



Algorithmic Work, Precarious Labor, and Everyday Resistance: A Comparative Socio-Cultural Study of Food Delivery Platform Workers in Canada and France

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how platform-based food delivery labor reshapes worker identity, social inequality, and collective action in contemporary urban societies. Focusing comparatively on Canada and France, the study analyzes how algorithmic management, migrant labor, legal classification, and communicative worker networks produce divergent patterns of labor precarity and resistance. The article argues that platform labor is not merely an economic transformation but a socio-cultural process through which workers negotiate dignity, belonging, surveillance, and collective agency under digitally mediated capitalism.

Using comparative sociological analysis, digital ethnography, labor policy analysis, and secondary labor datasets, the study compares two analytical dimensions: algorithmic labor control and worker collectivization. The findings demonstrate that Canadian delivery workers experience platform precarity through fragmented employment classification, racialized migrant labor, and weak collective bargaining protections, while French workers operate within a more conflictual but institutionally visible labor environment shaped by stronger labor traditions and regulatory debate. Across both cases, workers use digital communication channels to exchange information, contest platform opacity, and construct new forms of occupational solidarity.

The article contributes to social transformation scholarship by conceptualizing platform work as a site of algorithmic precarity and communicative resistance. It concludes that sustainable digital labor

governance requires legal recognition, algorithmic transparency, migrant worker protection, and institutional support for collective representation.

Keywords: platform labor; algorithmic management; precarity; food delivery workers; digital capitalism; migrant labor; labor resistance; Canada; France; social transformation

INTRODUCTION

Platform labor has become one of the defining features of contemporary digital capitalism. Food delivery platforms, ride-hailing applications, freelance marketplaces, and task-based digital labor systems have reorganized work through algorithmic allocation, data-driven surveillance, flexible contracting, and fragmented employment relations. These transformations are not only economic but deeply socio-cultural. They reshape how workers understand autonomy, dignity, time, risk, identity, and collective belonging. In platform-mediated labor markets, the worker is simultaneously positioned as entrepreneur, data subject, service provider, and replaceable logistical unit.

Food delivery work is especially important because it exposes the contradictions of digital urban economies. Delivery platforms promise flexibility, efficiency, and consumer convenience, yet their operation frequently depends on precarious workers who absorb risks related to income instability, road safety, equipment costs, platform deactivation, and social protection gaps. This study argues that food delivery labor reveals a broader transformation in the relationship between technology, inequality, and social citizenship. It connects urban consumer culture with algorithmic management, migrant labor, institutional regulation, and emerging forms of worker resistance.

Canada and France provide analytically significant comparative cases. Both countries have advanced digital economies, large metropolitan food delivery markets, and significant migrant participation in platform labor. However, they differ in labor law traditions, welfare institutions, union cultures, and regulatory approaches. Canada's platform labor environment is shaped by provincial employment regulation, multicultural urban labor markets, and fragmented collective representation. France, by contrast, has a stronger history of labor mobilization, public contestation, and state intervention in employment relations. These differences allow the study to analyze how similar platform technologies generate different labor cultures and resistance strategies across institutional contexts.

Existing scholarship on platform labor has emphasized precarity, misclassification, surveillance, and algorithmic control. Standing's concept of the precariat remains influential in explaining insecure work and weakened social citizenship. Srnicek's analysis of platform capitalism highlights how digital firms extract value through data infrastructures and network effects. Rosenblat's research on algorithmic management shows how platform workers experience opaque forms of control disguised as flexibility. Woodcock and Graham further demonstrate that digital labor is shaped by global inequalities, fragmented regulation, and

uneven worker power.

However, current scholarship remains limited in three areas. First, platform labor is often analyzed primarily through economic or legal frameworks, while its cultural and identity dimensions remain underdeveloped. Second, comparative research frequently focuses on regulatory differences without sufficiently examining how workers construct solidarity, meaning, and resistance through digital communication. Third, studies of platform work often describe precarity but less frequently explain the mechanisms through which algorithmic control becomes socially normalized and culturally contested.

This article addresses these gaps by analyzing food delivery platform work as a socio-cultural process. It examines how workers experience algorithmic management, how they interpret their labor identity, how institutional environments shape their vulnerability, and how digital communication enables everyday resistance. The study's novelty lies in integrating labor sociology, cultural studies, digital society theory, and institutional analysis into a comparative framework.

The article develops the following analytical framework: algorithmic management → labor precarity → identity negotiation → communicative solidarity → institutional contestation → social transformation. This framework allows the study to explain how platform work produces inequality while also generating new forms of worker agency. The objective of this study is to compare how food delivery platform workers in Canada and France experience, interpret, and resist algorithmic labor precarity, and to explain how these practices contribute to broader transformations in work, social protection, and collective identity.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative sociological research design combining digital ethnography, labor policy analysis, critical discourse analysis, and secondary data interpretation. Canada and France were selected because they share highly developed digital service economies and significant platform delivery sectors while differing substantially in employment regulation, welfare institutions, and labor movement traditions. The unit of analysis is the platform delivery worker as embedded within algorithmic labor systems, urban consumer economies, and communicative worker networks. The study compares two central dimensions: algorithmic labor control and worker collectivization. Empirical materials include public worker forums, platform policy documents, labor court decisions, union and advocacy reports, government labor statistics, OECD employment indicators, and peer-reviewed scholarship on platform capitalism, precarious labor, and digital work.

The analysis applies thematic coding to identify patterns related to income insecurity, platform surveillance, deactivation anxiety, migrant worker vulnerability, occupational identity, and collective resistance. Critical discourse analysis examines how platforms frame flexibility and entrepreneurship, and how workers counter-frame these narratives through claims of exploitation, dignity, safety, and recognition. Triangulation was achieved by comparing digital worker communications with policy documents, labor statistics, and existing empirical research. Ethical safeguards included the use of publicly accessible materials, avoidance of identifiable worker data, and non-

reproduction of private communications. The study is limited by the opacity of platform algorithms, uneven availability of comparable national datasets, and the absence of direct interview material; nevertheless, its comparative design enables a theoretically grounded interpretation of how algorithmic labor systems shape socio-cultural transformation.

Findings and Discussion

1. Algorithmic Management and the Cultural Production of Flexibility

The comparative evidence indicates that food delivery platforms organize labor through a powerful cultural narrative of flexibility. In both Canada and France, workers are formally positioned as independent contractors or self-employed service providers. This framing presents platform work as autonomous and entrepreneurial. However, workers' everyday experiences reveal that flexibility is structured by algorithmic dependency. Platforms determine order allocation, delivery routes, customer ratings, visibility, and access to income opportunities.

In Canada, flexibility is often experienced as insecurity. Workers must manage fluctuating demand, unpaid waiting time, fuel or bicycle maintenance costs, and unpredictable earnings. Migrant and international student workers are especially vulnerable because platform work provides immediate income but limited protection. The cultural promise of flexibility therefore masks structural dependency.

In France, the flexibility narrative is more publicly contested. Delivery workers and labor advocates have challenged the legal fiction of independence through court cases, strikes, and public campaigns. While French workers also experience algorithmic insecurity, the country's stronger labor traditions make the contradiction between autonomy and control more visible in public debate.

This comparison demonstrates that algorithmic management is not merely a technical system. It is a cultural regime that legitimizes risk transfer from platforms to workers. The worker is encouraged to imagine themselves as free, while the platform silently governs labor through data-driven control. This reflects broader transformations in neoliberal labor culture, where responsibility is individualized and institutional protection is weakened.

2. Migrant Labor, Social Inequality, and Platform Dependency

Food delivery labor in both cases is strongly shaped by migration, race, class, and urban inequality. In Canadian cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, platform delivery work is often performed by migrants, racialized workers, international students, and recent arrivals. These workers may enter platform labor because of credential barriers, limited employment networks, language constraints, and the need for flexible income. Platform work therefore becomes an informal entry point into the urban labor market, but one marked by insecurity and limited upward mobility.

In France, migrant workers also form a visible part of the delivery workforce, especially in Paris and other large cities. However, the French context involves stronger politicization of undocumented or semi-formal labor

within delivery platforms. Worker mobilizations have highlighted how subcontracting, account renting, and legal ambiguity expose migrants to intensified exploitation.

The comparative evidence suggests that platform labor reproduces urban inequality by concentrating risk among workers with limited institutional power. Digital platforms do not eliminate labor market discrimination; they reorganize it through supposedly neutral algorithmic systems. This finding supports critical scholarship arguing that digital capitalism often converts social inequality into data-mediated labor segmentation.

Culturally, workers negotiate dignity through narratives of endurance, mobility, and responsibility. Some describe platform work as temporary survival; others frame it as autonomy compared with traditional low-wage employment. Yet this autonomy remains constrained by algorithmic visibility and customer rating systems. Worker identity is therefore shaped by ambivalence: pride in self-reliance coexists with frustration toward exploitation.

3. Digital Communication and Everyday Worker Resistance

Despite fragmented employment relations, workers develop communicative networks that enable everyday resistance. In both Canada and France, delivery workers use WhatsApp groups, Reddit forums, Facebook communities, Telegram channels, and local advocacy pages to share information about platform updates, unsafe restaurants, police enforcement, wage changes, customer behavior, and collective actions.

In Canada, digital worker communication tends to be pragmatic and survival-oriented. Workers exchange tips about profitable zones, weather conditions, account problems, and platform incentives. These practices build weak but meaningful forms of occupational solidarity. However, fragmented regulation and geographic dispersion limit sustained collective organization.

In France, digital communication is more frequently connected to protest, legal campaigns, and union-supported mobilization. Worker groups use digital platforms not only for information exchange but also for collective framing. They articulate platform work as exploitation, demand legal recognition, and mobilize around strikes and demonstrations. This reflects France's stronger culture of labor contestation.

The findings demonstrate that the same digital infrastructures that enable platform control can also enable worker resistance. Communication channels allow workers to compare experiences, identify unfair patterns, and produce collective interpretations of algorithmic power. This supports theories of connective action while extending them into the domain of precarious labor.

However, digital resistance remains vulnerable. Platform workers often fear deactivation, lack stable organizational resources, and face linguistic and legal barriers. Digital solidarity can be rapid but fragile. Sustainable collective action requires institutional support, legal recognition, and worker organizations capable of converting communicative grievance into durable representation.

4. Institutional Regulation and the Future of Social Protection

The comparison between Canada and France shows that institutional environments significantly shape

platform labor outcomes. In Canada, employment regulation is fragmented across provinces, creating uneven protections and legal uncertainty. Debates concerning gig worker classification have intensified, but comprehensive protections remain limited. This produces a regulatory environment in which platforms can maintain flexible labor models while workers carry the burden of risk.

France has pursued more visible regulatory debates, including court cases concerning employment classification and sectoral discussions around platform worker representation. While protections remain incomplete, the French case demonstrates stronger institutional recognition of platform labor as a public issue. Worker resistance is more likely to enter legal and political arenas.

This institutional variation matters because algorithmic labor cannot be governed solely through consumer choice or platform self-regulation. The evidence suggests that worker vulnerability is intensified when legal systems fail to recognize the dependency created by algorithmic management. Social protection must therefore be redesigned for platform-mediated labor markets.

The policy implications are clear. Workers require minimum earnings protections, occupational safety standards, transparent deactivation procedures, access to social insurance, and collective bargaining rights. Migrant workers require additional protections against account exploitation, documentation vulnerability, and exclusion from legal remedies. Algorithmic transparency is also essential because workers cannot contest decisions they cannot understand.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Social Structures, Cultural Transformation, and Societal Outcomes

Variable	Case 1: Canada	Case 2: France	Empirical Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Labor Regulation	Fragmented provincial regulation	Stronger national labor contestation	Labor policy documents and court debates	Institutional structure shapes worker protection
Worker Composition	Migrants, students, racialized urban workers	Migrants, self-employed couriers, precarious workers	Labor reports and worker advocacy materials	Platform labor concentrates risk among vulnerable groups
Platform Control	Algorithmic allocation	Algorithmic control	Platform policies and	Digital control

	and rating dependenc y	publicly contested	worker forums	operates through opaque systems
Worker Identity	Survival, flexibility, and constrained autonomy	Exploitation, recognition, and labor dignity	Public worker communicati ons	Identity formation reflects institutional culture
Resistance Strategy	Informal digital coordinatio n	Strikes, legal claims, and union-linked mobilization	Advocacy reports and digital archives	Collective action depends on labor traditions
Social Outcome	Normalizati on of precarious flexible work	Politicization of platform labor rights	Comparative policy analysis	Platform labor produces divergent transformati on pathways
Policy Risk	Weak protection and individualiz ed risk	Partial institutionalizer ion without full security	Regulatory debates	Governance must address algorithmic dependency

The table demonstrates that platform labor produces similar forms of algorithmic precarity but different socio-political outcomes. In Canada, fragmented regulation facilitates the normalization of individualized risk. In France, stronger labor traditions transform platform work into a more visible site of public contestation. Across both cases, platform labor reveals the need to rethink social protection for digitally mediated work.

Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1: Algorithmic management transforms labor control by converting managerial authority into opaque technical coordination.

Platform workers experience control not through direct supervision but through ratings, incentives, automated allocation, and deactivation risk.

Proposition 2: Platform labor reproduces social inequality by concentrating economic risk among migrants,

racialized workers, and precarious urban populations.

Digital labor systems appear open and flexible but are embedded within unequal labor markets.

Proposition 3: Digital communication enables precarious workers to transform individual grievances into collective interpretation.

Worker forums and messaging groups create communicative solidarity, even when formal organization remains weak.

Proposition 4: Institutional protection determines whether platform labor becomes normalized precarity or contested social transformation.

Legal recognition, collective bargaining, and algorithmic transparency are essential for transforming platform work into socially sustainable employment.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how food delivery platform workers in Canada and France experience, interpret, and resist algorithmic labor precarity. The comparative findings demonstrate that platform labor is not simply a new employment model but a socio-cultural transformation in the organization of work, identity, inequality, and collective agency.

The analysis shows that algorithmic management produces a contradiction between flexibility and control. Platforms present workers as autonomous entrepreneurs while governing their labor through opaque systems of allocation, rating, incentive design, and deactivation. This contradiction is experienced differently across institutional contexts. In Canada, fragmented regulation and multicultural urban labor markets contribute to the normalization of individualized platform risk. In France, stronger labor traditions and public contestation make platform precarity more politically visible.

The article contributes theoretically by conceptualizing platform labor as algorithmic precarity shaped by communicative resistance. Workers are not passive subjects of digital capitalism. Through online forums, messaging groups, strikes, and advocacy networks, they create forms of solidarity that challenge platform narratives of autonomy and entrepreneurship. However, digital solidarity alone cannot overcome structural inequality without institutional recognition and legal protection.

Empirically, the study demonstrates that migrant and racialized workers are central to platform delivery systems. Their experiences reveal how digital labor markets reproduce social inequality while concealing dependency behind technological neutrality. The policy implications are significant: governments must establish minimum labor standards, social insurance access, transparent algorithmic governance, fair deactivation procedures, and collective representation rights for platform workers.

The study is limited by reliance on public digital materials and secondary labor data. Future research should include worker interviews, longitudinal ethnography, and comparative analysis across additional

platform sectors. Further research should also examine artificial intelligence in labor allocation and the psychological effects of continuous algorithmic evaluation.

Ultimately, this article argues that platform labor is a critical site of contemporary social transformation. It reveals how digital capitalism reorganizes work while producing new struggles over dignity, recognition, and social citizenship. The future of work will depend not only on technological innovation but on whether societies can build institutions capable of protecting workers within algorithmically mediated economies.

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