

Research on the Responsibility and Implementation of the Protection of Gig Workers' Rights and Interests of Platform Enterprises

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Abstract: *This paper employs a procedural grounded theory coding method to analyze the raw data of two cases, Meituan and DiDi, and extracts the two-tier structure of platform enterprises' responsibility and implementation of the protection of gig workers' rights and interests. The study finds that the responsibility of platform enterprises for the protection of gig workers' rights and interests includes baseline responsibility and contribution responsibility. Under the influence of external and internal factors, platform enterprises fulfill their safety and health responsibilities, labor remuneration responsibilities, and occupational development responsibilities through organizational development, diverse cooperation, and communication coordination. The implementation model of platform enterprises' responsibility for the protection of gig workers' rights and interests provides support for a better understanding of the connotation and fulfillment of corporate social responsibility of platform enterprises.*

Keywords: *Platform Enterprise Social Responsibility, Protection of Gig Workers' Rights and Interests, Corporate Social Responsibility Implementation*

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation, the platform economy supported by information technology has rapidly developed, becoming a new driving force for global economic growth. The platform economy continuously promotes model innovation and application innovation in in-depth integration with the real economy, spawning a large number of new forms of employment positions, including gig workers such as online delivery drivers and ride-hailing drivers. However, while platform enterprises provide a large number of employment opportunities, they also face issues such as irregular employment practices and evasion of employment responsibilities. The absence of corporate social responsibility by platform enterprises creates new imbalances between labor and capital, increasing the difficulty of protecting the rights and interests of gig workers. These issues have attracted national attention to the protection of gig workers' rights and interests of platform enterprises. The "Guiding Opinions on Safeguarding the Rights and Interests of New Forms of Employment Workers" jointly issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and other eight departments pointed out the need to guide and supervise enterprises to employ legally and compliantly and actively fulfill employment responsibilities. In existing studies, there is limited discussion specifically focusing on the responsibility of platform enterprises for the protection of gig workers' rights and interests, necessitating further in-depth research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Platform Enterprise Social Responsibility and Fulfillment Practices

Compared with traditional enterprises, scholars believe that the connotation of platform enterprise social responsibility is richer. The social responsibility of platform enterprises is defined as the social responsibility of independent operating entities, the social responsibility of commercial operation platforms, and the social responsibility of social resource allocation platforms^[1]. Due to the diversity of platform enterprise social responsibility content, its fulfillment model is more complex. Some scholars have proposed two responsibility practice paradigms: platformed responsibility^[2] and responsibility

platformization^[3] from the perspectives of the business ecosystem and responsibility platform domain, respectively.

2.2. Research on Platform Enterprise Social Responsibility and the Protection of Gig Workers' Rights and Interests

Scholars have provided different suggestions for platform enterprises to protect gig workers' rights and interests. Platform enterprises should actively self-govern, improve institutional rules related to labor rights, and establish communication feedback and complaint mechanisms^[4]. Platform enterprises should also consciously assume corporate subject responsibility and social responsibility, including standardizing their employment regulations and systems, reasonably utilizing algorithmic technology, and conducting qualification reviews and operational supervision of third-party companies^[5].

2.3. Review of Existing Studies

Existing studies have conducted extensive research on platform enterprise social responsibility and its fulfillment, but most of the research starts from a holistic perspective, lacking systematic research on the responsibility of platform enterprises in the protection of gig workers' rights and interests.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Method

Research on the responsibility of platform enterprises for the protection of gig workers' rights and interests is relatively scarce, and research on its fulfillment belongs to theoretical research. Therefore, it is suitable to adopt a case study method. The dual case study method reveals the commonalities and differences between cases through case comparison, which can further enrich and improve theories. When analyzing case data, the procedural coding process of grounded theory is chosen.

3.2. Case Selection

According to the theoretical sampling principle, Meituan and DiDi, as leading platform enterprises, are selected as dual case study objects. On the one hand, both of them need to bear social responsibilities for gig workers, and their responsibility fulfillment has commonalities. Dual case analysis can strengthen causal inference and achieve triangular verification. On the other hand, the two platforms belong to different industries, and there may be differences in fulfilling corporate social responsibilities. Through the mutual supplementation and comparison of case data, more universal research conclusions can be formed.

3.3. Data Collection

Meituan and DiDi have abundant publicly available data. The sources of case data are as follows: (1) Enterprise data, including public information on Meituan and DiDi official websites, such as activity information and corporate social responsibility reports; (2) Literature data, relevant information about case enterprises from academic articles and monographs; (3) News data, news reports from sources such as Tencent and Xinlang; (4) Policy texts, relevant policy documents.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Open Coding

Open coding is the process of labeling and conceptualizing raw data, and integrating and summarizing categories with certain logical relationships. Ultimately, 20 categories and their subordinate 106 concepts are abstracted from the raw data, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Open coding

No.	Category	Concepts
1	Government governance	Institutional norms, administrative guidance, problem interviews, special rectification, policy pilots, support for the development of new forms of employment
2	Labor union participation	Establishment and membership, joint guidance, collective bargaining, signing collective contracts, formation of meeting minutes
3	Negative media coverage	Traffic accidents, traffic violations, labor control, substitution of punishment for management
4	Corporate sustainable development	Business models, platform service capabilities, market response
5	High-quality employment in platforms	Providing employment choices, broadening income channels, preparing for re-employment
6	Labor relations determination	Employment contracts, written agreements, cooperative employment, cooperative agreements, convention norms
7	Algorithm rule optimization	Algorithmic selection, safety-oriented, fairness-oriented, order allocation rules, time rules, service evaluation rules, route navigation rules, algorithm transparency, dynamic adjustments, abnormal scenarios, penalty mechanisms, positive incentives, mandatory rest, a fatigue warning
8	Strengthening safety management	Equipment management, safety spot checks, equipment research and development, software optimization, safety publicity, awareness improvement, training exams, information dissemination, persuasion for violations, illegal control
9	Ensuring labor remuneration	Income distribution mechanism, basic income, bonus income, subsidies, minimum wage guarantee, timely and full payment, optimization of payment process, standardized and transparent process, construction of remuneration management system
10	Enhancing insurance system	Expanding insurance coverage, cooperating with occupational injury protection pilots, cooperating with commercial insurance protection, simplifying claims procedures, improving claim settlement speed
11	Welfare guarantee	Life service stations, holiday benefits, care materials, health check-ups, health consultations, disease screening
12	Assistance for difficulties	Assistance for serious illnesses, assistance for accidents
13	Providing skills training	Skill level identification, skills enhancement training
14	Broadening development pathways	Improving promotion mechanisms, career changes
15	Organizational construction	Party-building leadership, union construction
16	Diverse collaborations	Government-enterprise cooperation, police-enterprise cooperation, battery exchange cooperation partners, logistics cooperation partners, joint fire rescue teams
17	Communication and coordination	Communication channels, negotiation meetings, feedback on rule objections, customer service hotline, establishment of appeal channels, suggestion feedback, dispute mediation, dispute resolution
18	Safety and health responsibility	Occupational safety protection, reasonable labor intensity, determination of working hours, rest and vacation, insurance coverage
19	Labor remuneration responsibility	Fair and reasonable remuneration, minimum wage standards, statutory holiday remuneration, labor remuneration payment
20	Career development responsibility	Vocational training, career development paths, evaluation systems, occupational skill standards, qualification certificate system, employment support

4.2. Core Coding

Core coding refers to the process of building connections between categories and forming main

categories based on the results of open coding, utilizing the paradigm model of "causal conditions → phenomena → intervening conditions → actions/interaction strategies → outcomes". Through linking, categorizing, and abstracting categories, eight main categories are derived, as shown in Table 2. The schematic diagram formed according to the paradigm model is presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Core coding

Main category	Category	Description
External factors	Government governance	The government supports the development of new forms of employment by enacting a series of policy documents, requiring platforms to assume corresponding responsibilities, and supervising platform enterprises to fulfill their responsibilities through administrative penalties, administrative guidance, problem interviews, and other methods.
	Labor union participation	The union promotes the establishment of unions in platforms, advances collective bargaining between gig workers and platforms, and signs collective contracts to promote the rights protection and harmonious labor relations of workers.
	Negative media coverage	Reports of gig workers' rights being infringed upon by platforms for profit have attracted widespread attention.
Internal factors	Corporate sustainable development	Gig workers are important entities in the platform business ecosystem, influencing the platform's business model, service capabilities, and market performance.
	High-quality employment in platforms	Platforms have a vision of creating employment opportunities and achieving high-quality employment on platforms.
Maintenance behavior	Labor relations determination	Platforms establish labor contracts or written agreements with gig workers based on the nature of the labor relationship and sign cooperation agreements or self-discipline conventions with labor-cooperating enterprises to ensure standardized and fair labor practices.
	Algorithm rule optimization	Platforms are guided by safety and fairness, considering various scenarios comprehensively, implementing median-based algorithms, and promoting the transparency of algorithmic rules.
	Strengthening safety management	Platforms strengthen safety management during the labor process, conduct safety education activities and training exams, and enhance gig workers' safety awareness.
	Ensuring labor remuneration	Platforms categorize labor remuneration items, ensuring that labor remuneration is not lower than the local minimum wage standard and paid on time and in full.
	Enhancing insurance system	Platforms expand coverage of commercial insurance and occupational injury protection, optimizing insurance claims processes.
Care behavior	Welfare guarantee	Platforms establish workers' stations, distribute daily life and holiday benefits, and provide physical and mental health protection.
	Assistance for difficulties	Platforms assist with major illnesses and accident relief.
Enhancement behavior	Providing skills training	Platforms conduct vocational skills training and vocational qualification assessments.
	Broadening development pathways	Platforms improve promotion mechanisms and provide support for job transfers and career changes.
Promotion pathways	Organizational construction	Platforms establish grassroots party organizations and unions.
	Diverse collaborations	Platforms collaborate with governments, unions, and other social entities.
	Communication and coordination	Platforms broaden communication and coordination channels, listen to and respond to gig workers' grievances, and mediate disputes.
Baseline responsibility	Safety and health responsibility	Platforms have responsibilities for labor protection, scientifically determining workload and intensity, and providing insurance coverage.
	Labor remuneration responsibility	Platforms have responsibilities for determining fair labor remuneration, providing minimum wage standards, and ensuring payment security.
Contributory responsibility	Career development responsibility	Platforms have responsibilities to support the professional development of gig workers.

Table 3: Paradigm model

Evidence chain	Baseline responsibility		Contributory responsibility
Causal conditions	External factors: Government governance, labor union participation, negative media coverage		External factors: Government governance
	Internal factors: Corporate sustainable development		Internal factors: Corporate sustainable development, high-quality employment in platforms
Phenomenon	Under the profit-driven objectives of platform enterprises, the issue of responsibility deficiency is significant.		There is a dual need for platform enterprises to enhance service capabilities and support the development of new forms of employment in society.
Mediating conditions	Organizational construction, diverse collaborations, communication and coordination		
Action/Interaction strategies	Maintenance behavior, care behavior		Enhancement behavior
Outcomes	Fulfilling safety and health responsibility	Fulfilling labor remuneration responsibility	Fulfilling career development responsibility

4.3. Selective Coding

Selective coding refers to the process of extracting core categories from main categories, analyzing the relationship between core categories and other categories, and then using narrative threads to depict the entire phenomenon based on obtained categories and relationships. After repeated reading and contemplation, the core category of "Platform Enterprises' Protection of Gig Workers' Rights and Interests Responsibility Fulfillment" was ultimately derived. The narrative thread surrounding the core category is as follows: Under the combined influence of external and internal factors, platforms advance along three paths of organizational construction, diverse cooperation, and communication and coordination. They enact three major responsibility behaviors: maintenance behaviors, care behaviors, and enhancement behaviors, fulfilling baseline responsibility and contribution responsibility. Based on this narrative thread, the model is constructed, as shown in Figure 1.

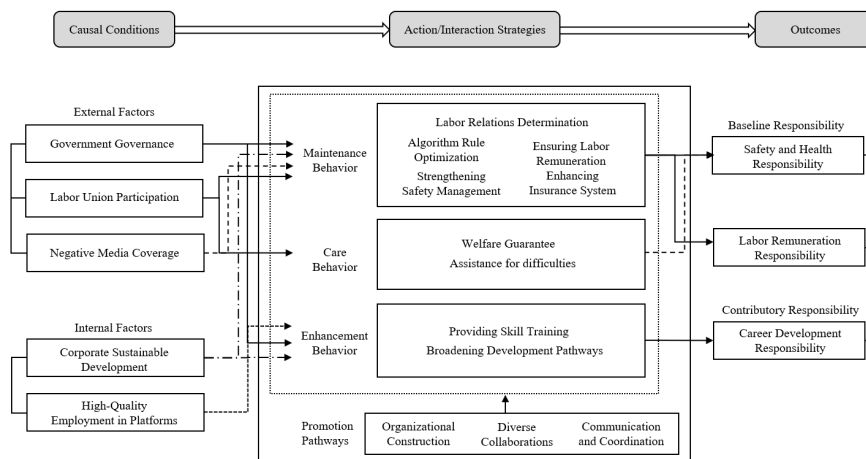


Figure 1: Responsibility fulfillment model

4.4. Theoretical Saturation Test

A saturation test was conducted on the reserved original data, which revealed no new concepts or

categories. Furthermore, it aligns with the responsibility fulfillment model illustrated in Figure 1. Therefore, the theoretical model constructed in this study has achieved saturation.

5. Model Elaboration

5.1. "Two-Tier Structure" of Responsibility

The study identifies a two-tier structure of platform enterprises' protection of gig workers' rights and interests responsibility: baseline responsibility and contribution responsibility. Baseline responsibility involves safeguarding gig workers' basic rights in terms of safety, health, and labor remuneration. Contribution responsibility involves providing gig workers with vocational skills training, enhancing their overall qualities, and expanding their career development opportunities.

5.2. Responsibility Fulfilment Model

Fulfillment of Baseline Responsibility: "External Factors + Internal Factors → Maintenance Behaviors + Care Behaviors → Baseline Responsibility." With the exposure of negative events damaging gig workers' rights, the government has successively introduced relevant policies to protect the rights of workers in new forms of employment, explicitly requiring platform enterprises to employ workers in compliance with the law and actively fulfill their employment responsibilities. Meanwhile, unions, as representatives of workers' rights and interests, fulfill their functions of construction and rights protection to promote platform enterprises in safeguarding gig workers' rights and interests. In response to various demands and market reactions, platform enterprises conduct self-examination and rectification, gradually safeguarding the rights of gig workers and seeking sustainable development paths.

Maintenance behaviors refer to actions taken by platform enterprises to maintain the basic rights of gig workers, including establishing employment relationships, optimizing algorithm rules, strengthening safety management, ensuring labor remuneration, and establishing a sound insurance system. Care behaviors refer to providing additional care for gig workers beyond basic rights maintenance, such as life and health care. Platform enterprises strengthen care and protection for gig workers by establishing service stations, providing materials, and offering medical examinations. In summary, platform enterprises fulfill safety, health, and labor remuneration responsibilities and practice baseline responsibility through the implementation of maintenance and care behaviors.

Fulfillment of Contribution Responsibility: "External Factors + Internal Factors → Enhancement Behaviors → Contribution Responsibility." With the identification of professions such as online delivery drivers and the promulgation of skill standards, the government vigorously promotes the career development of gig workers. Meanwhile, platforms, aiming to improve their service capabilities and driven by the vision of creating high-quality employment platforms, provide gig workers with vocational training and broaden their career development paths, thereby fulfilling the contribution responsibility of career development.

5.3. Paths for Promoting Responsibility Fulfillment

During the fulfillment process, platforms promote the implementation of responsibility behaviors through three paths: organizational construction, diverse cooperation, and communication and coordination. Platforms, guided by party building, leverage the service functions of unions, understand gig workers' demands through communication and coordination, and enhance their responsibility fulfillment capabilities through multi-party cooperation.

6. Research Conclusion

This study, combining case study methods with grounded theory coding, explores the responsibility and fulfillment process of the protection of gig workers' rights and interests by platform enterprises. It constructs a theoretical model, deepening the understanding of platform enterprises' protection of gig workers' rights and interests responsibility and its fulfillment. The study concludes that the responsibility comprises two dimensions and three components. Responsibility fulfillment stems from different internal and external factors, and platforms fulfill social responsibility through various responsibility behaviors. The paths for promoting responsibility fulfillment drive the implementation of responsibility behaviors.

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