

Discussion on Driver Behavior Norms and Platform Optimization Paths for Ride-Hailing Services from the Perspective of Destination Discrimination

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Abstract

Ride-hailing services have now become an important mode of urban transportation. However, frequent occurrences of drivers selectively accepting orders or refusing passengers based on the attractiveness of the destination have led to “destination discrimination,” which infringes on passengers’ rights and hinders the healthy development of the industry. Based on labor process theory and the social construction perspective of algorithmic discrimination, this paper integrates existing empirical research on platform labor control to analyze the generation logic, social impact, and governance path of destination discrimination. It extends research on algorithmic discrimination from the price dimension to the spatial dimension, proposes the concept of “destination discrimination,” and constructs a dual governance framework of “driver behavior norms + platform algorithm optimization.” Destination discrimination is the result of the combined effects of platform algorithm logic and drivers’ cost rationality. It requires coordinated governance through strengthening drivers’ professional ethics, establishing compensation and incentive mechanisms, improving algorithm transparency, and reconstructing the evaluation system to promote the development of the platform economy towards fairness and justice.

Keywords

destination discrimination, ride-hailing drivers, algorithm control, behavioral norms, platform optimization, algorithmic justice

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of the sharing economy has made ride-hailing a key component of urban public transportation systems. Ride-hailing services have greatly improved people’s urban travel experience with their convenience and flexibility, especially during peak hours and in areas where public transportation is insufficient, becoming an important supplement to citizens’ travel [1,2]. However, while the ride-hailing industry has developed rapidly, a series of service quality issues have gradually emerged. In urban travel scenarios, passengers often find it difficult to hail a taxi during peak hours, in remote areas, and on congested roads. Drivers frequently refuse passengers, cancel orders, or force passengers to get off midway, citing reasons

such as “the destination is too close,” “the road conditions are bad,” or “it’s too far to be worthwhile.” In August 2023, a passenger in Chongqing changed his destination to a nearby hotel, but the driver refused to change it, saying it was “too close and not profitable.” The two were deadlocked in the car, and the passenger eventually complained to the traffic enforcement department. The matter was finally resolved with the assistance of the relevant departments. In September 2020, a passenger in Nanjing was kicked out of the car by a driver from the Huaxiaozhu platform after only 800 meters because the destination was “too far and not worth it.” The driver also demanded the full fare. In July 2025, a 12-year-old boy in Tianjin was kicked out of a ride-hailing car during a rainstorm by a driver who claimed that the next order would be late. The driver even demanded a 4 yuan “cancellation fee.” In March 2025, a passenger from Korla, Xinjiang, took a Didi Hitch ride with two children to Bohu County. Halfway through the journey, the driver asked for an extra “return trip empty car fee,” which the passenger refused. He then abandoned the four of them in a remote village. The passenger had to walk four or five kilometers with the children and luggage to escape the situation. In addition, many drivers, after accepting an order, will directly contact the passenger to request cancellation when they find that the destination is in a remote mountainous area with no return trip available, arguing that “driving dozens of kilometers back without passengers is really not an option.”

These situations are not isolated incidents, but rather a common phenomenon of “destination discrimination” in the ride-hailing industry. This refers to the practice of drivers providing differentiated services to passengers based on factors such as expected revenue, road conditions, and travel time associated with the destination of the order. From the perspective of the types of algorithmic discrimination, this is a specific manifestation of geographical location-based algorithmic price discrimination in travel services [3]. This phenomenon is jointly generated by platform algorithm control and driver autonomous selection, and is a spatial manifestation of “big data price discrimination” in the travel field [4]. Current research mainly focuses on the control mechanism of platform algorithms over workers and the legal regulation path of algorithm discrimination. However, there is a lack of discussion on the mechanism by which ride-hailing platform algorithms and drivers’ autonomous choices jointly cause “destination discrimination” and the impact of this phenomenon on passengers’ right to fair travel.

Existing literature has noted the labor control issues in platform employment [5,6] and the dual impact of algorithmic power on workers and consumers [7,8], but “destination discrimination”, as an intersecting issue connecting labor control and consumer rights, has not yet been fully theorized. Destination discrimination not only directly infringes on the rights of individual passengers, but also exacerbates and solidifies the unequal pattern of urban spatial development. This article integrates the labor process theory and the social construction perspective of algorithmic discrimination, and combine the above real cases with existing empirical research results to focus on analyzing the three core issues of “how destination discrimination occurs,” “what practical impacts are produced” and “how to achieve collaborative governance of platform algorithm optimization and driver behavioral norms.” It can provide a new theoretical perspective for platform labor governance and promote the development of algorithms for good and the realization of social equity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Main Conclusions of Existing Research

2.1.1 Research on Algorithmic Discrimination and Platform Power

There is already abundant research on algorithmic discrimination. Scholars generally believe that algorithms are not neutral technical tools, but value carriers embedded in the social power structure, and will push different content to different groups of people.

Chen Zhibin and Dawa Dolma pointed out that the lack of platform, corporate and social responsibility is an important reason why algorithmic price discrimination is formed through mechanisms such as data collection, consumer profiling, personalized pricing and recommendations [1]. Huang Juan’s research further revealed that algorithmic discrimination and “big data familiarity” in the online ride-hailing market infringe on consumers’ rights to fair transactions and security. The platform relies on its advantages in data, technology, and capital to present a “winner-takes-all” effect [9].

Wu Ying proposed from a macro perspective that algorithmic power has gone beyond the scope of technical tools and has become a new form of power that can influence or even replace public power decision-making. Its transnational expansion has had a negative impact on the economic, political and social fields [10]. From the perspective of supervision, Xiao Hongjun and Shang Huichen proposed that the logical starting point of platform algorithm supervision stems from the non-neutrality of algorithm operation, the risk of algorithm technology development, and the ambiguity of platform supervision [4].

Regarding the issue of constitutional governance of algorithmic power, Zhang Wenlong proposed that digital power poses a challenge to the three levels of sovereignty, governance and human rights of modern political constitutions. He advocated the replacement of traditional political constitutional thinking with the theory of “social constitutional governance” to tame digital power [3]. From the perspective of government governance, Yang Fengyi and Sun Ping pointed out that social changes led by digital technology have caused conflicts between “digital governance” and “rule of law” in the same field, which are manifested in the practical contradiction between technology first and legislative lag, the procedural conflict between platform rules and law-based administration, and the value trade-off between pursuing convenience and efficiency and preventing the abuse of power [11]. Huang Wenyi and Sun Zheyue proposed the “meta-regulation” approach in the practical path of algorithmic governance. They believed that the meta-regulation theory not only respects the primacy and dominant position of self-regulation of Internet platforms, but also advocates the use of government re-regulation to make up for or eliminate the shortcomings of platform self-regulation [12]. Chen Quanzhen advocated building a platform economic governance model of “soft and hard collaboration” to achieve an organic combination of government supervision and platform autonomy [8].

2.1.2 Research on Platform Labor Process and Algorithm Control

There are also rich results in platform labor research. Luo Qi and Chen Jiahui conducted a survey on the food delivery platform and pointed out that the organizational management of the platform designed for commercial business objectives relatively emphasizes technology and neglects labor. Workers responded to the platform management model with actions such as “circular flow” and “high-priced part-time jobs.” The study further pointed out that platform labor mobility not only creates labor instability, but also brings continuous pressure to platform operating entities, especially agents and their sites [13]. Wei Haitao systematically elaborated on the challenges of platform workers to traditional labor process theory from the perspective of labor process theory. Platform workers show new characteristics such as separation from traditional employment security, separation of labor results and organizational ownership, and centralized deployment of production processes by algorithms. Seven major issues such as labor control, skill weakening, resistance behavior, emotional labor, and autonomy have been derived [7].

Research generally believes that information asymmetry and power imbalance caused by algorithmic black boxes are important reasons for the impact of algorithmic control on workers. From the perspective of Marxist political economics, Wang Zenan proposed that digital platforms achieve systematic “value deprivation” through the dual mechanisms of “labor control” and “data monopoly.” Platforms achieve sophisticated control of labor through algorithmic management and “manufacturing consent,” and privatize data and obtain “platform rent” through “digital enclosure” [14]. Based on their research on AI data annotators, Lu Gaofeng and Yao Zhiyu found that their labor process experienced “re-intermediation control of risk transfer and power imbalance, cognitive control of standardized output and value alienation, and numerical control of time manipulation and reward and punishment management.” The three control mechanisms intertwined and interacted, showing a hybrid control phenomenon. Based on this, they proposed a “mixed control framework” [15]. Huang Zaisheng made an in-depth analysis of the “self-exploitation” mechanism of digital workers controlled by algorithms. They pointed out that the platform creates workers’ “agreement” through value co-creation myths, digital excess games, digital piece wages, and customer rating mechanisms, which makes workers fall into the dilemma of “voluntary submission” and “self-exploitation” [6].

Regarding workers’ coping strategies, research by Luo Qi and Chen Jiahui found that platform workers would use various methods to fight against algorithms, but this expression of autonomy intensifies the instability and internal differentiation of the labor market [13]. From the perspective of organizational restructuring, Li Yanhao, Su Jun, and Wei Yuming revealed the organizational restructuring characteristics of digital platform workers from “unit people” to “social people,” from “other organizations” to “self-organization,” and from “embedding” and “disembedding” to “re-embedding” [16]. Wu Wenfang and Wang

Ruihong proposed that platform workers have dual identities of “workers” and “users,” and a user protection mechanism for platform workers should be built through consumer rights protection, personal information protection, and antitrust law protection [2].

2.1.3 Research on Spatial and Digital Inequality

Research on platform urbanism reveals that digital platforms are not neutral technologies that “deterritorialize” but redefine spatial distance and value through algorithms and data, creating a new center-periphery pattern. Based on a field survey of online merchants in Yiwu, Zhejiang, Qian Linliang found that although e-commerce technology has eliminated regional barriers to commodity transactions to a certain extent, online merchants’ “free shipping country”-style regional hierarchical concept has caused them to adopt differentiated hospitality methods for consumers in different regions. It creates a new differentiated pattern of online shopping consumption [17]. This finding has important reference significance for understanding the reproduction of spatial inequality in online ride-hailing travel services. Online shopping consumers in remote areas face higher shipping costs and worse services. Online ride-hailing passengers in remote areas also face a higher probability of being refused rides and longer waiting times. Bai Shizhen, Xu Wenhui, and Jiang Man used a tripartite evolutionary game model to analyze the “killing of familiarity” behavior of big data on e-commerce platforms, and pointed out that active government supervision and consumer rights protection are the key to promoting normal platform pricing. Increasing the amount of punishment and compensation can effectively reduce companies’ “killing of familiarity” pricing [18]. Such an analysis framework provides ideas for the understanding and governance of algorithmic discrimination on online ride-hailing platforms.

2.2 Shortcomings of Existing Research

Although existing research has accumulated rich results in aspects such as algorithmic discrimination, platform labor process, and spatial inequality and provided an important theoretical foundation, there are still shortcomings. First, existing research lacks a systematic definition and mechanism analysis of “destination discrimination”. Existing research on algorithmic discrimination mostly focuses on price discrimination based on user identity, price differential pricing based on user location, and discrimination based on gender, race and other factors. Although Qian Linliang’s research revealed the “differential order pattern” type of spatial hierarchy in the e-commerce field [17], there was no specific study on the issue of selective services in the field of travel services. Although some studies have touched on phenomena such as the urban-rural service gap and insufficient transport capacity in marginal areas, they have not taken “destination discrimination” as an independent research object.

Secondly, governance research mostly presents a single perspective. It fails to effectively connect drivers’ rational choices with platform algorithm optimization. Existing research on governance countermeasures often starts from a single subject, and rarely examines the economic rationality of driver behavioral choices and the design logic of platform algorithm rules at the same time, analyzing how the two jointly generate destination discrimination in their interaction. In fact, drivers refuse to take orders to remote areas for cost-benefit considerations, just as Qian Linliang revealed the economic rationality of online merchants who believe that “making extra delivery fees is not profitable” for consumers in remote areas [17]. The platform’s algorithm’s singular pursuit of “efficiency” provides the technical conditions for this selective service. These two aspects should not be viewed in isolation.

Third, labor control research rarely links the structural relationship between driver vulnerability and the damage to passengers’ rights and interests, and lacks an integrated analysis framework. While existing research on the labor process has profoundly revealed the multiple controls that platforms exert over workers and the resulting dilemma of worker subjectivity [10,11,13,14,20], it has mostly treated workers as the sole object of analysis and rarely conducted deeper inquiries. When workers’ bargaining space and autonomy are compressed, will this pressure be passed on to passengers? What are the consequences? Luo Qi and Chen Jiahui’s research pointed out that platform labor mobility “not only creates labor instability, but also brings continuous pressure to platform operating entities, especially agents and their sites” [13]. But they did not further explore whether and how this pressure is transmitted to passengers. In fact, destination discrimination is a typical example of the structural connection between the infringement of workers’ rights and the infringement of passengers’ rights: the dilemma of drivers being “trapped in the system” by the algorithm [20] and the dilemma of remote

passengers being “forgotten” by the system are essentially two sides of the same structure. However, existing research has not yet established a theoretical framework that integrates the two.

2.3 Theoretical Contribution of This Study

This article clearly defines the concept of “destination discrimination” and constructs a multi-level analysis framework of its formation mechanism. This article systematically sorts out algorithmic discrimination theory and spatial justice theory, expands the research on algorithmic discrimination to the spatial dimension, proposes a clear definition of “destination discrimination,” and explains its formation mechanism from three levels: platform algorithm logic, driver behavioral choices, and social spatial structure. Referring to the spatial imagination of “differential order pattern” in e-commerce economy revealed by Qian Linliang [17], this article believes that there is also a similar spatial hierarchy cognition of concentric circles with e-commerce industry centers such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai as the “center” in ride-hailing services. However, the basis for the division is not whether “free shipping” is included, but whether the destination is “remote” and “worth picking up.” This article fills the gaps in conceptual definition and theoretical analysis in this field.

This article integrates rational driver choices with platform algorithm optimization to construct a dual governance framework. This study attempts to break away from the single subject perspective of governance research and incorporate driver behavior norms and platform algorithm optimization into a unified governance framework. It acknowledges the real constraints of drivers’ cost-benefit considerations on their behavioral choices, which constitutes the micro-foundation of “economic rationality” [13]; and it also focuses on the optimizable space of algorithm rule design, which involves the institutional reconstruction of platform power at the level of “quasi-legislative power” and “quasi-administrative power” [7], seeking a governance breakthrough in the interaction of the two dimensions.

This article integrates the two research traditions of labor control and spatial justice to establish an integrated analytical perspective. This paper attempts to examine the controlled dilemma of platform workers and the excluded dilemma of remote passengers under the same structure, revealing the essence of destination discrimination as a “pressure transmission chain.” That is, the platform’s algorithmic control over workers (“labor control”) [10,11] and the workers’ selective refusal to carry remote passengers (“spatial exclusion”) [17] are the same power structure reflected in different subjects. In this way, this study builds a bridge for dialogue between labor process research and spatial justice research.

2.4 Social Significance of This Study

From the perspective of social fairness and justice, travel services are the basic prerequisite for urban residents to participate in social and economic life. As Qian Linliang revealed, the “differential order pattern” in the e-commerce economy causes consumers in remote areas to bear higher costs and receive worse services during online shopping [17]. In the same way, if residents in remote areas are excluded from convenient travel services due to spatial discrimination under algorithmic logic in online car-hailing travel services, this actually constitutes a structural deprivation of rights. Through a systematic analysis of destination discrimination, this study reveals the specific operating mechanism of spatial inequality in the algorithmic era, and provides academic support for maintaining social fairness and justice.

From the perspective of protecting workers’ rights and interests, the phenomenon of destination discrimination reflects the subjectivity dilemma of platform workers under the control of algorithms. Research by Luo Qi and Chen Jiahui shows that the organizational management model of platform capital that “emphasizes technology over labor” suppresses workers’ autonomy [13]. Huang Zaisheng further revealed that under the control of algorithms, workers fall into the survival dilemma of “self-exploitation” [20]. The underlying reason why drivers selectively accept orders lies in the algorithm’s extreme pursuit of efficiency and the flaws in the labor compensation mechanism. This study reveals this structural dilemma and helps promote the improvement of the platform labor security system.

From the perspective of digital social governance, platform economy has become an important field of urban governance. How to regulate the exercise of platform power and ensure fair access to public travel services is an unavoidable issue in digital social governance. The “meta-regulation” approach proposed by Huang Wenyi and Sun Zheyue [7] and the “hard-software synergy” governance model advocated by Chen Quanzhen [8] provide institutional design reference for this study. The dual governance framework proposed

in this study aims to provide policy reference for promoting the platform economy for good and realizing effective governance of the digital society.

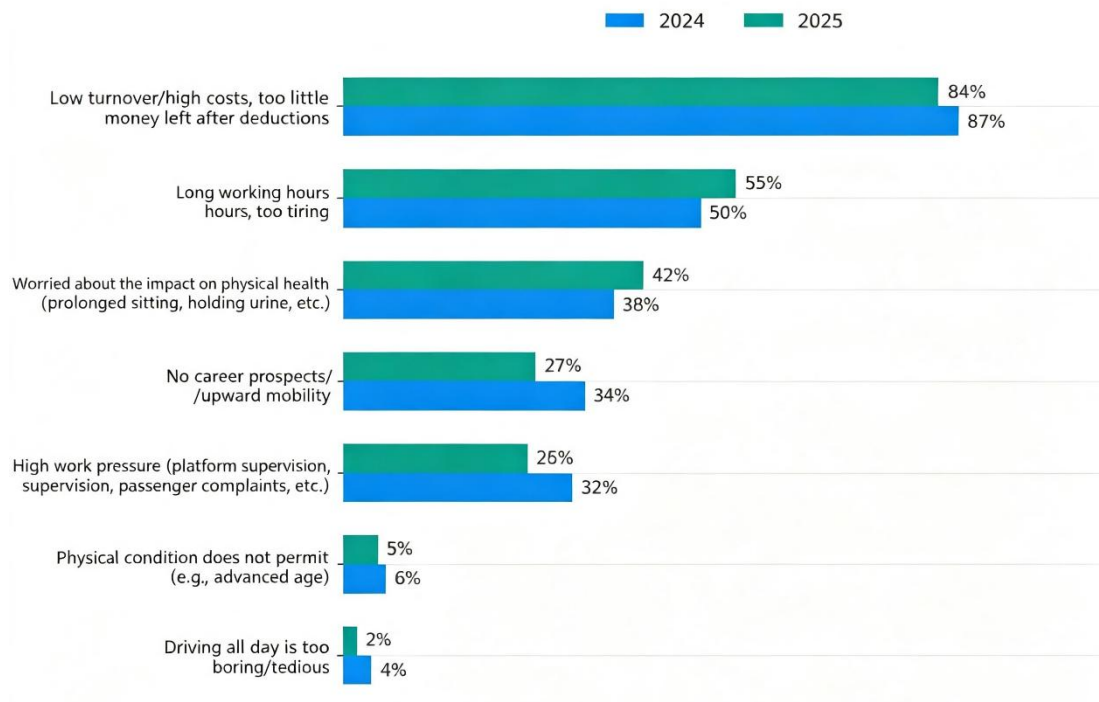
From the perspective of academic value, this study expands the research on algorithmic discrimination to the spatial dimension and integrates labor process theory and spatial justice theory, which helps to enrich the theoretical toolbox of platform economic research and provides analytical concepts and theoretical references for subsequent related research.

3. Origins of Destination Discrimination

3.1 Driver Behavior: Rational Choice under Cost Pressure

Online ride-hailing drivers are under multiple pressures such as high sunk costs, platform commissions, and operational losses. They will calculate the cost and benefit of orders, and will choose to refuse rides, pick orders, and increase fares halfway to cope with the superposition of empty returns, time and opportunity costs. Most existing studies attribute the high mobility of platform practitioners to the result of capital control, but in fact mobility is the result of the joint action of capital management and labor autonomy. Workers protect their own income by switching back and forth between dedicated delivery and crowdsourcing modes, and selectively accepting orders. Digital platform workers have completed the identity transformation from “unit workers” to “social workers” under the influence of the market, and have stronger independence and the ability to deal with risks [2,13,16].

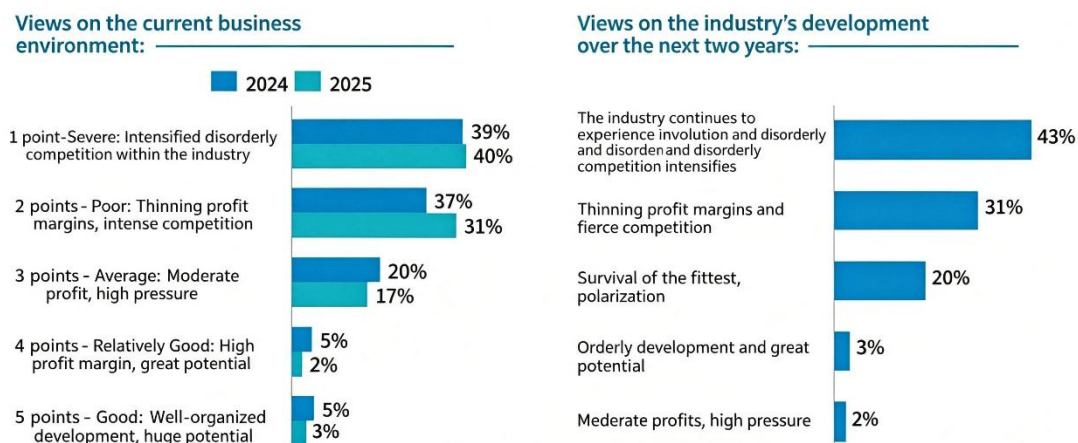
Figure 1: Reasons for the Loss of Current Drivers



As shown in Figure 1, data from the 2025 Online Ride-hailing Industry Transportation Capacity Enterprises and Drivers Survey Report show that between 2024 and 2025, people choose to leave their jobs due to “low turnover, high costs, and too little money.” Drivers accounted for 87% → 84%, always ranking first. The proportion of “working long hours and being too tired” increased from 50% to 55%, and “worry about affecting health (sitting for a long time, holding urine, etc.)” also increased from 38% to 42%. The superposition of cost-benefit imbalance and physical wear and tear is the core reason for the continued increase in driver turnover. When income continues to approach the cost line and hourly wages are lower than the local minimum wage, “resistance” such as refusing rides and choosing orders becomes an inevitable choice for drivers to survive within the framework of the platform.

The driver's judgment of the order value is the same as the logic that "areas of "free shipping countries" such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai are regarded as high-value centers, while areas further away are classified as low-value edges" [17]. Based on this spatial imagination, drivers will deliberately avoid short-distance low-yield orders and long-distance high-altitude risky orders, and may even abandon passengers midway and force fare increases. Platform assessment indicators further shape drivers' decision-making logic, making them prioritize platform rules over service ethics and passenger safety. Under the control of algorithms, workers are trapped in "self-exploitation." Through the performance illusion of "more work, more gain" and gamification incentives, they internalize the desire for capital into their own desire to create wealth [6,14]. Algorithmic control increases labor risks in the employment process of "online contract workers," increases their labor intensity, and reduces their freedom of employment choice [19].

Figure 2: Transport Capacity Companies' Views on the Industry's Operating Environment and Development Trends



However, this "self-exploitation" has not resulted in sustainable career prospects. As shown in Figure 2, in the 2025 Online Ride-hailing Industry Capacity Enterprises and Drivers Survey Report, drivers' comprehensive evaluation of career development prospects continues to deteriorate - the proportion of those who rated 1 (bad) and 2 (poor) climbed from 71% in 2024 to 77% in 2025, while the proportion of those who rated 4 (good) and 5 (good) dropped from 10% to only 5%. This means that more than three-quarters of drivers are pessimistic about their career prospects. The "personalized" shaping of workers by the algorithmic black box has led to internal differentiation among workers, making it difficult to form unified standards among individuals, and the lack of a common target for rights protection [21]. However, workers' autonomy still exists, but it mainly manifests itself in the selection of short-term favorable options within the given framework of the platform, which has obvious limitations [9]. When career prospects continue to decline and mobility becomes the norm, drivers increasingly put short-term gains ahead of service ethics when making decisions about taking orders. This is not a moral aberration, but a rational response for individuals to survive under the double squeeze of cost structure and algorithmic rules.

3.2 Passenger Situation: Weak Position under Information Asymmetry

Passengers are unaware of the platform's algorithm rules and cannot know the real reasons for order downgrades or drivers' malicious cancellations. This information asymmetry is the core reason why passengers are in a weak position in transactions [1,2]. The operating model of ride-hailing aggregation platforms further exacerbates this industry pain point. According to a survey by China Youth Daily in July 2025, aggregation platforms lack supervision over third-party ride-hailing companies that have joined them. Passengers often do not receive effective handling after complaining about issues such as arbitrary charges. When passengers initiate rights protection, aggregation platforms and third-party service providers shirk their responsibilities, making it impossible for passengers to identify the responsible party. The unclear division of rights and responsibilities is an important source of information asymmetry on the passenger side.

Data analysis from the Black Cat Complaint Platform clearly reveals the information blind spots passengers face throughout the entire ride-hailing transaction process. Ride-hailing complaints mainly fall into two categories: passenger complaints focus on fare disputes and travel safety issues, while driver complaints focus

on platform governance loopholes. Specifically, passengers cannot verify vehicle qualifications and driver identities before their trip, struggle to determine if fare calculations are compliant during the ride, and are unable to ascertain the true reasons behind order cancellations or refusal of service. This lack of information throughout the entire process leaves passengers in a consistently passive position.

Furthermore, the service agreements of these aggregation platforms legitimize this unreasonable information asymmetry. The service agreements of platforms like Baidu Maps and Gaode Maps stipulate that disputes and losses arising from third-party ride-hailing services must be borne by the passenger and the third-party service provider through negotiation. The platform can only provide non-mandatory assistance, without clearly defining the specific content and scope of such assistance. Cheng Cheng, director of the Transportation Digitalization Center at Tongji University's China Transportation Research Institute, points out that these vaguely defined terms of agreement significantly increase the difficulty for passengers to protect their rights.

The common behavior of drivers inducing passengers to cancel orders is a typical manifestation of information asymmetry in daily travel transactions. According to a case investigated by China Youth Daily, after Ms. Wang from Chengdu placed an order through an aggregation platform, the driver asked her to cancel the order because the distance to receive the order was too far. However, the platform set up differentiated rules: passengers need to pay a cancellation fee of 3 yuan if they cancel on their own initiative. If the driver cancels on his own, he does not need to bear the cost and can directly pass the default price to the passenger. In the end, after waiting for a long time, Ms. Wang had her order canceled by the driver in person. She was unable to know the real reason why the driver refused the order throughout the process, and could only passively accept the result.

A more prominent information barrier lies in the verification of vehicle and driver qualifications, directly threatening passenger safety. Investigations have revealed widespread discrepancies between the actual vehicles accepted and the online registration information on ride-hailing platforms, a clear violation of regulations governing ride-hailing services. An undercover investigation by reporters at several ride-hailing service centers in Harbin confirmed that some agencies can illegally alter vehicle ages and erase drivers' criminal records, resulting in a significant discrepancy between the compliant ride-hailing information passengers see when placing an order and the actual situation. Unlicensed vehicles, vehicles with counterfeit license plates, and drivers with criminal records are frequently seen accepting orders, leaving passengers in a comprehensive information blind spot.

According to data from the Black Cat Complaint Platform published by China Youth Daily on July 13, 2025, nearly 30 days ago, Huaxiaozhu Taxi received 1,819 complaints, and Gaode Map Taxi received 925 complaints. The complaints mainly covered issues such as drivers overcharging, deliberately taking longer routes, poor service attitude, and unsuccessful attempts to seek redress. However, the high number of complaints has not forced the industry to rectify its problems. The core reason is the significant trend of small-amount disputes in ride-hailing services. As shown in Figure 3, complaints under 30 yuan accounted for 52.09%, while complaints between 30 and 50 yuan, 50 and 100 yuan, and 100 and 200 yuan accounted for 13.61%, 11.23%, and 9.29% respectively. Complaints over 200 yuan accounted for only 13.78%. Because the procedural and time costs for passengers to seek redress far exceed the losses incurred, most passengers choose not to pursue legal action. This is a key reason why small-amount infringements occur frequently in the industry and no one is held accountable.

From the perspective of the user structure of complaints, the difficulties faced by ride-hailing users in protecting their rights exhibit distinct group characteristics. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of ride-hailing complainants are young people, with users aged 20-30 accounting for 62.95%, those aged 31-40 accounting for 24.22%, those under 20 accounting for 8.26%, and those over 41 accounting for only 4.57% in total. As the core user group of ride-hailing services, young people generally lack experience and ability in protecting their rights, making them the main group that actively abandons pursuing accountability due to the pressure of cost-effective rights protection.

In summary, passengers face difficulties in protecting their rights throughout the entire ride-hailing transaction process: it is impossible to verify qualifications when placing an order, it is impossible to verify the fare for the trip, it is impossible to find out the cause of abnormal orders, and it is impossible to hold anyone accountable for the loss of rights. In addition, the appeal process is cumbersome, the evidence is difficult to obtain, and the cost of protecting rights is high, so most passengers ultimately choose to remain silent. Among

them, the channels for protecting rights for vulnerable groups such as minors and passengers in remote areas are more limited. At the same time, the platform's internal appeal handling is insufficient and the compensation standards are too low, which cannot effectively restrain violations [9].

Figure 3: Distribution of Complaint Amounts

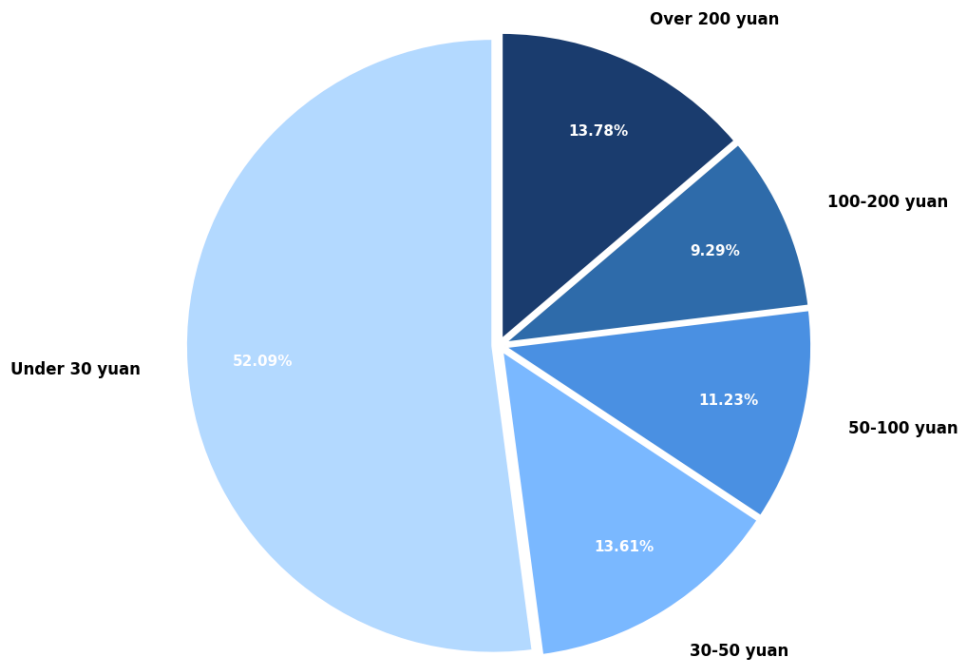
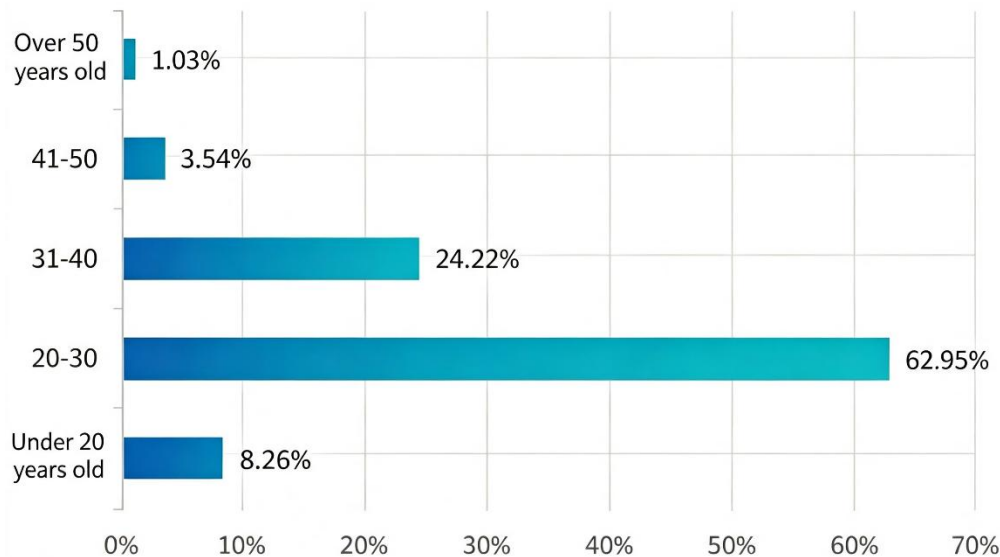


Figure 4: Age Distribution of Users Who Complain about Ride-hailing Services



In essence, the behavior of drivers transferring the cost of breach of contract by relying on the information gap of the platform stems from the unbalanced transaction system dominated by the platform. Both passengers and drivers are the weak groups under the control of platform rules [1]. Digital platforms rely on their technological advantages to form “private power.” By replacing traditional legal norms with code rules, they have quasi-legislative, quasi-administrative and quasi-judicial control authority, which ordinary users find difficult to resist [3,11]. At the same time, the “de-labor relations” characteristic of the platform economy allows the platform to avoid employer responsibility while organizing ride-hailing services, further weakening the basis for the protection of passengers’ rights [7]. From the perspective of value, the platform acquires passenger travel data free of charge through “digital land grabbing” and transforms user data into its own

surplus value [14]. Under the combined influence of algorithmic bias and traffic logic, the imbalance of the distribution of discourse power in global cyberspace has been further aggravated [20]. In the collaborative governance system, effective consumer rights protection is the key to regulating platform pricing and rectifying industry order. However, the high cost of rights protection and the difficulty of proof have led most consumers to give up their rights protection, and industry chaos continues to proliferate [18].

4. Consequences of Destination Discrimination

4.1 For Passengers: Infringement of Their Right to Travel and Right to Fair Trade

Destination discrimination leads to longer waiting times and reduced service availability for passengers in remote areas and on short-distance trips, directly infringing on their right to travel and right to fair trade. The algorithm's ranking of spatial value is implemented through the driver's behavioral choices, making discriminatory behavior more covert and structured [1]. This geographically based differential treatment is similar to the logic of the marginalization of consumers in remote areas in the "free shipping country" phenomenon in the e-commerce field [17].

Data from a field survey of ride-hailing services conducted by Sun Jinyun's team at Fudan University in five major cities confirms the structural contradiction of uneven distribution of travel resources. As shown in Figure 5, the response time of ride-hailing services varies significantly in different scenarios. The average response time during the morning rush hour in Beijing is as high as 32.5 minutes, while in Shenzhen it is only 1.5 minutes during the off-peak hours. Because the algorithm black box obscures the operating logic behind the differential treatment, passengers cannot identify the existence of discrimination based solely on the waiting time. Passengers cannot know the algorithm rules of the platform's order assignment weight and capacity allocation, and it is difficult to distinguish whether the long waiting time is a normal fluctuation in market supply and demand or a destination-oriented structural discrimination [10]. Even if they perceive the differential treatment, they give up on seeking redress because it is difficult to obtain the platform's original algorithm data and the cost of obtaining evidence is high [18]. In extreme weather and remote road sections, such discriminatory behavior will further threaten the personal safety and basic survival rights of passengers, widening the gap in travel services between urban and rural areas and the outskirts of urban areas. This reflects that the platform has formed a "value deprivation" closed loop through algorithm control and data monopoly, making the systemic damage to passengers' rights an inherent component of the platform's capital appreciation [14].

At the same time, algorithmic discrimination is precise, complex, and amplifying. The platform can accurately implement "price discrimination" against individuals. The algorithm black box makes it difficult for people to understand the reasons for discrimination. The ultra-large scale of algorithm operation makes the consequences of discrimination spread from individuals to the community [3]. As shown in Figure 6, the average waiting time for passengers during Shanghai's evening peak hours reached 13.7 minutes, and the waiting time during Chongqing's evening peak hours was 10.4 minutes. It can be seen that waiting times increased significantly during peak periods. Within the same city, orders placed in suburban, short-distance, and remote destinations are more likely to encounter long waiting times. Guided by algorithmic revenue, drivers proactively prioritize high-yield long-distance orders in the city center and avoid low-yield remote orders. This ultimately leads to a continued decline in the availability of travel services in peripheral areas, and geographical differences translate into substantial travel treatment gaps.

4.2 For Drivers: Internal Differentiation and Job Burnout

Experienced drivers selectively pick and choose high-value orders, while novice and compliant drivers are forced to accept the remaining low-value orders, exacerbating income disparity within the group. This income disparity within the driver group is well-documented in empirical data. A 2025 study published by Tsinghua University's School of Environment, titled *An Empirical Study on the Impact of New Energy Vehicles on the Ride-Hailing Industry*, shows that ride-hailing drivers' average monthly income exceeds 8,000 yuan, but significant group differences exist.

Figure 5: Online Ride-hailing Response Time in Various Cities during Different Periods (minutes) N=819

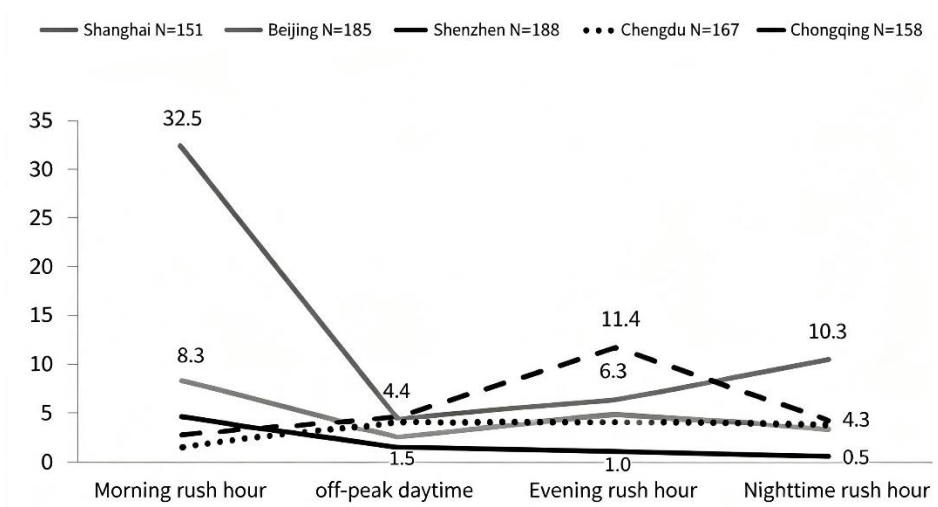


Figure 6: Overall Passenger Waiting Time (minutes) N=819

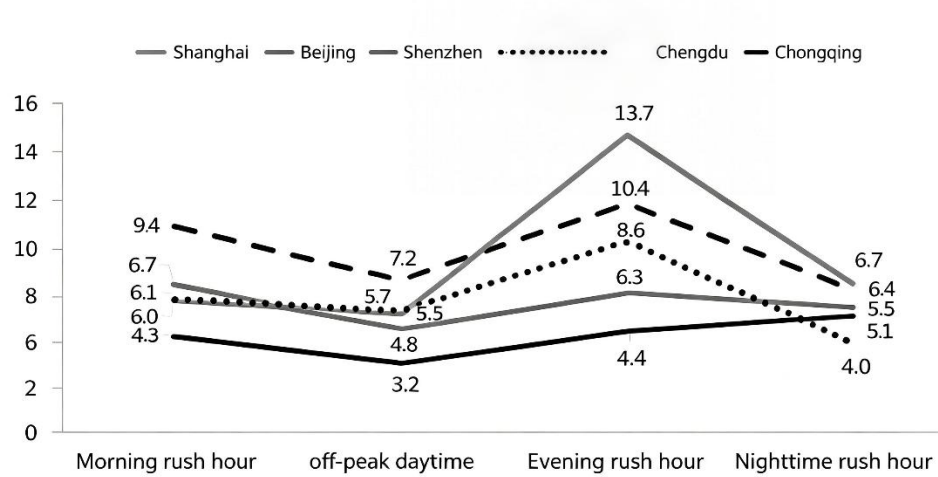


Figure 7: Comparison of the Number of Ride-hailing Drivers, Their Income, and the Number of Orders Received by Different Age Groups

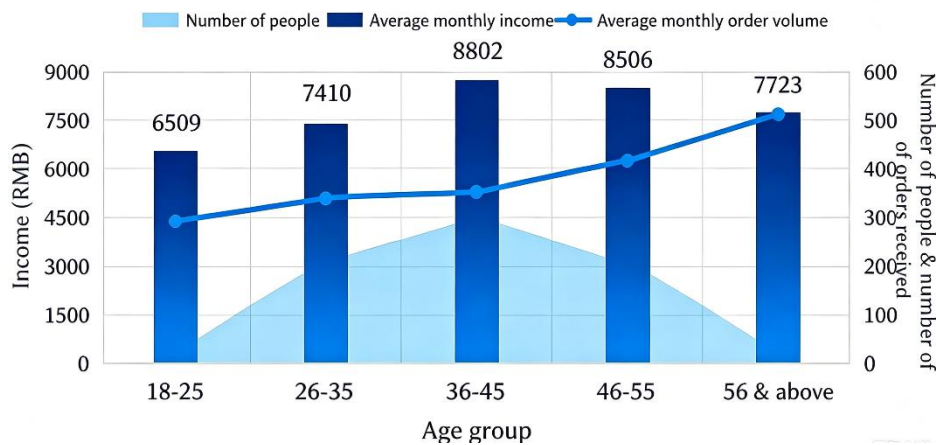


Figure 7 shows a significant difference in average monthly income among drivers of different age groups. Drivers aged 18-25 take an average of 320 orders per month, earning approximately 9,450 yuan, while drivers aged 56 and above take an average of 650 orders per month, earning only 7,723 yuan. The latter, with more

than twice the number of orders, earns less than 82% of the income of the former, with a difference of 2.48 times in the average value per order.

Figure 8: Comparison of the Number, Income and Order Volume of Online Ride-hailing Drivers with Different Education Levels

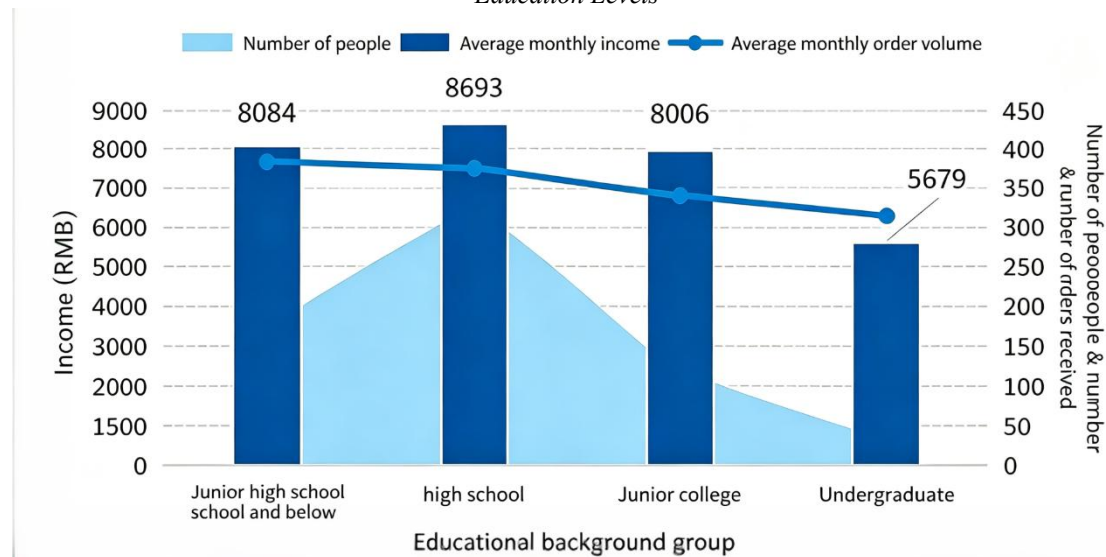


Figure 8 clearly illustrates the significant income stratification among ride-hailing drivers based on education level: a driver with a bachelor's degree completes 300 orders per month and earns 9,400 yuan, while a driver with a junior high school education or below earns only 4,800 yuan per month—almost double. This demonstrates that the industry's original “more work, more pay” distribution logic has been replaced by a new model that relies on experience to select orders for profit. Young, highly educated, experienced drivers leverage online communities to exchange order-taking techniques and prioritize high-value orders. Conversely, older, less educated, novice drivers can only accept the remaining low-priced orders, falling into the predicament of “the more they drive, the lower their income.” This directly confirms the reality of severe income disparity among drivers due to their selective order-taking behavior.

The sharing of experiences among online driver communities has further amplified and solidified the unhealthy trend of drivers picking and choosing orders in the industry. Online social channels for online ride-hailing drivers are mainly divided into two categories. One is the intermediary community established by the leasing company to manage and recruit drivers, and the other is the WeChat group chat formed by the drivers themselves. In these virtual communities, drivers share high-earning order times, popular order areas, and cross-platform income-generating techniques without reservation. This transforms order selection from individual experience into a collaborative operation across platforms and regions. Many drivers use WeChat groups and QQ groups to share information on order supply and demand across the entire network and to coordinate their actions. Some passengers who booked rides home were repeatedly delayed and refused rides without reason by multiple drivers in a group, with some drivers even saying they would only accept the ride if they paid more. This typical case clearly demonstrates that the act of picking orders has evolved from individuals independently selecting orders to a situation where a group of drivers jointly monopolize orders, rendering the platform's unified pricing rules for ride-sharing ineffective, and the market has completely shifted to a seller's market dominated by drivers.

This atomized, vicious competition among drivers, coupled with a long-term struggle with platform algorithms, not only causes drivers to neglect service quality but also continuously erodes their professional identity, ultimately leading to high staff turnover and widespread burnout in the industry. According to the 2025 Survey Report on Ride-Hailing Industry Capacity Companies and Drivers jointly released by 58.com and the China Urban Public Transport Association, 77% of new drivers have been on the job for less than six months on average, only 24% are experienced drivers with more than three years of experience, and a staggering 44% are novices with less than one year of experience. Despite 76% of drivers working more than 10 hours a day, their income has not increased accordingly, highlighting the growing disconnect between order volume and revenue in the industry: the percentage of drivers averaging more than 20 orders per day has risen

to 61%, but the percentage of drivers earning more than 400 yuan per day has fallen to 20%. This income imbalance has directly impacted the willingness to work in the industry; 35% of drivers are dissatisfied with their current jobs, and the percentage willing to commit to the ride-hailing industry long-term has dropped from 30% to 23%. Another 38% of drivers plan to switch careers, while 64% of job seekers explicitly stated they do not want to enter the industry. Ride-hailing is gradually transforming from a lucrative and flexible job in the public eye into a temporary, fallback career. In addition, over 70% of transportation companies are pessimistic about the industry's development over the next two years, and 57% of companies list high driver turnover as a core operational challenge. All these data together prove that the dual pressures of atomized competition and platform algorithm control continue to lower drivers' sense of professional belonging and exacerbate staff turnover and job burnout.

At its root, the platform's management model of "emphasizing technology and neglecting labor" is the underlying cause of a series of industry problems. Although workers can gain limited autonomy by frequently changing jobs and taking on high-paying part-time jobs, these coping mechanisms have further exacerbated the internal differentiation and overall instability of the labor market [13]. The organizational form of workers on digital platforms has changed from "other organizations" controlled by the platform to "self-organizations" formed by drivers on the Internet. Although this has created a new communication channel for workers, it has weakened the rights protection capabilities of traditional labor organizations to some extent [16]. Under the mixed control framework of multiple industry controls, drivers have to bear the triple constraints of platform algorithms, community relationships and rental intermediaries, and their own space for independent operation is continuously compressed [15]. The black box of algorithms causes information asymmetry and power imbalance between the platform and the driver, which intensifies the vicious competition among individual drivers and forces them to pursue personal order income while ignoring collective labor rights [17]. This also makes the protection of the rights and interests of online workers face two major crises: lack of algorithm transparency and lack of algorithm ethics [19].

4.3 For Society: The Solidification of Spatial Inequality

The algorithm stratifies urban space by value, labeling remote and underdeveloped areas as low-value spaces, resulting in a systemic shortage of service supply. In the second half of 2025, the reporter traveled between Kunming and Shangri-La by high-speed train six times, encountering difficulties such as refusal to carry passengers, price negotiation, forced carpooling, and failure of ride-hailing dispatch on four occasions. At the exit of Shangri-La Station, there were very few taxis and ride-hailing vehicles waiting. The ride-hailing platform showed that more than 100 people were calling for a ride nearby. The reporter had to ask the taxi driver to pay twice the normal metered price and share a ride before he could get home. During the National Day holiday in 2025, a group of ride-hailing drivers arbitrarily increased fares for passengers by claiming that "the destination is too remote and a return trip fee is required." In remote areas and at night, drivers are less willing to accept orders, and the platform would reduce the number of vehicles deployed in the area to ensure service sustainability. One passenger reported, "We live in a relatively remote area, and we've been trying to call a taxi for over 20 minutes without success." Another driver admitted, "I've been driving around here for over an hour. There are at least 20 other cars around, but I can't get any orders. It's obviously a problem with the platform." Digital platforms are not neutral technologies, but rather redefine spatial distance and value through algorithms and data, shaping a new center-periphery pattern [5].

The spatial hierarchy of "differential order pattern" divides consumers in different regions into close and distant relationships, thus enabling the systematic marginalization of residents in remote areas to be reproduced [17]. According to data from the Ministry of Transport, as of October 31, 2024, the number of licensed ride-hailing drivers nationwide had reached 7.483 million, with ride-hailing penetration exceeding 80% in first-tier cities. However, in county and rural areas, transportation capacity is severely insufficient. Some passengers complained on social media that "the village shuttle bus only goes to the city two or three times a day, and the timing is not fixed." A taxi ride home usually costs more than 30 yuan, but sometimes it costs as much as 80 yuan. While some ride-hailing platforms may lower their commission rates in rural areas, the scarcity of drivers results in "few orders, and points will be deducted when there are no orders. If the points drop, the platform will not assign any more orders."

From a political economy perspective, the transformation of platform capital accumulation model is reshaping the situation of workers through algorithm technology and embedding spatial inequality into the

labor process [7]. The commodification of data elements and their monopolistic appropriation by platform capital mark the transformation of capital accumulation from traditional to digital models. Marx's theory of rent reveals the essence of private capital seizing surplus value by monopolizing factors of production, while monopoly capital under digital capitalism controls market dominance by monopolizing data elements, evolving into a new form of exploitation [14]. Platforms privatize data and seize "platform rent" by "digital land grabbing," and this deprivation accumulation amplifies the digital divide and service gap between regions [14]. Digital platforms collect "digital rent" from users by virtue of ownership and data possession. The generation of digital rent is based on the platform as the underlying architecture, data as the core element, and monopoly power as the necessary driving force. The platform completes digital land grabbing in the process of boundary expansion and power contraction, locks in both supply and demand by controlling market channels, and collects digital rent from merchants in the name of the owner [14]. Digital inequality is characterized by the negative social effects brought about by technology: platforms are above public interests, algorithm applications are implanted with bias and discrimination, digital control restricts the rights of vulnerable groups, digital burden causes imbalance between supply and demand of public services, digital exclusion affects public participation, and digital stratification shows a polarized "bimodal distribution" in urban and rural spaces.

From the perspective of social constitutionalism, if the expansion of digital systems is not constrained, it will have negative externalities on the economic and political systems, and the solidification of spatial inequality is a typical manifestation of this [3]. The deep embedding of digital technology has intensified the power restructuring and transfer driven by technology, data and algorithms; the normalization of digital life, the intersection of digital twin spaces and the capture of platform power have jointly strengthened the replication, diffusion and superposition of digital inequality [3]. The platform, based on "cloud territories", has generated a new class structure at the social level and contributed to digital hegemony at the national level, exacerbating global digital inequality. Algorithms catalyze the uneven distribution of ideas, which in turn consolidates the hegemony of network ideology [13]. Algorithmic discipline leads to "group behavior lock-in and cognitive narrowing", which makes users indulge in the illusion of freedom through cultural hegemony, resulting in cognitive narrowing and polarization [20]. This kind of algorithmic discipline systematically stratifies consumers in different regions in terms of information and service access, thereby consolidating the unequal spatial cognitive pattern.

Traditional government regulation has gradually failed in the face of the large-scale, scenario-based and decentralized characteristics of the platform economy, leading to the loss of control over platform power and further exacerbating the reproduction of spatial inequality [8]. In 2025, the transportation department in the area where Shangri-La Station is located implemented 91 cases of "no penalty for first offense" against minor violations of cruising taxis throughout the year, and 21 cases were filed and punished for failure to comply with relevant regulations and did not meet the conditions for "no penalty for first offense." However, there is still a clear gap between the intensity of punishment and the frequency of chaos. Pingyuan County launched a special rectification of online ride-hailing violations in September 2025, focusing on issues such as fare increases and denial of rides. However, the rectification measures are still based on "interviewing online ride-hailing platforms with violation records," making it difficult for external supervision to effectively play an effective role.

5. Governance Path: Driver Behavior Standards and Platform Optimization Path

5.1 Strengthen Awareness of Professional Ethics and Rules

It is recommended to improve pre-job and routine training for drivers, incorporate fair service ethics, and include refusal to pick up passengers, selective order picking, and abandoning passengers midway in the behavior score assessment. Establish a stepped punishment mechanism, ranging from warnings, order restrictions to permanent account bans. Positively guide the public opinion of the driver community, commend compliant service models, and curb the spread of experience in picking orders. Incorporate algorithmic ethics into driver training content, strengthen the value recognition of fair services, and guide drivers to transcend the spatial bias of "differential order pattern" [15]. At the same time, the effect of corporate self-discipline should be strengthened to promote the healthy development of the industry. Platform companies should abide by the legal bottom line, actively accept supervision, and curb the motivation of "killing familiarity" pricing [18].

5.2 Establish a Fair Compensation and Incentive Mechanism

It is recommended to establish a special subsidy fund for empty return trips to remote destinations, with differentiated compensation based on mileage and region. Establish a minimum revenue guarantee mechanism for short-distance orders, and optimize the exemption rules for timeliness assessment in bad weather and congested road sections. Compensation standards should be disclosed in advance and rules should be transparent to increase drivers' expectations of taking orders and reduce regrets and private price increases after taking orders. This requires the platform to improve transparency in pricing and commission mechanisms, and protect the drivers' rights to know and fair transactions as transaction counterparties [2], thereby alleviating service exclusion caused by geographical distance [17]. At the same time, the demands for autonomy of platform workers should be faced squarely, and the relationship between capital and labor should be coordinated through reasonable system design rather than pure technical control [13]. In response to the phenomenon of "self-exploitation," labor intensity should be set scientifically to ensure that workers' normal labor income is not lower than the local minimum wage standard [6]. Improving the reward and punishment mechanism, refining the supervision system, and increasing the amount of punishment and compensation can effectively inhibit the motivation of companies to "kill familiarity" in pricing, but more importantly, it is to increase consumers' willingness to defend their rights by reducing the cost of rights protection and establishing an appropriate reward system [18].

5.3 Break the Algorithm Black Box and Improve Algorithm Transparency

The platform should disclose the order assignment principles and weight logic, and should not reduce the weight based on the destination to avoid geographical price discrimination [1]. The algorithm design should be public service oriented, taking into account both efficiency and fairness. Disclosure of pricing and compensation dispatch rules to drivers and acceptance of inquiries, and adding reasons and explanation mechanisms for car-free cancellations on the passenger side. The government should establish an algorithm registration and impact assessment system to prevent spatial discrimination in advance and strengthen automatic decision-making supervision [2,9]. State intervention can regulate technical monitoring rules and empower workers with collective rights [7], break the platform's dominance over urban space, and introduce public value [5]. Mandatory disclosure of core algorithm logic and construction of a multi-stakeholder governance structure [14,15]. Digital governance should constrain the functional architecture of digital systems [3]. Improve virtual space legislation, integrate the virtual and the real, and give full play to the effectiveness of local legislation [11]. Algorithm supervision must follow the five requirements of diverse participation, tolerance, transparency, scenario-based, and fairness, and build a consensus system of hard and soft laws [4]. Clarify the level of algorithm transparency and enhance interpretability [10]. Global governance should be transparent, just, and benevolent, eliminate black boxes, curb the logic of capital, and strengthen mainstream values [20]. Meta-regulation respects platform self-regulation, compensates for it with government re-regulation, and builds a collaborative model of software and hardware [8,12].

5.4 Reconstruct the Evaluation and Appeal System

It is recommended to refine the passenger evaluation dimensions and add evaluation indicators such as willingness to accept orders, unjustified requests to change destinations, and inducement to cancel. Build a two-way independent appeal channel and introduce third-party arbitration and track recording evidence. Establish a green channel for vulnerable passengers to complain, simplify the process and prioritize handling. Strengthen government supervision and restraint on platform complaint mechanisms to avoid self-judgment by platforms. This helps to repair the information asymmetry between the platform and users and protect the procedural rights of passengers and drivers [2]. At the same time, a sound workers' grievance mechanism should be established and improved to ensure that their grievances on matters such as account freezes, ratings and evaluations are responded to in a timely manner and handled fairly [6]. Improve the "online job contracting" complaint feedback system and optimize polarized decentralized control [19]. To improve the reporting and complaint mechanism, the platform should build a smooth and convenient reporting and complaint channel, and provide timely processing and feedback to users' reports and complaints [12].

5.5 Platform Assumes Responsibility, Shifting from Control to Governance

The platform should share travel data with the government, cooperate with transportation capacity planning, and use subsidies to guide transportation capacity to remote areas; improve driver communities, psychological counseling and legal aid, build cross-platform credit files and include refusals of rides and other behaviors into industry credit reporting, achieve joint punishment, and build a multi-faceted collaborative pattern of government-platform-drivers-passengers. The government should strengthen anti-monopoly and consumer protection, platforms should improve algorithms and data rules, and consumers should actively protect their rights to form a joint force [1,9]. The transformation of urban platforms should involve the public sector and society [5], and the government should support the organizational restructuring of emerging employment groups [16]. On a macro level, it is recommended to explore data ownership, algorithm regulation and worker empowerment, and break the capital expropriation through data revenue sharing and algorithm democratization [14]. Digital governance needs to balance “positive” and “negative” politics [3], and promote the rule of law and the digital resilience of it [11]. Actively participate in the setting of international algorithm standards and strengthen local rules [10]. In view of the black box of employment algorithms, strengthen collective strength, improve the labor law framework, build digital unions, introduce professional institutions, innovate consultation mechanisms, and promote algorithm transparency [21]; establish algorithm ethics review to prevent algorithms from harming the rights and interests of online contract workers [19]. A multi-entity ecological regulatory network and dynamic supervision throughout the entire process should be formed [4]. Under the meta-regulatory framework, it is suggested to adhere to multi-entity collaboration, equal emphasis on private rights and public interests, prevention first, inclusiveness and prudence, and external incentives to build a governance system that connects platform self-regulation with government re-regulation [12]. E-commerce collaborative governance requires the efforts of all three parties to increase penalties and compensation, reduce the cost of rights protection, and establish a reward system [18]. The judiciary should respect platform autonomy, but respond promptly when autonomy is insufficient or excessive [8].

6. Conclusion

Destination discrimination is the result of the combined effect of platform algorithm efficiency priority logic, rule opacity, driver cost-benefit considerations and spatial inequality structure. This article extends this discrimination to the spatial dimension, defines the concept, and constructs a dual governance framework that takes into account driver behavioral norms and platform algorithm optimization.

This phenomenon directly infringes on the rights and personal safety of passengers, aggravates driver burnout, and solidifies the pattern of urban spatial inequality. Theoretically, it shows that platforms are not equal tools for deterritorialization, but rather reproduce existing spatial structures driven by algorithms and capital. Labor process theory points out that the high mobility and instability of platform labor stem from the game between capital management and worker autonomy. Under digital capitalism, the coupling of algorithmic control and data monopoly constitutes “value expropriation,” which not only extracts surplus value, but also colonizes workers’ space-time autonomy and alienates their subjectivity.

The root cause lies in the structural tension between the expansion logic of digital systems and social fairness and justice. It is recommended to introduce the concept of “social constitutionalism” and embed fairness constraints into the operation of digital systems. Algorithms are not value-neutral, and their non-neutrality leads to an imbalance in the distribution of ideas and asymmetry in discourse power, making governance urgent.

The governance path should be systematic and multi-dimensional: promote driver professional ethics, improve remote order compensation, improve algorithm transparency, reconstruct the appeal system, and promote the institutionalization of platform public responsibility. It is suggested to build a meta-regulatory model that connects platform self-regulation and government regulation, forming a “hard-software synergy” system, giving full play to three-party collaborative governance, and ultimately realizing the fair, safe and sustainable development of online ride-hailing services, promoting the platform for good, and enhancing social justice.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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