

# Between Compliance and Defiance: A Grounded Theory of How Gig Workers Adapt to, Pacify, Manipulate, and Resist Algorithmic Management

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## Abstract

Algorithmic management plays an increasing role in the digital labour platforms' methods of task allocation, productivity tracking, payment, ratings, and sanctions. This study focuses on the changing patterns of accommodating and resisting reactions that restaurant delivery workers in New York City have to delivery systems over time. The research is conducted with semi-structured critical-incident interviews of full-time and part-time workers on various platforms to develop a grounded theory using a constructivist perspective that fits the interpretive paradigm. Differences in platform dependence, intensity of work, multi-platform involvement, experience, and warning or deactivation exposure are captured in maximum-variation purposive sampling and theoretical sampling. Initial coding, focused coding, constant comparison, writing memos, theoretical coding and conceptual diagramming in NVivo are used to analyse data. The study introduces a conception of worker responses as a repertoire that is dynamic, ranging from compliance, to tactical adaptation, algorithm pacification, manipulation, voice, collective resistance, withdrawal, to exit. Transitions between these responses are dependent on the interpretations of the workers in relation to algorithmic encounters, income dependence, perceived sanction risk, alternative job options, professional identity, and social validation. The study challenges the dichotomy of compliance and resistance and advances a recursive process model to describe how algorithmic encounters, worker sensemaking, response selection, consequences, and reactions by platforms are interlinked; it also provides implications for transparency, appeals, worker voice, and regulation. It thus contributes to learning about the agency of workers in changing, opaque, and consequential algorithmic control systems.

**Keywords:** Algorithmic management; gig economy; platform work; worker resistance; algorithm pacification; constructivist grounded theory; delivery workers; New York City

## 1 Introduction

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Digital labour platforms have changed the way service work is organized and governed by relying on algorithmic systems to coordinate geographically dispersed workers and customers, tasks and transactions. In the app-based work model, algorithms are used in the same role as an app user, e.g., allocation of tasks, scheduling, navigation, monitoring of others' performance, calculating pay, distributing incentives, evaluating, and disciplining. It has been theorized as algorithmic human resource management control, where digital infrastructures turn management goals into rules, classification, and decisions that are automated and carried out by machines. Algorithmic management is therefore an organizational system in which platforms wield managerial control over workers, rather than just being a technological support for management (Duggan et al., [2020](#), [2023](#); Lee et al., [2015](#); Parent-Rochelleau & Parker, [2022](#)).

As algorithmic control spreads, it creates a new challenge to conventional arguments about autonomy and flexibility for gig workers. While delivery workers can potentially decide when to log in and which deliveries to take on, their actual choices are influenced by ratings, rankings, demand forecasting, acceptance criteria, incentives, recommendations for routes, customer feedback, and the risk of being suspended or deactivated. Therefore, platforms can offer workers restricted options and keep control of the conditions of work. In terms of gig-work autonomy, therefore, the concept needs to be understood as a condition of or as mediated by technology. Platforms can alter the rules, incentives, and digital affordances that shape the degree of meaningful choice that workers have (Gandini, [2019](#); Griesbach et al., [2019](#); Veen et al., [2020](#); Cameron, [2024](#)).

This imbalance is exacerbated by wide-spread surveillance and algorithmic opacity. Platforms can provide a lot of data about where workers are, how they travel, how quickly they respond, their patterns of accepting jobs, customer feedback and reviews, and how fast they work, but not much on how all that information relates to how jobs are distributed, how much they get paid, how they are rated, or whether they are disciplined. This means that workers can see what is happening to them in terms of the results of algorithms, but they cannot see the criteria that generate the results. Asymmetries of information and calculation further consolidate platform power and pass off the burden of uncertainty on workers. This has been described as an “invisible cage”, a space in which workers are constantly adapting their behavior to “performance” standards of an incompletely understood and unpredictable nature (Newlands, [2021](#); Rahman, [2021](#); Cutolo & Kenney, [2021](#)).

Even with these constraints, gig workers are not mere pawns in the game of algorithmic control. They proactively work out strategies to interpret and go through platform systems. Workers can discover trends in demand, go to profitable regions, alter schedules, resolve client interactions, safeguard ratings, and share practical expertise with co-workers through several applications. Some of these are still considered to be accommodative as employees are keen to protect their income and access to accounts without vocally challenging the platform. Algorithmic management can thus be done in a way of persuasion and self-regulation, as well as direct surveillance and punishment. Gamification can be used to motivate workers to stay active and act in line with the platform goals through progress indicators, time-limited incentives, uncertainty of rewards, and demand notifications (Galière, [2020](#); Le Breton & Galière, [2023](#); Tuomi et al., [2024](#)).

An especially significant accommodative approach is that of algorithm pacification. Workers can try to guess what the platform requires and adjust their behavior. This could be leaving work at a

less convenient time, taking extra on-the-job tasks, not complaining, suppressing feelings, decreasing social interactions, or undercompensating for their labour to avoid getting caught by algorithms or sanctioned. Such responses can help protect short-term income but can also help to consolidate platform authority by reinforcing workers' adaptation to rules that are not transparent and are not really contestable. Compliance is not necessarily an indication of trust, agreement, or perceived legitimacy. Instead, it could be a sign of economic dependency, selectively protecting access to an account, fear of sanctions, or a temporary solution where there are limited choices (Bucher et al., [2021](#); Cameron, [2024](#)).

Other answers are more clearly oppositional. Workers may refuse or delay work, ignore route recommendations, challenge rating, alter data, purposely schedule cancellations, file grievances, arrange with other workers, engage in collective action (wages and working conditions). The significance of digital communication networks lies in their ability to facilitate geographically dislocated workers to share operational knowledge, confirm shared grievances, organise mutual assistance and build solidarity. Platform architecture can then be used in opposition: it can fragment and regiment work, yet it can additionally structure digital networks where opposition and collective identity develop (Anwar & Graham, [2020](#); Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#); Lei, [2021](#); Yu et al., [2022](#); Bonini et al., [2024](#)).

But resistance is not always accompanied by greater autonomy or better working conditions. Circumvention by workers can lead to a redesigning of interfaces, toughening up surveillance, changing the rules of incentives, reducing information, or implementing other disciplinary measures. Furthermore, there is a lack of uniformity in the resistance of workers. It relies on people's ability to find alternative work, family income and livelihoods, platform experience, multi-platform use, and detection and punishment. Platform dependent workers with less alternative income may find themselves with fewer real options to challenge decisions of the platform than workers with other income sources. This is because the contractual freedom to disconnect needs to be differentiated from substantive autonomy that stems from genuine economic choice (Schor et al., [2020](#); Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Wood & Lehdonvirta, [2021](#)).

These patterns illustrate the problems with viewing compliance and resistance as mutually exclusive and binary categories. It may be the same worker who takes an undesirable job for immediate reward, changes his behavior at a later interaction, tries to manipulate a specific rule, engages in formal voice after an unfair decision, and finally decreases participation or leaves the platform. The existing literature tends to focus on the distinct aspects of anticipatory compliance, manipulation, everyday resistance, voice, solidarity and withdrawal. But between these responses workers switch in response to varying conditions. Scholarship in the recent past has also emphasized the need to distinguish between the various elements of adaptation, pacification, manipulation, subversion, disruption, collective resistance, and exit, as well as the circumstances of transition (Cameron, [2024](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)).

It is important to have a process-oriented viewpoint, especially because algorithmic management is recursive. Platform and workers learn from every interaction and adjust their strategies. Greater income dependence can turn adaptation into pacification, finding out how the rules of the platform can be manipulated can foster collective resistance, and the failure of individual coping strategies can enhance collective resistance. Responses in turn, however, change how workers will interpret

and plan for the future. The static cross-sectional classifications are thus not sufficient to reflect temporal transitions, feedback processes, and strategic recalculations. A grounded theory approach might be better for understanding how the responses of workers develop, strengthen, weaken, and shift over time as a result of multiple worker-platform interactions.

New York City serves as an important context for exploring these dynamics because app-based restaurant delivery work takes place in a highly-algorithmic environment of restaurant coordination and a relatively transparent regulatory regime. There are still protections in place in the city regarding compensation, payment statements, trip information, retaliation, complaints, and platform accountability, but platforms remain in control of task allocation, monitoring, compensation, performance measurement, and access to work. This makes it possible for workers to engage in informal adaptation, tactical circumvention, formal appeals, complaints to regulations, and collective claims.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a grounded process model of the restaurant delivery workers' sense-making of algorithmic encounters and their navigation through compliance, adaptation, pacification, manipulation, resistance, withdrawal, and exit. Instead of compliance and defiance being worker types, the study takes a more dynamic approach and considers it as evolving roles that are being negotiated and constantly re-created via worker's sensemaking, dependence on income, risk assessment, social contexts, platform features, outcomes of previous approaches, and platform responses. The aim of this method is to create a recursive model of the relationship between algorithmic encounter, interpretation, algorithmic strategy, consequences, and algorithmic feedback over time.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Algorithmic Management in Gig Work

Human management of gig work has been replaced with a more data-focused approach, including task allocation, monitoring, performance measurement, and compensation and discipline (Kellogg et al., [2020](#); Möhlmann et al., [2021](#)). The algorithmic management is not only a matching of workers with customers, but also a coordination and direction, assessment and discipline process, and dynamic pricing. (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#); Kellogg et al., [2020](#)). Following a multidisciplinary review, the dimensions identified by platforms' algorithmic management of gig workers are: algorithmic monitoring, algorithmic information and algorithmic power asymmetries, direct and indirect control, and algorithmic pricing (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)).

Flexibility is often mentioned with regard to platform work, in which workers choose their employers, log on when they like, and their activities and even whether they participate in certain projects (Wood et al., [2019](#)). However, the timing, location and nature of the work is influenced by ratings, rankings, time pressures, incentives, pricing and access rules (Rosenblat & Stark, [2016](#); Wood et al., [2019](#)). The autonomy of gig-workers that it entails, therefore, is only partial, limited by platform algorithms, which set up and continually reshape boundaries to autonomy (Möhlmann et al., [2021](#); Wood et al., [2019](#)).

In this section he presents a basic critique of the digital culture. In this section, he provides a basic criticism of digital culture.

The platform-based view of algorithmic management relies on information asymmetry as the

platforms gather detailed information about users' behaviours, but give little explanation to the workers about how tasks are defined, how ratings are assessed, how incentives and threats are calculated, etc. (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#); Rosenblat & Stark, [2016](#)). Although Uber remains a stand-alone enterprise, it does wield considerable indirect control and information over its drivers, according to Rosenblat and Stark ([2016](#)). It's also a calculation fact that can be done by platforms and not by individual workers, so they're asymmetries. Likewise, these imbalances are also numerical – platforms can handle the collection of data, while individual workers cannot. (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)) When workers do not understand or challenge such decisions algorithmic control can be seen as procedurally unfair/unlegitimate (Wiener et al., [2023](#)).

The contested-terrain perspective points to the algorithms not being the end of labour-control conflict but to its transfer to the digital realm of metrics, interfaces, data uses and automated rules (Kellogg et al., [2020](#)). Platforms algorithmically propose and restrict behaviour, watch and evaluate performance, reward or penalise workers, and workers attempt to understand, adapt, block and contest algorithms (Kellogg et al., [2020](#)). Control and resistance are thus co-constituted since platform controls create opportunities for other actors to act, while other actors can change the platform systems (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#)).

### 2.3 Adaptation and Pacification

Gig workers do not react only with manifest resistance to algorithmic pressure, since maintaining access to work and income might need to be accommodated, and might need anticipatory compliance (Bucher et al., [2021](#)). Bucher et al. ([2021](#)) refer to “pacifying the algorithm” as the strategies workers employ to perform in a manner they think will meet the algorithmic expectations, but do not know how these expectations are defined. Pacification can be achieved through a variety of means, such as taking on undesirable tasks, undertaking additional duties, rating carefully, being available, or avoiding actions that are thought to lead to penalties (Bucher et al., [2021](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)).

Adaptation can also involve learning demand patterns, moving job location or working hours, working with a number of platforms, and shaping the job tasks to ensure income or discretion (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#); Möhlmann et al., [2021](#)). Platform power can be short-lived through these practices, which can potentially be a mechanism of platform experimentation and adjustment in which workers personally bear costs (Bucher et al., [2021](#)). Platform-income dependence can make it more difficult to find alternative work, thereby lowering the ability of workers to refuse undesirable work and potentially increasing sanctions (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#); Wood et al., [2019](#)). Adaptation versus submission is therefore a blurred concept as the same action could be a manifestation of practical agency, economic necessity, and validation of algorithmic authority in different ways (Bucher et al., [2021](#)).

### 2.4 Manipulation, Subversion, and Disruption

Platform controls have a stronger oppositional worker agency when workers deliberately hinder or subvert or question platform controls (Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#)). Ferrari and Graham ([2021](#)) distinguish these three from one another: manipulation, subversion, and disruption, all of which make a break in algorithmic power, a power that does not play as it is supposed to play. Manipulation is about utilizing incomplete rules, subversion involves redirection of platform mechanisms towards a working purpose, and disruption is about the direct disruption of authority or operation of the platform (Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#)). The examples show how much power is in algorithms, but how little. Algorithmic power is only as powerful as the workers, as situated as the knowledge, and as cooperative as the behaviour (Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#)).

The following tactics are reported in the tactical level: ignoring tactics, refusal or postponement of tasks, customer screening, cancel and coordinating cancels, multiple applications, sharing tactics, challenging rating or deactivation (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)). There is a potential to empowerment that can happen through resistance, but also a potential to sanctions to the worker in response to resistance, and the potential to greater surveillance, and greater algorithm changes, and restoration of control (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#)). The other factor is that the ratings of the customers place further constraints on resistance as the customer can serve as a delegated manager whose ratings will shape the future availability of tasks and earnings for the workers (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Rosenblat & Stark, [2016](#)). The level of resistance is therefore an estimation of resistance that varies based on platform-dependency, sanctions expected, alternative options, and expectations of success (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Wiener et al., [2023](#)).

## 2.5 Collective Resistance and Worker Solidarity

Platform work is fragmented and individualised but gig workers can establish a form of solidarity through sharing of common spaces, digital communities, informal support networks, and mobilisation together (Tassinari & Maccarrone, [2020](#)). In the Italian U.K. comparative analysis, the development of a sense of solidarity was not a product of common working conditions, but rather of active relational practices (Tassinari & Maccarrone, [2020](#)). However, although individual perceptions of unfairness may be detrimental to collective organising through personalised working allocations and arrangements, worker communities can also turn individual perceptions of unfairness into collective interpretations, strategies and demands (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#); Tassinari & Maccarrone, [2020](#)).

Collective resistance can not only be against work processes in the here and now, but also against payments, deactivation, transparency of data, classification and regulation protection of workers (Tassinari & Maccarrone, [2020](#)). Platforms have the potential to respond to either complaints or coordinated refusals, public campaigns or regulatory pressure by disclosing platform content, followed by changes to platforms that can result in new platform controls (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#); Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#)). However, adaptation-resistance is a recursive and temporal process, rather than compliant versus defiant workers (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#)).

## 2.6 Research Gap

Previous studies reveal the reactions of the gig workers to algorithmic management, such as adaptation, pacification, manipulation, subversion, disruption and collective resistance, but it does not always explicitly differentiate between these reactions nor categorize them under the same heading of resistance (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)). The literature does not offer a satisfactory explanation of the workers' alternation of response modes, of why a worker may comply in one context and resist in a different, or how income dependency, platform experience, the power and influence of customers, perceived risk, and worker networks affect the course of these transitions (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)). Long-term impacts of pacation and the impact of workers' actions on the later design of platform have not been explored adequately either (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)).

Compliance and defiance are therefore not two camps of worker types but rather points on a spectrum of dynamic responses, as is proposed in the present study (Bucher et al., [2021](#); Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#)). A grounded theory using a constructivist approach can be used to fully understand the algorithmic experience, the ways in which delivery workers think about the experience of economic dependence and risk, the strategies they will use, and how they will change their chosen strategies if they see different results on the platforms (Charmaz, [2014](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)). This way, the strategy adopted is studied, as well as the conditions that lead to the way of adaptation – pacification, manipulation, individualization, collective action, or exit – (Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research philosophy and design

This study will adopt an interpretivist paradigm and constructivist grounded theory to explain how app-based delivery workers navigate algorithmic management. Interpretivism is appropriate because workers may assign different meanings to the same automated order allocation, rating, incentive, route recommendation, warning, or deactivation decision according to experience, economic dependence, platform knowledge, and prior interactions. Constructivist grounded theory is suitable because the study examines an underexplored social process—how workers move between accommodation, compliance, pacification, manipulation, resistance, and exit—rather than measuring predetermined variables or merely describing experience. It develops theory iteratively from participants' accounts while recognising that data and interpretations are co-constructed by participants and researchers (Charmaz, [2014](#); Charmaz & Thornberg, [2021](#)). Grounded theory also requires concurrent data collection and analysis, constant comparison, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling, which explain the conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences forming a social process (Chun Tie et al., [2019](#)). This design directly responds to Kadolkar et al.'s ([2025](#)) recommendation to differentiate the forms and intensities of gig-worker adaptation and resistance and examine the feedback between worker responses and subsequent platform changes.

#### 3.2 Research setting and population

The study will be conducted in New York City, United States, among app-based restaurant-delivery workers. New York City is an information-rich setting because delivery work is extensive, multi-platform, algorithmically coordinated, and subject to distinctive municipal protections. The city has formally investigated delivery-worker pay and working conditions through platform records, worker surveys, stakeholder consultations, and public testimony. It also regulates minimum compensation, pay disclosures, trip information, route and distance limits, ratings-related retaliation, and complaint procedures. This combination of intensive algorithmic control and institutional contestation enables the study to examine informal adaptation, platform circumvention, formal appeals, and rights-based resistance within the same labour environment.

The study will focus on restaurant-delivery workers using platforms such as DoorDash, Uber Eats, and Grubhub. Ride-hailing drivers, grocery shoppers, and online freelancers will be excluded because their task structures, compensation arrangements, regulatory coverage, customer relationships, and forms of algorithmic monitoring differ. This occupational boundary will strengthen contextual coherence, while the inclusion of several delivery platforms will provide sufficient theoretical variation. The unit of analysis will be the process through which workers interpret and respond to specific algorithmic encounters rather than the individual worker considered as a fixed analytical unit.

#### 3.3 Sampling, eligibility, and sample size

The participants should be 18 years old or older, have at least 6 months of experience in delivering restaurant food using an app, and have worked in the restaurant industry within the last 3 months. A worker deactivated or withdrawn may also be included if his or her experiences help to explain resistance, withdrawal, or exit, in recent years. The initial sampling technique will be maximum variation sampling across platforms, boroughs, work intensity, platform tenure, income dependence, modes of transportation use, multi-platform participation, and warning/deactivation experiences. Participants for these gaps in newly emerging categories will then be recruited through theoretical sampling, e.g. differences between workers who have alternative income versus those who have not, or single-worker versus multi-platform. The number of participants is about 30-35 with final adequacy based on information power and theoretical sufficiency in lieu of

statistical representation. Workers and worker support groups, courier waiting rooms, restaurants, online social groups, and referrals are all channels for recruitment. Platform companies will not be involved in recruiting to preserve participants' openness to sharing of sensitive experiences.

### 3.4 Data collection

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### 3.5 Data analysis

Analysis will begin after the first interview and proceed concurrently with data collection. NVivo will be used to organise transcripts, participant attributes, codes, memos, and conceptual diagrams. NVivo is appropriate because the study requires systematic comparisons across platforms, employment conditions, and worker characteristics; however, it will support data management rather than automatically generate categories or theory.

Initial coding will be conducted line by line using concise, action-oriented gerunds that remain close to participants' accounts. Constant comparison will examine incident against incident, participant against participant, and emerging categories against new data. Focused coding will identify the most analytically significant initial codes and develop their properties, conditions, variations, and consequences. Memo-writing will record conceptual decisions, contradictory cases, researcher assumptions, relationships requiring further investigation, and priorities for theoretical sampling. Theoretical coding and diagramming will subsequently integrate the categories around a core process explaining how workers interpret algorithmic encounters, assess dependence and risk, select responses, experience consequences, and revise their behaviour following platform reactions. These procedures represent the iterative analytical logic of grounded theory (Charmaz, [2014](#); Chun Tie et al., [2019](#)).

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

Methodological quality will be evaluated through credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Credibility will be strengthened through theoretical sampling, constant comparison, negative-case analysis, analytical memo-writing, and peer review of selected coding decisions. A reflexive journal and audit trail will document recruitment decisions, interview-guide revisions, category development, and theoretical choices. Selected participants will assess the preliminary process model's resonance and identify omissions without making participant agreement the sole criterion of validity. Reporting will follow the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research to ensure transparent disclosure of the research team, setting, sampling, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Institutional Review Board approval will be obtained before recruitment. Participation will be voluntary and based on informed consent, and participants may decline questions or withdraw before anonymised analysis. Pseudonyms will replace names, while platform account identifiers,

telephone numbers, customer details, and precise work locations will be removed. Consent records, recordings, and transcripts will be encrypted and stored separately. Because disclosure of circumvention or resistance could threaten workers’ income or platform access, no identifiable information will be shared with platform companies, and sensitive practices will be reported conceptually rather than as operational instructions.

4. Analysis and Findings

This section illustrates how the proposed constructivist grounded theory analysis could be reported after completion of the fieldwork. The hypothetical dataset comprises 32 semi-structured interviews with app-based restaurant-delivery workers in New York City. The simulated interviews average 76 minutes, yielding approximately 2,430 minutes of audio and 303,000 transcribed words. The analytical unit is the incident through which a worker encountered, interpreted, and responded to an algorithmic decision. Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, the illustrative analysis moves from line-by-line coding to focused coding, conceptual categorisation, theoretical integration, and development of a core category (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

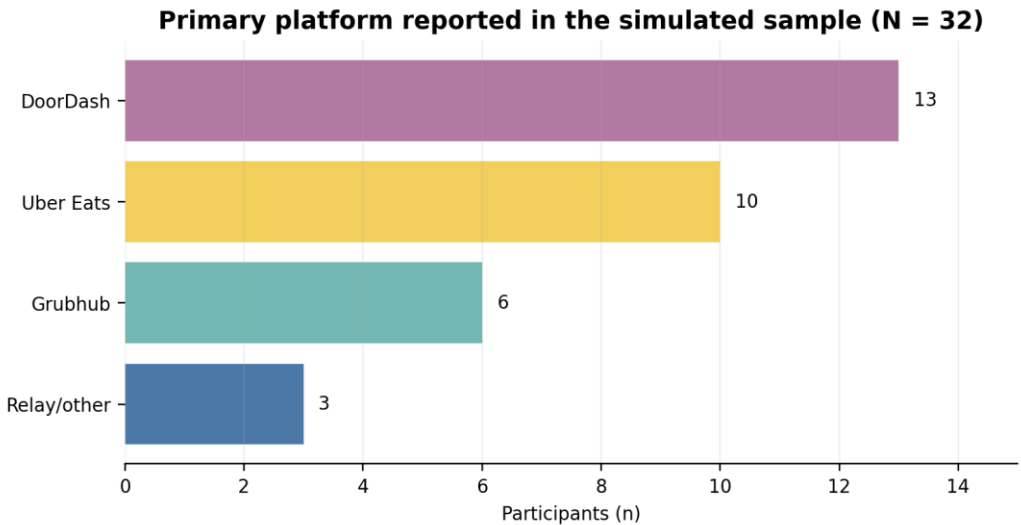
NVivo is used in the illustration to organise case attributes, transcripts, codes, memos, code co-occurrence matrices, and conceptual maps. The software is treated as an analytic support system rather than an autonomous theme generator. The central analytical finding is represented by the core category “calibrating dependence and risk under opaque control.” This category captures how workers continuously weighed their dependence on platform income, the perceived risk of account restriction, and the expected value of challenging or circumventing an algorithmic decision. The process did not progress in a simple linear movement from compliance to resistance. Instead, workers moved repeatedly among compliance, tactical adaptation, pacification, manipulation, voice, and exit as platform conditions and personal circumstances changed.

Table 1. Simulated participant characteristics (N = 32)

| Characteristic  | Category                     | n  | %    |
|-----------------|------------------------------|----|------|
| Gender          | Man                          | 24 | 75.0 |
|                 | Woman                        | 6  | 18.8 |
|                 | Non-binary/prefer not to say | 2  | 6.2  |
| Age             | 18–24                        | 6  | 18.8 |
|                 | 25–34                        | 13 | 40.6 |
|                 | 35–44                        | 9  | 28.1 |
|                 | 45+                          | 4  | 12.5 |
| Work intensity  | Full-time platform work      | 19 | 59.4 |
|                 | Part-time platform work      | 13 | 40.6 |
| Platform income | Primary household income     | 21 | 65.6 |
|                 | Supplementary income         | 11 | 34.4 |
| Platform use    | Multi-app worker             | 23 | 71.9 |
|                 | Single-app worker            | 9  | 28.1 |
| Tenure          | 6–12 months                  | 7  | 21.9 |

| Characteristic | Category          | n  | %    |
|----------------|-------------------|----|------|
|                | 1–2 years         | 10 | 31.3 |
|                | 2–4 years         | 9  | 28.1 |
|                | More than 4 years | 6  | 18.8 |

**Figure 1. Primary platform distribution in the simulated sample.**



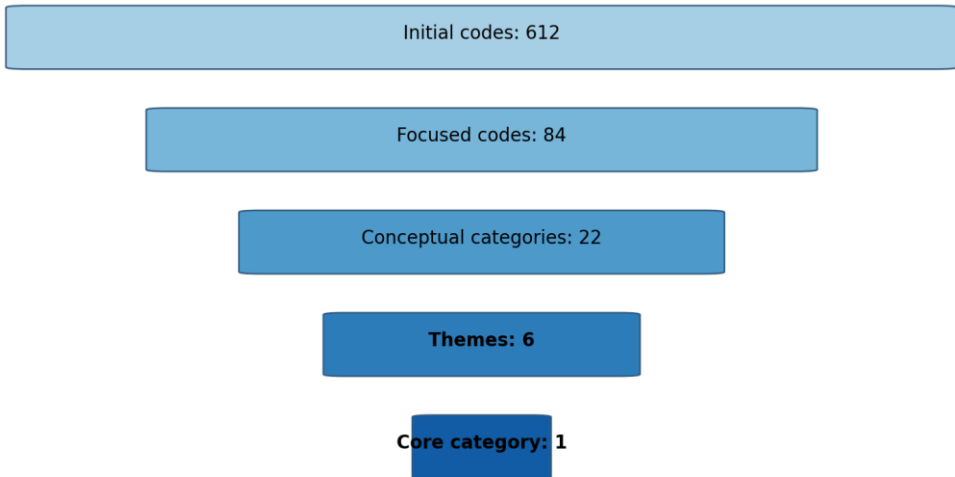
The maximum variation profile is intended to enable comparisons of the economic dependence profile, the work intensity profile, the tenure profile and the profile of platform configuration. Of the hypothetical participants, 21 indicated platform work as their main source of income for their household, and 23 indicated that they worked in two or more platforms. Such contrasts gained a theoretical significance when the strength of effort to protect account access was related to high dependence and single-platform exposure, while the flexibility of voice and exit responses was related to low dependence and multi-platform exposure.

#### 4.2 Coding process and development of the thematic structure

In the process of illustrating coding, 612 initial codes are related to action. These are reduced to 84 focused codes through constant comparison and memo-writing and developed into 22 conceptual categories. Then, 6 themes are brought together around a core theme. The number of incidents is not reported as a measure of analytical quality – it is a way of explaining how a trustworthy coding audit trail can reveal movement from incidents to explanation. The final structure of coding in an actual study should be exported from the completed NVivo project and checked against the transcripts and memos.

**Figure 2. Illustrative coding funnel from initial codes to the core category.**

### Illustrative grounded-theory coding funnel



**Table 2. Illustrative audit trail for coding and theoretical integration.**

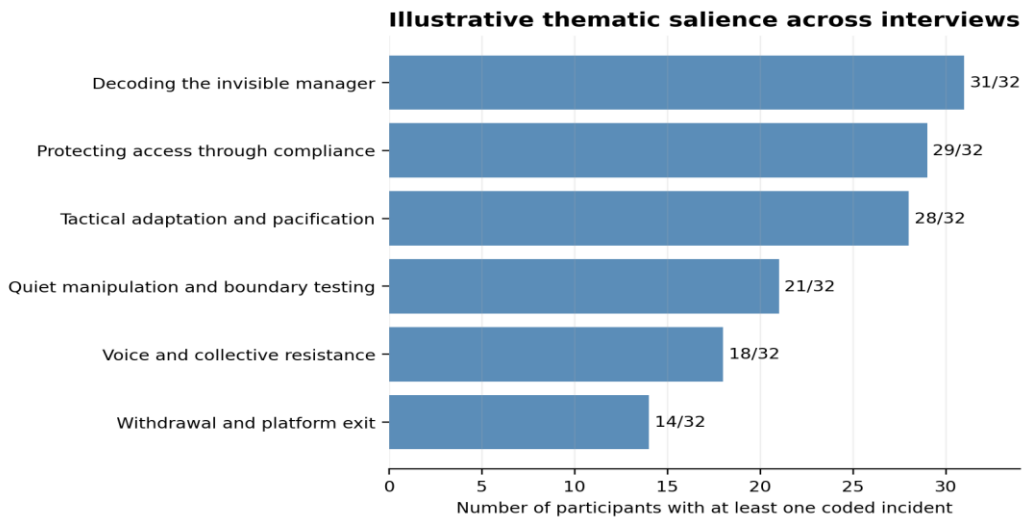
| Analytical stage        | Illustrative output | Analytical purpose                                      | Example                                                                |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initial coding          | 612 codes           | Remain close to actions and meanings in each incident   | “Protecting the rating”; “testing the app”; “absorbing an unfair loss” |
| Focused coding          | 84 codes            | Select analytically significant and recurrent processes | “Preserving platform access”; “decoding allocation patterns”           |
| Conceptual categories   | 22 categories       | Specify conditions, strategies, and consequences        | “Dependence-constrained voice”; “collective algorithmic sensemaking”   |
| Themes                  | 6 themes            | Organise related categories into higher-level patterns  | “Tactical adaptation and pacification”                                 |
| Theoretical integration | 1 core category     | Explain movement across response patterns               | “Calibrating dependence and risk under opaque control”                 |

#### 4.3 Thematic findings

The illustrative analysis generates six themes which are interrelated. The first three themes outline ways in which workers have rendered algorithmic control viable and acceptable enough to work; the next two themes are more assertive attempts to influence or question platform decisions; the sixth theme is about exposure reduction or exit. Theme salience refers to the number of participants who exhibit a pattern and does not refer to the analytic importance of the pattern. Even a less

common category can be the determining one in theory if it is used for explaining transition or contradiction or boundary conditions.

**Figure 3. Illustrative thematic salience across the simulated interviews.**



### ***Theme 1: Decoding the invisible manager***

In Theme 1, students will analyze the invisible manager. In Theme 1, students will examine the invisible manager.

The first theme reflects workers' efforts in making practical explanations of decisions taken by systems they were not directly able to inspect. Thirty-one of the 32 simulated participants reported at least one event where the basis for allocating the order, pay, rating change or warning was not clear. The workers countered with the practice of doing informal experiments – moving, modifying their acceptance behaviour, comparing incomes between time periods and talking to others about platform patterns. This activity wasn't necessarily the technical knowledge of the underlying code, but rather algorithmic sensemaking, or knowledge of the algorithm itself. They decided if an association was reliable enough to support future action, despite the fact that the platform systems might change without warning.

*“The app never tells you why one order appears and another disappears. I learn by changing one thing at a time and comparing notes with riders who work the same area.”*

**Table 3. Theme 1 coding structure**

| Subtheme                | Illustrative codes                        | focused                                | Participants | Interpretive meaning                                                        |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inferential learning    | testing patterns; zones; incentive timing | acceptance comparing reading           | 27           | Workers treated everyday experience as an informal experiment.              |
| Opacity and uncertainty | questioning not ratings; hidden penalties | allocation; understanding anticipating | 25           | Unexplained decisions intensified dependence on unofficial interpretations. |

|                |                                                                                  |                                                                                   |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Peer knowledge | sharing screenshots; 22<br>comparing pay;<br>warning others about<br>app changes | Worker networks<br>functioned as an<br>alternative information<br>infrastructure. |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### ***Theme 2: Protecting access through compliance***

Compliance was not taken as being acquiescent. It was a conscious income protection measure for 29 of the participants. Workers took an undesirable order, did not cancel, did not complain and obeyed signals of route or timing when they thought that not doing so would lead to a decrease in work in future or endanger access to the account. The key condition was perceived replaceability, when workers felt they could replace another courier with ease, and compliance was an indicator of maintaining eligibility and not necessarily an agreement with platform decisions. This pattern was intensified when platform income was high.

*"I may disagree with the trip, but the account pays the rent. First I protect the account; I can question the decision later if there is a safe way to do it."*

### ***Theme 3: Tactical adaptation and algorithm pacification***

Twenty-eight participants discussed plans aimed at enhancing outcomes without questioning platform authority directly. Twenty-eight participants spoke about plans aimed at enhancing outcomes, but not directly challenging platform authority. These encompassed the ability to wait in preferred restaurant groups, to shift work hours to better match incentive cycles, to take multiple small orders prior to getting picky, and to change applications. These practices were often described as "working with" the algorithm, but they were often intended to be used to appease or guide the algorithm. Adaptation was contrasted with compliance, as in adaptation, active reconfiguration of working routines was an important element, while in manipulation, the workers generally did not consider the strategies to be acceptable under platform rules.

*"You do not beat the system by fighting every order. You learn when it is generous, where it sends good work, and when to move to another app."*

### ***Theme 4: Quiet manipulation and boundary testing***

Twenty-one of the participants reported behaviours that crossed the boundary of adaptation into more ambiguous or forbidden areas. The hypothetical incidents ranged from communicating with users about the cancellation, operating multiple devices, hacking location service, or simply waiting for a consequence to be detected following a platform action. Rarely such practices were considered misconduct by the participants. They supported them as proper reactions to the unilateral or irrational platform decisions. Workers were most likely to engage in boundary testing when they felt a decision was unfair, but they felt that appeals were futile. Despite this fear of deactivation, these actions were not frequent and not visible.

*"When the app creates a problem and gives no human solution, people make their own solution. The question is how far you can go without losing the account."*

### ***Theme 5: Voice and collective resistance***

Eighteen of the participants said they had engaged in some type of voice, such as making individual appeals, repeating support requests, public posting, worker-group coordination, and participating in collective action. Individual voice was frequently seen as procedural and low impact, as workers were given standardized answers or were not able to find a decision-making body. When workers had a common understanding of the problem, communication channels and a perception that coordinated withdrawal or public visibility could cost the platform, collective resistance became

more viable. The transformation of the individual to the group was thus a process that required social legitimacy and a sense of collective efficacy.

*“One complaint becomes a ticket number. When hundreds of riders post the same screenshot or refuse the same condition, the company sees a business problem.”*

#### **Theme 6: Withdrawal and platform exit**

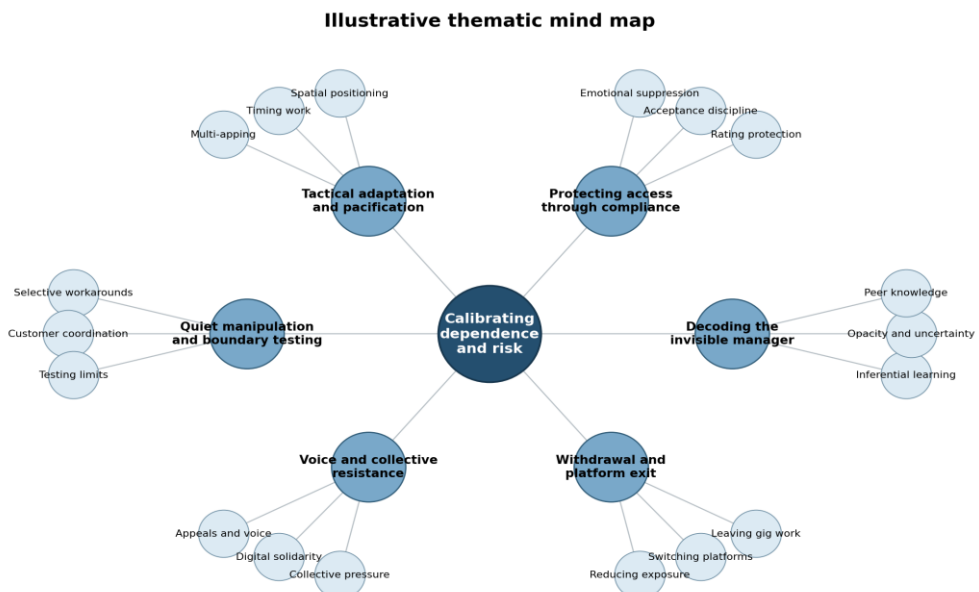
Fourteen participants reported a decrease in hours, a change to another platform or a possible phase-out of gig work. Not all workers were necessarily exiting the most defiantly; in some cases, exit was not even an option. It was possible once other income or work across multiple platforms or family support lowered the cost of leaving. Alternatively, because of continued pay disagreements, failed appeals, or the threat of deactivation, a more slow and steady psychological withdrawal occurred in other cases leading to eventual exit. The analysis thus differentiates between reduction of exposure, switching applications and even abandoning platform work altogether.

*“Leaving is easy only when another income is waiting. Most people exit slowly—fewer hours, another app, another job, and then they stop opening the old app.”*

#### **4.4 Core category: Calibrating dependence and risk under opaque control**

The six themes are tied together in the central theme, “calibrating dependence and risk under opaque control.” Not only did workers evaluate fairness of a platform choice, but they also evaluated economic feasibility and strategic safety regarding a response. This calibration was determined by three interdependent judgements: dependence on platform income, the estimated risk of being sanctioned, and the availability of other platforms or employment opportunities. That one person may therefore have been able to fulfil the obligations in one incident, to manipulate the system in another, and to become a part of collective resistance later on. The responses were not a set of permanent worker kinds, but rather a set of situational achievements.

**Figure 4. Illustrative thematic mind map centred on the core category.**



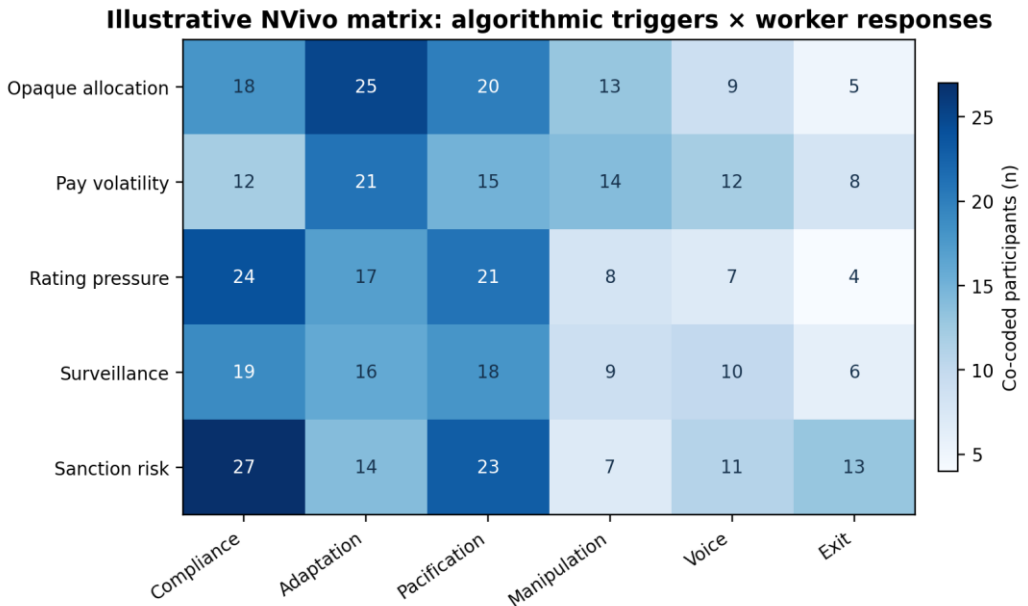
4.5 Cross-case and matrix analysis

Across-case comparison illustrates the shift in the meaning of resistance in practice due to economic dependence. In contrast, workers with high dependence reported a more limited range of behaviours and talked about injustice as often as other workers. They had to go with the authority and be pacified as the expected loss of access to accounts was more significant than the uncertain gain of challenging a decision. Moderate or low dependency workers may have other applications to compete with, other jobs to obtain or household support in order to make voice and exit more credible.

Table 4. Illustrative cross-case comparison by dependence on platform income.

| Income dependence | n  | Dominant response  | Secondary response | Voice/exit potential | Interpretation                                    |
|-------------------|----|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| High              | 18 | Compliance         | Pacification       | Low                  | Account preservation constrained overt challenge. |
| Moderate          | 9  | Adaptation         | Manipulation/voice | Moderate             | Alternative options expanded tactical choice.     |
| Low               | 5  | Voice or switching | Exit               | High                 | Lower switching costs made challenge credible.    |

Figure 5. Illustrative code co-occurrence matrix linking algorithmic triggers with worker responses.



The simulated NVivo matrix suggests that opaque allocation most strongly co-occurred with adaptation, whereas rating pressure and sanction risk most strongly co-occurred with compliance and pacification. Pay volatility generated a broader response profile, including manipulation,

voice, and exit. These patterns would not establish statistical associations in an empirical qualitative study. Their purpose would be to identify cases for closer reading and to clarify the conditions under which a trigger acquired a particular meaning.

#### 4.6 Negative and deviant cases

Three imaginary negative cases perfect the developing theory. First, two highly dependent workers were involved in public voice, even though they faced significant income risks, due to a prior deactivation experience that diminished their trust in compliance maintaining their security. Secondly, because of the greater predictability of the platform compared to the human supervisors that had previously worked there, one low-dependence worker adopted a consistent approach. Third, the two multi-app experts who knew how to manipulate did not do so when it was important for them to present themselves as professionals, but not so when they felt the loss, they incurred would be short-lived. The cases illustrate that dependence has an influential but not determinative effect on response selection; answer selection is also influenced by prior experience, perceived legitimacy, identity, and moral evaluation.

**Table 5. Illustrative negative cases and theoretical refinements.**

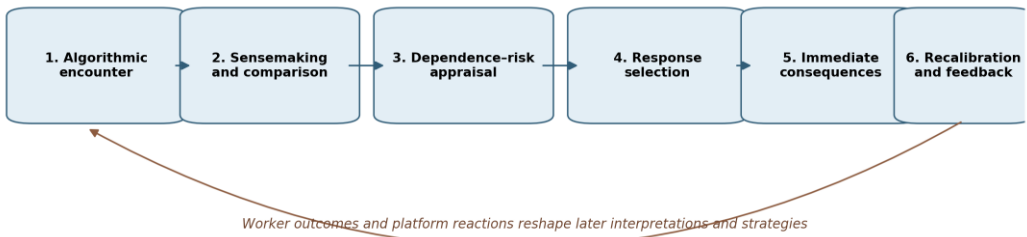
| Deviant case                                | Expected pattern | Observed illustrative pattern      | Theoretical refinement                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High dependence after prior deactivation    | Compliance       | Public voice and collective action | Perceived security through compliance can collapse after irreversible sanction. |
| Low dependence with positive algorithm view | Voice/exit       | Consistent compliance              | Perceived procedural consistency may legitimise algorithmic authority.          |
| Experienced multi-app professional identity | Manipulation     | Rule-consistent adaptation         | Moral identity can constrain strategically available responses.                 |

#### 4.7 Grounded process model

The integrated model has six stages, which are recursive linked together. The algorithmic encounter was preceded by an allocation, payment, rating, monitoring, or sanction event, thus causing a disruption to expectations. The interpretation of the event was then made by workers using prior experiences and knowledge of peers. Thirdly, they evaluated dependence, risk of sanctions and options available. Fourth, they chose a preliminary response of compliance to exit. The immediate consequences (earnings, ratings, support reactions, peer reactions, and/or platform penalties) gave new information in fifth. Workers made the final adjustment to the subsequent behavior, and platform reactions might change conditions that ignited the process. The reason for adaptation and resistance to change and not stay static is the feedback loop.

**Figure 6. Illustrative grounded process model of movement between compliance and defiance.**

### Grounded process model: movement between compliance and defiance



#### 4.8 Theoretical statements generated from the illustrative analysis

The grounded model can be expressed through six provisional theoretical statements. In a completed empirical study, these statements should be derived only after categories are saturated and supported by multiple incidents, negative cases, and analytic memos.

P1: Greater perceived opacity increases workers' reliance on peer-based and experimental sensemaking.

P2: Dependence on platform income narrows the response repertoire by increasing the perceived cost of overt resistance and exit.

P3: Adaptation becomes pacification when workers modify behaviour primarily to reduce algorithmic attention or sanction risk rather than to improve work efficiency.

P4: Perceived failure of formal voice channels increases the legitimacy of informal workarounds and boundary testing.

P5: Collective resistance emerges when a privately experienced problem becomes socially validated and workers perceive coordinated action as capable of imposing platform costs.

P6: Worker responses generate feedback that changes later interpretations, strategies, and—when visible at scale, platform practices.

#### 4.9 Illustrative evidence of analytical sufficiency and trustworthiness

It is assumed that the code saturation was reached around interview 14 and that meaning and theoretical saturation were achieved later in the interviews. In interviews 15–22, properties of the category were elaborated; interviews 23–28 focused on contrasts related to income dependence and platform multiplicity as well as prior sanctions; interviews 29–32 dealt with negative cases and boundaries of the core category. In the actual fieldwork, these claims should be recorded in dated memos, sampling decisions, codebook versions, and transcript-linked evidence and not be made a posteriori (Hennink & Kaiser, [2022](#)).

**Table 6. Illustrative progression toward theoretical sufficiency.**

| Interview phase      | Illustrative interviews | Analytical contribution         | Sampling decision                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Initial exploration  | 1–10                    | Broad incident and action codes | Maintain maximum variation.           |
| Category development | 11–22                   | Properties of compliance,       | of Recruit by dependence and platform |

|                            |       | adaptation,<br>manipulation                       | and configuration.                                       |
|----------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Boundary testing           | 23–28 | Voice, exit, and<br>transition conditions         | Seek contrasting and<br>high-risk cases.                 |
| Theoretical<br>integration | 29–32 | Negative cases and<br>core-category<br>refinement | Stop when new data<br>repeat developed<br>relationships. |

The simulated analysis offers a picture of algorithmic management as a process of negotiation, rather than one-way systems of control. Workers didn't just take or defy algorithms. They created informal knowledge, they guarded access to accounts, they restructured the working life, they experimented with limits, they collectively and individually spoke their voice and they withdrew when other options became available. The key explanatory mechanism was a process of continual calibration of the risk of economic dependence and sanctions in a context of reduced information. The opacity brought about the need for sensemaking, the dependence limited the range of possible responses, social networks expanded the capacity and knowledge, and the consequences of each response provided feedback for further action. The grounded theory, then, is a relational, fluid and recursively produced response to algorithmic authority that is related to compliance and defiance.

## 5. Discussion

The results indicate that gig workers are not always compliant or resistant to algorithmic management. Rather, they shift fluidly between sensemaking, compliance, tactical adaptation, algorithm pacification, manipulation, voice, collective resistance, withdrawal, and exit (Kellogg et al., [2020](#); Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)). These changes are shaped by workers' reliance on platforms for their income, their experiences of the platform, their perceptions of fairness, their exposure to sanctions and their access to other work (Schor et al., [2020](#); Wiener et al., [2023](#)). Algorithmic management is thus a socio-technical mode of work organisation which influences how tasks are allocated, how they are monitored, ratings, rewards, discipline, income opportunities and worker autonomy (Duggan et al., [2020](#); Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, [2022](#)).

One of the main points is the concept of “decoding the invisible manager” as the algorithms used on platforms are opaque, workers are actively experimenting to gain insights into shift allocation, payment, ratings, incentives, and deactivation. They analyze earnings patterns, move places, conduct screen captures and share information with other employees. They don't just sit on the fence; they create their own informal understanding of algorithmic rules (Rahman, [2021](#); Tuomi et al., [2024](#)). This is part of the concept of an “algorithmic imaginary” where workers try to comprehend systems whose calculations are not visible (Bucher, [2017](#)). Platforms have a high level of information, while workers are not well informed about how the platform makes its decisions (Rosenblat & Stark, [2016](#); Curchod et al., [2020](#); Cutolo & Kenney, [2021](#); Newlands, [2021](#)).

Peer networks are then important informal knowledge infrastructures. Online and offline communities make workers aware of payment changes, warnings, hard to deliver areas, and may be the outcomes of refusing work. These networks enable mutual learning, tactical knowledge sharing, solidarity, and day-to-day resistance (Le Breton & Galière, [2023](#); Yu et al., [2022](#); Bonini et al., [2024](#); Reyes, [2024](#)). Collective knowledge, however, is not working-class emancipatory as it can equally assist workers to better fit in with the expectations of platforms, thus at an indirect level reinforcing power structure (Le Breton & Galière, [2023](#)). Furthermore, the knowledge is impermanent as interfaces, incentives, allocation systems and evaluation mechanisms on platforms are constantly changing (Möhlmann et al., [2021](#); Tuomi et al., [2024](#)).

Results also show that **\*\*visible compliance is not always associated with a sense of trust or acceptance of algorithmic authority\*\***. Workers may take unwanted deliveries, not cancel jobs, act on prompts, or not complain about deliveries due to the economic significance of platform access (Bucher et al., [2021](#); Cameron, [2024](#)). For this reason, there is no contradiction between apparent autonomy and financial pressure, rating systems, incentive thresholds, and limited information (Wood et al., [2019](#); Griesbach et al., [2019](#); Veen et al., [2020](#)). Compliance becomes then best understood as a negotiated solution to dependence rather than a true acceptance of control of the platform (Schor et al., [2020](#); Galière, [2020](#)).

The study also builds upon the concept of anticipatory compliance/algorithm pacification (Bucher et al., [2021](#)). The workers change their behaviour when they think that some behaviours can restrict task access, emit a warning or increase the risk of deactivation. This type of behavior is exacerbated by lack of transparency in decision making, dependence on income, incentives based on gaming, and the threat of sanctions (van Doorn & Chen, [2021](#); Bucher et al., [2021](#)). Workers might thus try to meet supposed algorithmic expectations when they are not certain (Cameron, [2024](#)).

If workers feel platform decisions are not fair and formal support are ineffective, some workers begin to engage in manipulation and boundary testing. They can manipulate the tasks, relocate between locations, use several applications, or adapt their approach to the tasks in order to take advantage of allocation inconsistencies (Shapiro, [2018](#); Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#); Tuomi et al., [2024](#)). These practices show that algorithmic power is far from all-powerful as platforms are reliant on the local knowledge, physical mobility, judgement, and ongoing engagement of workers (Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#)). However, the manipulability is strongly linked to the likelihood of being detected, the possible loss of income, and availability of alternative platforms, as well as workers' moral assessments of specific strategies (Curchod et al., [2020](#); Schor et al., [2020](#); Wiener et al., [2023](#)).

Private dissatisfaction can also turn into voice and collective resistance when workers validate each other's experiences and begin to build a collective understanding of injustice (Tassinari & Maccarrone, [2020](#); Lei, [2021](#)). Solidarity, information sharing, public visibility, strikes and collective identity can be created with the help of messaging applications and social media (Yu et al., [2022](#); Bonini et al., [2024](#); Bulut & Yeşilyurt, [2024](#); Reyes, [2024](#)). However, there is still an unequal chance for exit. Highly dependent workers may continue to be involved in a decision even if there is disagreement because they lack other income resources or access to multiple platforms (Wood et al., [2019](#); Schor et al., [2020](#); Wood & Lehdonvirta, [2021](#)).

In general, the grounded process model depicts algorithmic management as a recursive process between platform control and worker agency (Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#); Stark & Vanden Broeck, [2024](#)). Algorithmic encounters create worker interpretations, which influence responses, which influence subsequent behaviour, which influence responses in turn, which influence changes to interfaces, incentives, monitoring, allocation, and/or disciplinary rules on the platform (Anteby & Chan, [2018](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)). The five concepts are not mutually exclusive, but rather are overlapping and recurring processes in which workers continually re-evaluate the nature of their dependence, legitimacy, risk and options (Duggan et al., [2020](#); Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, [2022](#); Kadolkar et al., [2025](#)).

## 5.1 Theoretical Implications

The study also contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge by moving away from the dichotomy of compliance and resistance to a range of responses across five dimensions: dependence, threat of sanctions, perceived legitimacy, alternatives, and social validation. It expands the contested terrain theory by outlining a relational phase of system interpretation during which workers collectively attempt to understand ambiguous systems, and then taking action in

response (Kellogg et al., 2020; Cameron & Rahman, 2022). It builds on anticipatory-compliance research by separating out compliance from tactical adaptation and marking when adaptation turns to pacification: when a worker is trying to adjust their behavior to avoid attention, deselection or sanction, not to be more efficient at doing a task (Bucher et al., 2021). It also builds on fissures-in-algorithmic-power theory, highlighting the fact that this exists, but also that there are income-dependent, moral identity and confidence factors in the formal voice channels. Finally, the core category is an extension of the IPO model suggested by Kadolkar et al. (2025), where the worker/platform behaviour would be interpreted through the algorithmic inputs, the selection of the right response would be done, the evaluation of the consequences would be performed, and recalibration of the worker/platform behaviour would be done in a recursive manner.

## 5.2 Practical Implications

Platforms should reduce T&E by the informal sector and provide transparency on how the tasks are allocated, how they are paid, how ratings will change, when a warning is issued, and when a worker is deactivated. Automated responses to appeals from workers may encourage them to view informal circumvention as more valid than the formal appeal, so that they should be backed by a readily available human review process in the clear terminology of a decision notice. Platforms should not have retaliatory voice mechanisms, set clear performance expectations, provide delivery workers with access to those who they are delivering to, and involve delivery workers in developing and testing algorithmic management systems. The recommendations are backed with evidence that judgements of legitimacy, fairness and autonomy affect the use of workarounds and platform continuance (Wiener et al., 2023). Multilingual digital communities, independent access to data, collective representation and effective deactivation appeals are all improved through peer communication, which can also help decrease information asymmetry and facilitate learning and solidarity (Bonini et al., 2024; Reyes, 2024).

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

There are also some limitations to the study: It is qualitative, conducted in one city, and based on one occupation; It is not possible to draw statistical inferences from the findings and make causal claims. The accounts are also backward looking, and may be influenced by memory and self-presentation and/or lack of knowledge about proprietary algorithms. Research in the future needs to be based on a process model by conducting longitudinal interviews with workers, worker diaries, donations of platform data, participatory algorithm audits and comparative studies between cities, regulatory regimes, platforms, and workers' groups. The following hypotheses were considered for quantitative research: dependence predicts transitions from compliance to paciation, manipulation, voice, and exit; perceived sanction risk predicts transitions from compliance to paciation, manipulation, voice, and exit; procedural legitimacy predicts transitions from compliance to paciation, manipulation, voice, and exit; multi-platform access predicts transitions from compliance to paciation, manipulation, voice, and exit; and collective efficacy predicts transitions from compliance to paciation, manipulation, voice, and exit. However, future research is required to examine the differential experiences of platform workers and the nature of these platform protections and worker networks and the resources that resist these experiences, according to Kadolkar et al. (2025) and Vallas & Schor (2020).

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this study, algorithmic management is considered an negotiation process in which workers negotiate the meaning of their opaque algorithmic choices, attempt to understand the algorithmic dependence and risks, create a tentative algorithmic strategy, and then update and adapt the strategy according to algorithmic consequences. There is not a single, consistent pattern of submission or resistance to algorithmic authority—the experiences they have on platforms are shifting, their identities are changing, their collective resources are growing and declining, and so

are their patterns of submission and resistance to algorithmic authority. The study demonstrates how worker agency is more temporally nuanced -- it is the "calibration of dependence and risk under opaque control" that is the process behind all three responses, and how "algorithmic power" is consequential but never complete (Bucher et al., [2021](#); Ferrari & Graham, [2021](#); Cameron & Rahman, [2022](#)).'

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## Appendix A. Illustrative provisional codebook

| Focused code                       | Operational meaning                                                        | Inclusion rule                                              | Exclusion rule                                            | Illustrative indicator                                       |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decoding platform patterns         | Worker tests or infers how an algorithm responds                           | Specific comparison, trial, or repeated inference           | General statement that the app is confusing               | Changing location to observe order quality                   |
| Protecting access                  | Action primarily intended to avoid reduced access or deactivation          | Explicit link between conduct and account safety            | Routine task compliance without perceived risk            | Accepting an undesirable trip to protect metrics             |
| Pacifying algorithm                | Worker acts to reduce algorithmic scrutiny or restore favourable treatment | Action framed as calming, satisfying, or resetting the app  | Efficiency-oriented adaptation only                       | Accepting several low-value orders before becoming selective |
| Boundary testing                   | Worker explores the limit of rules or enforcement                          | Deliberate uncertainty about whether conduct is permitted   | Unintentional error or misunderstanding                   | Pausing functions to observe consequences                    |
| Dependence-constrained voice       | Worker suppresses or limits a complaint due to income risk                 | Explicit conflict between speaking and maintaining earnings | Absence of complaint without stated reason                | Not appealing because the account is essential               |
| Collective algorithmic sensemaking | Workers jointly interpret platform behaviour                               | Exchange of evidence or explanations among workers          | Casual social interaction unrelated to platform decisions | Comparing screenshots in a worker group                      |
| Collective resistance              | Coordinated action intended to change platform practice                    | Shared target, coordinated conduct, and change objective    | Parallel individual complaints without coordination       | Collective log-off or public campaign                        |
| Platform pathway                   | Progressive reduction, switching, or departure                             | Clear movement away from platform dependence                | Temporary break without change in reliance                | Reducing hours while establishing alternative income         |