Which Elements of Algorithmic Management Do Workers in Gig Economy Consider Important to Trust the Platform?

Author: Sofiia Peti
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT,
The gig economy, characterized by short-term employment usually facilitated by digital platforms, is currently reshaping traditional employment models through the integration of algorithmic management. This change brings attention to challenges concerning worker trust in automated systems, which is crucial for the sustainability and fairness of such work. While previous research has recognized the complexities of algorithmic management, few have made contributions to examine how gig workers perceive and interact with these systems, and more importantly, what elements they consider important when trusting the platform they rely on daily. This thesis seeks to provide a clear understanding of the factors that affect the trust of gig economy workers in platform-based algorithmic management. By conducting interviews with food delivery couriers, first-hand knowledge was obtained on the complex relationship between transparency and perceived goodwill and competence crucial for shaping worker trust. This study provides insights into how it is affected by algorithmic opacity and what drives the need for specific types of transparency. Practical implications for stakeholders aiming to foster a more trustworthy and sustainable gig economy are also offered.

Graduation Committee members:
Dr. V. C. Göttel
Dr. J. G. Meijerink

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AI use declaration*: During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT to summarize the results of the interviews. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms that revolve around connecting employees with employers on a short-term contractual basis to complete specific tasks are a fairly new phenomenon that keeps advancing in the digital age (Malik et al., 2021). In the early days, platforms like Uber and Fiverr were leveraging network effects and manual management to match supply and demand. However, growing demand and complexities of the platform, along with advancements in technology, created the need for a more intricate and optimized approach to matchmaking (Zhu et al., 2024). Algorithmic management allows the use of data-driven systems to complete the work of human managers, such as monitoring performance and assigning tasks for workers (Pilatti et al., 2024). This has been shown to reduce costs and increase the efficiency and scalability of processes. For workers, especially, algorithmic matchmaking can enhance job flexibility via increased autonomy as they can choose their own schedule and working hours (Pilatti et al., 2024). Algorithms can also avoid human biases when evaluating performance and assigning tasks.

On the other hand, algorithmic management also introduces some challenges due to the lack of transparency regarding the mechanisms behind the logic of algorithms. Information regarding algorithms' purpose and drivers usually remains opaque to workers to protect them from manipulation (Won et al., 2023). In line with the agency theory, issues then arise between the agent and the principal because the agent has access to information that the principal does not. Thus, the agent can act in their best interests that are not aligned with those of the principal (Moloi & Marwala, 2020). In the context of gig economy, platforms function as principals, while workers act as agents whose work is dictated by opaque algorithmic mechanisms. Information asymmetry, therefore, unlike in the traditional corporate setting, is created due to the principal possessing more information than the agent. Lack of transparency then leads to a disbalance of power between the employees and the employers, as workers cannot make informed decisions (Zhu et al., 2024). Moreover, it threatens the ability of workers to develop trust in the system, which is fundamental for the proper completion of their tasks (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2022). Lee & Mitson (2025) state that corroded trust diminishes people's desire to commit to the company in the long term, which is especially important to consider in gig economies where jobs are unstable and unpredictable. Erosion of trust firstly stems from perceived inconsistency and unreliability of the algorithms. For example, many workers in gig economies do not understand the varying rates of compensation or order allocation (Lee & Mitson, 2025). This leads to lower levels of competence-based trust as workers find it difficult to judge the performance of the algorithm. Secondly, trust is reduced when workers consider that algorithms lack authenticity and care for them, which directly affects goodwill-based trust. Lee & Mitson (2025) explain that a lack of information regarding algorithmic decisions is often perceived as an indication of bad intentions.

While prior research acknowledges the effect of algorithmic transparency on workers in gig economies, much of it is general in focus. Although many researchers, such as Lee & Mitson (2025) and Zhu et al. (2024) support the notion that algorithmic transparency can have a positive effect on workers, they do not specify its dimensions. Moreover, despite some findings stating that clear information regarding both the source and the content is needed to positively influence employees' perceptions of algorithms, the voices of those directly affected by algorithmic management have been oftentimes underrepresented as few studies have explored how gig economy workers themselves interpret specific aspects of algorithmic management and use it to facilitate trust. This thesis addresses the gap by employing a bottom-up approach that is centered on the thoughts of the workers themselves and focusing on specific aspects of algorithmic management in gig economies, such as order allocation, pay calculation, and performance rating, that are potentially crucial for strengthening trust.

1.1 Research Objective and Question

Keeping the above information in mind, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing research on algorithmic transparency in gig economy by examining the specific information of algorithmic management processes that workers need to know in order to build competence-based and goodwill-based trust. Conducting interviews with Thuisbezorgd couriers will help gain first-hand knowledge and grounded insights into perceptions of algorithmic transparency. The research question is as follows:

"*Which elements of algorithmic management do workers in gig economy consider important to trust the platform?"*

1.2 Academic and Practical Relevance

While existing research has established that transparency can improve perceived trust in gig economies (Zhu et al., 2024; Ouyang, 2019), few studies have explored the dimensions of trust or put workers' opinions at the center of their research. Those studies that compare different algorithmic transparency elements or people's perceptions of it such as Bitzer (2022) and Lee (2018), still do not explore the idea that workers might not find algorithmic transparency important at all, and do not explicitly mention links to both goodwill and competence-based trust, especially in the specific context of food delivery companies. It also challenges a common assumption that greater algorithmic transparency automatically leads to increased trust among workers, as recent research by Ouyang (2019) and Bitzer (2022) suggests that it might not be the case, with transparency being ineffective if it lacks relevance and clarity. Thus, this study also offers some critiques to this narrative, focusing on the quality and purpose of transparency rather than the concept as a whole.

This thesis also provides practical contributions by gaining insights into gig economy platforms like Thuisbezorgd, which have been on the rise since the COVID-19 pandemic. While these platforms may recognize the importance of trust in the workplace, they often lack direction or motivation to actively implement transparency in a way that their workers would find meaningful. By identifying specific elements that should be improved within the app, such as communication styles or policies, platforms can make changes to strengthen trust within their workers. This is likely to lead to better retention rates, job satisfaction, and enhanced brand reputation. Moreover, the findings of this report can help workers advocate for fairer and transparent labor platforms, ensuring better working conditions overall.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Algorithmic Management

Algorithmic management is a concept that has greatly evolved in the past decades, along with the developments of computing power and digital data collection (Wood, 2021). Although the use of algorithms in organizational settings is not a new phenomenon, contemporary algorithmic management is mostly concerned with automating the execution of managerial tasks through software use (Wood, 2021). Key definitions of

algorithmic management highlight these software algorithms as being complex systems that autonomously direct and evaluate workers using real-life data, with many scholars linking its rise with gig economy platforms (Lee et al., 2015, Keegan and Meijerink, 2025). Thus, algorithmic management can be defined as a system, along with its institutional mechanisms, that manages workers in both online and traditional workspaces through software algorithms and processing of data, enabling managerial tasks to be fully or partially automated (Keegan & Meijerink, 2025).

Algorithms have been shown to outperform humans by completing tasks with greater effectiveness and efficiency and so algorithmic management is extensively used in digital labor platforms to manage large workforces that cannot be handled by manual management due to the complexity of interactions between workers, managers, and customers (Bitzer, 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). In gig economy platforms, algorithmic management is used to efficiently match supply and demand and carry out human resource processes such as rating and managing the performance of workers, assigning work, and determining pay (Duggan et al., 2019). Online labor platforms differ in their use and deployment of algorithms based on the nature of their operations. In freelance platforms, such as Upwork and Fiverr, algorithmic management is used to facilitate successful matching between the client and the worker (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). Algorithms are mainly used to rank and monitor the conduct of workers based on metrics like their skill level, ratings, and past performance (Kuhn & Maleki, 2017). To ensure successful matchmaking, the platform accounts for projected demand and current labor supply (Keegan & Meijerink, 2025). In ride-hailing and food delivery platforms like Uber and Thuisbezorgd, algorithms are mostly used for task allocation to ensure operational and logistical efficiencies. More specifically, they complete the job of route optimization, order assignment, pricing determination, and performance rating (Sigroha & Kapoor, 2024).

By transferring responsibility for management decisions in these tasks from human managers to the platform, algorithmic management allows both the platform and the workers to reap several benefits (Jabagi et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024). Optimized supply and demand contribute to workers' increased quality of work and perceived autonomy, which in turn directly affects job satisfaction (van Zoonen et al., 2021). Mohlmann (2021) explains that perceived autonomy also stems from the ability of workers to choose their own working schedules and tasks, which is one of the main perks of gig economy platforms. For the actual platform, algorithms reduce labor costs due to the lesser number of managers needed to control and manage the workforce via tracking performance or allocating tasks, while real-time decision-making regarding things like choosing the best delivery route leads to lower operational costs (Zhu et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2015).

Algorithmic management, however, has also been criticized for creating issues for workers within the organization. For example, as explained by Wood (2021), algorithmic management increases work intensity by extending working days and allocating more tasks for workers. This is also reflected in findings by Lee and Mitson (2025), where workers felt like the platform prioritizes profits and productivity over their well-being. This is especially stressful for workers employed by ride-hailing and food delivery companies, as their quality of work and productivity directly affect their ratings and access to work (Pulignano 2024, Sigroha & Kapoor, 2024). Lack of a human manager and the nature of gig economy platforms also limit interactions between workers, which can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of guidance (Sigroha & Kapoor, 2024). Another issue of algorithmic management stems from its role in undermining the feeling of autonomy. Sigroha and Kapoor (2024) explain that while gig economy workers are, in theory independent contractors, they are managed by algorithms at each stage of their employment, such as during order acceptance, route following, and performance rating. Won et al. (2023) argue that consequently, it provides workers with almost no opportunity for autonomy expression, despite companies promising flexibility and freedom in their employment. This creates a dynamic in which they become dependent on the system, which they cannot control.

Lastly, algorithms, despite being perceived as objective, are not safe from bias. Mateescu & Nguyen (2019) and Ouyang (2019) state that algorithmic management can reinforce existing beliefs because of the bias embedded in its training data. One example is how customer reviews, which are inherently subjective and potentially discriminatory, are used to guide further decisions such as task allocation and pay determination (Mateescu & Nguyen, 2019). Thus, even though algorithmic systems are powerful and useful tools in the context of the gig economy, they have invisible constraints that undermine their advantages.

2.2 Algorithmic Transparency

Algorithmic transparency refers to disclosure of the algorithm's source code and processed data that makes the logic behind its decisions clear and understandable (Ouyang, 2019). Bitzer (2022) further explains that this transparency can be both the perception of the state of the algorithm and the actual act of disclosing information. In the context of gig economies, this is a concern because workers are subject to algorithmic decisions without any human mediator. Algorithmic transparency can be broken down into 3 components: input, transformation, and output (Bitzer, 2022). Input algorithmic transparency involves disclosing information regarding the data collected and used by the machine to make the decisions. In food delivery platforms, this is the delivery driver's distance to the customer, traffic, customer ratings, and sometimes the driver's past performance (Sigroha & Kapoor, 2024). Transformation data is concerned with the way the algorithm works, such as its key design features and rules applied. In this case, this might be concerned with how the platform assigns orders to the workers or determines their pay rates. Lastly, Blitzer (2022) explains that output transparency is the disclosure of the results of algorithms, such as when workers are notified of their rating change or deactivation from the platform. This can involve a variety of explanations ranging from textual and numerical representations to graphs.

However, workers are often unaware of how exactly algorithms manage their work because gig platforms do not follow traditional managerial structures, and decisions regarding wages, task allocation, and performance evaluation are communicated exclusively through the app, with the platform acting as both the manager and the gatekeeper (Lee et al., 2015). Thus, gig workers are left with limited access to expertise that can explain the logic and the drivers of algorithmic decision making (Mateescu & Nguyen, 2019). Moreover, Won et al. (2023) state that oftentimes this information is stored by the company internally and used as a tool, which creates an informational monopoly. This then leads to information asymmetry and power imbalances between the workers and the platform because workers find themselves unable to understand and challenge the decisions (Kellogg et al., 2020). Jabagi et al. (2023) argue that the absence of algorithmic transparency leads to feelings of a lack of autonomy, perceived unfairness, and unpredictability. As outlined previously, Lee & Mitson (2025) further claim that these perceptions directly undermine feelings of trust.

The intended purpose of algorithmic transparency is to eliminate doubt within workers by allowing them to observe and examine its underlying system (Ouyang, 2019). It has been shown to be the solution to improving workers' ability to trust the platform and complete their work productively (Lee et al., 2018; Grimmelikhuijsen, 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). More specifically, disclosing different types of information for all 3 types of algorithmic transparency is aimed at increasing users' understanding, building credibility and trust, protecting users, and avoiding loss of focus (Bitzer, 2022). Some disclosure actions of input algorithmic transparency that can contribute to this include informing users about key input data used, and highlighting boundaries of data collection. For transformation algorithmic transparency, Bitzer (2022) proposes actions such as informing workers of machine deployment and informing users of limitations. Lastly, providing results of the algorithm, indicating algorithm performance, and allowing users to tailor the output in line with their needs are some examples of output transparency that can benefit the workers. Bitzer (2022) highlights that some outcomes, such as gained user feedback, maximized returns, and enabled experts, can also benefit the platform itself. This can be achieved by limiting the complexity of disclosed information, documenting the aspects of the model, and sharing key data features with the users.

Despite this, some findings in the literature suggest that algorithmic transparency can also produce unintended negative effects. Ouyang (2019) argues that disclosing algorithmic rules may lead to manipulation of performance metrics, which will undermine the fairness and effectiveness of the platform. This is especially important to consider for food delivery platforms like Thuisbezorgd that are incentivizing careers mainly through ratings and performance systems (Pulignano, 2024). Bitzer (2022) and Ouyang (2019) further explain that instead of facilitating more trust, full or even partial disclosure of information may overwhelm platform users due to the algorithm's technical complexity. This can create confusion or distrust if the logic is deemed inconsistent. Thus, algorithmic transparency is of no use to workers unless it is actionable, allowing them to question it or influence its outcomes (Ouyang, 2019). The author also argues that oftentimes it is not applicable in practice and just leads to a psychological feeling of being in control. Findings by Bucher et al. (2021) further suggest that instead of being concerned with the lack of transparency, workers adapt to algorithms via anticipatory compliance. Algorithmic transparency, therefore, although associated with greater trust levels and perceived fairness in workers, should not be regarded as a direct solution to problems associated with its opaqueness, especially without considering the desires of workers themselves.

2.3 Trust in Gig Economies

Lee (2018, p.4) defines trust as 'the attitude that an agent will help achieve an individual's goals in a situation characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability'. The dimensions of 'uncertainty' and 'vulnerability' are especially important to highlight in gig economy platforms that are characterized by a vast number of interactions and interdependencies, and where strategic communication between parties is highly regulated by the algorithms, with workers mostly being communicated via algorithmically generated texts with no ethical considerations or human empathy (Lee & Mitson, 2025; Zhu et al. 2024). Thus, it is a crucial concept in the workplace because it is required for effective cooperation within the firm due to its strong links with group cohesion and resilience (Das, 2020). Without trust, workers are less likely to cooperate with the platform's expectations and stay with it in the long-term (Lee & Mitson, 2025).

Another proposed definition of trust is based on Mayer et al.'s (1995) Integrative Model of Organizational Trust in which it is defined as 'willingness of a party to be vulnerable' (p. 712). The authors also propose 3 dimensions of trust-building, namely 'ability' (focusing on trustee's skills and competencies), 'benevolence' (belief that the trustee wants to do good for the other party), and 'integrity' (adherence of principles). This reflects the two types of trust outlined by Sako (1998): 'ability' directly mirrors 'competence-based' trust, while the dimensions of 'benevolence' and 'integrity' correspond to Sako's 'goodwill-based' trust. While both frameworks offer insights into how trust is formed in relational contexts, Sako's (1998) distinctions of competence-based and goodwill-based trust allow for its clear operationalization that translates well into the context of algorithmic platforms, where trust is based on technical performance and perceived care. This allows to examine gig economy platforms not only for their functional reliability but also for the way they are designed to treat their workforce. Mayer et al. (1995) also developed their model for application in traditional organizational contexts, while Sako's (1998) framework has been extensively used in inter-firm relationships where trust is not necessarily built through personal familiarity but rather through consistent interactions. This makes it more appropriate for gig economy workers who interact with impersonal platforms rather than human managers. Both frameworks, however, are similar in their shortcomings as both are based on general and subjective assumptions of trust, which may not account for cultural or contextual differences. However, given its strengths outlined above, it serves as a strong foundation for the exploration of this study's research question.

Thus, in the following sections, the concept of trust is broken down into two dimensions, namely competence-based and goodwill-based trust, following Sako's (1998) framework.

2.3.1 Competence-based trust

Competence-based trust is based on how well the party fulfills their promise from a managerial or technical point of view (Sako, 1998). In gig economies, it is shaped by how consistently the platform completes its job and relates to how accurately the platform assigns tasks, rates performance, and determines pay.

According to Lee (2018), workers have high expectations for algorithms to fulfill these 'mechanical' tasks with accuracy because this type of knowledge is explicit and therefore can be easily codified and taught to the algorithm. Lee and Mitson (2025) have found that gig economy workers who strongly trust their relationship with the app do so because they consider the algorithms to be reliable and consistent. Thus, people perceive algorithmic decisions regarding straightforward technical tasks, like pay calculation and route optimization, as equally or more trustworthy than decisions made by human managers (Lee, 2018). In line with this, people are less trusting in algorithmic decisions after it has made a mistake, even though overall algorithms outperform humans when making decisions (Dietvorst, 2015). These findings suggest that competence-based trust can be strengthened in gig economy workers if algorithms are used for tasks that are perceived as requiring precision and accuracy rather than human judgement.

However, people need to be able to understand how these algorithms work because opacity limits workers' access to information that allows them to make these judgements accurately (Das, 2020). Won et al. (2023) also state that platforms need to take responsibility and take workers' suggestions into account when asked about errors made by

algorithms in order to promote trust. This is consistent with statements of Ouyang (2019) that argue that for algorithmic transparency to facilitate trust, it needs to be actionable.

2.3.2 Goodwill-based trust

Goodwill-based trust concerns the belief that the platform cares about the well-being of its workers and has good intentions. Sako (2018, p. 27) defines it as a 'mutual expectation of open commitment to each other'. Unlike competence-based trust, which is based on concrete output, goodwill-based trust relies on perceived empathy and fairness. Lee (2018) explains that workers react more negatively towards algorithmic decisions that require human judgement, such as performance evaluation and hiring, because they perceive the algorithm to be lacking emotional depth and understanding. This is, once again, especially important to consider in platforms such as Just Eat Takeaway, whose employment tactics are mainly rooted in performance ratings of workers (Pulignano, 2024).

One of the main obstacles to goodwill-based trust in gig economies is the lack of a human mediator who can communicate with workers in a fair and empathetic manner. Lee and Mitson (2025) have found that although workers find platform messages efficient and friendly, they do not trust the source of this communication and do not consider it to be fair. Many workers claim that the platform overwhelms them with tasks and sends alerts in the middle of delivering an order, which reinforces the impression that it prioritizes profits over their well-being. Moreover, it is a general sentiment among workers that even though the platform does an excellent job at communicating updates, such as bad news regarding their performance, it lacks empathy in the way it is delivered. This, despite increasing output algorithmic transparency, still reduced trust. Overall, even if the platform seems transparent in the way it communicates with workers, Lee & Mitson (2025) and Das (2020) both argue that digital platforms are still characterized by secrecy. One example is highlighted by Lee & Mitson (2025) where workers are unaware of details regarding the delivery destinations and payouts, until after accepting the order. A large number of workers also noted feeling left in the dark about the reasons why a certain decision was made; this is especially prominent in the communications regarding policy changes (Lee & Mitson, 2025). This withholding of information fosters frustration and erodes trust, as gig workers perceive it as a fundamental indication of bad intentions (Lee & Mitson, 2025).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to conclude which elements of algorithmic transparency are important for trust building for gig economy workers. By using a qualitative approach to gain data through interviews, an in-depth exploration of people's subjective experiences with and perception of algorithmic systems is allowed, which is essential when dealing with different dimensions of trust. This choice of data collection was guided by Edmondson and McManus (2007), who recommend qualitative methods for research in areas that are still theoretically underdeveloped. Since most literature on algorithmic transparency explores it as a general, broad concept, rather than breaking it down into different types of trust, and does not actually take into consideration the possibilities of algorithmic transparency having a limited effect on workers, this study contributes to the field that is still in early stages of development.

Thus, I want to gain insight into specific parts of algorithmic transparency rather than test certain hypotheses. Although quantitative approaches, such as collecting data via a survey, were considered, they did not seem suitable because the end goal of this study is not to establish statistical generalizations but explore emerging topics and develop understanding for workers' desires in gig economy platforms when it comes to algorithmic transparency.

3.2 Selection and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to identify and interview individuals who have experience working as delivery drivers at Thuisbezorgd. Thuisbezorgd was chosen as the case platform due to its strong presence in the Dutch food delivery market and its use of algorithmic management systems in managing its workforce. Given the research question's focus on workers' perceptions of algorithmic management and trust, it was important to approach those who possess first-hand experience of working via the platform. According to Ahmed (2021), purposive sampling is an appropriate method to use when aiming to gather relevant data from individuals who are particularly experienced in the topic being studied. Purposive sampling ensured that the attitudes and behaviors of food delivery workers, namely their interpretations of algorithmic decision-making, were studied in depth. One noted disadvantage of purposive sampling, however, is that it limits the generalizability of findings to other gig economy platforms (Ahmed, 2021). Nevertheless, the goal of this research is not statistical generalisation but insight into experiences that are not easily observable from the outside. To ensure that participants were suited to answer the interview questions meaningfully the following criteria were used: (1) participant must currently work, or have recent experience, as a delivery driver at Thuisbezorgd, (2) participant must have at least 1 month experience of working with the platform, and (3) be at least 18 years old with a sufficient level of English. These conditions ensured that the courier has the relevant experience and is familiar with the platform's mechanisms enough to meaningfully reflect on the questions.

Participants were recruited through online channels such as LinkedIn, rider communities on Discord, and word-of-mouth referrals. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with riders working in different cities in the Netherlands. Although the sample size is relatively small, Hennink & Kaiser (2022) have shown that data saturation typically occurs within the first 9-12 interviews. In this study, thematic saturation was reached at around 8 interviews, with the last two interviews confirming the consistency of findings.

3.3 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected via semi-structured interviews using an interview guide (Appendix A) consisting of questions that covered the guiding themes. Interview guides help ensure that the participants are questioned systematically and the interview has a stable line of focus throughout (Jamshed, 2014). Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the order of questions was changed depending on the respondent's answers. The guiding themes for the interview were workers' understanding of algorithmic systems (mainly order allocation and pay calculation), perceptions of trust in the platform and its decisions, workers' experiences with the platform, and attitudes towards transparency and fairness. Each of these themes contained several open-ended questions which were based on existing theoretical frameworks such as algorithmic management (Keegan & Meijerink, 2025; Wood, 2021), transparency in algorithmic control (Bitzer, 2022; Ouyang, 2019), and competence and goodwill-based trust (Sako, 1998; Lee &

Mitson, 2025). By grounding each theme in theoretical findings, the questions balanced between flexibility and structure. Conducting interviews in a semi-structured way allowed for adaptability to the unique experiences and responses of participants. Prepared follow-up questions were used consistently to promote elaboration and reduce the likelihood of socially desirable responses being given (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

Interviews were conducted either in person or via online video calls in Google Meet, depending on the preferences of the participants. Before the start of the interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and how their data is going to be handled. Informed consent was obtained orally before each interview, with participants having the right to withdraw it at any time. Each interview lasted between 10 and 20 minutes and was audio recorded with the participant's consent for accurate analysis.

Despite a thorough approach to data collection by employing clarifying questions and trying to maintain neutrality during the whole process, certain limitations were still identified. Firstly, researcher bias may have subtly influenced data due to the way the questions are asked (Mwita, 2022). Moreover, even though all participants possessed sufficient English skills, potential minor language barriers or differences in accents may have influenced the quality and understanding of responses (Mwita, 2022).

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data and identify recurring patterns and themes. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis offers a systematic yet flexible method for examining a collection of subjective experiences, which in this case refers to how workers interpret algorithmic opacity and trust within a gig economy platform. The audio recording from each conducted interview was transcribed verbatim and then anonymized to protect the confidentiality of the data. Microsoft Excel was used as the analysis tool due to its accessibility and ease of use. Given the manageable sample size, Microsoft Excel was well suited for the systematic sorting and grouping of data.

The analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase process. Initial codes were generated inductively, based on recurring sentiments that emerged during the interviews to ensure the inclusion of themes that might not have been mentioned in previous research. The codes were then categorized into broader themes, which were generated both inductively, and deductively, stemming from the theoretical frameworks of Sako (1998), Jabagi et al. (2023) and Bitzer (2022). An example of a quote-code-theme analysis structure is demonstrated in Appendix B. To promote reliability and consistency, the themes were regularly cross-checked against the raw data. As a result, several key themes were identified that showcase workers' attitudes towards algorithmic management and their effects on trust levels. The data structure and the summary of results can be found in Appendix C.

4. RESULTS

This section discusses the findings of the interviews conducted with 10 delivery drivers of Thuisbezorgd to identify which aspects of algorithmic management they find important to facilitate goodwill- and competence-based trust. The results are structured into categories based on themes identified via coding and analysis in the previous step. Participants and their statements are referred to as Px, where 'x' is the number of the participant, respectively.

4.1 Algorithmic Opacity and Information Gaps

First and foremost, a dominant theme that emerged across the interviews was the lack of explanations and clarity regarding the platform's algorithms. Namely, all riders reported getting little to no explanation of order allocation. While all respondents mentioned that their location to the restaurant is one factor considered when the platform assigns orders to them, the majority mentioned that this was not explained and is based on their own experiences and inferences. For example, this is reflected in the following quotes: 'I think it is based on who is nearby… no one explained that to me, it is just an assumption' (P4), 'maybe if I am closer to the place, I will get an order from there.... I just picked it up by myself because the people who trained us during the onboarding process explained how to do the job and not how it works' (P7), and 'I suppose it is decided by who is the closest to the restaurant...there's no transparency regarding how the app works exactly' (P9). In a lot of participants, this consequently leads to a lack of understanding of the logic behind the algorithm. P3 said, 'Maybe the algorithm takes into account other factors, but I am not sure', while P1 stated, 'Maybe if they take into account your historic data on pickup times...'. An exception to this was P6, who did not support this consensus, mentioning that 'everything is clear to me'.

To a lesser extent, there also seemed to be confusion regarding pay calculation and performance evaluation. While a few riders such as P5 and P10 reported that pay calculations are pretty straightforward, others expressed uncertainty ('not sure exactly how they calculate it' (P1); 'I do not understand the connection… between the distance of the deliveries and the pay' (P9)), and mentioned having situations where their pay fluctuated with no reasoning ('I thought I got lower than expected' (P2)). The same is reflected regarding performance evaluation in responses of P3 and P4, both of whom reported feelings of uncertainty regarding their ratings calculations, with P3 specifying that 'it would be nice to know how each delivery affects [my] rating'.

4.2 Trust in Algorithmic Management

4.2.1 Competence-based trust and distrust

Interviewees' assessment of competence-based trust stemmed from its reliability and functional performance, as well as perceived rationality of algorithmic outputs, most of which were concerning the order assignment and pay calculation. Competence-based trust was expressed by participants who perceived the platform to be consistent and almost error-free. For example, a lot of participants stated trusting the app 'because it worked as expected' (P4), 'because I never had any issues within the app' (P6), and 'because I didn't have any problems with it that stopped me from working' (P8).

Conversely, respondents who reported having issues with the platform had lower levels of competence-based trust. For instance, P5 called the process of order allocation 'unpredictable', with P7 and P9 drawing attention to inconsistent order flows and wait times. All 3 participants then showed a lower degree of trust, explaining that 'I wouldn't say [that I can rely on the app] because... I had days where I would get orders one after the other and some others not at all (P5), 'The app itself wasn't trustworthy because of all the lags and inconsistencies with orders' (P7), and '[trust level] is minimal... the confusion about my pay calculation and order assignment throws me off' (P9).

A theme of human mediation has also emerged in responses of participants who had functional or technical issues with the

platform. Several interviewees highlighted their reliance on human support teams to help resolve issues or gain clarity that was not provided by the algorithm. For example, P6 said 'I just contact the support team, who are always very responsive and helpful', with P10 echoing 'the human support system is helpful to contact whenever something like a glitch happens'. P3 and P7 explicitly highlighted that this directly helps them trust the platform, stating 'I feel like the app supports me but mostly due to the human operators' (P3) and 'I would say I mostly trusted it because of the humans behind the app' (P7).

4.2.2 Goodwill-based trust and distrust

Goodwill-based trust was predicated on workers' perception of the platform acting fairly and having good intent.

Several couriers expressed that the platform does not take their well-being and feelings into account. This can be tracked in responses of P2, who revealed 'I do not think the platform cares about my feelings' and, P8 who described feeling like 'I am simply a pawn on the chessboard.' Some participants, like P5 who stated that 'productivity was more important than workers' well-being', noted that the platform seems to value productivity above their welfare. Many participants explain that this sentiment is a result of the platform's failure to take individual preferences into account when assigning orders. P5 described the app as 'impersonal', with P8 stating 'there's no opportunity for customization regardless of anyone's preferences' and P4 stating 'I do not think the app recognizes if you like a certain area or restaurant'.

Furthermore, distrust was generated due to the perceived opacity of algorithmic management discussed earlier. When information is not disclosed, workers connect it to manipulative intent and a lack of goodwill. For example, P5 mentioned that a lack of transparency creates a 'grey area' and makes workers wonder 'why the company doesn't disclose this data'. This was also mirrored by P10, who theorized that 'they don't really want workers to tweak the system to fit their preferences', which makes them feel 'undervalued' by the platform. One respondent (P8), however, noted that the lack of transparency on the platform can be justified as it prevents 'cheating the system' and unhealthy competition in the workplace. Regardless, transparency was seen as a demonstration of care and effort to foster goodwill, with some respondents arguing that transparency would make them feel 'more valued as a worker' (P10) and that information should be disclosed 'for the sake of the worker' (P5, P6).

Perceived fairness was also a prominent theme, with many couriers trusting the algorithms because they ensure 'all workers are equal' (P2) and promote fairness because it is the system making the decisions rather than a human. For example, P4 said 'I do not think it is unfair if it is not on purpose', while P7 and P10 explained 'because it is a system, I can't really deem it unfair' and 'I wouldn't call it unfair especially because it is the system deciding it and not an actual person', respectively.

On the other hand, some workers noticed patterns of unfair order distribution. P1 mentioned that some workers figured out a way 'to get more orders', while P8 and P9 both said that they've had situations before where the algorithm seemed to prioritize other workers when assigning orders. This perceived unfairness, in turn, undermined their belief that the platform has good intentions, with P9 declaring having 'no understanding of... why sometimes I do not get orders while the others do'.

4.3 Desire for Algorithmic Transparency

It should be noted that the benefits of algorithmic transparency beyond competence-based and goodwill-based trust were discovered. A significant number of participants expressed a desire for transparency due to its prospect of increased control and autonomy. P4, P5, P7, and P9 all mentioned that having a better understanding of the algorithm would give them more control.

More specifically, they highlight the potential for influencing outcomes such as 'getting opportunities for more orders' (P4) and 'picking a strategy of when to work...and how much I make' (P9). This feeling of control was also directly linked with increased motivation and job satisfaction in P1 and P4.

4.4 Limitations of Transparency

Despite the desire for transparency regarding decisions such as order assignment, pay calculation, and performance evaluation from many respondents, some expressed indifference or undermined its value. For instance, P1 and P3 stated that they 'don't care' how the orders are assigned to them, with P4, P6, and P10 also affirming that they have a lack of interest in how the system works, despite the potential advantages of transparency. P4 and P8 explained that delivering food is quite a simple job and just a means to 'earn extra money' (P8), so does not require additional understanding beyond just what is expected from them. Some others, such as P10 ('how likely it is that it will actually change anything in the way you work?') and P3 ('If that information gave me some power...over outcomes of the app, I would like that') believed that transparency by itself is not actionable so would not actually change anything in the way they approach their work.

A few workers brought attention to the potential negative consequences of algorithmic transparency. For example, P6 suggested that full disclosure 'might confuse or scare' workers who lack the technical knowledge needed to understand the given information. Another interviewee (P2) mentioned that 'it would make me more aware [of the platform's shortcomings] and maybe I wouldn't have taken up the job in the first place', suggesting that transparency could reduce their initial trust in the platform. Another perspective brought on by P8 revealed that exposing algorithmic rules regarding order allocation could motivate workers to 'cheat the system'.

Paradoxically, one participant (P7) mentioned that 'some people rather not know because it gives them a feeling of not being responsible for it', meaning that transparency could lead to a feeling of lack of control because it would expose the rigid nature of algorithmic decisions.

5. DISCUSSION

In the following section, the key findings of this research are interpreted and explained in relation to the initial research question as well as critically compared to the existing literature on algorithmic management (AM), algorithmic transparency (AT), and Sako's (1998) framework of goodwill-based and competence-based trust.

5.1 Algorithmic Opacity as a Barrier to Trust

The results strongly support the notion that algorithmic opacity is a persistent challenge in gig economy platforms to establish trust, which aligns with previous research of Jabagi et al. (2023), Won et al. (2023), and Mateescu & Nguyen (2019). Participants particularly highlight this as being an issue in order allocation, which reinforces claims of Lee and Mitson (2025) who state that workers are often unaware of the details of delivery orders. Many couriers acknowledged that while they are aware of some logic behind the algorithm, they lack knowledge about other factors,

such as past performance and experience, that are potentially considered. Some others expressed a desire for explanations regarding how and if their location to the restaurant or the customer plays a role in whether or not a certain order is given to them. Prominently, but to a lesser extent, workers brought attention to their lack of understanding of pay calculations, especially when it comes to the connection between each delivery and payout. This points to the importance of input and transformation transparency outlined by Bitzer (2022), as workers are neither informed about which data is being collected nor how it is processed by the algorithms to make the decision.

Lack of clarity regarding performance evaluation was also mentioned by two respondents, pointing to the absence of output transparency concerning workers' ratings (Bitzer, 2020). This limited the workers' understanding of crucial aspects of their employment, as highlighted by Sigroha & Kapoor (2024) and Pulignano (2024) regarding rating systems.

These results confirm the existence of informational asymmetry in the context of the gig economy as the algorithms acting as principals possess more information than workers, who act as agents, aligning with the agency theory as outlined by Moloi & Marwala (2020). This was directly linked to feelings of confusion and lack of understanding, which can be explained by Lee (2015) and Mateescu & Nguyen (2019) who observed that gig economy workers often lack the expertise that can help them make sense of the algorithms. Jabagi et al. (2023) further note that a lack of transparency creates perceptions of unfairness and unpredictability, which erodes workers' confidence in the system's fairness and reliability.

5.2 Competence-Based Trust

Competence-based trust, grounded in the belief that the algorithm completes its technical tasks accurately, is an important component of workers' reliance on the platform (Sako, 1998).

Higher levels of competence-based trust were reported in those who perceive the platform to be functioning smoothly and consistently. Thuisbezorgd couriers who experience consistent order flows, and predictable app functionality such as correct pay calculations, scheduling, and order assignment from restaurants with close geographical proximity, stated that the platform is 'consistent' and 'works as expected', viewing algorithmic management as a reliable tool that they could trust on the day-to-day basis. This suggests that for some workers, reliable functioning of the system alone is enough to establish a baseline level of trust, even in the absence of transformation transparency. This supports the findings of Lee and Mitson (2025) and Lee (2018), who suggest that transparency is not necessary to build trust when algorithms function reliably while performing objective tasks.

In line with this, competence-based distrust was mainly driven by observed inconsistencies and perceived randomness of order allocation. Respondents who called the system 'random' and had issues with unpredictable order flows reported challenges with relying on the platform, and in some cases, felt confusion and frustration. The lack of input transparency of order allocation, such as distance to restaurants and other couriers, and transformation transparency regarding specific rules for order assignment, is a clear contributor to reduced trust in the platform's ability to make competent decisions. This reinforces Dietvorst's (2015) argument that even if the system outperforms humans in task fulfillment, inconsistencies and errors significantly reduce workers' trust.

This also brings attention to the contradicting nature of algorithmic management, where, even though it is beneficial in theory for being an efficient manager of the platform, as stated by Duggan et al. (2019) and Zhu et al. (2024), inconsistencies negatively impact the trust of workers in their core competencies. This idea is further supported by several participants relying on human support teams to resolve issues with the platform or get clarity that was not provided by the algorithm itself. This suggests that human intervention can mitigate the negative effects of errors in algorithmic management, consistent with arguments of Sigroha & Kapoor (2024) for the importance of human interaction in gig work.

5.3 Goodwill-Based Trust

Goodwill-based trust was expressed less frequently than competence-based trust and was directly based on the perceived empathy and care that the platform delivers, supporting Sako's (1998) framework.

A number of interviewees linked the lack of input transparency, such as factors influencing pay, and transformation transparency, such as order assignment logic, to suspicions about the platform's intentions, suggesting that transparency plays a role in fostering goodwill. Statements about feeling like the lack of transparency exists to prevent workers from tweaking the system to fit their wants or needs explicitly link opacity to a perceived lack of goodwill, supporting literature suggesting that information asymmetry undermines trust and gets interpreted as bad intentions (Won et al., 2023; Lee & Mitson, 2025). As expected, most of those who desired transparency did so because it is perceived as showing respect and care to workers. More specifically, certain workers highlighted that more transparency regarding the algorithm's internal mechanisms would make them feel valued by the company.

Another factor that was shown to diminish goodwill-based trust in delivery drivers is the feeling that the platform does not seem to consider their preferences when it comes to preferred areas of work or restaurants. A few couriers explicitly stated that makes them perceive the platform as lacking care and prioritizing profits over their well-being. This aligns with critiques of Lee and Mitson (2025), who state that algorithmic management often gives priority to productivity over worker welfare and undermines their feelings of being valued by the platform. Furthermore, this indicates that couriers often perceive algorithms as lacking the emotional depth needed to manage people (Lee & Mitson, 2025; Lee, 2018). This advocates for the idea that transparency should not be merely about sharing information but also about signaling good intent and commitment to worker well-being.

Interestingly, some participants noted that the platform may have reasons for withholding information, including concerns about system manipulation, which reflects Ouyang's (2019) argument that algorithmic transparency may incentivize strategic manipulation. Thus, some workers may be willing to accept limited transparency in exchange for a perceived greater good.

5.4 The Desired Transparency

A significant number of participants expressed a clear desire for algorithmic transparency due to its prospects of increased control and autonomy, and related benefits that can directly contribute to their trust in the platform.

The leading anticipated benefit of transparency is perceived control and autonomy, with many respondents expressing that having a better understanding of the algorithm, in particular its transformation rules for order assignment and input data for pay

calculation, would give them more control and enable them to make better informed decisions. This was also directly linked to practical outcomes, with mentions of getting opportunities for more orders in the form of adapting to the system and changing their work strategy. When transparency was believed to offer such power, it was highly desired among workers as it provided them with the opportunity to be a more engaged participant in the dynamic, reinforcing Ouyang's (2019) argument that transparency is useful when actionable. This supports the idea that transparency can address concerns of lacking autonomy and power in gig economy platforms mentioned by Won et al. (2023) and Zhu et al. (2024).

Beyond control, transparency was linked to increased job motivation and satisfaction, which supports the findings of van Zoonen et al. (2023) who link increased sense of autonomy to greater job satisfaction. In turn, this also contributes to overall engagement and trust. For example, one respondent noted that a higher degree of output transparency regarding their rating would feel motivating. Another participant stated that transformation transparency in order allocation would establish clearer expectations, potentially leading to a more predictable and trustworthy environment.

5.5 Nuances and Limitations of Transparency

While the desire for transparency was reported among many, the results also identified nuances and limitations to this demand.

A significant number of workers expressed a relative indifference to algorithmic transparency, explained by factors previously underexplored in academic literature. Firstly, for some, being primarily motivated by earning money and perceiving the job as being 'simple' invalidates the need for input, transformation, and output transparency as the immediate functionality and income outweigh the potential advantages of having more knowledge. Furthermore, some respondents explained that they do not view transparency as actionable as even if they would possess knowledge on how the algorithm assigns orders, there is little potential for using that information in practice. This reinforces Ouyang's (2019) belief that transparency only offers a psychological feeling of control without actually providing it.

Certain participants also brought attention to the potential negative consequences of information disclosure. For instance, providing workers who do not possess technical knowledge needed for proper understanding with explanations regarding input data and transformation mechanisms of algorithms could create more confusion and fear, once again echoing findings of Mateescu & Nguyen (2019) who argue that gig economy workers are faced with lack of access to expertise that can explain the logic of algorithmic management. Furthermore, as highlighted by one interviewee, transparency can decrease trust in workers by exposing the algorithm's immutable nature of management. This aligns with Bucher et al.'s (2021) concept of anticipatory compliance, where workers are not concerned with understanding the algorithm and instead just adapt to it.

5.6 Theoretical Implications

This research's contributions to the existing body of literature concerning algorithmic management, transparency, and trust in the gig economy can be explained via a conceptual framework that summarizes the relationship between them.

5.6.1 Core Antecedent: Algorithmic Opacity

Firstly, this study nuances the concept of algorithmic opacity of Mateescu & Nguyen (2019), Ouyang (2019), and Zhu et al. (2024), who treat it as a general lack of understanding by distinguishing between specific types of opacity and each of their distinct consequences on gig workers. This study's findings demonstrate that low levels of input and transformational transparency (Bitzer, 2022) of order allocation are the primary cause of perceived randomness and feelings of confusion, which challenge Lee's (2018) assumptions of algorithmic predictability. It also supports Dietvorst's (2015) findings that perceived algorithmic inconsistencies caused by low levels of transformation transparency erode competence-based trust. At the same time, the absence of input transparency in pay calculations leads to uncertainties about earnings and contributes to perceived information asymmetry, echoing findings of Kellogg et al. (2020). The findings also demonstrate that transparency across all 3 types explained by Bitzer (2022) is a signal of care, generating goodwill-based trust. This extends the original framework of Sako (1998), who did not differentiate between different levels of opacity and their effect on the two types of trust. Theoretically, this calls for a more intricate understanding of algorithmic opacity beyond just the two mutually exclusive dimensions of transparency/opacity, as it is experienced differently based on what kind of information is withheld. Evidently, when workers do not understand the logic behind the algorithm, data usage, or the explanations given, they form their perceptions, in this case either algorithmic incompetence or lack of goodwill, which leads to an increase or decrease in levels of both types of trust towards the platform.

5.6.2 Moderator: Digital Environment

This study applies Sako's (1998) framework of competence-based and goodwill-based trust to the digital workplace governed by algorithms. Whereas the original model (Sako, 1998) was developed for inter-firm relationships where both the influencer and the influenced are humans, this research extends its application to contexts in which the trustee is an opaque algorithmic system. This then inherently re-conceptualizes the agency theory, where information and power asymmetries are created due to the principal, who is a non-human entity (the platform), having access to information not available to the agent (the workers), and affects how concepts of trust are developed. Consequently, this predicts how workers behave within a system characterized by the lack of human management. The findings demonstrate that workers desire actionable transparency, especially transformation and output, to gain agency and optimize their work. This confirms the notion that transparency enhances workers' sense of autonomy when it enables them to make more informed decisions. In turn, this positively contributes to Sako's (1998) dimensions of trust, stemming from the better ability to predict and take control of the outcomes (competence-based) and enabling the workers' agency (goodwill-based).

5.6.3 Moderator: Preferences of Workers and Nature of Gig Work

Finally, the findings challenge the theoretical models that assume that transparency always leads to improved feelings of trust, as contexts were identified in which this was not the case. For example, workers prefer not to know algorithmic details if it reduces their sense of being responsible. For some, the feeling of indifference was also aided by the simplicity of and the transactional relationship with the job. This highlights that transparency is not a universal tool for fostering trust in gig economy workers and is contingent on the characteristics of the job and worker's own perceived needs.

5.7 Practical Implications

The findings of this research also offer several practical implications for diverse groups of stakeholders within the gig economy, particularly platform developers and operators, and policymakers who aim to improve workers' working conditions and foster trust.

A checklist with an overview of recommendations for platform designers is showcased in Appendix D. To explain, platforms should focus on providing clear, understandable explanations of input and transformation data. This can be done via in-app messages or panels that explain how or if distance, previous performance, or current demand is used to assign orders or calculate pay. Secondly, it should be explained in simple terms how the algorithm processes this data to ensure proper understanding of the connection between the input factors and the decision of the algorithm. Regarding pay calculation, it may be helpful to display each component of it, such as base rate, distance (if applicable), and customer tip, directly within the app. This information reduces confusion and enhances competence-based trust. In the same manner, communicating the logic behind algorithms' decisions can demonstrate goodwill and reduce perceptions of uncaring treatment. To ensure worker control, special attention should be given to communicating performance feedback and metrics to allow couriers to adjust their workdays accordingly. However, the language used should be respectful and without any impersonal messages. Lastly, investments in strong human support systems are crucial since they have been shown to compensate for algorithmic shortcomings.

Policymakers should mandate algorithmic transparency standards at the legislative level, pushing for disclosure of all types of transparency regarding order assignment, pay, and performance evaluation. Moreover, ensure that workers always have access to human support systems that can provide them with explanations and intervention in case of issues.

The workers themselves can advocate for greater transparency by sharing their experiences with each other and unionizing. This can help make sense of platform patterns and bring attention to overlooked effects of algorithmic management.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section, the limitations of this research and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Firstly, one of the limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size, focused exclusively on food delivery drivers in the Netherlands. As mentioned prior, this limits the generalizability of findings and their applicability to different cultural and regulatory environments because worker motivation and experiences, as well as platform design and regulations, differ significantly across contexts. Thus, future research could quantitatively assess larger, more diverse samples to validate the relationships found qualitatively in this study. This could be done both across different geographical regions and different sectors of gig work or platform models.

Another limitation of this research is its reliance on self-reported data. While conducting interviews allowed to gain various perspectives of workers at a deep level, it was also susceptible to participants' limited understanding of complex algorithmic mechanisms and social desirability bias as outlined by Bergen & Labonté (2020). This might have created differences between the objective and the perceived levels of algorithmic opacity. To combat this, future studies can incorporate observable data to encourage objectivity and explore workers' perception of algorithms through a mixed-method approach.

Additionally, the scope of this research was limited to algorithmic transparency and its effect on trust, without exploring other aspects of gig work, such as benefits and compensation structures, that might indirectly affect trust levels. This provides future researchers with opportunities for exploration of the relationship between these broader work conditions and workers' trust in algorithmic systems.

Finally, this study's findings that some couriers express indifference to algorithmic transparency and recognize its potential negative consequences invite further exploration of specific conditions under which Bitzer's (2022) types of algorithmic transparency are valued or deemed unnecessary. This could be fulfilled by designing and testing various transparency interventions targeted at input, transformation, and output transparency. Research in this area can also be enriched by incorporating perspectives of platform managers and designers to get insight into technical and legal challenges of transparency in the gig economy not included in this study.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore different aspects of algorithmic management and their effect on workers' feelings of trust in the context of platform work by answering the question: 'Which elements of algorithmic management do workers in gig economy find important to trust the platform?'.

Through conducting interviews with Thuisbezorgd delivery drivers, it was found that algorithmic opacity remains a significant barrier to fostering trust. Workers consistently reported a lack of understanding regarding order allocation, pay calculation, and performance evaluation. This algorithmic opacity, specifically in terms of lacking transformation transparency in order allocation, input transparency in pay calculation, and to a certain degree output transparency in performance evaluation, diminishes both competence-based and goodwill-based trust. Confusion and perceptions of the platform being unreliable and uncaring were direct consequences of the lack of clarity.

Perceived control and autonomy were discovered to be the most significant drivers for the desire for transparency as they empower workers via the ability to make more informed decisions. However, it was also shown that in some cases, transparency information might diminish a sense of control. This study refines the understanding of algorithmic opacity by breaking it down into various impacts based on the type of information withheld and extends Sako's trust framework (1998) to algorithmic contexts. It also provides platform operators and policymakers with ideas on integrating actionable transparency into gig economy platforms' core operations. Ultimately, building trust in algorithmic management systems requires commitment to transparency that empowers workers and shows genuine care for their well-being.

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10. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Note: Before each interview, participants were orally asked to give their consent regarding collection and recording of data.

Every interview started with a short introduction between the researcher and the participant. Some warm up questions such as 'How long have you been working with Thuisbezorgd?' and 'What made you decide to take this job?'.

Part 1: Understanding How the System Works

Q1: When you're out delivering, how do you think the app decides which orders go to which riders?

Q2: Has anyone ever explained how that works, or did you just pick it up over time?

Q3: Have there been moments where you were confused or surprised by an order you got or didn't get?

Q4: Do you feel like it matters to you how these decisions are made?

Q5: What about pay-do you feel like you understand how it's calculated?

Q6: Has anything ever seemed off or unclear about your earnings?

Part 2: Information and Transparency

Q7: Is there anything about how the app works that you wish was explained better?

Q8: Do you think having more info about how orders or pay are decided would make a difference in how you work or feel about the job?

Q9: Would you say having more insight gives you more control or not really?

Part 3: Personal Experience

Q10: Have you ever felt like something was unfair—like missing out on orders, changes in pay, or ratings?

Q11: How did you respond when that happened? Did you feel you could do anything about it?

Q12: Do you feel the app or platform understands or takes into account how you work or what you prefer?

Q13: Have you talked to other drivers about how the system works for them? Do your experiences seem similar?

Part 4: Trust, Control & General Feelings

Q14: Do you feel like you can rely on the app to treat you fairly and consistently?

Q15: When something unexpected happens do you feel supported by the system?

Q16: Overall, how would you describe your level of trust in the platform?

Appendix B: Examples of Quote-Code-Theme Analysis Structure

Interview #	Allias	Quote	Initial Code	Theme
2	K	'I do not think the platform cares about my feelings'	Does not feel platform cares about workers	Goodwill-based distrust
4	Mr	'Overall I trusted the app because it worked as expected'	Trusts the platform to perform consistently	Competence-based trust

6	Ed	'no one explained the actual algorithms behind the decisions'	Lack of explanations for decisions	Algorithmic opacity - order allocation
9	An	'Definitely would give me more control because then I feel like I will be able to influence how much I make.'	Transparency gives control	Transparency advantages - perceived control/autonomy

Appendix C: Data Structure & Summary of Results

Initial Code	**Theme**	**Algorithmic Element**	**Type of Trust**	**Mentioned by participants**
Lack of explanation for decisions	Algorithmic opacity - order allocation	Order allocation	N/A	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Confused about order allocation				
Lack of explanations for order allocation				
Algorithmic opacity				
Lack of transparency				
Aware of algorithm but not the logic	Algorithmic opacity - pay calculation	Pay calculation	N/A	P1, P2, P3, P9
Confused about pay calculation				
Would like more transparency on pay calculation				
Not enough explanation on pay calculation is given				
Lack of explanations for decisions				
Aware of algorithm but not the logic	Algorithmic opacity - performance evaluation	Performance evaluation	N/A	P1, P4
Enough information on pay calculation is given	Algorithmic transparency	Order allocation, pay calculation	N/A	P5, P6, P10
Explanations are good/sufficient				

Would like transparency on order allocation	Desire for transparency - order allocation	Order allocation	N/A	P5, P7, P8, P10
Desire for transparency				
Confused about pay calculation	Desire for transparency - pay calculation	Pay calculation	N/A	P1, P2
Would like transparency on pay calculation				
Would like transparency on performance evaluation	Desire for transparency - performance evaluation	Performance evaluation	N/A	P3, P4, P1
Order allocation is random	Competence-based distrust	Order allocation	Competence-based distrust	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10
Platform is inconsistent				
Confused about order allocation				
Inconsistency reduces trust				
Displeased with algorithmic decisions				
Inconsistency reduces trust	Competence-based distrust	Pay calculation	Competence-based distrust	P2
Platform ignores rider preferences	Goodwill-based distrust	Order allocation	Goodwill-based distrust due to the platform not taking preferences of riders into account when allocating orders	P3, P4, P5, P8, P9
Does not feel platform cares about workers				
Does not feel platform cares about workers	Goodwill-based distrust	General algorithmic logic/Not specified	Goodwill-based distrust due to suspicions of the platform having bad intentions	P2, P8, P9, P10
Lack of transparency decreases trust				
Does not feel platform cares about workers	Goodwill-based distrust	N/A	Goodwill-based distrust due to platform valuing productivity over worker's well-being	P5, P8
Feels no control				
Platform is consistent	Competence-based trust		Competence-based trust	

Platform inconsistencies do not affect attitude towards the system		Order allocation, pay calculation		P4, P6, P8, P9, P10
Consistency increases trust				
Trust stems from reliable app				
Trusts the platform to perform consistently				
Thinks platform is fair	Goodwill-based trust	Order allocation	Goodwill-based trust based on reasoning that platform is not wholly responsible for the decisions	P4, P7, P10
Platform itself is not responsible				
Platform cares about workers	Goodwill-based trust	Not specified	Goodwill-based trust based on the platform being constantly improved via workers' feedback	P6
Transparency gives control	Transparency advantages - perceived control/autonomy	Order allocation	N/A	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
Transparency increases job satisfaction	Transparency advantages - job satisfaction	Order allocation	N/A	P1, P4
Transparency improves productivity	Transparency advantages - job performance	Order allocation, performance evaluation	N/A	P4, P6, P7
Transparency makes feel more valued	Transparency advantages - goodwill-based trust	General algorithmic logic/Not specified	Goodwill-based trust	P5, P6, P10
Transparency improves trust				
Transparency increases fairness				
Transparency leads to feeling of lack of control	Transparency limits - lack of perceived control/autonomy	Order allocation	N/A	P7, P10
Transparency is not actionable				
Does not care how the system works	Transparency limits - does not care	Order allocation, pay calculation	N/A	P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P10
No desire for transparency				

Transparency does not affect trust	Transparency limits - goodwill-based trust	Order allocation, pay calculation	Goodwill-based trust due to transparency exposing underlying mechanisms	P1, P2, P3
Transparency reduces trust				
Actionable transparency might reduce trust				
Introducing transparency might waste time	Transparency limits - unnecessary	General algorithmic logic/Not specified	N/A	P6
New information may confuse workers				
Would like more human mediators	Preference for human mediation	General algorithmic logic/not specified	N/A	P1, P3, P6, P7, P9, P10
Relies on humans for work				
Trusts the platform because of people			Goodwill-based trust stemming from the human support team providing explanations	P7

Appendix D: Practical Recommendations for Platform Designers

Action	**Method**	**Goal**
Explain order allocation, pay calculation, performance ratings logic	In-app messages/info panels, FAQs *Example:* 'This order was assigned to you based on your proximity to the restaurant and the availability of other couriers in the area.'	Improve understanding of algorithmic logic Enhance competence-based trust Enhance goodwill-based trust
Provide actionable feedback, break down metrics	Graphs, progress bars, weekly summaries *Example:* 'This week you have completed 26 deliveries! This is an increase of 5 deliveries since last week.'	Support worker control and perceived autonomy
Use empathetic language	In-app personal messages, positive reinforcement *Example:* 'Thank you for completing 6 shifts this week, *name*!'	Foster goodwill-based trust
Allow riders to gain additional explanations	Live chat, human support systems on stand-by	Provide human support Foster goodwill-based trust