PLATFORMISATION OF RIDE HAILING, FOOD DELIVERY AND DOMESTIC WORK

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Contours of independence in platform work

Working in the digital platform economies has typically been characterised by a narrative of independence—freedom to determine work schedules, and the (mis)classification of workers as 'independent contractors'. This suggested novelty in the nature of jobs and upending of hierarchies by technological processes has raised questions of livelihood, the nature of the employment relationship and the role of state.

Scholars have critiqued platforms' discourses of race and gender blindness by paying attention to demographics of the workforce in the case of domestic services (Doorn, 2017) and constructions of services as empowering women as workers and consumers (Shade, 2018). Similarly, platforms' claims of leading a return to an intimate, close-knit community has been critiqued for commodifying intimate social relations (Ravenelle, 2016). Along with these criticisms, somewhat contradictorily, scholars from the Global South have demonstrated how gig work offers new kinds of support – digital payments (Surie, 2017) and training (Raval & Pal, 2019).

On the face of it, platforms challenge hierarchies as they 'open' up classed and gendered forms of work. For instance, food delivery work has been the preserve of largely upper-caste men and women, especially from oppressed castes who are over-represented in domestic work. Despite this, across platforms, interdependence amongst a community of workers enabled joining and sustained participation of workers. These networks of support become important sites for the reproduction of the platform economy, especially since technological mediation opened up this work to those who historically did not have access to this kind of work (Lalvani 2019).

More recently, scholarly attention to the process of platformisation has turned to the changes occurring at an institutional level *and* in the everyday (Duffy, Poell, and Nieborg 2019).

This panel examines the institutional and the everyday realities through the case of platformisation of service work and relationships in 'old' lines of work like taxi driving, food delivery and domestic work. Prior to platforms, these services have been informal, non-standard forms of work segregated along the lines of caste, religion, class and gender in urban India. Therefore, we aim to unpack the restrictions on independence and the functions of interdependence when these forms of work are platformised. We do so by situating platforms' promise of independence through the absence of a boss in the everyday experiences of workers, their interactions with the gendered, spatial aspects of urban life and pre-existing relationships with and within households. Our findings are based on qualitative, ethnographic and participatory fieldwork across ride hailing, food delivery and domestic work platforms in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore.

The papers in this panel explore what platformisation of these old forms of service work has meant for workers and their experiences of work. Has the involvement of technological intermediaries challenged parochial considerations of class, caste, gender, religion? In what ways do the promises of independence, flexibility and freedom to work autonomously translate and fail to translate in the everyday lived experiences of gig workers? What relations does platformisation and technological mediation have with and within urban realities and households?

The papers

Staying within the household, the **first paper** uses participatory feminist methods to problematise the techno-centric understandings of platformisation by centering domestic and care workers' intersectional identities and domestic work's occupational histories. It focuses on design choices of platforms that reify and amplify the paternal, upper-class and upper-caste gaze cast upon domestic workers. Several findings regarding the varying extent of control and independence of, and discrimination against workers emerge. The paper calls for a significant reimagination of platform work in domestic and care work industries, if any of its stated ambitions of being a pathway to decent, secure and formalised work are to be achieved.

The **second paper** follows platforms' promises and prescriptions from the city into households. It examines how food delivery platform services resolve questions of social reproduction while *relying* on the same reproductive arrangements from worker

households and *threaten* reproductive arrangements and norms of feeding and being fed in employer households.

The **third paper** explores the navigation of gendered urban spatialities that demand not only spatial and temporal labour, but also affective and emotional labour from gigi workers. The construction of the notions of risk and safety surrounding women passengers are mediated by the social categories of caste, class and gender. This paper analyses women's presence as workers and passengers/customers, outlining the figure of the woman and the gendered forms of labour that underpin gig workers' everyday realities.

The **fourth paper** is concerned with how information asymmetry created by platform mediation affects ride hailing drivers' understanding of their work. Information asymmetry clouds fundamental questions of rides allocation and fare setting in ambiguity and makes it difficult for drivers to plan not only their long-term future but also their work day. Thus, this paper examines how drivers operate from a place of unknowing which is both a form of precarity, as well as a coping mechanism. It identifies how drivers employ a sensorial algorithmic gut to cope with the absence of crucial work-related information.

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PLATFORMS, POLITICS AND POWER: PERSPECTIVES FROM DOMESTIC AND CARE WORK IN INDIA

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Introduction

Women, particularly those experiencing intersectional marginalities including that of caste and class, are overrepresented in the informalised work in India. Domestic work in particular has been stratified along the lines of caste and gender historically. Digital platforms are increasingly becoming intermediaries in domestic work industries, mediating between so called 'semi-skilled' or 'low-skilled' workers from lower classes, and millions of middle and upper class employers in metropolitan cities. This is expected to shift the organisation of workers and employment relations profoundly. Through a feminist approach to digital labour, this paper examines the dynamics of platformisation in, and of domestic or reproductive care work.

Our hypothesis was that platforms are reconfiguring labour conditions, which could empower and/or exploit workers in ways qualitatively different from non-standard work off the platform. In order to interrogate this further, we studied several aspects of the work relationship, including wages, conditions of work, social security, skill levels, and worker surveillance off platforms.

Through this paper, we surface the configuration of gender, class, and caste relations in the context of platform-mediated care and reproductive work. This included among other modes, online and offline modes of surveillance of workers by platforms and employers. We also paid particular attention to strategies of collective bargaining and organisation that have evolved in the context of informal reproductive and care work, and their reconfiguration in the platform economy.

Methods

The data for this paper was collected through an extensive desk-based review of over 70 platforms' publicly available documentation, 65 in-depth semi-structured interviews and 2 focus group discussions. The urban centres (and major demand zones for domestic work services) of New Delhi and Bengaluru were the sites for much of this work. A majority of the interviews were with domestic workers who were seeking or had found work through platforms. We also did interviews with workers who had found work through traditional placement agencies to compare our findings, and with representatives from platforms, government labour departments, and workers collectives. Of the workers we interviewed, a majority were women, but men were included as well.

We worked with grassroots activists affiliated with the Domestic Workers Rights Union (DWRU), a trade union based in southern India, as co-data collectors and authors of the research. Draws on standpoint theory, which encourages knowledge production that centres the lived experiences of marginalised groups. We were acutely aware of our own positionality as high income, Savarna researchers studying a sector dominated by Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi women from low income groups. This power differential was softened partially by involving DWRU through the course of the project. Workers across both field sites were also interviewed in spaces familiar to them, most often their homes, in languages that they were comfortable with including Hindi, Kannada, and Tamil.

Key findings

A taxonomy of interventionism

We develop a typology of platforms that has emerged in domestic and care work industries – (i) **marketplace platforms** list workers' data on their profile, provide certain filters for automated selection of a pool of workers, and charge a fee from customers for access to workers' contact details, (ii) **digital placement agencies** provide an end-to-end placement services to customers, identify appropriate workers on the basis of selection criteria, and negotiate conditions of work on behalf of workers, and (iii) **on-demand platforms**, provide services or 'gigs' such as cleaning on an hourly basis, performed by a roster of workers who are characterised as 'independent contractors'.

On one end of the spectrum are marketplaces, with minimal intervention in setting the conditions of work, and on the other on-demand platforms, that exact control over each aspect of work on a daily, granular basis. Digital platforms reconfigure the conception of intermediaries in the domestic work sector, functioning as next-generation placement agencies. All three platform types contain aspects that provide workers agency, as well as those that reinforce their positions of low-power. Platform design impacts the role platforms play in setting conditions of work, but does not determine it entirely.

Digital divides and workers' agency

We find that workers are primarily onboarded onto platforms by learning about it from other workers, through onboarding camps held by platforms, or offline advertising by platforms. Such in-person onboarding techniques allow workers with no digital access or literacy to register themselves on marketplace platforms and digital placement agencies.

However, we find that low levels of education and digital literacy continue to impact platformed labour by creating a strong informational asymmetry between workers and platforms. For instance, we find that women workers from low income communities have very little information about how platforms work, causing deep distrust. Workers with digital devices and literacy (and therefore a relatively better understanding of the functionality of the platform), physical mobility and the resources to bear indirect costs that were outsourced to them were at a significant advantage in finding better-paying jobs. Workers who were seeking flexibility and were not necessarily dependent on the platform for their primary income were also better placed than those entirely dependent

on platforms. Women workers tended to be disadvantaged on all these counts, limiting their agency and capacity to reap the benefits of the platform economy.

Across the three types of platforms, systems of placement and ratings add to the information asymmetry, as workers are not aware of the impact of ratings on their ability to find work or charge better wages. Ratings and filtering systems also hard-code the impact of workers' social characteristics on their work. Workers are unable to exercise control over their data, further undermining their agency vis-a-vis platforms and employers. We identify a clear need for collective bargaining structures to protect workers' rights, although platformed domestic workers remained distant from both domestic work unions and emergent unions of platform workers in other sectors.

Surveillance

While there is a wealth of literature already on algorithmic management and surveillance of gig workers, we find that domestic workers on platforms are also managed and surveilled by various other bosses—human managers, and platforms' customers. Women domestic workers on digital platforms grapple with surveillance by men in their families. Digital access in India is marked by deep-seated normative barriers precluding women and girls' access to mobile phones (Pande and Schaner, 2017). In several Indian households, mobile phones are a shared asset, access to which is controlled by a man in the family. Patriarchal norms of gendered roles and power imbalances result in heightened surveillance of women's use of mobile phones.

Such domestic surveillance is built into the design of some platforms. Taskbob, for instance, sends an SMS to a woman worker's husband every time she receives a job posting, due to the discomfort of men in the family in not having knowledge of their wives' exact whereabouts (Kadakia, 2016). While engaging husbands to increase access to employment opportunities for women may be useful, catering to patriarchal control and surveillance tendencies further entrenches regressive gender norms.

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PROMISE AND PRESCRIPTION: PLATFORMISATION OF THE WORK OF FEEDING AND BEING FED

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Introduction

Feeding and being fed in India have been largely informal, unpaid work by women for and within the household. Yet, who cooks, what they cook, who eats and with whom they eat are governed by strict gender, caste, class, religious and regional norms about food (Khare 1992; Kikon 2017), its consumption and concomitant labour processes like cooking, serving (Sara Dickey 2000; Iversen/Raghavendra 2006) and delivery. Therefore, I define social reproduction as the reproduction of structures of gender, class, caste, community and norms (Jarrett 2015).

In this paper, I examine the transformation of socially reproductive labour of feeding and being fed when organised through platform companies. I do so by looking through political theorist Carole Pateman's concept of 'sexual contracts.' Pateman used the term sexual contract to refer to the persistence of women's subordination despite the social contract's guarantee of civil liberties to all individuals. She argues that women's subordination persists despite social contract guaranteeing individual liberty because contracts assume that all individuals own property that they can contract out as per their choice. She suggests through the case of employment and marriage contracts that choice and subjectivity are not simply owned by individuals (Pateman 1988). Similarly, feminists have demonstrated how subjectivities of women, racial and caste minorities have been central to accumulation in capitalism (Costa/James 1975; Federici 2004) as well as Brahmanism (Chakravarti 2015).

This earlier work reveals that tension between freedom and societies' prescriptions is not new. Instead of finding their coexistence, I anticipate seeing platforms' promise of independence and their prescriptions. Existing research about the platform work has addressed how the employment relationship offers freedom but simultaneously curtails it. Most often this has been done by demonstrating how platform companies position themselves as technological intermediaries to shift the costs and risks of work onto workers (Gillespie 2010; Srnicek 2017) or through informational and power asymmetries (Rosenblat and Stark 2016). Along with these economic costs, platforms also create socio-cultural burdens and risks for workers evident in requirements of emotional labour (Raval and Dourish 2016), impression management to ensure good reviews, and in discriminatory behaviour (Ravenelle 2016). I examine the socio-cultural burdens and risks that arise for workers *and* customers due to platforms' challenges to the norms of feeding and being fed. I do so by looking at 2 interrelated aspects – (i) household requirements of food delivery work, (ii) the definition, social meanings and anxieties associated with eating out and how platforms make anxiety inducing outside food popular, if not palatable, amongst employer-households.

Method

The findings are based on the author's qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork between January and May 2019 in Mumbai for the Mapping Digital Labour Project at the Centre for Internet and Society. The sample included app-based food delivery workers and delivery workers at restaurants and fast food chains. Consumers' perspectives are based on newspaper reports and workers' conversations.

Worker household arrangements

In my fieldwork with delivery workers in licensed *udupis* (upper-caste South Indian entrepreneur owned food establishments) and restaurants in Mumbai I found that workers continued to be hired based on rural networks. They were most often paid on a commission basis for a 9-14 hour shifts. In addition to wages, all the non-managerial staff that worked at *udupis* and restaurants was usually housed in the staff quarters which was generally in the neighbourhood next to the food establishment. Only single male migrants lived in the staff quarters which were organised according to whether one was a waiter, delivery boy or kitchen staff. One room was occupied by 7-8 people and the *seth* (employer) paid the electricity bills and rent. Delivery workers in fast food companies like McDonalds or Dominos were not provided any food or accommodation. They worked full or part time and were paid on either a monthly or per order basis and received a motorbike, petrol and a provident fund (PF).

Unlike 'offline' forms of hiring and working described above, food delivery companies' websites advertise app-based food delivery work as offering an ease of entry and high earnings without the pressure of a boss. Workers are required to use their own vehicle and decide how many hours they want to work and all they have to do according to the UberEats website is 'log in' 'pick up,' 'drop off' and 'earn money.' Despite the presentation of work as readily available and hiring processes that ensure 'safety' when recruiting migrants, several migrant men who worked as delivery boys in restaurants found it difficult to gather documents with urban domiciles that are required to join app-based platforms. A delivery boy at an *udupi* explained the importance of one's own home in making this work viable. Own here did not refer to ownership of the house but was used as a shorthand to refer to the household division of labour which made it possible to save money by eating home cooked food:

"For that first one needs to have a home of one's own…after riding a cycle for 8 hours if one is expected to prepare one's own food there is a problem there...if you decide to eat out at a hotel, ordering one rice item or anything really will cost you above Rs 200. So if you eat out thrice, how much does that add up to?"

These non-economic requirements are not determining factors that make joining impossible for single male migrants, but they influence the viability of this work. And reveal the socio-cultural, household arrangements that are implicit requirements to support this work.

Employer household and palatable prescriptions

I argue that eating outside the household implies eating outside the physical space but also outside the mandated household division of labour. So how do platforms engage with household anxieties? Customers of platforms enjoy immunity from responsibility towards workers but can participate in the evaluation of workers by rating them (Doorn 2017). Despite this privilege, customers cannot profile or choose workers. Public dining in India has been a source of anxiety since colonial times. In contemporary times, the anxiety around public dining or eating out occurs in public and at home. The food cooked by outsider-servants, has raised anxieties on two counts – it threatened caste purity and the performance of women's domestic duties. In an effort to maintain caste purity, households practised a caste division of labour of servants in the household. Even in contemporary times, largely upper-caste servants are hired to cook (Dickey 2000, Frøystad 2003).

I place reports of customers expressing preference for Hindu workers within this loss of control over hiring. So how does food cooked and delivered by anonymous outsiders become palatable to employer-households? Un/intentionally, the presence of women in uniform during the day allows notions of safety, respectability to be associated with the company. One woman delivery worker pointed out that the presence of women became a symbol of progress for the company. Another made a similar observation about how customers felt good about the status of women based on the presence of women in this work. One woman delivery worker explained that customers found it easier to trust women and offer them entry to their homes – a privilege the profession of delivery has never seen before.

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GENDERED NAVIGATIONS: SPATIALITIES OF SAFETY AND RISK FOR RIDE-HAILING DRIVERS IN MUMBAI

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Introduction

Platforms such as Uber and Ola have been cited as trustworthy and reliable transport options for women, especially when compared to overcrowded buses, trains and other modes of public transport. The app-based services promise accountability and traceability, enforcing safety standards by way of providing qualified and well-groomed drivers. As a result, service sector professionalism is impressed upon the drivers not just through the spatial and temporal constraints enforced by the platform, but also through the mandates of providing a 'high-quality' service by performing amicable personalities and ensuring the customers' safety. However, reports of violence against women in cabs have implications for drivers across the country due to "platform-effects". Cab drivers are surveilled not only by the corporate and legal infrastructures, but also by the public eye. Incidents of violence against women present jarring narratives of risk for women as well as platform-workers, both of whom are responsible for women's safety in urban spaces. It is crucial to ask *whose* safety is being imagined, prioritized and designed for (which class of women are central to the imagination of the safety discourse).

In this paper, I explore the gendered cityscapes that drivers in the ride hailing sector navigate on an everyday basis. Building on insights from fieldwork in the ridehailing economy in Mumbai, I show how drivers rely not only on their spatial knowledge of the city, but also on social knowledge that genders social exchange, predicates identities and draws boundaries. Gig work produces new risks and safety concerns that require new mediations and negotiations. Analysing women's presence as workers and passengers/customers, I think through the figure of the woman and the gendered forms of labour that underpin gig workers' everyday realities.

Platforms in Gendered Cityscapes

Given the presence of *kaali-peelis* (black-yellow cabs) in Mumbai's landscape since the 1950s, taking a cab is not a luxury in the city. Platform companies claim democratizing public transport and safer travel options in the city against this backdrop. While the proliferation of these services in Mumbai has increased options for mobility and transportation alternatives (catering largely to populations who have higher purchasing power), drivers travel uncertain routes and endure long drawn out working hours to complete incentive targets. They perform spatial labour on an everyday basis (Anderson 2017), transcending boundaries of the private and public sphere, of gated communities and narrow bylanes, of the city centres and borderlands. As drivers are often overworked and stressed due to falling incomes and rising debts, the merging of individual and work time leads to a spatio-temporal disorientation.

Most drivers in the platform economy are domestic male migrants or Muslim drivers from within or outside the city, with experience in the Radio Taxi sector or driving a *kaali-peeli*. Considering taxis as mediating artefacts (Sharma 2008), social differentials between customers and drivers collapse within the metal body of the cab, as the time-coordinated rides effectively wield control over drivers' lifeworlds. Digital platforms should then be evaluated as struggles for the production of social space (Anderson 2017). Gig work also involves emotional and affective labour to bridge the gaps between the digital and the real (Raval and Dourish 2016). Relationships in the digital space are rooted in logics of calculability (Anderson 2017). Quality service then translates to more work, as drivers are expected to put on smiley faces (Nixon 2009) and temper interactions with customers, lest their ratings be impacted. However, underlying vulnerabilities due to caste-class inequalities threaten to intensify conflicts as the 'veiled masculinities' (Chopra 2006) of working class men batter in the face of various insecurities leading to disempowerment and the loss of control (Choi 2018).

The autonomy and access afforded by the platform transforms the upper class and upper caste women - who can afford these services - into potential customers. Their agency is constrained by the boundaries of the cab though, as their drivers are charged with the responsibility to ferry them across the hostile cityscape filled with 'unfriendly bodies' (Phadke 2013). The gendered cityscape is thus produced by the confinement and erasure of female bodies in public space. As demonstrated by studies mapping the movement of women in the city (Ranade 2007), spatio-temporal factors create gendered bodies in order to keep patriarchal norms intact. These norms, as I argue, are detrimental not just to women but also to other marginalised sections of the urban population, in this case platform workers.

Terms of Safety

Male drivers' social identities exacerbate the anxieties around safety in the predominantly upper caste and upper class customer base. Proximity to a potential aggressor in the closed space of the cab is particularly heightened in situations when a female passenger is inebriated or is travelling alone at night, demanding over caution by drivers. Carrying her corporeal body is a risk for the cab driver. The woman's body undergoes an exchange of custody in these instances, as the logics of guardianship and protectionism override her agency. Infact, protecting the female body and her sexual safety is the responsibility of the society as a whole.

Caste and class mediate the doubts, fears and insecurities that gender differentials cause. Interactions between lower caste or Muslim men and upper caste/class women are inscribed by 'landscapes of fear' (Tuan 1979). Be it the apprehensions about sharing a ride with a passenger of the opposite sex (Sarriera et. al 2017) or reports of gang-rapes by cab drivers, the scripts of social conduct are constructed through narratives of risk and safety. While drivers extend respect to female customers, it is only applicable to 'good women.' Nevertheless, power hierarchies are reinforced by the platform through training sessions for drivers that include gender sensitisation lessons. The gendering of the platform economy is baked into these instructions and training programs that reproduce male drivers as figures of safety and constant positive affect.

Gender, Safety and Enterprise

While platform companies claim a large number of women employees, fieldwork interactions indicated otherwise. Ironically, mass driver-training programs are seen as a quick way to make low-skilled and migrant male workers employable in Indian cities while it has been impossible to retain women drivers due to stereotypical perceptions of gender and persistent social stigma. So if the ridehailing passenger woman (upper/middle-class, white-collar professional) is a stakeholder to design for, female drivers (and all female workers) are a liability for platforms.

Some ride-hailing ventures also service women passengers and employ women drivers exclusively. Their fleet of women drivers eliminate the risk of interacting with a man from different socio-economic strata. However, the premium charged by these companies was telling of the value of safety and affordability of these services for a large section of their intended audience, namely women with higher disposable incomes residing in metropolitan cities. Moreover, most of these ventures proved unsustainable for various logistical and economic reasons. Even so, the idea of a women-centric service continues to remain valuable because of the promise of safety that factors in considerations of class, caste, gender and religion (Phadke 2005). They are considered valuable in a deeply stratified society entrenched in caste-class hierarchies upheld by the institutions of religion and the market economy alike.

Conclusion

I have tried to show how gendered norms govern the construction of safety and risk which in turn regulate social interactions. Limiting exposure in a personal cab as opposed to a public bus/train heightens considerations of intimacy and proximity to a potential aggressor (often from a marginalised socio-cultural background). Women-centric cab services mitigate this by promoting the image of the female driver who breaks social norms. However, these services dwindle till they completely disappear due to a capital crunch or insufficient infrastructural support. Patriarchal contexts reaffirm the woman as a risky object by highlighting narratives of vulnerabilities and insecurities in the ridehailing space. Besides the woman, the cab drivers are held accountable for bearing this risk and ensuring her sexual and physical safety. These patriarchal hierarchies of protectionism are sustained by platform workers' affective labour which lubricates the wheels of the platform economy.

On Method

The findings are based on the author's qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork between January and May 2019 in Mumbai for the Mapping Digital Labour Project at the Centre for Internet and Society. The research draws upon observations from the field and semi-structured qualitative interviews, group discussions with a range of stakeholders, the majority of which are cab drivers, who operate in Mumbai, in India.

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NOT KNOWING AS PEDAGOGY: THE CASE OF RIDE-HAILING DRIVERS IN DELHI

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Introduction

Ride-hailing platforms have "disrupted" public transport in India since their arrival and have now almost become a permanent feature of urban and peri-urban India with these aggregators operating in over 100 Indian cities now. But what hasn't received enough attention (especially outside the US) is how these platforms create a deliberate regime of information invisibility and control to keep the drivers constantly on their toes which works to the companies' advantage.

In this paper, I examine the dual state of not knowing or unknowing of adequate information as both a specific form of precarity as well as a pedagogy or means of coping by drivers. This paper, then, explores how the lack of transparency around algorithmic structures not only prohibits drivers from knowing completely and surely about their work ("why did I get this ride?", "why did my ratings drop?") but also how they build tactics of coping and earning *from a place of unknowing.*

Note on methods

The findings are based on the author's qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork between January and May 2019 in Delhi for the Mapping Digital Labour Project at the Centre for Internet and Society. The study is based on observations on the field and semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders, the majority of which are the cab drivers, in New Delhi, India.

The framework within which I analyse my findings certainly borrows from the existing literature on performing platform labour (precarity et al) in a tech-mediated set-up apart from the existing domain of mobility justice wherein I try to identify not just the modalities of new-age models of efficient mobility but also highlight the cost borne by invisible intermediaries.

When algorithms *make us not know*

Algorithmic interactions form the core of the technology in ride-hailing apps through which service seekers and providers interact. As Lee et al. (2015) describe, "Algorithmic management is one of the core innovations that enables these (cab-riding) services."

Moreover, platform companies are not transparent about how their business logics contribute to these "optimizations", which makes it difficult for all the stakeholders to make an accurate assessment of their functioning. Algorithms act as a regulator of work and their inherent structure constraints drivers from knowing fully about their work. Unknowing thus has two aspects: first, drivers do not have access or means to gather

information; second, it is difficult to be sure of the existence of the said information in the first place.

In my research on ride-hailing in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR), there were three things that I asked drivers about which led to ambiguous and inconsistent replies: how rides were allocated, how fares were determined and how ratings worked. While some drivers told me upfront they did not know how these systems worked, others offered explanations that they had devised or heard from somewhere else.

Further, not knowing what they will make per trip means that drivers plan their day in terms of target earnings instead of number of trips. Yet not knowing what the next trip will earn them means they can't refuse rides easily. Many drivers expressed discomfort about this fact, especially when compared to other means such as auto-rickshaws and traditional cabs where drop destination is known beforehand and fares can also be pre-negotiated.

Knowing the terms of work—such as how the good jobs are being allocated and to whom, and an explanation of one's income—can help drivers plan their earnings and how to structure their day so as to be able to meet their income targets.

Furthermore, as drivers showed me, ride-hailing companies spontaneously change the revenue model for "driver-partners" (as they are called) by sending them an SMS right before the change happens, thereby altering trip and mileage targets frequently to keep a degree of unknowability in drivers' work. This unknowability disincentivizes drivers from going off the road as per their will and helps maintain a steady supply of cabs on the road. While the app design gives them an option to "choose" to accept or reject a ride, drivers are constrained by lack of adequate information pertaining to the trip as well as the rider in making this choice.

Unknowability *as* a form of knowing: A pedagogy of coping

As I observed in my interactions with drivers online and offline, new drivers often struggled with the degree of uncertainty and unknowability while more experienced drivers had accepted 'not knowing' and the opacity of the system as features of their work.

Similar to what Rosenblat, Gray et al. and others have observed in the US, in India drivers were constantly engaged in meaning-making through communicative labor, i.e., sharing their experiences with other local drivers online and offline. Agreeing, reassuring, and repeating that drivers actually do not know enough through these discussions also gave them shared confidence in their own abilities and how they were approaching work despite being firmly rooted in unknowing. For instance, when I asked one Uber driver about how ratings worked, they said that all 5-star drivers were matched with 5-star passengers. Another Uber driver said that the higher a passenger's ratings, the less time they would have to wait for pick-up.

How, then, does one learn to cope with such unknowable systems as a worker? And what values does such a pedagogy of coping with algorithmic opacity imbibe? In my fieldwork, apart from answering my questions, drivers were extremely interested in talking *about the companies,* including news about companies' stock value, their futures, profits, etc. A persistent rumour in the field was that Reliance, the country's largest telecom provider, was soon coming up with a competitor ride-hailing app, suggesting that there could be an incentive boom again. I interpret these practices of making sense of long and short-term work, framed as responses to constant ambiguity and uncertainty, as the development of an "algorithmic gut".

This gut responds to the anxieties produced by platform infrastructure through a keen awareness of the shifts, the tweaks, the changes and the errors. And it orients how drivers approach and cope with their work by acknowledging that there is a lot unknown (and unknowable) in this kind of daily work. It also guides how drivers focus on the short-term (daily) goal of making profit by tuning into peer groups both online and offline. This gut is an affective, sensorial attunement to how platforms are allocating and shifting power among drivers and plays a generative role in guiding drivers' work decisions.

In conclusion

Uncertainty is an embedded part of a ride-hailing cab's model of service delivery. For ride-hailing drivers, this ambiguity translates into less control over everyday negotiation of work as well as planning of financial assets for the future.

Drivers acknowledge that while companies and their structures may be problematic, what will keep them employed is passengers' appetite for a service like this. They would like to imagine the future of their work but are cognizant of the dual challenge of the present: making money while struggling for self-preservation in order to perform immediate activities. Drivers are cognizant of an ambiguous future and even hesitant to engage in long-term planning. For now, they would prefer better earnings and greater control over how they perform labour.

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