moral cost to the workforce. The data demonstrates that riders are caught in a high-pressure environment where customer ratings and aggressive deadlines create a constant state of operational stress and physical risk. The most profound takeaway from the study is the overwhelming consensus among workers that the 10-minute promise is not ethically justifiable, as it systematically prioritises “consumer delight” over the fundamental right to a safe and humane working environment. Moving forward, the sustainability of this model depends on a shift in corporate philosophy from a narrow focus on speed to a broader commitment to worker welfare. This includes re-evaluating punitive rating systems and implementing safety-first protocols that protect riders’ dignity. Ultimately, for the ultra-fast delivery sector to mature, it must bridge the ethical gap between the convenience it offers the public and the vulnerability it imposes on its employees.

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