DELIVERED: WORKING AND LIVING WITH ALGORITHMNS IN MEXICO CITY

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DEDICATION

Para todos los repas de México y el mundo.

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ABSTRACT

Labor platforms—digital platforms that algorithmically mediate between companies, workers, and consumers—have caught the attention of organizational scholars, sociologists of work, and science and technology scholars. Attention has been given primarily to algorithmic control—that is, the usage of algorithmic systems to manage workers at a distance. Less attention, however, has been given to how the algorithmic systems embedded in labor platforms are experienced on the ground by workers who are embedded in specific cultures and economies. Without scholars paying attention to how algorithmic systems in labor platforms unfold *in situ,* these systems remain conceptually static and closed. In this dissertation, I address this gap by moving from algorithmic control to algorithmic practice. In particular, it investigates the practices, interpretations, and contestations that workers have with regard to algorithmic systems. To do so, I draw from 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork spent working alongside platform-based food delivery couriers in Mexico City, 75 semi-structured interviews with platform-based food delivery couriers, and online ethnography conducted in online Facebook communities. This dissertation is organized in three articles. The first article draws primarily from interviews to address how couriers evaluate platform-based delivery gig work in relation to other available options in the urban labor market in Mexico City. Evaluation and perception of platform-based work is dependent upon workers' past employment trajectories. This article moves away from a conceptualization of homogenous reception to address workers' heterogeneity. The second article draws from participant observation as a food delivery courier, ethnographic observations at bases, and online ethnography in Facebook forums to address how the labor process in food delivery platforms is sedimented across spaces exhibiting different levels of virtuality. Rather than concentrating solely on algorithmic control, this article takes seriously the agency of couriers and details how they engage in practices of consent and resistance as they interact

with algorithmic technologies embedded in food delivery platforms. The third article also draws from participant observation as a food delivery courier, ethnographic observations at bases, and online ethnography in Facebook forum in order to address the gap that exists between technological design of food delivery platforms and local economic practices, particularly the saliency of cash in Mexico City. Given that cash administration requires physicality, this task is delegated from platforms to couriers. This results in an added layer of algorithmic control given that platforms must ensure that couriers are completing this task adequately. Moreover, this task is not experienced uniformly among workers as existing socioeconomic divides shape this delegated task. This article addresses how algorithmic control does not follow a universal template and how local economic contexts shape technologies themselves. Across these three articles, this dissertation offers insightful contributions to our understanding of the intersection between technological diffusion and digitally mediated labor control. Despite the world of work experiencing an era of technological convergence, local contexts shape how these digital technologies are interpreted, navigated, and contested by workers *on the ground*.

INTRODUCTION

The future of work—where workers' actions are predicted, controlled, and surveilled by an algorithmic machine, and where workers' economic and social power are diminished—is no longer so distant. It is now a commonplace reality across the globe (Anthony et al., 2023; Jain & Ranjan, 2020; Kraus et al., 2023; Shestakofsky, 2017; Silva, 2022). No workplace embodies this new reality of work as clearly as labor platforms. "Labor platforms" refer to digital infrastructures that coordinate between companies, workers, and consumers (Vallas & Schor, 2020). The origin of labor platforms is attributed to the increasing digitization of the internal operations of traditional work organizations (Aneesh, 2009) and the proliferation of entirely digitally based companies that employ the Internet to usurp existing markets such as e-commerce (Hossain, 2020). By now, most people in the United States recognize the names of Uber, Airbnb, and Postmates—and most likely have these platforms downloaded on their smartphones, enabling them to request services from ride-hailing to food delivery on-demand. For workers, labor platforms translate into a novel form of work that allows them to sell their services—or rent their physical assets—via digital mediation without having to go to a physical workplace or see a flesh-and-bones management figure.

Labor platforms, representing a disruption to traditional work organizations, have not only captured the attention of workers and consumers, but also the attention of scholars from various disciplines. In economic circles, labor platforms are celebrated for their entrepreneurial potential. According to this view, platforms allow for the disruption of the traditional corporate model, reducing bureaucratic intermediaries and allowing greater labor force participation (Sundarajan, 2016). Sociologists offer a more pessimistic view. For them, labor platforms constitute the paragon of what sociologist of work Arne Kalleberg calls a "bad job" (Kalleberg, 2011). Platform-based workers, also known as gig workers, are, for the most part, not considered workers by law,

precluding them from enjoying basic employment protections such as health insurance or a fixed salary (V. Dubal, 2019, 2022; V. B. Dubal, 2017). Given this, labor platforms intensify labor precarity and erode the previously established social contract in which effort was exchanged for good wages and social protections (Schor et al., 2020a, 2020b; Sutherland et al., 2020; Zhou, 2022).

Sociologists and technology scholars have focused their attention on another salient feature of labor platforms: the algorithmic systems that powered them. Joining the chorus of scholars that investigate how algorithms are transforming our social realities (Brayne & Christin, 2021; Burrell & Fourcade, 2021; Christin, 2017; Fourcade & Healy, 2013), these scholars pay attention to how algorithms control workers. To make this sense of this *new* form of management, scholars have coined the phrase "algorithmic control," also known as "algorithmic management" (Griesbach et al., 2019; Huang, 2023; Isbah, 2022; Kellogg et al., 2020; Li, 2024).Opening the "black box" (Pasquale, 2015) of algorithmic management reveals several mechanisms that allow for the management of workers, to borrow Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose's famous phrase, "at a distance." Among the algorithmic mechanisms that control workers are systems of surveillance, evaluation, recommendation, and restriction (Kellogg et al., 2020). Moreover, scholars point to the usage of "gamification techniques"—the application of individualized and algorithmically derived rewards—to elicit effort from workers (Nichols, 2021; van Doorn & Chen, 2021; Vasudevan & Chan, 2022).

Discussions of algorithmic control often err on the side of criticism. These discussions point to how algorithms afford employers never-before-seen levels of control and surveillance where every worker's movement is recorded and scrutinized. Moreover, algorithmic management is worrisome given algorithmic opacity and information asymmetry—workers' lack of understanding on how algorithms operate and the purposeful concealment of these operations (Burrell, 2016; Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). However, discussions of algorithmic management take the power of

algorithms for granted, neglecting the way that those algorithmic systems unfold *in situ*. In other words, algorithmic management does not occur in a vacuum—it is received and contested by workers who are themselves embedded in local contexts. In this dissertation, I move from "algorithmic management" to "algorithmic practice" to reveal how algorithmic systems embedded in labor platforms are interpreted, navigated, and contested by workers.

I do so by examining the case of food delivery platforms in Mexico City. Amid a context of profound economic precarity and informality, these platforms that algorithmically mediate between companies, workers, consumers, and restaurants have become an increasingly viable option for workers to generate income. Every resident of and traveler to the Mexican metropolis can attest that seeing couriers[1] travelling on their motorcycles or bicycles and carrying giant cooler backpacks has become a feature of the urban landscape. Between 2022 and 2023, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork on food delivery gig work in Mexico City. During this time, I hung out at a base (a physical location where couriers congregate to wait to be algorithmically assigned a food order), became a *Coala (*an assistant to another courier), and conducted participant observation as a food delivery courier for the Colombian food delivery platform Rappi. In addition, I conducted 75 semi-structured interviews with food delivery couriers. I observed and listened to how couriers made sense of and navigated the multiple algorithmic systems embedded in food delivery platforms and how they understood their relationship to this digitally mediated form of work.

Based on this ethnographic material, I find that algorithmic control does not follow a universal template; rather, the economic, cultural, social, and spatial context in which workers are embedded shapes how workers experience control and how they interpret it. I present this argument in three articles. The first article addresses how workers evaluate platform-based work in relation to

[1] Common name for food delivery platform workers.

other options available in the urban labor market of Mexico City. The second article addresses how the labor-process of platform-based work is sedimented across different organizations exhibiting different levels of virtuality. Finally, the third article address how workers on the ground bridge the gap between technological design of platforms and local economic practices.

FROM ALGORITHMIC CONTROL TO ALGORITHMIC PRACTICE

Control

Sociologists and scholars within management studies have been long concerned with investigating how management exhorts control over workers (Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Smith, 2015; Thompson & Vincent, 2010). Control, scholars argue, is inevitably tied to technology. This was the argument presented by Harry Braverman in his canonical book *Labor and Monopoly Capital.* According to Braverman, technology and scientific management led to the degradation of work in the 20th century. Primarily, an impetus for efficient production led to the separation between mental and manual labor. In this arrangement sedimented by technology, judgment and knowledge was concentrated in the hands of management and their agents, subjecting workers to work that is routinized and mentally diluted. Later, scholars inspired by Braverman located and delineated different mechanisms of managerial control exhibiting different facets in accordance to transitions in the global political economy. In all these facts, again, technology takes center stage. This is because, as Marx would argue, new technologies are mobilized to reduce costs and increase control over labor (Marx, 1973). In this vein, each managerial facet armed with its own technology innovation produces its own version of control. Fordism and its automated assembly line technology led to a type of control in which each task was meticulously studied to achieve the highest level of productivity (Braverman, 1974). Innovation in computerized technologies beget another managerial facet: post-Fordism (Roobeek, 1987). No longer concentrated in the *domestic* manufacturing sector,

computerized technologies lead to a new type of control in the workplace. Instead of direct bureaucratic control, accomplished by rules, roles, and subjective judgment of supervisors, software programming schemes allowed the coordination and control of action in precise ways, even if geographically dispersed (Aneesh, 2009; Sirianni & Zuboff, 1989).

It is within this tradition that the concern for algorithmic management or algorithmic control emerges. Algorithmic technologies, defined as computer-programmed procedures that transform input data into desired outcomes, reconfigured organizational control in profound ways. Kellogg et al. (2020) identified three important technological affordances of algorithms for the control of workers and their work. First, algorithmic technologies allow for a more *comprehensive control* as new levels of worker's data and natural language-process algorithms can monitor the productivity, mood, and turnover intent. Second, algorithmic technologies allow *instantaneous feedback* given the velocity of big data, algorithmic technologies can produce instantaneous and real-time information about workers. As a result, feedback and assessment is continuously integrated in modalities of control. Third, algorithmic technologies promote *interactivity*—that is, using different algorithmically mediated platforms, employers can adjust team hierarchies and workflow depending on inputted information.

While algorithmic systems can be found in various work organizations (Brayne & Christin, 2021; Christin, 2017), an increasing number of studies have attempted to reveal the algorithmic techniques that power food delivery platforms—and which accomplish control over gig workers at a distance (Galière, 2020; Griesbach et al., 2019; Huang, 2023; Li, 2024; Newlands, 2022; Velkova & Kaun, 2021). Among these techniques are geolocalisation and geofencing techniques that create different spaces to efficiently coordinate and control mobile delivery gig work (Heiland, 2021), information asymmetries (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016), evaluative feedback loops (Huang, 2023), and

data-driven gamification techniques based on individualization to elicit higher productivity among workers (Nichols, 2021; van Doorn & Chen, 2021; Vasudevan & Chan, 2022).

As important as opening the black box (Burrell, 2016; Pasquale, 2015) of algorithmic management is, remaining here and not addressing how these systems unfold *in situ* presents a rather limited view of contemporary work relations. Moreover, it promotes what technology scholars call "technology determinism"—the idea that technology exhorts absolute control over society (Hauer, 2017; Héder, 2021). In the real world, technologies—algorithms included—are negotiated, contested, and interpreted by workers. A more comprehensive approach addresses the role of users and their practices in shaping the effects of algorithms at work.

Practice

Here enters the labor process tradition reinvigorated by sociologist Michael Burawoy. Within this tradition, the focus is not uniquely centered on the mechanisms of managerial control *without workers*. Rather, armed with ethnographic techniques, attention is given to the production of consent in the workplace. Attention to consent—the alignment between the interests of workers and the interests of management—demands a different conceptualization of workers. In this vision, workers are not lifeless avatars unconsciously being controlled by managers—or in this case, algorithms. Rather, great analytical consideration is given to their practices and to their overall *lived experiences*. Of course, this lived experience may be shaped and structured by managers, but in giving agency to workers, control *and* consent are not given or assumed, but their processes properly examined. As Burawoy (1979, p. 27) specifies, in the workplace, the worker is presented with a set of choices that she must attend to, however narrowly confined these choices might be. Again, this turns our attention to workers' practices with agency restored. The labor process tradition via the extended case method (Burawoy, 2009), has produced several important works that detail the practices of

workers across different workplaces and under different managerial structures, resulting in consent and, at times, resistance. From call centers (Sallaz, 2015; 2017) to *maquiladoras* (Salzinger, 2003) to centers for the unemployed (Shore, 2007) to more recently, labor platforms (Manriquez, 2019).

The field of science and technology studies also gives attention to practice. Here, the attention is directed not solely at "workers" but also to "users of technology." Attention to technology *in practice* emerged from a critique of a tendency within technology and design studies to privilege the technical over the social (Bailey & Barley, 2020). Scholars within this tradition urge others to study the interactions of users with a given technology as doing so reveals the gap that may exist between technological design and the contexts of use (defined as the desires, needs, and practices of users) (Li, 2024; Maiers, 2017; Siles et al., 2022). A user-centered approach has been extended to the study of technologies in workplaces. For instance, Zuboff (1988) investigated on-the-ground practices with computerized control systems in three pulp paper mills. In this study, the author finds that the use of control systems by managers varied across the three mills and their success was dependent upon willingness from managers to cede control to operators. In another study, Bailey & Leonardi (2015) showed that a user's occupational knowledge and expertise shaped how willing engineers were to adapting new technologies. More recently, in her ethnographic study of truck drivers, Karen Levy (2023) shows how truck drivers interpret and circumvent recently implemented electronic lodging devices designed to surveil and control each trucker's work. Across these studies, the effects and outcomes of a technological system are shaped by how people embedded in different contexts use and interpret new technologies. Like accounts of the labor process, user-centered approaches to technology urge against economic and technological determinism. Once again, agency is restored.

In this dissertation, I place these two traditions in conversation to note how workers in Mexico City interpret, navigate, and sometimes circumvent the algorithmic systems embedded in food delivery platforms. Attending to *algorithms in practice* (Christin, 2017; 2018; 2020) allows me to note how consent *and* resistance are produced on-the-ground and through the practices of workers.

FOOD DELIVERY GIG WORK IN MEXICO CITY

Strolling through Mexico City, one can see hundreds upon hundreds of food stands and restaurants in close proximity to each other serving all kinds of local delights, from quesadillas, tlacoyos, and tacos de suadero to high-end restaurants serving mole. In these stands and restaurants, one encounters workers, bureaucrats, and families digesting in co-presence. Given the abundance of food at the street level and the long-time tradition of eating outside of the home, one would suspect that food delivery platforms—digitally mediated and algorithmically powered Internet-based platforms that mediate between companies, restaurants, consumers, and workers, to deliver food to your home—would be a complete failure. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, food delivery platforms, are now used widely—from local food stands subscribing to Uber Eats in an effort to open their consumer market to consumers in high-class enclaves and popular neighborhoods ordering food from their smartphones, and of course, to workers who *sign-in* to food delivery platforms in the hopes of generating income to support their families.

The first food delivery platform to make an appearance in Mexico City was *Sindelantal*—a Spanish food delivery platform that made its market debut in 2012. After several failed attempts from U.S. food delivery companies such as Postmates and Cornshop, it was not until 2018 that the now-food delivery giants arrived at the scene. Silicon Valley's Uber Eats appeared in 2018, followed by Rappi from Colombia, and finally, in 2020, DiDi Food from China (Trecone, 2023). The popularity among workers and consumers was gradual; however, the COVID-19 pandemic really

cemented their presence. Quarantine measures led consumers to rely on food delivery platforms to order food to their homes, while workers who had lost their jobs amid the pandemic signed-in to platforms to generate much needed income. This led to what workers told me was the *era dorada* or golden age of Internet-based food delivery, when deliveries abounded and when, according to couriers, one could rely on making a living on the platforms. Quarantine measures slowly lifted, but food delivery platforms are now part of everyday life in the city.

Figure 1. DiDi Food advertisement spotted in barrio Tacuba.

For consumers, food delivery platforms allow them to get food delivered to their doorstep with just a few clicks of their smartphones, letting them avoid the chaotic streets of the city or the persistent rainy days. For workers, however, food delivery platforms constitute a work opportunity

amid a context of deep unemployment and labor precarity. Given the relatively low prerequisites of entry—mainly the mobilization of everyday assets such as motorcycles, bicycles, and smartphones—food delivery gig work becomes an appealing way to quickly generate income. As I explore further in *Article 1,* food delivery couriers—workers who *sign-in* to work for food delivery platforms—come from a variety of employment trajectories. Primarily: the informal sector, the professional sector, the service sector, and students with no previous employment history. Today, there are approximately 33 thousand food delivery couriers in the city, a number that continues to increase (Ortega Erreguerena, 2023). Uber, the ride-hailing platform company, had previously set a regulatory precedent for workers in Mexico City in which they were considered not workers but independent contractors and therefore excluded from basic employment trajectories (Radetich, 2022; V. Dubal, 2019). Recent labor reforms, formulated and mobilized by the arduous effort of worker's unions, now include food delivery gig workers as workers protected by law which allows them access to social security and health insurance (Gobierno de Mexico, 2024). Given the predominance of food delivery gig work—the second biggest market of platform food delivery in Latin America after Brazil—Mexico is a strategic site to investigate the effects of algorithmic systems on work and workers.

Figure 2. Food delivery gig couriers waiting to get algorithmically assigned a food order in Zona Rosa. Credit: Mario Jasso from Cuartoscuro.

Food delivery gig work is significantly different from previous modes of work that predominated in Mexico City during various transitions in the global political economy. It is different than agricultural work in the fields, where workers were under the command of an *hacendado,* or landowner, that predominated prior to the Mexican Revolution, or work in state-owned manufacturing factories during the import-substitution model, where workers were managed by a corporativist managerial structure (Cruz, 2010; Lascurain Fernández & Romero Leon, 2018). Its major difference lies in the fact that all managerial functions are transported into multiple and intersecting algorithmic systems, where workers do not see a flesh-and-bones management figure. In this dissertation, I examine how workers navigated and interpreted this novel algorithmically powered form of work emblematic of the platform economy that came to transform work and work relations in the city.

STUDYING ALGORITHMS IN PRACTICE

Si quieres saber que es lo que es ser un repartidor, lo tienes que vivir en carne propia.

If you want to know what ii is like to be a food delivery gig courier, you have to live it with your own flesh.

-*Jose Luis,* 33-year-old courier.

Entering the Field

Unlike work-ethnographers before me who would enter a physical enclosure, be it a factory (Burawoy, 1979) or a call center (Sallaz, 2015), food delivery gig work takes place in open time and open space. Given this, I had to devise several strategies to gain access to food delivery gig work. One of the strategies that I employed was taking long walks along the main avenues of the city and distributing flyers to couriers to recruit them to participate in my study, and particularly to participate in an interview. On one of these walks, I stumbled upon the *Insurgentes* Subway station—an open circular station located in the center of the city. In this station, there were around fifteen couriers *hacienda base* (making base). "Making base" refers to the practice of congregating in a public space—a park, a plaza, a subway station—to rest, hang out, eat meals, and more importantly, wait to get algorithmically assigned a food order. I approached this base, and I told couriers about my research study. Mainly, I told them that I wanted to know how the food delivery platforms work and what it was like to work as a food delivery gig courier in Mexico City. Jose Luis, who acted as one of the leaders, very acutely told me: "If you want to know what it is like to be a food delivery gig courier you have to live it with your own flesh." He proceeded to invite me to join their base. I did. From October 2022 to December 2023, I would go *Insurgentes* four times a week for 2 to 5 hours per day. While at the base, I hung out with couriers and listened carefully to how they talked about their personal lives and their past jobs, their opinions about food delivery gig work, their daily experiences with customers, and their theories, frustrations, and sometimes, exhilarating experiences with *el algoritmo* (the algorithm)—the name couriers called the opaque algorithmic systems that powered

food delivery platforms. At the base, under the mentorship of Jose Luis and other couriers, I *signed-in* to become a food delivery courier myself.

Participant Observation

At the base, couriers instructed me on the steps to take to become a food delivery courier. I had to assemble several documents and instruments. First, I had to locate my social security number (known as RFC in Mexico) followed by a national identification that gave me authorization to work. I had these documents since I have Mexican nationality; however, I had to visit several offices to gather all proper documentation. This process took several months. I also had to open a Mexican bank account and buy a Mexican smartphone. I did not have a motorcycle or a bicycle, so I decided to use the local government-sponsored bicycles called Ecobicis, for which I bought a year-long subscription. Finally, I ordered a cooler backpack online. After gathering all materials, I signed-in to Rappi, the food delivery platform that couriers advised me was the easiest to get into; Uber Eats and Didi, where the entry of couriers are more heavily controlled, had waiting lists. After uploading all my materials to the platform and waiting two hours, I was authorized to work. After I was officially a *Rappitendera*—the name given by Rappi to its couriers—I traveled to *Insurgentes* with my bicycle and cooler backpack, and with all other couriers, I waited to get algorithmically assigned a food order.

Making base at *Insurgentes* was a strategic decision, as the station connected several of the most important neighborhoods of the city: Colonia Juarez, Roma, Condesa, Polanco, Escandon, Tacubaya, and the City Center. Within these neighborhoods, restaurants and food stands were in close proximity to each other. Given this, not too much time would pass before a courier would receive a notification from Rappi. A complete delivery consisted first of going to an assigned restaurant or food stand. After receiving the food item from the restaurant, the courier notified the platform, which then revealed the address to which the courier had to deliver the food item.

Working as a food delivery courier granted me direct experience with how the algorithms embedded in platforms organized work. I explore more of this in detail in *Article 2*. I completed 10 food orders on my own. I was really slow with my deliveries, resulting in much frustration from consumers. Following Jose Luis's invitation, and in order to gain more velocity, I decided to become a *Coala. I*n Mexico City, "coala" (koala) refers to assistants to other couriers. *Coalas* are typically women who travel on the back of a motorcycle or bicycle and assist the courier by carrying the backpack and operating the smartphone. One can see where the nickname came from: while riding on the back of the motorcycle or bicycle and hugging the courier, *coalas* resemble the animal koala hugging a tree. As a *coala* alongside Jose Luis, I conducted around 25 deliveries. Given that Jose Luis was signed-in to the other two most popular food delivery platforms Uber-Eats and Didi I gained access to and direct experience with how these other platforms organized work.

Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews with food delivery couriers. I recruited participants via two methods. First, as mentioned previously, I recruited participants via physical flyers. In the flyer, I described my study and included my WhatsApp number for participants to contact me. This method of recruitment yielded limited results. I was only able to recruit 12 participants via this method. I then tried another method. I joined five Facebook forums dedicated to food delivery gig work and, after asking for each administrator's permission, I posted information about my research study in these forums. I then advised participants to communicate with me via direct message if they were interested in participating in an interview. This was a more successful recruitment technique. With this method, I was able to recruit 63 participants. Interviews lasted around one to five hours and, according to each participant's preference, took place either via phone or in public locations such as public parks, subway stations,

plazas, coffee shops, and shopping malls near the courier's preferred area of work—that is, where they liked to log-in to receive orders. Interview questions were organized around the following themes: personal history; employment trajectory; entrance to food delivery gig work; their typical day as a food delivery gig worker; interaction with and perception of algorithmic systems in food delivery platforms; interactions with others in food delivery gig work; general reflections around food delivery gig work; and future plans. A complete interview guide in Spanish and English can be found in appendices A and B. With each participant's permission, I audio-recorded the interviews to facilitate later transcription. I conducted all interviews in Spanish and translated excerpts to English.

Online Ethnography

Devising alternative recruitment strategies led me to discover the online communities of food delivery gig work. I joined five Facebook forums**.** All forums were dedicated to food delivery gig work in Mexico City, varying slightly in their focus. For instance, one was for people who delivered solely on bicycle. Another one was for people who delivered through Rappi. One was for people who delivered for Uber Eats, one was for food delivery gig workers in general, and the final forum was humorously called *lo que callamos los repartidores* (the secrets of delivery guys), named after a Mexican novela called *lo que callamos las mujeres* (the secrets of women). I secured permission from administrators to recruit participants for my interview, then I shifted my focus to analyze these communities in-and-of themselves. I updated my IRB request to accommodate this change. In these forums, I was not an active participant beyond posting my research study and answering people's comments within those posts. I screenshotted around 140 posts and memes. I purposely did not capture participant's information in screenshots to protect their identity. Posts were often related to questions about how algorithms and the overall design of platforms worked, how to navigate the city, and the city's laws and regulations. More experienced workers would offer their

recommendations and advice. Memes and posts were related to folk theories and observations around how algorithms work (Siles et al., 2020), critiques and celebrations of food delivery gig work, and overall cultural tropes around food delivery gig work.

Analytical Strategy

To better understand how couriers interpreted, navigated, and made sense of algorithmic systems embedded in food delivery platforms, I relied upon methodological triangulation (Tracy, 2019). Ethnographic observations at the base helped me understand the practices that couriers employed to navigate the algorithmic, metric, and virtual systems of platforms. Participant observation as a courier and *coala* allowed me to experience these systems directly. Interviews helped me understand how couriers understood algorithmic systems and food delivery gig work in general. Finally, Facebook forums allowed me to investigate the visual and written representation that couriers mobilized to make sense of algorithms. I used an abductive approach to analyze the data (Tavory, 2022). Abductive analysis allows for a constant dialogue between theoretical orientations and data. I analyzed my data in conversation with labor process theories and theories of technological practices within science and technology studies. I analyzed all my data using MAXQDA software.

Interactions and Identity

The intersections of a researcher's personal identity initially shape their interactions with research participants (Reyes, 2020). My position as a young, light-skinned Mexican woman shaped my interactions with couriers in important ways. In the field, I was what Patricia Hill Collins (Collins, 1986) calls an outsider-within. On the one hand, my Mexican nationality granted me access to a cultural repertoire—words, phrases, and cultural references—which I mobilized to build rapport with participants and which helped me to better understand how couriers made sense of

food delivery gig work. On the other hand, my gender, and my status as an academic in the United States cast me as an outsider. These characteristics of my identity sometimes served as an asset and sometimes as a methodological obstacle. For instance, my status as a woman in a male-dominated profession placed me in a position where couriers felt the necessity to protect me. This was especially the case at the base, where couriers often discouraged me from conducting deliveries alone. This limited access in some respects, as I was not able to deliver in some areas of the city. While I was a *coala* with Jose Luis, he often made me carry a giant metal chain to wear around my neck when he was inside an apartment complex, and I was outside guarding the bicycle and cooler backpack. The protective stance was further intensified by perceived race and class status. As a light-skinned Mexican living in the United States, I was perceived as a *fresa*—a gendered and racialized slang term to denote high- and middle-class individuals. Couriers would often jokingly tell me "*te falta barrio"*— "you lack street-smartness." My perceived naiveté prompted couriers to be particularly illustrative with explaining concepts around food delivery gig work in the city—allowing me to understand how they navigated and perceived food delivery gig work without imposing my own interpretations and understandings. Based on my interactions, I sensed that couriers were happy to "teach me the ways" of food delivery gig work. Even though I lack the counterfactual, I suspect that interactions, and subsequently, the data collected would be different for another individual exhibiting different characteristics.

THE DELIVERY AHEAD

In what follows, I present three articles that investigate how food delivery platforms and the algorithms that power them are understood, navigated, and resisted by couriers in Mexico City. The first article, entitled *The Platform is in the Eye of the Worker: Labor Market Trajectories and Food Delivery Gig Work Assessment in Mexico City,* introduces the couriers of food delivery platforms in Mexico City,

and *asks* the following question: How do workers in Mexico City—embedded in an urban labor market context marked with informality and precarity—evaluate food delivery gig work? Drawing on 75 semi-structured interviews with food delivery gig workers in Mexico City, this article mobilizes a relational framework to investigate how workers asses and experience food delivery gig work in relation to other options available in the urban labor market along three structural and subjective dimensions—earnings, perceived autonomy, and flexibility—and the degree to which food delivery gig work constitutes meaningful work. I present typology of four orientations towards food delivery gig work for couriers coming from the service, professional, informal, and non-employment sectors. This article contributes to our understanding of the relationship between gig work and the broader urban labor market, particularly in a Global South context, moving away from a perception of universal reception and addressing heterogeneity.

The second article, entitled *Screens and Streets: The Labor Process of Food Delivery Gig Work Across Spaces,* draws upon ethnographic fieldwork, online ethnography, and 75 semi-structured interviews to investigate how the labor process is sedimented across different spaces exhibiting different levels of virtuality. Specifically, I follow instances of control, consent, and resistance as they manifested in food delivery platforms, work bases in public spaces, and Facebook forums—and in the interaction between these spaces. Rather than concentrating solely on algorithmic control, this article takes seriously the agency of couriers and details how they engage in practices of consent and resistance as they interact with algorithmic technologies embedded in food delivery platforms. Furthermore, this paper reveals how the labor process is no longer executed in single, bounded organizations and no longer solely takes on physical and spatial configurations. Rather, the modern labor process is fragmented and spatially distributed in digital *and* physical spaces, taking the form of memes that serve to consolidate consent or resistance or algorithms that serve to control and extract effort from workers.

The third article, entitled *The Platform's Cash Administrators: Delegation, Location Adaptation and Labor Control in Mexico City,* draws upon ethnographic fieldwork, online ethnography, and 75 semi-structured interviews to delve into the process of technological adaptation to local environments. Primarily, it focuses on the tension between platform design and local economic practices. Given the primacy of cash as an object of economic exchange in Mexico City, platforms facilitate cash payments. Platforms then delegate the task of cash administration to couriers. Labor control around this task is then institutionalized in the form of platform features. Furthermore, platform dependency to cover basic necessities shapes divergent experiences of the delegated task of cash administration. Conceptually, this article employs the Latourian concept of delegation to explore the human and nonhuman enrollments mobilized to adapt digital technologies to local environments. Zooming in on the process of adapting food delivery platforms to cash-centric Mexico City revealed heterogenous experiences of repair work and subsequently different experiences with algorithmic control. Zooming out to a global scale reveals that algorithmic management does not follow a universal template. Rather, enrollments between humans and technology related to addressing inconsistencies between design and local practices result in local articulations of algorithmic control.

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APPENDIX A

The Platform is in the Eye of the Worker: Labor Market Trajectories and Food Delivery Gig Work Assessment in Mexico City.

ABSTRACT:

This article moves away from the insular focus on the Global North when evaluating platform-based gig work and asks: How do workers from the Global South—embedded in a labor market context marked with informality and precarity—evaluate gig work? Drawing on 75 structured interviews with food delivery gig workers in Mexico City, this article mobilizes a relational framework to investigate how workers assess and experience food delivery gig work in relation to other options available in the urban labor market along three structural and subjective dimensions: earnings, perceived autonomy and flexibility, and the degree to which food delivery gig work constitutes meaningful work. A typology of four orientations towards food delivery gig work for workers coming from the service, professional and informal sectors is presented. This article contributes to our understanding on the relationship between gig work and the broader urban labor market in the Global South context.

Introduction

Is platform-mediated gig work a "good" or a "bad" job? It depends on who you ask. Since the advent of on-demand labor platforms including food delivery and ride-hailing services more than a decade ago, scholars have debated their job quality (Vallas and Schor, 2020; Wood et al., 2019). Two differentiated positions have emerged. One school of thought casts gig work as beneficial for workers; business and economics scholars particularly have emphasized how low barriers of entry for workers allow labor platforms to democratize the possibility of entrepreneurialism, eroding barriers for labor force participation (Sundarajan, 2016). The other school of thought casts gig work as a "bad job." Scholars of work emphasize how gig work exacerbates labor precarity (Kalleberg, 2011). Specifically, scholars point out that platforms represent an intensification of broader economic terms towards the flexibilization of economic relations (Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenblat, 2018). This is evident in the categorization of workers as independent contractors as opposed to workers, which excludes them from basic employment protections and worker's rights (Dubal, 2017; 2019; 2022). Additionally, scholars have emphasized how platforms rely on algorithmic control based on opacity and informational asymmetries to discipline workers (Griesbach et al., 2019; Heiland, 2021; Kellogg et al., 2020; Lata et al., 2023; Shapiro, 2018; Veen et al., 2020).

How can scholars explain such divergent positions? Both narratives have generally assumed a homogenous workforce and, therefore, uniform treatment of gig work. Scholars paying attention to heterogeneity have added greater analytical precision by addressing how workers coming from divergent economic positions experience and evaluate gig work differently (Au-Yeung and Qiu, 2022; Lee, 2023; Manriquez, 2019; Schor et al., 2020; 2023). In addressing heterogeneity in gig work, scholars have argued that the worker's level of dependency determines their experience and evaluation of gig work. Under the dependence model, less dependent workers—those who have another main employer and use gig work earnings supplementally—tend to have a more positive

experience in gig work. Conversely, more dependent workers whose primary source of income is platform work are more exposed to precarity and have a more negative experience of gig work (Schor et al., 2023). By focusing on heterogeneity in terms of dependency, these accounts have generated a fruitful analysis that addresses the relationship between gig work and the broader labor market. Specifically, proponents of the dependency model suggest that labor platforms are "free-riders" because they benefit from the benefits and security offered by main employers (Schor et al., 2020).Yet, transporting the dependency model to the context of labor markets in the Global South proves its limitations. In other words, platforms benefit from institutional arrangements in the formal labor market. But what happens in other national and city contexts, particularly in the Global South, where labor markets are characterized by precarity and informality (Lee, 2019; Lee and Kofman, 2012; Scully, 2016)? A puzzle emerges: how do Global South workers—embedded in a labor market context marked labor precarity and informality—evaluate and experience gig work?

Drawing from 75 structured interviews with food delivery gig workers in Mexico City, this article proposes to answer this puzzle. Building upon approaches to gig work that address workforce heterogeneity, I focus on employment trajectories as a crucial axis of differentiation among food delivery gig workers. Drawing on insights from relational sociology, I propose an analytical approach that addresses how workers experience and evaluate gig work relative to other options available to them in the urban labor market along three dimensions: earnings, perceived autonomy/flexibility and the degree to which food delivery gig work constitutes meaningful work (Laaser and Karlsson, 2022; Wood et al., 2019). I introduce a fourfold typology of orientations towards food delivery gig work for workers coming from different employment trajectories: For workers coming from the precarious service sector, food delivery gig work represents a *job upgrade*. For workers coming from the professional sector, food delivery gig work is a *downwardly mobile temporary solution* to the predicament of unemployment. For workers coming from the informal sector, food delivery gig

work is an o*pportunity for investment* where workers seek to apply learnings, skills and earnings to their small business. Finally, young workers who have no or minimal employment history see food delivery gig work as a *temporary diversion* to generate income while earning a college degree. Orientations towards delivery gig work are important as they reveal the attachment that workers have to platforms, contributing to our understanding of the stabilization of the gig labor market.

This article makes three contributions. First, this article moves away from the insular focus of the Global North when studying the gig economy and gig work. By focusing on a city of the Global South, this article deepens our understanding of how labor platforms travel to different locales that exhibit different institutional arrangements and the differentiated logics of consent and loyalty that follow from these arrangements (Burawoy, 1988; Hirschman, 1977). Second, by going beyond dependency and focusing on employment trajectories as an important axis of differentiation among the gig workforce, this article contributes to our understanding of how workers import organizational logics from previous employment to make sense of gig work. Finally, by mobilizing a relational framework, this article contributes to our understanding of how workers from the Global South consent to precarious work (Adler, 2021; Mears, 2015). Rather than being guided by a "false consciousness," workers are pragmatic subjects evaluating and comparing their available options in the urban labor market (Sallaz 2019).

Heterogeneity in Platform Work

Heterogeneity among the workforce is not unique to gig work. Scholars of work have documented how differentiations along race, gender and class foster different experiences and perceptions of the workplace (Presser, 2003; Price-Glynn and Rakovski, 2012; Sallaz, 2017). Yet scholars have noted that heterogeneity is endemic in gig work (Schor et al., 2023). Three elements of gig work allow for a heightened heterogeneity of the workforce. First, gig work has an open employment relationship that relies on schedule flexibility, allowing the accommodation of a variety

of workers—full-time workers and part-time workers who have either full-time or part-time work elsewhere (Schor et al. 2020; Schor, Tirrell, and Vallas 2023). Second, in most parts of the globe, gig workers are legally classified as independent contractors rather than workers. This precludes workers from basic employment protections and worker's rights, such as a fixed hourly wage, but allows people who have historically been denied access to the formal labor market, such as migrants and racialized populations, to enter gig work (Lam and Triandafyllidou, 2022; McMillan Cottom, 2020; van Doorn and Vijay, 2021). Lastly, the low entry barriers to gig work, and specifically food delivery gig work (aside from mobilizing relatively readily accessible personal belongings), allows for the incorporation of a variety of workers regardless of skill.

Discussions around the linkage between heterogeneity of gig workers and experience and perception of gig work has primordially focused on the open employment relationship in terms of flexibility of schedule. Dependency is defined as the degree of dependency that workers have on platform work to pay basic expenses (Schor et al. 2020). Under the dependency logic, the more a worker is economically embedded—that is, the more the worker is embedded in the conventional economy by holding a full-time and part-time job elsewhere—the higher the earnings and the higher the overall satisfaction and thus less dependent on a specific source of employment (Schor et al. 2020). On the other hand, workers completely disembedded from the conventional economy are the most dependent and thus the most precarious and more likely to be dissatisfied. In this vein, dependency translates into differentiated overall satisfaction in gig work (Schor et al. 2020), different perceptions of risk (Schor et al. 2023) and different political subjectivities (Lee 2023). This means that consent is not uniform and wholly adopted but fractured in relation to dependency (Manriquez 2019). Moreover, migrants and racialized populations who have historically been more disembedded from the conventional economy are more likely to be dependent and precarious (McMillan Cottom 2020; Lata, Burdon, and Reddel 2023; Lee 2023; McMillan Cottom 2020).

While an emphasis on heterogeneity and dependency has resulted in fruitful insights and greater analytical precision into the concrete worker's experience of gig work, there are two significant limitations. First, dependency does not address the recent move towards the *deflexibilization* of gig work, and specifically food delivery gig work. As labor platforms become sedimented in local economies, reformulations in managerial algorithmic techniques—where couriers are hierarchically displaced by algorithmically from lack of hours in the platforms—alongside a cultural normalization of gig work incentivizes workers away from a flexible modality of work and into taking gig work as a "permanent" full-time job (Sun, Yujie Chen, and Rani 2023). Second, the insular focus on the Global North, particularly the United States, has hindered analysis of how institutional conditions elsewhere—and particularly in other labor market contexts—may affect a worker's experience and overall perception of gig work. To address these limitations, this article focuses on worker heterogeneity in food delivery gig work in Mexico City. While the emphasis on heterogeneity has been placed on overall dependency to the platform, less attention has been given to heterogeneity in terms of differentiated employment trajectories prior to coming to gig work. While dependency and employment trajectories could be entangled at times, they are analytically distinct. This article argues that situating employment trajectories as the nexus of heterogeneity allows for analysis of the relationship between gig work and the broader labor market. Focusing on employment trajectories, this article addresses two questions: 1) How do worker's employment trajectories shape how workers experience and perceive gig work; and 2) How do gig workers evaluate gig work relative to other options available to them in the labor market? Before answering these questions, I introduce my analytical approach.

Analytical Approach: The Relationality and Relativity of Gig Work

While gig work is now a global phenomenon, the experiences and meanings attached to gig work acquire national-, regional- and city-specificity in accordance to wider labor market conditions (Au-Yeung and Qiu 2022; Lam and Triandafyllidou 2022). The analytical approach taken here to investigate food delivery gig work in relation to the broader urban labor market rests on two assumptions. The first assumption relates to *openness* and *heterogeneity* as key features of gig work. Openness refers not only to flexibility of schedule, but to the low entry barriers—particularly in regard to skill—that capture a variety of workers coming from a variety of employment trajectories. Following this logic, openness breeds heterogeneity which breeds differentiated experiences and evaluations. Second, I contend that workers do not evaluate gig work in a vacuum but rather in relation to other available options for supporting themselves. Here, I take inspiration from Ching Kwan Lee (2019), who argues for the investigation of "informality" and "precarity" not as objective phenomena but as relational categories and struggles (Emirbayer 1997). In this case, evaluations of gig work cannot be entirely derived from fixed and objective criteria; instead, evaluations are "relative, and culture-and context-dependent," (Lee 2019). In this vein, scholars of work have noted how workers of the Global South evaluate precarious jobs in accordance with the broader labor market predominantly in terms of precarity and informality (Scully 2016). For instance, Sallaz (2019) noted that call center jobs in the Philippines present an attractive option relative to existing forms of employment. Call center jobs are a middle path between migrating abroad or remaining at home with a lesser-paying job. As opposed to the context of the United States or India, call center jobs in the Philippines are "goods jobs." Echoing Lee (2019), what is deemed precarious and informal in the United States—or in the Global North in general—may be considered secure and formal in the Global South.

Building upon this analytical lens, this article situates employment trajectories and previous jobs as fruitful points of departure to evaluate perceptions and experiences of food delivery gig work

relative to the broader urban labor market of Mexico City. Organizational logics of previous employments become a key resource for workers to make sense of the work arrangements of gig work. In a relative evaluation, three dimensions that conflate subjective and objective dimensions of work are emphasized (Laaser and Karlsson, 2022). First, *earnings*—how workers earnings compare to their generated earnings in other employment relationships. Second, *autonomy* and *flexibility*—while the flexibility of schedule may be related to structural conditions of gig work, here, the extent to which workers value and place a premium on this flexibility and autonomy is contextualized in light of possible tradeoffs such as a lack of employment protections or a fixed salary (Katsnelson and Oberholzer-Gee, 2021; Wood et al., 2019). Lastly, I consider the extent to which workers consider gig work to be *meaningful work*—work that provides meaning and transcendence beyond the self (Bailey and Madden, 2017).

Case and Methods

Food delivery platforms, which algorithmically mediate between restaurants, consumers, workers and platform companies, are now well established in Mexico City. In 2023, 24.2% of mobile phone users had food delivery platforms installed on their phones (Trecone 2023). By that same year, there were approximately 350 thousand food delivery couriers. The presence of food delivery couriers has become a feature of the urban landscape of the city. Today, the three most popular food delivery platforms are Uber Eats, Rappi and DiDi Food (based in the United States, Colombia and China, respectively). At the time of my fieldwork, couriers from all three platforms are categorized as independent contractors and are excluded from employment protections and social security (Radetich 2022).

My analysis draws from participant observation and interview data gathered between October 2022 and December 2023. To recruit participants to my study, I distributed flyers across Mexico City.

While distributing flyers at a subway station, I encountered a base of approximately 15 couriers. A base is public space, typically near restaurants and residences, where couriers congregate to charge their phones, eat their meals and wait for delivery assignments. I was invited to join this base, and I eventually signed-in to work for Rappi. While at the base, I noted that couriers came from a variety of employment trajectories which greatly influenced how they perceived food delivery gig work. To achieve greater variation among my participants, I extended to structured interviews and continued to distribute flyers. Additionally, I posted a request for participants in Facebook forums dedicated to food delivery gig work. I relied on snowball sampling, asking participants to refer me to other couriers who might be interested in participating in my study.

My recruitment processes yielded a sample with heterogenous employment trajectories and socio-economic backgrounds. Over 41% of my sample came from the service sector, including workers with a high school education that were employed as servers, bartenders, security guards, convenient store workers, supermarket workers, call center workers and delivery gig workers. A further 24% came from the professional sector, including workers with a bachelor's degree or higher who previously held formal employment aligned with their professional careers. These included lawyers, architects, engineers, accountants, chemists, sociologists and business administrators. Over 18% came from the informal sector; these workers had a middle school or higher education. Many had acquired their specific trade or skill via informal apprenticeship. This included construction workers, plumbers, welders, bus drivers and taco stand cooks (*taqueros)* or street vendors (*puesteros).* Often, members of this sector were small business owners and were proprietors of a food stand or a public bus. The remaining 16% were students actively enrolled in college with no or minimal employment history. Within the sample, 66% had no supplemental income apart from food delivery gig work, while 33% had supplemental income.

The employment trajectories and socioeconomic demographics of my sample reflect the overall situation of the labor market in Mexico City, where the service sector compromises 80% of those who are formally employed and the professional sector compromises 10%. The informal sector compromises 47.9% of those who are economically active. Further, Mexico City has a 3.9% unemployment rate (INEGI 2023). Two of the 75 participants were women, which is consistent with the gendered stratification of the transportation sector in Mexico City (INEGI 2023). Couriers' ages ranged from 18 to 62. All participants were Mexican nationals.

Semi-structured interviews lasted between one and three hours and were conducted in public spaces near couriers' preferred urban area of work or over the phone. I asked participants' permission to audio record the interview to facilitate transcription. The interview guide centered on several themes. I first asked participants to narrate their employment trajectories before entering food delivery platforms, then about their rationale for entering food delivery work and their entry experience. I followed this with questions regarding the daily experiences of food delivery gig work and the participant's overall evaluations of food delivery gig work. Finally, I asked about the participant's future and aspirations. While I asked explicitly about their employment trajectory and about what job or employment relationship they had enjoyed the most, couriers often spoke about food delivery in relation to other jobs they had previously held. This suggests that couriers relied on comparison to make sense of the work arrangements of food delivery gig work (Higgins 2017).

I took an abductive approach to data analysis (Timmermans and Tavory 2022). I began with the surprising finding that despite the structural conditions of food delivery gig work, couriers evaluated this work in divergent ways. I then selected several index cases that detailed the evaluation of food delivery gig work in relation to previous employment relationships. I used these cases to

develop a coding scheme to apply to the remaining transcripts. Subsequent rounds of coding resulted in a typology of perceptions and experiences of food delivery gig work.

Findings

Seeing like a Worker: Four Views from Four Employment Trajectories

Using a relational approach, I map four perceptions and experiences of food delivery gig work for workers coming from four distinct employment trajectories. Workers coming from the service sector considered food delivery gig work an upgrade from their previous jobs. Workers coming from the professional sector considered food delivery gig work a temporary and downwardly mobile solution to their predicament of unemployment. Workers coming from the informal sector considered food delivery gig work an opportunity of investment in their small business. Lastly, young workers with minimal or no employment history considered delivery gig work a temporary diversion before entering the formal labor market.

The Service Precariats: A Job Upgrade

Of the 75 workers of the sample, 31 (41.33%) came from the precarious service sector. Couriers in this group had previously worked as servers, bartenders, security guards, convenience store workers, supermarket workers, call center workers and delivery gig workers. All these jobs compromise the service sector that, while eligible for employment protections under the *Ley Federal del Trabajo* (Federal Labor Law), receive starkly low pay.

All workers within this group reported earning a similar amount or more than what they earned at their previous jobs. As piece-rate work subject to fluctuations in consumer demand and algorithmically assigned food orders, calculating and comparing earnings could be a tricky affair. Nevertheless, as full-time workers, these workers reported that their earnings improved significantly.

The majority of workers (28 of 31) reported that their earnings in food delivery gig work were twice what they earned in their previous jobs. The rest reported having similar earnings. This is not surprising as the monthly wage for a waiter in Mexico City ranges from 4 thousand to 7 thousand pesos (approximately 230 to 410 USD) (INEGI 2023). While the average monthly salary for a cashier in a convenience store or supermarket is 4 thousand pesos (approximately 230 USD), in food delivery gig work, workers reported earning an average of 300 to 500 pesos per day (approximately 17 to 30 USD) and up to 700 or 1 thousand pesos (approximately 41 to 58 USD) on a good day with high consumer demand, amounting to a monthly salary ranging from 10 thousand to 14 thousand pesos (approximately 588 to 820 USD). Moreover, workers reported that the effort-to-earnings bargain was more appealing in food delivery gig work than in their previous jobs. As illustrated by John, a 33-year-old who previously work as a delivery worker for Domino's, "I remember my first food order, they paid me 45 pesos [approximately 3 USD]. I remember thinking to myself, this is awesome! That's when I realized that I could be earning way more money in a day than in a whole week. I was ecstatic when I realized *esto es lo mío* [this is for me]." Like John, other couriers quickly discovered that they could earn more money in less time. While they earned 200 pesos (approximately 12 USD) from a full 8-hour workday in a service job, two orders taking approximately 30 minutes each could yield the same amount.

Apart from more generous earnings relative to earnings in the precarious service sector, workers from this sector placed value on the autonomy and flexibility that food delivery platforms offer. This is consistent with findings from other locations that report that platform workers value the feeling of autonomy that stems from not having a boss (Griesbach et al. 2019). However, for workers coming from the service industry, and specifically those working as servers, this acquired a specific meaning. Distance from a "boss" meant specifically distance from the heavily controlled and

demanding work setting common in restaurants (Sloan 2012). Ricardo, a 33-year-old courier who had previously worked in restaurants, explained:

> I really like this new modality [food delivery platforms] because when you are a waiter, the fact of having a uniform and a very rigid schedule, for me, that's all very tiring. The fact that you must stay until midnight or later and after you finish cleaning up. Or the fact that even if it's finally your rest day, they call you up because someone decided not to show up. If you show up late, they yell at you. I'll say it again, that's all very tiring. If you ask me, what do I prefer? I say platforms, without a doubt.

Similarly, Raul, a 28-year-old courier, had previously worked in a famous chain restaurant in the city called *Casa de Tono* which he re-labeled the "house of horrors." At first, Raul was recruited to work in the restaurant after he saw that they were offering a generous salary (one ad said 14 thousand pesos a month). Weeks after arriving at the restaurant, he realized this was far from the truth. His boss discounted money from his salary for every fault, including being minutes late to his shift or not having the appropriate uniform. Not being able to stand such scrutiny, Ricardo joined food delivery platforms and found much-needed respite.

Autonomy from despotic flesh-and-bones management figures did not translate into "absolute freedom" as workers were now subject to algorithmic control (Kellogg et al. 2020). However, assessing food delivery gig work in relation to previous jobs meant that workers were ascribing technologies with other meanings beyond control. Workers coming from the service sector perceived food delivery gig work to be meaningful work. Cesar—a 30-year-old man who had previously worked in restaurants—described the algorithms embedded in food delivery platforms as a "benevolent entity." Cesar told me: "The algorithm is benevolent. [It] connects you [the worker] with the person who needs the food the most. Like one time, I got assigned to deliver a cake to a girl

on her birthday, and then another time food to an elderly person who was unable to walk." This is further illustrated by Alejandro, a 41-year-old courier who had an extensive career in the service sector:

> I really like the apps because I really love being of service to others. I think serving others gives you a purpose in life. I think I am good at it; I am tactful with others. I don't see this as a temporary job. This is my main source of income. I see serving others as my life calling.

Overall, for these workers, the possibility to conduct meaningful work serving others and away from rigid schedules and work rules meant that food delivery gig work was perceived as an upgrade from their previous jobs in the precarious service sector. This does not mean, however, that they found the perfect job. The gains from food delivery gig work came with significant costs. As independent contractors, couriers did not enjoy a secure salary, nor were they eligible for basic employment protections. Furthermore, while they generally enjoyed better earnings, this did not translate into the possibility of having savings. Victor, a 33-year-old courier, told me: "I may earn more in the apps than as a salesman at the mall, but beyond that, I have not been able to buy a house or anything like that. I am still just surviving." Furthermore, having an overall positive assessment of food delivery gig work did not mean that workers were internalizing an entrepreneurial ideology and exhibiting a false consciousness as demonstrated in previous studies (Galière, 2020; Manriquez, 2019). In this case, consent to precarious conditions of food delivery gig work was guided primarily by pragmatism. For these workers, food delivery gig work was a "good job" relative to other options available to them in the urban labor market.

The Professionals: A Downwardly Mobile Temporary Solution.

Among participants, 24% came from the professional sector. These workers held bachelor's degrees or higher. Unlike workers coming from the service sector who considered food delivery gig

work to be an upgrade, professional workers considered food delivery gig work a downwardly mobile temporary solution to their predicament of unemployment. The majority of workers (14 of 18) lost their formal employment during the COVID-19 health crisis, while the rest lost their employment prior to the pandemic for unrelated circumstances such as downsizing or tensions with co-workers and management. Workers coming from this sector had resorted to entering food delivery gig work due to an inability to re-enter the formal market. This was the case for Don Ale, a 54-year-old engineer who was fired from his job at water processing plant. When he was unsuccessful in his extensive search for formal employment, he decided to join the apps.

Professional workers experienced a decrease in earnings when entering food delivery gig work. Their previous monthly salaries ranged from 15 to 30 thousand pesos (approximately 880 to 1,700 USD). While in food delivery gig work, reported earnings ranged from 580 to 820 USD. Like workers from the service sector, given the absence of other employment, food delivery gig work was the only source of income for 15 of the 18 professional workers.

In some instances, professional workers echoed the ideology of "being your own boss" (Manriquez, 2019) and praised the autonomy and flexibility that the platforms offered in relation to their previous formal job that was governed by a fixed schedule and a division of labor. This was the case for Ramon, a 36-year-old man who had previously worked at a logistics firm in the business district of Polanco:

> This work [food delivery gig work], although it is not well paid, I think the autonomy it offers compensates for the lack of pay. Obviously, you would rather earn more, but at least here you're away from the office, the toxic boss, away from the people and all the interpersonal relationships. What being in the apps has taught me is that it's better to own your own means of production.

While some professional workers saw the perceived autonomy and flexibility of platform work offered as advantages over their previous work, others appeared to mobilize this discourse as more of a justificatory frame to placate unpleasant sentiments about being underemployed. This is because their previous employment, aligned with their professional career, offered them meaningful work that food delivery gig work was unable to provide. For instance, Don Ale described being an engineer as being a semi-God because engineers could construct something out of nothing. Similarly, Fernando, a 33-year-old architect, reminisced about his previous job in an architecture firm where he was part of a team and oversaw important projects. While riding his bicycle and delivering food orders, he would visit the buildings built by his previous firm and stare in awe that he was able to participate in their design. The meaning that professional workers attached to their previous jobs was juxtaposed with how they perceived food delivery gig work. Contrary to how service workers perceived the same work, professionals saw food delivery gig work as devoid of personal transcendence or fulfillment. This was described by 29-year-old Saul, who had a degree in sociology with a specialization in education and had worked previously in a call center as a manager implementing pedagogical tools for workers:

> I wouldn't like to be [in food delivery gig work] for a long time. There is no… How can I say it? There is no fulfillment, you're only driving from point A to point B delivering food. I would like to apply for teaching job.

In this vein, professional workers experienced a quixotic effect or what Bourdieu (1988) calls "hysteresis," a misalignment between habitus and the present, while working as food delivery gig workers. In this case, the expectation of professionals with a higher education to have a meaningful, rewarding, well-paying job was fractured due to the conditions of the labor market (Ayala-Hurtado 2022). This feeling of hysteresis was expressed again by Fernando:

> I was in denial, I was embarrassed. How can someone like me, who is an architect, that has a career, be a courier? When I told my wife, she was in denial too. She is an architect too. But then again, we thought, *chamba es chamba* [a job is a job].

Like Fernando, professional workers felt a sentiment of resignation while being in food delivery courier. Food delivery gig work, far from being meaningful work, was only valuable in so far as the low entry barriers offered a rapid solution to the predicament of unemployment and fulfill the need to make a living—a need that was augmented for couriers who had a family and breadwinning responsibilities. Overall, professional workers assessed food delivery gig work in a negative light, considering it to be a "bad job." This assessment was constructed in relation to their previous jobs which had offered them a good salary and meaningful work. It is hard to predict how their discontent will translate into a political subjectivity. This is because professional workers, regardless of the amount of time they work in the platform, continue to position delivery gig work as transitory and temporal as they hope to eventually find employment that is better aligned with their professional careers (Lee 2023).

The Informal Serial Hustlers: An Opportunity for Investment

14 out of the 75 participants came from the informal economy. Rather than seeing it as an upgrade or a downwardly mobile temporary solution, workers from the informal sector perceived food delivery gig work as an opportunity for investment in their small business.

Unlike workers coming from the service sector who experienced an increase in earnings or workers coming from the professional sector who experienced a sharp decrease in wages, workers coming from the informal sector experienced more variation in their wages. Of the 14 participants from the informal sector, eight reported having similar earnings in food delivery gig work as in their small business, while four reported having better earnings in their small business. Only two reported

having better earnings in food delivery gig work. Informal workers reported that a comparison in earnings was difficult given that both food delivery gig work and work in their trades tended to fluctuate. Importantly, unlike service workers or professionals who dedicated themselves fully to food delivery platforms, earnings for informal workers were generally *supplemental earnings*.

Informal workers perceived the flexibility offered by platforms in a positive light, but as "professional hustlers" with extensive careers in the informal sector, having autonomy from a managerial hierarchy or a flexible schedule was not a new experience. It presented a continuation of their economic activities in the informal sector. Instead, couriers from this sector valued food delivery platforms because they allowed them to *campechanear* or oscillate between two activities. Workers switched between their business and platform jobs continuously within the same work week or in different time periods. This is best illustrated by the case of Erwin, a 31-year-old courier who opened his own hamburger stand.

When Erwin opened his stand, business did not go well. Because he had already acquired a motorcycle to deliver his own food, a trusted friend advised him to join the platforms on the days that the stand did not have sufficient customers. Erwin devised his own schedule: Monday through Wednesday, work for the platforms; Thursday through Sunday, cook in his stand. He realized that he was earning more in the apps, so he decided to temporarily close his stand and dedicate himself to food delivery platforms, intending to use his earnings to re-invest in his business.

Similarly, Ricardo, a 41-year-old bus driver and father, has a "double shift." In the mornings, Ricardo drives his bus, and in the afternoons, he dedicates 2 to 4 hours to making deliveries. Earnings from bus tickets are his primary source of income, while he saves the earnings generated from deliveries. At the moment, his plan is to use this supplemental income to buy another bus to rent out to another driver.

Both Ricardo and Erwin used earnings in food delivery platforms to supplement their incomes. In this way, informal workers resemble platform workers documented in studies from the Global North for whom platform income is supplemental. These workers have less dependency on platforms and thus greater overall satisfaction (Schor et al. 2020). However, they differ in important respects. While less dependent workers in the Global North are protected from dependency by formal employment elsewhere, workers in Mexico City escape dependency through their participation in the informal economy. Here, "protection" is not provided by a secure salary, but by the flexibility and autonomy that both the informal economy and platform work offer, allowing workers to oscillate between two economic activities and generate more income.

Given that their pride and loyalty lay in their respective skill or trade, informal workers did not find food delivery gig work meaningful. It acquired meaning in relation to the benefits that it offered to their respective small business, not only in terms of monetary investment as in the cases of Ricardo and Erwin, but in terms of possible transferable skills and knowledge. This was more salient for workers who had a small business involving selling food. As described to me by Francisco, a 29-year-old with a healthy food business who also works as a food delivery courier:

> I am doing fieldwork just like you, but instead, I am making a market study of what people like and don't like, what people order and what they don't, and the production line of restaurants, what works and what doesn't. I am here [in food delivery platforms] for a reason. Nothing is random. This whole experience has a purpose.

Francisco attached meaning to his experience of food delivery work by purposely transferring his newly acquired knowledge to perfect his own food business. Informal workers also attached value to the technological affordances of platforms by stating how algorithmic matching had allowed them to access a variety of restaurants and clients that would help them create a better

business. For these workers, the meaning of digital technology—specifically algorithms—went beyond the paradigm of control (Cini 2023; Griesbach et al. 2019; Heiland 2021; Kellogg et al. 2020).

For informal workers, food delivery gig work was neither a "good" or "bad" job, but was situated somewhere in between, as a stepping stone into building a better and more profitable business of their own (Lam and Triandafyllidou 2022). As described by Toni, the owner of a pharmaceutical business:

> In the apps you don't have a boss, but you are still an employee. You're a… How can I say it? You're a self-employee. The goal, however, is to be your own boss, to have your own business. That's the real goal.

For Toni, like many other workers from the informal sector, having a business of your own represented the ideal, away from the controlling algorithm and the despotic human boss.

The Youngsters: Video Game Experience

The final 16% of workers fell between the ages of 18 and 25 and had little or no employment history. Most of these workers (8 of 12) were enrolled in a university to earn a bachelor's degree. Given their lack of employment history, their experience and perception of platform work serves as a counterpoint to the argument that workers evaluate food delivery gig work relative to previous employment. Young workers experienced food delivery gig work as a *video-game experience*—having no major breadwinning responsibilities aside from contributing to their education expenses, the ludic qualities of platforms took center stage.

In terms of earnings, young workers generally had no frame of reference. Some young workers had previously worked in small, family-run businesses; as grocery baggers at a supermarket

chain where they were paid only in tips; or in the service sector, particularly in fast-food chains. Those who had previously worked in the service sector reported having better earnings in food delivery gig work than in their service job. However, unlike workers who have had an extensive career in the service sector, young workers did not enter food delivery gig work to establish a primary source of income; rather, they entered out of a genuine curiosity of the novel form of work that platforms represent and to contribute economically to their household and education.

Consider the case of Christian, a 24-year-old single man who lives with his parents, while studying for a bachelor's degree in public relations and marketing. He started working in his family's bakery when he was 13-years old. Many of his friends, including his best friends, worked as food delivery gig workers, giving him insight into the job possibilities. Christian wanted to get in as an excuse to own a motorcycle. He had asked his parents for one before, but they had refused because they perceived motorcycles as dangerous, so Christian strategized. He sat his parents down and told them about the apps and how he could make money with a motorcycle by delivering food. His parents finally accepted and agreed to give him money for the down payment on the condition that he pay the rest. His best friend, who was already on the apps, sent him a link to sign in. He was ecstatic.

Other young workers like Christian used food delivery gig work to fund their college education. The flexibility of schedule afforded by platforms allowed them to attend their classes and log in when they had extra time. This was the case for Jesse, a 24-year-old psychology student at a prestigious university. Jesse logs into Uber Eats when he does not have any homework or school activities:

> I log in when I am free from school. I do it for the extra money. I think it would be different if I had children and I had to use it as an 8-hour job. If that was the case, I don't think you can earn much money like that. I, on the other hand, have the privilege of freedom.

Jesse recognized that being protected from platform dependency allowed him to enjoy working in food delivery platforms (Schor et al. 2020; Schor, Tirrell, and Vallas 2023). However, he was not protected from dependency by having a supplemental income, but by his family dynamics that allowed him to distance himself from major breadwinning responsibilities. Jesse, like Christian, continued to live with his family and used the money he earned to pay for his education expenses and occasional outings. Given their non-dependence on platforms combined with the lack of experience in other sectors of the urban labor market, young workers were more likely to subscribe to the ideologies mobilized by platform companies—specifically its emphasis on "fun" and the discursive conversion of work into leisure that results in the commodification of free time (Dusi 2018; Ritzer 2015). This was not simply an ideology without material reference; rather, it was reinforced by gamification techniques and adjacent technology such as motorcycles which interpellated young workers as ludic subjects (Nichols 2021).This was the case for Jose, who decided to join food delivery platforms after watching a video from Luisito Comunica (a famous Mexican YouTuber) where he was a courier for a day. Jose recalls thinking: "I could really do this. I already love riding motorcycles, I bet it would be really fun." Young workers considered food delivery gig work meaningful not because it allowed workers to serve their communities or transcend the self (Bailey and Madden 2017; Laaser and Karlsson 2022) but because food delivery gig work blurred the lines between work and leisure for young workers.

As young workers begin to strategize their future, the initial allure and value of platform work as a way to earn extra money begins to dwindle. This was the case for Christian. When I asked him about his future plans, he replied:

> I hope to continue delivering for two or three more years. I mean, it's not certain, because they can block you at any moment, but that's the plan. Two or three more years until I finish my bachelor's and then, if all goes well, I hope to work for a radio station or a marketing agency.

In this sense, given their hopes to acquire a job aligned with their professional careers, young workers enrolled in college resembled workers coming from the professional sector who sought meaningful jobs elsewhere. Young workers who were not enrolled in college had different strategies. One young worker had plans to migrate to the United States to work as a construction worker alongside his cousin; others were less certain about their future plans but continued to view food delivery gig work as temporary. As expressed by 25-year-old Luis Eduardo:

> I don't have a definite date of when I am going to leave the apps. I think that as long as they pay good money, they are always going to be a good supplement to your income. I identify with those memes where there is a 60-year-old man and he is still delivering [he laughs]. Well, not really. In five years, I really hope I am no longer delivering for Rappi.

The Stabilization of a Labor Market: Assessing the Quality of Attachments.

How did evaluation and experiences along the good-and-bad job continuum translate into action? To understand, it useful to look into exits. Exits—that is, leaving a job—are important as they reveal the level of attachment or loyalty workers have to their jobs (Hirschman 1970; Sallaz 2019). Further, by looking at the heterogeneity of workers and their different experiences and evaluation of platform work, we get a sense of workers' plans to remain or to exit—revealing the

composition of the Internet-based food delivery labor market. While I did not observe exits *in situ* (Sallaz 2017) I got a sense of workers' levels of attachment to platforms based on their strategies of exit and their future plans. Unsurprisingly, workers coming from the service sector form the backbone of food delivery in Mexico City. In my sample, they ruled in numbers. Workers from this sector found a "good job"—an attractive option relative to other options available to them in the urban labor market. As described to me by Rodolfo: "I finally found a job where I feel comfortable. I finally have a job that I genuinely enjoy." These workers wished to remain in food delivery platforms for good. The only impediment for them in continuing to work in food delivery platforms was the deterioration of their bodies—that is, the work could continue until the body could not hold any longer (*hasta que el cuerpo aguante)*, as described by Rodolfo.

For workers coming from the rest of the sectors, the attachment to platforms was not as strong or durable. Workers coming from the professional sector hoped to be in food delivery platforms temporarily until they found a job that was more aligned with their professional careers. In this sense, in theory, their attachment was neither strong nor durable. In practice, however, their prolonged stays in food delivery platform work hindered their chances of acquiring such job. Such was the case of Omar, a 31-year-old economist who lost his formal job at a logistics firm and had sign-in to food delivery platforms to pay for hospital bills during the COVID-19 health crisis. Omar had worked in the platforms since 2020. Regarding his future plans, Omar told me:

> It's very complicated. I don't think I can return to a formal, professional job. Employers are very demanding. I have tried. They always ask me why I did not do "anything" [Omar emphasized with air quotations] all these years. Why I did not study more or earn more specializations at least. I told them I was paying for my debts. I tell them I have references, I have experience. But they don't buy it.

Given their lack of prospects in the formal labor market, some workers coming from the professional sector were giving up their search for formal employment and expressed plans to transition to the informal economy and own a small business, particularly in the food industry. Such was the case of Fernando, the architect who wanted to open an online business for keto-based goods.

For those workers already in the informal economy, attachment to platform was durable but weak. That is, as long as food delivery platforms continue to give those workers a supplemental source of income to use as investment in their business, they have no concrete plans to completely sign-out. Their real loyalty, however, is to their skill or trade. Finally, initially, young workers with no or little employment history were strongly attached to the platforms. However, the attachment becomes weak as soon as workers begin to seriously contemplate their future plans and professional careers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Zooming out to the whole globe reveals similar experiences of gig work to those of Mexico City—low entry barriers, legal categorization as independent contractors excluded from basic employment protections and worker's rights, and relative value placed on autonomy and flexibility. Yet the findings presented signal deviations from the dependence model that has been primordially tested in the Global North context (Schor et al. 2020; 2023). Given widespread economic insecurity in the Global South, the dependence model predicts uniformity in experience and perception of gig work—that is, that *all* workers are dependent workers with overall negative evaluation of gig work (Schor et al. 2023). However, evidence presented here suggests that in the Global South, the openness of gig work also yields a heterogeneous workforce with divergent orientations and cultural logics to evaluate gig work.

Second, zooming-in to the heterogenous experiences and perceptions of gig work in Mexico City reveals different logics of evaluation than those predicted by the dependence model. For instance, the dependence model predicts that workers in a more economically precarious situation or who are economically disembedded are more likely to have negative evaluations towards gig work while those who are more economically embedded and protected from dependency by having a "main job" or dual-spousal income are more likely to consent to the work arrangements of gig work. However, we see here opposing operating logics functioning. Those who are more economically precarious, such as workers coming from the service sector, are more likely to be dependent on platforms but have an overall positive experience and perception of gig work. Professional workers, who may appear to have a more economic advantageous position, are also full-time dependent workers, but the misalignment that exist between gig work and their professional careers impedes their ability to have a positive evaluation of gig work. Informal workers resemble the "independent workers" presented by the dependence model in that they are part-time gig workers who are more or less able to present positive evaluations of gig work and consent to work platforms, but they differ from independent workers in that it is precisely their economic disembededness and their participation in the informal economy that allows them to be less dependent on platforms. Finally, young workers with no or minimal employment histories also resemble independent workers; protection in this case comes from their family structure and the lack of major breadwinning responsibilities.

Furthermore, paying attention to how workers evaluate gig work—not only in terms of dependency, but relative to other options available options in the urban labor market—further crystalizes the relationship between gig work and the broader labor market. While studies of the Global North lend themselves to conclusions regarding labor platforms "free-riding" on the formal labor market—which provides the security and stability to make gig work desirable— an opposite

relationship happens in Mexico City. In the labor market context of Mexico City, gig work takes advantage of the precarious service sector, the informal economy, and a context of increasing unemployment and underemployment to make gig work desirable. First, in comparison to options available in the service sector, gig work offers better earnings and more autonomy and flexibility. Second, the flexibility already present in the informal economy allows workers to supplement their income with gig work. Lastly, low entry barriers allow workers to generate an income when in a situation of unemployment. Overall, by evaluating gig work, and specifically food delivery gig work, in relation to the broader labor market, this article contributes to our understanding of heterogeneity in platform work (Au-Yeung and Qiu 2022; Lee 2023; Schor et al. 2020, 2023; Vallas and Schor 2020; van Doorn and Vijay 2021) and in general to how workers consent—or fail to consent—to precarious work conditions (Adler 2021; Matlon 2016; Mears 2015; Sallaz 2015).

Based on an abductive analysis, I situated employment trajectories as important axis of differentiation. Other axes were not explored and call for further research. For instance, how do gendered identities shape how workers evaluate gig work? How is gender connected to dependency and the overall labor market? In the case presented here, food delivery gig work is predominantly male. How does masculinity factor into the evaluation of gig work? This contrasts with findings in other locales where the gendered composition of food delivery gig work is predominantly female (Milkman et al. 2021). A fruitful avenue of research would be to compare differently gendered configurations in connection to experiences and perceptions of gig work across multiple locales in the Global North and South.

Further, my account remains limited in that it only explores one city and one labor platform. While this allows for depth of exploration, there is also value in a broader and more comparative approach. For instance, the question about how different labor platforms in the labor landscape of

Mexico City are hierarchically ordered in terms of work conditions and work evaluation remains unanswered. A comparison with ride-hailing platforms appears obvious, but a comparison with other platforms such as care work platforms with varied gender compositions and dynamics is also needed (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). Lastly, more studies conducted in other cities of the Global South would deepen our understandings of gig work on a global scale.

Table 1. Typology of worker's view of food delivery gig work according to previous employment trajectories.

Previous Employment	Overall Evaluation of Food Delivery gig Work	Earnings	Autonomy/Flexibility	Meaningful Work	Quality of Attachment	% Of Sample
Service Sector	Job Upgrade	Increase in earnings	Appreciation of autonomy and flexibility in relation to tight control in previous jobs.	Meaningful. Emphasis on serving others.	Strong attachment.	41.33%
Professional Sector	Downwardly Mobile Temporary Solution	Decrease in earnings	Reminiscent of previous work arrangements with work teams, physical offices and work schedules.	Not meaningful. Misalignment between career aspirations and food delivery gig work.	Weak attachment.	24%
Informal Sector	Opportunity for Investment	Earnings as supplemental	Autonomy and flexibility allow workers to continue working on their skill/trade and/or informal business.	Meaningful not on its own but as a source of monetary investment and translation of knowledge and skills.	Moderate attachment.	18.66%
No or Miminal Employment History	Temporary Diversion	Earnings as supplemental	Autonomy and flexibility allow workers to be enrolled in courses at their respective university.	Not meaningful. Initial attraction disappears as young workers see a misalignment	Moderate attachment.	16%

	between food delivery gig work and their future professional careers.

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APPENDIX B

Screens and Streets: The Labor Process of Food Delivery Gig Work Across Organizational Spaces.

(Invited to Revise and Resubmit at *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*)

ABSTRACT

Given the increasing presence of work organizations that are temporally and spatially dispersed, how *and* where does the labor-process unfold? This article answers this question through a case study of food delivery gig work in Mexico City. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, online ethnography, and 75 semi-structured interviews this article investigates how the labor process is sedimented across different spaces exhibiting different levels of virtuality. Specifically, I follow instances of control, consent, and resistance as they manifested in food delivery platforms, work bases in public spaces, and Facebook forums—and in the interaction between these spaces. Rather than concentrating solely on algorithmic control, this article takes seriously the agency of couriers and details how they engage in practices of consent and resistance as they interact with algorithmic technologies embedded in food delivery platforms. Furthermore, this paper reveals how the labor process is no longer executed in single, bounded organizations and no longer solely takes on physical and spatial configurations. Rather, the modern labor process is fragmented and spatially distributed in digital *and* physical spaces, taking the form of 1) memes that serve to consolidate consent or resistance, or 2) algorithms that serve to control and extract effort from workers.

Introduction

Work ethnographers have been long concerned with investigating how the labor process unfolds in different organizational spaces (Burawoy, 1983; Braverman, 1974). Labor process within the Marxian tradition refers to the process by which management extracts effort from workers, and on occasion solidifies consent through the construction of organizational cultures (Kunda, 1995; S. P. Vallas, 2006). For the most part, labor process ethnographies have been organizationally bounded, meaning that ethnographers go to a single physical enclosure, be it a factory, or a call center, and participate in work life within a fixed schedule. Within the same work*place,* ethnographers observed how the physical layout of contributed to the control of workers and the reproduction of hierarchies (Acker, 1990; Braun, 2011; Greedharry et al., 2023; Ray, 2019) how managerial discourses that are propagated and internalized (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Salzinger, 1997, 2001), and how workers at the shop floor engaged in games in response to the mandates of management (Burawoy 1979; Sallaz, 2015). As work arraignments become increasingly fragmented across time and space, and enclosed institutions become a dying organizational breed, contemporary work ethnographers can no longer afford to remain in the same place. As a response to the changing spatiality of work arraignments, ethnographers have begun to trace how the labor process unfolds across different settings beyond the work site (McRobbie, 2002; Mears, 2015; Parreñas, 2021).

The dispersion and fragmentation of the labor-process is particularly acute when dealing with organizations that are digitally mediated or that exhibit high levels of virtuality, such as labor platforms (Ferreira et al., 2023; Vallas, 2006), or organizations that heavily rely upon digital technologies to organize work (Aneesh, 2009; Christin, 2017; Shestakofsky, 2017). No longer in co-presence with management figures and workers, and no longer rooted in place within which to experience managerial culture, how *and* where does the labor-process unfold? In this article, I seek to guide the reader through how the labor process of food delivery gig work sediments across different

spaces exhibiting different levels of virtuality. Food-delivery gig work presents a strategic case for which to investigate the labor-process in contemporary work organizations. Food delivery gig work takes place within the digitally mediation of workers, consumers, companies, and restaurants. Furthermore, there is not a fixed schedule because food delivery gig couriers can theoretically work at any time. As a result, this digitally mediated work is spatially *and* temporally fragmented. I draw from ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico City consisting of, participant observation as a food delivery courier, 75 semi-structured interviews, and online ethnography. The findings reveal that the labor-process is not restricted to a single organizational setting, rather, processes of control, consent, and resistance occur at various spaces that have different levels of virtuality, which inform and shape one another. This article contributes to our understanding on how the labor process unfolds in contemporary work organizations that are not rooted in a single physical space.

The Labor Process in Platform-Based Organizations

The virtual configuration of platform-based organizations presents several challenges for ethnographers of work. First, workers are not united in a physical enclosure but rather are spatially dispersed, which complicates immersion. Second, as managerial functions are relegated entirely to the virtual realm, ethnographers have to become competent in computer-based systems such as algorithmic management (Kellogg et al., 2020), such as gamification techniques, to fully capture the managerial, ideological, and political contours of platform organizations. To address these challenges, platform scholars have devised several methodological strategies ranging from traditional ethnographic methods to combinations of digital and traditional qualitative methods. For instance, scholars have participated in ride-alongs with workers working in and through ride-hailing platforms (Manriquez, 2019; Rosenblat, 2018). Ride-alongs permitted scholars to observe how workers navigate and interpret labor platforms *in situ.* Another strategy has aimed to delineate the organizational contours of platforms by attending to the technological and legal dimensions of

platforms, paying careful attention to how metric and algorithmic systems organize work (Lei, 2021). Scholars have also combined online ethnography and on-the-ground ethnography to explore how workers engage in collective action (Anwar and Graham, 2020; Chesta et al., 2019; Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020). Lastly, given the challenge of spatial dispersion, scholars have relied upon interviews and surveys to capture how workers evaluate labor platforms. While these accounts have done incredible work in opening the "black box" of platform-based organizations (Christin, 2020b; Pasquale, 2015), they contain several limitations. First, accounts that focus on algorithmic control do not attend to the practices on the ground that sustain or disrupt algorithmic control, this results in accounts that position algorithmic control as a fixed and closed system. Second accounts that attend to how couriers interpret and evaluate food delivery gig work rely on surveys that divorce workers from the context in which workers operate (Schor et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2019). Overall, a restriction of these studies is that they focus on a single-organizational setting: the digital configuration of labor platforms. However, an investigation on how platform-based gig work unfolds on the ground, reveals that alignments, and misalignments, between workers and management bleed into other spaces.

Studying Control, Consent, & Resistance Across and Beyond Virtuality

Control of worker's work, consent to work relations, and resistance to these work relations, are key stages of the labor process, or how employers are able—or not, to extract surplus from workers. In contemporary work-organizations, these essential key stages occur in digital spaces and/or are digitally mediated. As a result, scholars need to delve into these digital spaces to investigate the labor process. In management and organizational studies, digital methodologies have been mobilized to study how contemporary organizational culture is crafted in and through online spaces where employers and employees engage in and mobilize different conversations, languages, and symbolic repertoires. For instance, in their study of a large Danish bank, Madsen & Verhoeven

(2016) used netnographic approaches to study how workers used an internal social media that contributed to the construction of an organizational identity. In her study of French and American journalism organizations, Christin (2020a) researched how workers in both organizational spaces navigated and made sense of web analytic software programs and developed divergent understandings of their work and their professional identities based on their interaction with this digital tool. Across organizations, the way that "digital" is studied varies. Merres (2017) offers a useful typology to distinguish between different types of digitally mediated research. According to her, in the study of digitally mediated sociality, digital infrastructures can be the *object* of study*, instruments* of social inquiry*,* or involve the *practice* of human and digital devices *in situ.* The study of digital infrastructures as an *object of study* treats digital spaces as an arena that must be studied in and of itself. A careful attention to digital spaces as objects of study does not presume that data generated from these spaces—photos, pictures, or messages—is indicative of "naturalistic behavior" representations; rather, digital devices in conjunction with organizational spaces shape the communication strategies of participants. Digital infrastructures as *instruments of social inquiry,* on the other hand, reveal the potential impacts that digital technologies, especially social media platforms, can have on data collection and recruitment. Finally, a *practice-based methodological approach* to the study of digital technologies pays close attention to how people use and understand digital technologies in practice (Licoppe, 2004). In this article, I engage with this typology on digitally mediated methods to investigate the labor-process of food delivery gig work as it sediments across different spaces exhibiting different degrees of virtuality. Rather than focusing solely on the digital infrastructure of food delivery platforms, I travel to other spaces where couriers interpret, navigate, and make sense of the virtual and algorithmic systems that power food delivery platforms. Doing this allows me to move beyond algorithmic control—the way that algorithmic systems are employed to guide the

actions of workers, to address the labor process—how an alignment (and sometimes misalignment) between workers and management is solidified through cultural and normative practices.

Case and Methods

In October 2022, I traveled to Mexico City to conduct an ethnography of food delivery gig work. In Mexico City, there are approximately 300 thousand food delivery gig workers, compromising one of the biggest platform-based food delivery markets in Latin America (Santiago, 2024). Food delivery gig work forms part of the platform economy that encompasses a variety of digitally mediated economic transactions, including the exchange of goods and services (S. Vallas & Schor, 2020). In this case, food delivery gig work is work that is algorithmically mediated and performed offline. The three most popular food delivery platforms in Mexico City are Rappi from Colombia, DiDi Food from China, and Uber Eats from the United States. According to a census conducted by *Colegio de Mexico*, 41.2% of food delivery gig workers work for Uber Eats; 34.8% for Rappi; and 14.8% for DiDi, while the rest (9.2%) work for another platform (Florez, 2023).

Unlike workplace ethnographers before me who would visit a specific workplace within a fixed schedule, food delivery gig work occurs in open space and open time rather than a single organizational space. Given this, I had to devise several methodological strategies to gain access to the organizational life of food delivery gig work. I relied on three main methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and *digital ethnography*. Participant observation involved signing in to work for Rappi as a food delivery gig worker. While working for the platform, I took jottings in between deliveries, which I transformed into extensive fieldnotes upon arriving at my home each day (Emerson et al., 2013). In total, I performed 10 deliveries on my own. I worked as a *coala* during additional deliveries. *Coalas* are typically women who assist couriers by carrying the backpack and operating the phone while the courier operates the motorcycle or bicycle. As a *coala*, I completed 20 hours of participant observation, completing 25 deliveries. I also conducted

participant observation at a *base*—a physical public space where couriers congregate to hang out, rest, eat their meals, and—most importantly—wait to get algorithmically assigned a food order. For a duration of 14 months, I went to the base and hung out with 12 other couriers for approximately 20 hours a week. With participants' consent, I recorded jottings in my notebook while at the base, and on occasion, with participants' permission, I audio-recorded our conversations. There were 15 constant members of the base. Fourteen identified as men and one as a woman. Their ages ranged from 18 to 62 years old.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted 75 semi-structured interviews with food delivery couriers. I recruited participants via physical flyers and Facebook forums. I recruited 63 participants via Facebook forums and 12 via physical flyers. Interviews lasted between 1 and 3 hours and were conducted in public spaces such as parks, commercial plazas, and subway stations near workers' preferred zones of work, where they would log-in to food delivery platforms. With permission of participants, I audio-recorded the interviews to help with transcription. Out of the 75 interview participants, 2 identified as women and the rest as men. I used an abductive approach to analyze data (Tavory, 2022). Abductive analysis allows for a constant dialogue between theoretical orientations and data. In this case, I engaged in a dialogue between data, methodological fieldnote reflections, and the literature on digital methods within organizational studies.

Finally, I conducted digital ethnography by joining five Facebook forums dedicated to food delivery gig work in Mexico City. As I will illustrate in the following sections, with the permission of group administrators, I first joined the Facebook Forums to recruit participants for interviews; however, I remained in the forums and disclosed my identity as a researcher to group members. With added permission from the IRB, I was able to collect memes and posts from these forums without capturing member's personal information.

In the field, which included online *and* offline spaces, I was what Patricia Hill Collins (1986) calls an outsider-within. My status as a Mexican national gave me access to a cultural and linguistic repertoire which I mobilized to build rapport and understanding with participants. However, my status as a doctoral student at a university in the United States casted me as an outsider. Participants were aware that I was working with food delivery platforms as a part of research and that I had the privilege to sign-out of platforms whenever I saw fit as I was not dependent on them for income. Furthermore, my age and gender (a woman in her twenties) allowed me to present myself as an eager-to-learn novice. Many of the men I interviewed and spent time with at the base took a paternalistic and protective stance towards me. This was often the case in Facebook forums, where because I was using my personal accounts, participants could deduce my positionality based on my pictures. In the following segments, I guide the reader into my access and data collection processes in various physical and online spaces. My introduction to and prolonged presence in these spaces, as well as the data that I was able to collect, was shaped and informed by my positionality.

Findings

The Food Delivery Platforms

Getting access to food delivery platforms as a consumer is an easy affair. One must only download the app; once downloaded, a few clicks on your smartphone will result in food being delivered to your doorstep. Gaining access to a platform as a worker, however, is a tricker affair. When I arrived in Mexico City, I decided to sign-in to Rappi because I was told by other couriers that this was the quickest platform through which to gain approval. I first had to collect all necessary materials, which included a Mexican identification card (known in Mexico as INE), a national bank account, and a local smartphone. Once I uploaded the documentation, I was approved to work within two hours, and with this, I gained access to the worker version of a food delivery platform. I was greeted with a text that said "Welcome *Rappindero* [name]," (Rappindero is a nickname that the

company uses for their workers), next to an amiable-looking avatar of a young man with a mustache wearing an orange hat with the Rappi logo.

Within the Rappi platform, there are two important design features that stand out and that shape the organization of platform-based delivery gig work. The first feature is the wallet tab that displays your current balance—that is, the money that you have earned making deliveries. If your current balance appears with a minus sign and in red, this means that you have an outstanding balance and that you have acquired debt. Couriers accumulate debt for various reasons: the first most common one occurs when couriers have received deliveries paid with cash. Given the prevalence of cash in Mexico City, customers are allowed to pay with cash. In turn, couriers had to administer this cash money and deposit the commission that was owed to the platform for each delivery at a local convenience store or an affiliated bank. If couriers did not deposit this money right away, they began to accumulate debt. Another way of accumulating debt was if a customer cancelled an order, and a courier already had the food order in hand. Alternatively, if a courier cancelled an order, they also acquired debt. The significance of acquiring debt is that if a courier had an outstanding balance that surpassed a certain amount, they were subject to punitive measures from the platform. When a courier passed half of their allowed amount, they first stopped receiving food deliveries that are paid with cash, then stopped receiving food orders completely and were blocked entirely from the platform. This control was displayed in the form of a horizontal thermometer with two extremes. At the extreme left was a "like icon"—, indicating that you were in the clear; at the extreme right was a "wrong way" icon, indicating that you were blocked from the platform. As a method of digital control, the "current balance" tab was displayed at the center of the platform and was the first thing that you saw when you logged in. This served to condition couriers to pay their debts (Manriquez, 2025). A red number produced anxiety whiles a green number produced satisfaction.

Another significant design feature that served to control the work of couriers were work metrics. Under a tab named "Mi estado" (*my status*), couriers could view their calculated metrics based on their deliveries and work performance. Metrics were divided into five categories: user satisfaction (the aggregation of customer ratings of a courier's deliveries); acceptance rate (the percentage of orders that a courier accepted when notified of a delivery); finalization rate (the percentage of orders that a courier completed once they accepted an order); number of reservations (reservations referred to "reserved working hours" that couriers selected; if a courier worked throughout those reserved working hours, they received one completed reservation); and number of hours that you were logged into the platform during moments of high customer demand. Calculated metrics were important given that together, they determined a courier's *status*. The platform contained four different statuses in hierarchical order: Alerta (*Warning),* Bronce (*Bronze),* Plata (*Silver),* and Diamante (*Diamond).* The most privileged status was the Diamante status, having this status grants courier's greater preference in the algorithmic assignment of food orders. In addition, couriers were eligible to receive work merchandise from Rappi such as backpacks, uniforms, and oil changes for your car or motorcycle, which otherwise had to be paid for by workers. At the opposite side of the spectrum, an Alerta status indicated that a courier had to increase their metrics significantly, as they were in the low end of the algorithmic prioritization for food orders. Consistent with gamification techniques (Nichols, 2021), the calculation of metrics and the hierarchical categorization of different statuses served to extract continuous effort from workers and to control their work. Even though I did not have direct access to Uber Eats and DiDi—the other two main food delivery platforms in Mexico City—I later learned through accessing the other platforms with other couriers that they had very similar digital features and differed only slightly in their digital organization.

Following Merres (2017), I inhabited the digital space of the worker-side of food delivery and took fieldnotes to understand how it constituted work-organization by treating food delivery platforms as an *object of study*—an arena that must be studied in and of itself. Concerning the labor process of food delivery gig work, a careful attention to food delivery platforms revealed different methods of digital control—including gamification techniques (Nichols, 2021; Vasudevan & Chan, 2022), and control through debt-relations (Mahmud, 2012), which were articulated and presented in the platform's virtual design. However, learning how workers interacted with and made sense of food delivery platforms took me outside of the smartphone screen and into the streets of Mexico City.

The Base

Given that food delivery gig work happens in open space and open time, I had to devise several strategies to recruit participants for interviews. One of the strategies I employed was walking in the main avenues of the city and distributing flyers whenever I saw food delivery couriers. On one of these walks, I stumbled upon the *Insurgentes* subway station, a circular and open subway station located in the center of the city. In this subway station, I saw several couriers' *hacienda base*—or "establishing base." For couriers in Mexico City, a "base" refers to a physical space—typically a public space like a park, plaza, or subway station—where couriers congregate to charge their phones, eat their meals, rest, and—most importantly—wait to get algorithmically assigned a food order. Bases were common throughout the city and were typically established nearby a zone of restaurants that were in close proximity to residences. Being in these zones increased a courier's probability of being assigned a food order.

I approached the *Insurgentes* base, and after telling couriers about my research study and talking to them for several hours, they invited me to form part of their base. I joined their base, and

thereafter would go to the *Insurgentes base* for 2-5 hours a day, 4 days a week. At the base, I met several couriers who would later become key informants in my study. While hanging out and waiting to get algorithmically assigned food orders, we would recount personal anecdotes and debate about several topics including work and politics. Moreover, it was here at the base that couriers learned with each other how to navigate the different features of food delivery platforms. This was the case one afternoon when Don Ale—a 60-year-old member of the base—explained to me and other couriers about a gamified dynamic promoted by Uber Eats for the World Cup. The game was called the "Uber Eats championship." Don Ale explained:

> DA: Supposedly, Uber Eats is going to place Uber Eats couriers in groups, and if you are the person that makes the most deliveries within your group, you go up a level and you are placed in other groups until you make it to the finals where you can earn up to 20,0000 pesos (approx. 1,170 USD).
>
> A: How are the groups determined?
>
> DA: I don't know. I suspect they don't even place you in groups and the game is just a hoax for you to be making more and more deliveries, and if you have a competitive spirit, well then you get hooked. (Fieldnotes, November 10).

As Don Ale's comment illustrates, at the base, not only did couriers explain to other couriers how the platforms worked, but they also offered a critique of the platforms. Specifically, couriers disclosed the motivations behind the design feature of food delivery platforms in extracting effort from couriers. This denunciative act could be framed as an act of resistance in which management decisions were questioned (Lloyd, 2017). In this case, it led to several couriers at the base *exiting* the game. However, discursively critiquing food delivery platforms and denouncing bad working conditions was not the only way that couriers engaged in acts of resistance. There were more direct practices that couriers engaged in to "beat the box" and resist the digital algorithmic systems of food delivery platforms (Levy 2023). Among these strategies was creating fake profiles using the information of family members in order to circumvent blockages or punitive measures from the

platforms. Another strategy involved couriers activating airplane mode on their phones when they did not want to conduct a food delivery, and in this way, not impact their cancellation rates. All of these strategies were shared and discussed at the base. However, resistance was not the only posture that forged relationships at the base: consent to work relations was also collectively produced in interaction with digital technologies. This was evident in the way that couriers talked about the different statuses promoted by food delivery platforms (known as "levels" on other food delivery platforms), often expressing pride of being at a certain status. For instance, one day at the base, couriers were concerned that demand was low, which translated into very few food orders. To this concern, Daniel a 30-year-old courier responded:

> You know that things are bad when I (emphasis on the I) am not receiving anything. You know because I am Diamante (*Diamond).* I am always at the top of their list (to get algorithmically assigned a food order). Unlike you guys (referring to other couriers at the base) who are Bronce (*Bronze).*
>
> – Fieldnote, November 22nd.

Later, when Daniel was not there, couriers complained about his comment and labeled him as being conceited. For our purposes, what Daniel's comments reveal is that couriers engaged with the different categorizations that platforms imposed to incentivize effort among couriers. In this case, it served to construct consent and alliance to the platform's organizational culture. Moreover, it led to the erection of symbolic boundaries among couriers and the interruption of worker's solidarity (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Overall, going beyond the digital space of food delivery platforms and into a base—a physical and public space in the city—revealed to me the different ways that couriers interacted with digital technologies *in situ.* This was consistent with the practice-oriented approach that pays close attention to how technologies are used and interpreted by social actors (Licoppe, 2004). In this case, differing uses and interpretations led to different articulations

and practices of consent and resistance. However, bases were not the only spaces where consent and resistance was evident and practiced, thus leading me to yet another digital space.

The Facebook Forums

As mentioned previously, my first strategy for participant recruitment was to distribute physical flyers while walking on main avenues. However, this strategy yielded limited results. Using this method, I was only able to recruit 12 participants. Given this, I devise yet another strategy. I logged-in to Facebook and used keywords to search for forums that were dedicated to food delivery gig work in Mexico City. I was able to locate 5 Facebook forums. I wrote to the administrators and asked for permission to join the group and to write a post describing my study in order to recruit participants for semi-structured interviews. With the administrators' permission, I posted this information in the forums. This strategy yielded more productive results. Using this method, I was able to recruit 63 participants. Given that food delivery gig workers are dispersed and work throughout the city, using Facebook forums was an effective strategy for accessing various participants in a single *digital* space. In this vein, I employed Facebook as a *tool* for data collection. In other words, Facebook forums allowed me to gain access to a population who would have been inaccessible or much harder to reach through conventional ethnographic methods (Murthy, 2013).

However, the Facebook forums in my study did not only remain a *tool* for data collection, but also became an *object*—a digital space that was worth studying in and itself (Merres, 2107). I remained in the Facebook forums to continue recruiting participants throughout my study. Being in these Facebook forums made me realize how these digital spaces, similarly to the bases, allowed couriers to feel a sense of community despite platform-based work being designed to be individualized (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). Given that in my research study, Facebook forums shifted from being a *tool* of recruitment to an *object,* I modified my IRB application to allow for this change. These updates were approved by the IRB, and I proceeded to conduct a digital ethnography

of Facebook forums. To protect participants' identities, I selected posts and memes and screenshotted them for analysis, but I purposely did not capture participant's names or personal information. After I screenshotted and downloaded different posts and memes that I found illustrative of how couriers navigated food delivery gig work, I took notes. I ended up with 180 posts and memes. Aside from introducing myself in the Facebook Forums and describing my research study—which was met with several comments within the posts, friend requests, and private messages, I was not an active participant in the forums, meaning that I did not post my own posts or memes.

Like bases, Facebook forums were spaces where couriers helped each other navigate food delivery platforms. For instance, in the below post, a forum member is asking other couriers if having the Alerta (*Warning)* status is really a bad situation. Given that food delivery platforms themselves announce this status as a bad situation, this participant is others if it's really as bad as food delivery platforms present it.

Figure 1. Translation: It's really bad to be in a warning status? Retrieved December 27, 2024. From: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1562853210473760.

It was common to see new couriers ask questions regarding the best zones to log-in to food delivery platforms or ask questions about the average income generated each day. In response in the comment section, other participants would give opinions regarding their own experience. Participants did not only help each other navigate food delivery platforms; I soon realized that Facebook forums were also a space where a collective identity of food delivery gig work was forged outside of the organizational culture promoted by the digital design of food delivery platforms. This collective identity was mainly forged via memes. As several digital scholars have noted, memes are expressions that contain discourses that fall outside or affirm mainstream discourses. Moreover, the network capacity of memes facilitates the construction of a collective identity (Ask & Abidin, 2018; Gal et al., 2016), while also serving as the building blocks of ideological meaning (DeCook, 2018). In this vein, memes shared in Facebook forums dedicated to food delivery gig work served to construct a collective identity as well as expressions of consent and resistance. For instance, the following meme could be read as being indicative of an expressive act of resistance:

Figure 2. Translation: Sometimes you earn more money sleeping. Retrieved on 9th February 2025. From: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1562853210473760.

The caption of the meme is translated as: "Sometimes you earn more money sleeping." The first image presents someone sleeping with the caption: "He's been sleeping for 8 hours with ease." The last image of a delivery gig worker has a caption that reads: "He's been delivering for 8 hours, has made 7 deliveries, and has earned $148 pesos (approximately 8 USD), he does not know that a client is about to report him, and he will lose $440 pesos (approximately 24 USD). This meme goes against the narrative promoted in recruitment advertisements by food delivery platforms in which they promise that couriers will earn good money while "being your own boss" and working on your own time (Manriquez, 2019b). This meme received laughing and crying emojis. However, not all memes denounced the working conditions of food delivery platforms—some memes served to forge consent. This is evident in the meme below, captioned: "At the end of the day, we are men, and we must endure everything." Here specifically the meme refers to delivering on a motorcycle during a rainy day—which is very common in Mexico City. This meme is consistent with the use of gendered discourses and tropes to build consent to working relations (Salizinger, 2003). In this case, an allusion to a masculine identity serves to build an alignment between the interests of couriers to reinforce their masculinity and the interests of management in extracting effort from couriers—even when the weather conditions are not favorable.

Figure 3. Translation: At the end of the day, we are men, and we must endure everything. Retrieved July, 2024.

Overall, the Facebook forums in my study shifted from being a *tool* of recruitment to being an *object* of study. Being in these digital spaces and observing the different memes and posts being shared, revealed to me that these spaces were significant for building a collective identity—and for expressing discontentment with the working conditions of food delivery platforms or expressing an alignment to them. Overall, like the factory shop floor that Burawoy (1979) observed in his ethnography of a manufacturing plant, Facebook forums—through the networked proliferation of texts and images—were sites where a cultural system was built from the bottom up.

The Intersections

So far, I have guided the reader through the three different spaces in which the labor process—defined as the alignment between management and workers—is achieved. Given that the recounting of these spaces is organized into different sections, the reader may have the impression that these are separate and discrete spaces. However, in practice, this was far from the case. These different spaces often intersected in various ways, revealing that these spaces were not strictly either digital or physical—rather, like other arenas of social life, these lines were often blurred, with the digital informing the physical and vice-versa. Given that these intersections increasingly characterize our work lives and life in general, the ethnographer is required to move constantly and not remain in a sole "digital" or "physical" space. The ethnographer must be attentive to how these spaces meet and connect. To illustrate this, I present the reader with two spatial intersections.

Food Delivery Platforms and the City

The first intersection is that between food delivery platforms and the city—specifically, the physical streets, avenues, and neighborhoods. While food delivery platforms are a digital object and space, food deliveries are performed "offline." This means that food delivery platforms do not exist

as an entirely online and digital space, but rather are enacted in the "physical world," which creates a deep intersection between the two arenas in which they deeply inform one another. One salient aspect that I observed at this intersection is how Mexico City's spatial distribution deeply informed how food delivery couriers navigated food delivery platforms and shaped food delivery platforms themselves. For instance, couriers were reluctant to deliver in neighborhoods that they considered to be dangerous—and where they were subject to robbery. Given that Mexico City resembles what sociologist Marco Garrido (2019) calls a "patchwork city," where middle-class enclaves are in close proximity to popular neighborhoods, it was often the case that the algorithms embedded in food delivery platforms would push couriers to neighborhoods they perceived to be dangerous even when they were logged-in or working in a neighborhood they deemed safe. This led to the resistance strategies described in the section above, where couriers would place their phones into airplane mode when they received an order to go to a popular neighborhood and, in this way, avoid affecting their cancellation metric. This is illustrated in the following fieldnote:

> I was working as a Coala with Jose Luis in la Colonia Escandon. We had just delivered a food order to a hospital. We were sitting on the sidewalk. I was willing to continue working and do more deliveries in the area, but Jose Luis told me, "I am going to hit the airplane mode button, and then let's go back to the base." I asked why, and he replied by saying that we were very close to Colonia Tacubaya. Then he told me, "And you know what they say about Tacubaya—*si no sabe no vaya* (if you don't know, don't go)." This implied that this was not a safe neighborhood in which to conduct deliveries.
>
> -Fieldnote, March 10th.

What this experience revealed was that it was not sufficient to study food delivery platforms as a fixed digital object and/or space. Instead, one had to examine how these platforms were used and navigated in practice and in and through the physical and spatial composition of the city. This required simultaneous attention both to digital methods *and* traditional ethnographic methods, to note how workers interacted with the platform as a digital object and navigated their physical environment. Both were essential in deciphering the daily working life of couriers. The intersection

between food delivery platforms and the city was not the only space where the lines between the digital and non-digital were blurred. This was also the case for bases and Facebook forums.

Bases and Facebook Forums

As illustrated in the above section, bases were physical spaces where couriers congregated despite efforts from platforms to individualize platform-based work (Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2020). These were spaces in the city where workers exchanged opinions and gave each other advice, helping to consolidate a cultural system beyond the one prescribed by platform companies through virtual design and algorithms. Facebook forums, on the other hand, were digital spaces and communities where food delivery couriers exchanged textual and visual images that forged a sense of community and common identity. However, there was not a clear line that divided these two spaces. It was often the case that couriers at bases were not only logged-in to food delivery platforms, but were simultaneously checking Facebook and looking at memes or asking for advice in Facebook forums. Consider my following observation of the base:

> It was a sunny afternoon; I did not make any deliveries. I was hanging out with Jose Luis and Marco. While they were waiting to get assigned food deliveries, we were looking at memes on Facebook forums. I was proud of myself that I understood them; maybe this means that I am getting more immersed in the culture of food delivery gig work in Mexico City. I asked Marco to send me some funny memes.
>
> – Fieldnote, April 6th, Glorieta Insurgentes.

Because bases were common throughout the city, memes often depicted daily life at the base-–suggesting again that the lines between the digital and non-digital were blurred, as the culture and daily life of food gig work deeply informed the visual content represented in and shared on Facebook forums. Simultaneously, the content shared on Facebook forums was often discussed in face-to-face interactions among couriers. For instance, this was the case of a widely-shared meme known as "el vato de los mil diarios"—translated as: "*The guy who makes 1k a day*." This was a meme making fun of couriers who claimed that they made 1k pesos (approx. 55 USD) each day. Couriers

made fun of these couriers by saying that ironically, the people who made this boisterous claim often looked non-presentable. Simultaneously, this meme also made fun of platform companies that promised couriers that they could earn this money for the purpose of recruiting them to this work. It was common to hear couriers exclaim, "*Ahi va el vato de los mil diarios,*" ("There goes the 1k guy,") making direct reference to the widely-shared meme. These commonplace interactions revealed to me that a culture system was erected from below not only in physical spaces—the bases—or in digital communities—the forums—but in the interaction between the two.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper provided autoethnographic reflections on studying the labor process of food delivery platforms using digital ethnographic methods. Specifically, by following the labor process—the ongoing and constructed alignment (and sometimes misalignment) between workers and management—this paper reveals the different ways that digital ethnographic methods could be mobilized to study modern organizations that go beyond a single site and that surpass the lines between the physical and digital, or between online and offline. Grounding my observations in Merre's (2017) analytical distinctions in digital methodologies, I presented how food delivery platforms could be studied as an *object* of control, how bases provided a site to study food delivery platforms *in practice*—in other words, how couriers navigated and made sense of the digital features of food delivery platforms *in situ*—and how Facebook forums could be both a *tool* for recruitment and an *object*—a digital community to study in its own right. Finally, I presented two intersections between digital and non-digital spaces: the intersection between food delivery platforms and the physical distribution of the city, and the interaction between bases and Facebook forums. To study these intersections requires a digital methodology centered *in practice*—that is, an investigation into how digital technologies are used and mobilized by social actors in specific contexts. What can these observations tell us about digital methodologies and what can they tell us about the labor process in

modern organizations? I offer two reflections. First, as organizations are exhibiting greater levels of digitality and virtuality—from platforms to remote work—it becomes less relevant to make a distinction between digital and traditional ethnographic methods (Castells, 1996). Rather, the work ethnographer must be equipped with both methodologies and must mobilize a synthesis between the two to best attend to contemporary forms of organizing. She must be both a fly on the screen and a fly on the wall simultaneously. Second, and following from this, labor process ethnographers must attend to how control, consent, and resistance are no longer forged and executed in a single bounded organization and no longer take solely physical and spatial configurations. Rather, the modern labor process is fragmented and spatially distributed in digital and physical spaces, taking the form of memes that serve to consolidate consent and/or resistance or algorithms that serve to control and extract effort from workers. In this paper, I presented reflections on the different digital methodologies mobilized to follow the labor process in platform-based work organizations that lack a single physical enclosure or flesh-and-bones management figures in the hope that they may be.

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APPENDIX C

The Platform's Cash Administrators: Delegation, Local Adaptation, and Labor Control in Mexico City.

(Published in *New Media and Society*)

ABSTRACT

This article draws upon ethnographic fieldwork, online ethnography, and 75 semi-structured interviews to delve into the process of technological adaptation to local environments. Primarily, it focuses on the tension between platform design and local economic practices. Given the primacy of cash as an object of economic exchange in Mexico City, platforms facilitate cash payments. Platforms then delegate the task of cash administration to couriers. Labor control around this task is then institutionalized in the form of platform features. Furthermore, platform dependency to cover basic necessities shapes divergent experiences of the delegated task of cash administration. Conceptually, this article employs the Latourian concept of delegation to explore the human and nonhuman enrollments mobilized to adapt digital technologies to local environments. Zooming in on the process of adapting food delivery platforms to cash-centric Mexico City revealed heterogenous experiences of repair work and subsequently different experiences with algorithmic control. Zooming out to a global scale reveals that algorithmic management does not follow a universal template. Rather, enrollments between humans and technology related to addressing inconsistencies between design and local practices result in local articulations of algorithmic control.

Introduction: Cash is King

Despite efforts from private banks and public financial institutions to eradicate cash in favor of credit cards and digitized payments, cash persists as a central mode of economic exchange among city dwellers in Mexico City. According to the National Survey of Financial Inclusion, 66% of Mexicans are outside of the banking system, while 92% percent of people who do have a credit or debit card prefer to pay in cash. Not only do consumers prefer to pay in cash, but small business owners also prefer to be paid in cash (INEGI 2021).

The centrality of cash presents a contradiction with the values and imperatives of food delivery platforms. To consumers, food delivery platforms promise to compress time and space and deliver food to your doorstep with a click of your smartphone, all while minimizing physical encounters. The design-architecture behind platforms reflects this imperative. Operating under optimization logics, platform design assumes a frictionless and idealized environment (Ke Li 2024; Viljoen, Goldenfein, and McGuigan 2021). Cash transactions complicate this vision. While all economic objects are material things (Gabrys et al., 2013), cash as a medium of economic exchange demands a physical, concrete encounter between buyer and seller. The handling, counting, storage, and movement of cash occur in the physical realm as opposed to a digitized infrastructure (Nelms and Maurer, 2014; Rella, 2020; Seitz, 2017). For food delivery platforms, this means that cash operations need to transpire *outside* of the platform's digital infrastructure, further complicating the tension between virtual design that presumes a Global North user who mainly uses a credit-card and the local environment that centers cash as a medium of economic exchange.

Despite the challenge that cash presents, food delivery platform companies decided to facilitate cash payments to consumers in Mexico City[1]; failing to do so would mean excluding a

significant segment of the city's population that continues to rely on cash for economic exchange. In 2018, two years after its arrival to the city, Uber Eats announced to city dwellers via e-mails, billboards, and news articles that moving forward, it would accept cash as a form of payment. "*Ya aceptamos efectivo!" (*We now take cash!") read an Uber Eats ad. The two other most popular food delivery platforms in Mexico City, Rappi and DiDi Food, which arrived in the city in the same year, also accepted cash as a form of payment (Garcia 2018).

The case of food delivery platforms *adapting* to the local economic practices of Mexico City presents an interruption to two potent myths at the epicenter of technocentric narratives: the myth of automation and the myth of technological universality (Munn, 2022). First, for food delivery platforms to accept cash, they had to *delegate* the task of cash administration to couriers—revealing the need for human labor to make technologies operable on the ground (Li, 2024; Qadri and D'Ignazio, 2022). Second, platforms instituted rewards and punishments as platform features to ensure that this task was adequately performed (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). This new added layer of labor control attests to the fact that labor platforms do not follow a universal algorithmic and digital design (van Doorn and Chen, 2021).

Early scholarly accounts of the gig economy, and specifically platform-based work, focused on a *decontextualized* algorithmic management—that is, the focus was on delineating the multiple and intersecting algorithmic and digital techniques to control workers at the moment of the labor process (Kellogg et al., 2020; Shapiro, 2018). Scholars have begun moving away from a universal algorithmic management template and started addressing how local histories, labor markets and institutions shape the algorithmic and virtual design of labor platforms and how, in turn, local histories and cultures shape the reception of labor platforms leading to different paths of consent and resistance (Chesta et al., 2019; Manriquez, 2019; Sun et al., 2023; van Doorn and Chen, 2021;

Vasudevan and Chan, 2022; Wood et al., 2019). Other scholarly accounts have instead focused on departing from the vision of a closed algorithmic management system, highlight the reparative work of humans to make algorithms and platforms operable on the ground (Li, 2024; Qadri and D'Ignazio, 2022).

In this article, following Latour and others, I bridge these two perspectives by theorizing *technological adaptation as a process of delegation* where adapting technologies to local environment requires the ongoing mobilization of technology and human labor (Bijker and Latour, 1988; Callon, 1984; Latour, 1984, 2016). Drawing from ethnographic observations in physical and virtual spaces and 75 semi-structured interviews with food delivery gig couriers for the three most popular food delivery platforms in Mexico City (Uber Eats, Didi Food, and Rappi), I empirically trace the mobilized process of delegating tasks between couriers and platforms to facilitate cash transactions and adapt platforms to rooted local economic practices. Further, by following this process ethnographically, I engage with what Angele Christin (2020) calls *algorithmic reification*—the ramifications and consequences of algorithmic systems as they unfold in specific social contexts. Specifically, I address how the delegative task of cash administration is not experienced uniformly; rather, dependence on platforms to cover basic necessities creates different experiences among couriers around this delegated task (Schor et al., 2020). Whereas more economically prosperous workers are able to administer cash with greater ease, more precarious workers position this task as a moneylending system which results in them receiving more punitive measures from platforms.

In this article, I seek to make two contributions to existing studies on the gig economy and to our understanding of technological diffusion and adaptation more broadly. First, I go beyond the role of designers in adapting labor platforms to local contexts to addressing the ongoing everyday enrollments between humans and technology needed to adapt technologies to local environments

(van Doorn and Chen, 2021). In this vein, I echo the call in digital labor studies to render invisible work visible (Casilli, 2017; Gruszka and Böhm, 2022). Second, this article moves away from the image of an abstract and homogenous worker performing repair work to address how platform dependency shapes the delegated repair work of cash administration. By doing so, this article contributes to our understandings of heterogeneity in experiences of algorithmic control (Lee, 2023; Milkman et al., 2021; Schor et al., 2020, 2023).

Literature Review

Local Articulations of Platform Labor: Questioning Universality

For the most part, early accounts of algorithmic management remained *decontextualized*. That is, algorithmic control was theorized without reference to the embeddedness of platforms to different institutional and cultural environments. In some cases, accounts situated the operations and techniques of Western platforms as the universal standard. While striking similarities in algorithmic techniques can be observed across different locales (Wood et al., 2019), platform work scholars have begun to fully theorize the relationship between platforms and the environment that surrounds them.

In this view, labor platforms are not fixed entities; rather, they are more like "prisms" reflecting and amplifying existing social dynamics (Christin, 2020) or like chameleons that are shaped by the institutional contexts in which they operate (Vallas and Schor, 2020). From this position, two theoretical and empirical directions stand out. The first one notes how the institutional context—mainly existing labor regimes, labor markets, state policies, and local labor conditions—shapes the technological design and organizational form of platforms, resulting in different experiences for workers (Lei, 2021; Li, 2022; Sun et al., 2023; van Doorn and Chen, 2021). For instance, Van Doorn and Chen (2021) challenge assumptions of a universal mode of gamification and highlight

differences in techniques for food delivery platforms in New York and Beijing. The authors posit that compared to US platforms, the gamification techniques are more elaborate in China due to the diversity of working arrangements and workers that correspond to the historical dominance of informal labor practices in the region. This results in different experiences for Chinese and American workers on the ground. The second strand of this research focuses less on differences in technological and organizational design, instead focusing on platform reception. These accounts have noted how local sense-making cultures, derived from context-dependent labor histories, shape how workers make sense of and interpret labor platforms, resulting in different avenues of consent—and resistance—despite technological convergence (for other examples in other technological arenas, see: Christin, 2018; Siles, 2023). For instance, Chen and Soriano (2022), recognizing the interconnection between global capital and local labor in China and the Philippines, have noted how worker's local culture of sensemaking, association, and informal organizing gives rise to diverse means of labor resistance strategies. Other scholars have noted how migrant workers in Global North contexts interpret and navigate labor platforms given their situation in a labor market context that marginalizes them (Lam and Triandafyllidou, 2022; Lee, 2023).

In this article, I build upon studies that emphasize the local articulation of labor platforms—in both design and reception. However, my analysis and case differ from previous theorizations in various respects. First, previous accounts have assumed a seamless translation between technological design and national and local institutional and cultural contexts related to labor. My case focuses on Mexico City, where the gap between technological design and local practices and infrastructures is most salient (for similar cases in other regions of the Global South, see: Daramola and Etim, 2022; Krishna, 2020). Second, previous accounts tend to ignore the on-the-ground process by which technological platforms are adapted to local environments. In these accounts, once design is encoded with local and institutional practices, it is wholly imposed onto workers. In this article,

instead, I accentuate the ongoing human and non-human enrollments (Callon, 1984) needed to adapt technologies to local environments, with consequences for algorithmic control and reception. Before I delve into how this plays out empirically, I theorize the groundwork of local adaption as a process of delegation between humans and nonhumans.

Theorizing Local Adaptation as Delegation: Questioning Total Automation

The gap and tension between design and localized experiences has become more ubiquitous and intensified in today's data-driven societies (Burrell and Fourcade, 2021; Fourcade and Gordon, 2020). In the realm of work, Levy (2023) emphasizes the discrepancy between digital surveillance technologies that aim to control truckers driving habits and the driving skills needed to successfully transport goods across the United States. Similarly, in the context of mobility platforms, Quadri and D'Ignazio (2022) noted the gap between data-driven technological maps and the spatial knowledge and improvisation of drivers as they navigate the urban landscape of Indonesia.

Gaps between design and concrete experience raise questions about automation. Automation—the replacement of human labor for technologies—cannot occur *in toto*; given the continuous gap between technological design and concrete experience, human work will constantly be required to make technologies operable. This is exemplified by the concept of *algorithmic unfitness* as examined by Angela Ke Li (2024). Algorithmic unfitness refers to the discrepancy between algorithmically programmed food delivery platform design, which relies upon an optimal and mechanized view of human labor, and the concrete experiences of couriers on the ground. Rather than perceiving this gap as a failure, Li (2024) demonstrates that platforms purposely delegate the *reparative work* (Graham and Thrift, 2007; Qadri and D'Ignazio, 2022) to couriers who must align embodied realities (e.g., navigating an unpredictable urban setting) with the reductionist logic of

algorithmic design. In summary, there is no total automation, as people—and more concretely, human labor—are integral to the operation of technologies *in situ*.

This mutual interdependence begets the question of the ongoing process of enrollment between human and non-human actors (Callon, 1984). In other words, the process by which tasks are in Latour's (1988) words, *delegated* to humans and technology to accomplish a specific task. In his humor-saturated essay, Bruno Latour (1988; writing as Jim Johnson) presents the reader with the example of a door-closer. In this example, the task of creating a hole to allow for the constant in- and out-flux of people and things is delegated to hinged doors. However, you still need someone to open the door. Latour imagines that this task is delegated to a human, specifically a doorman. However, once this task is delegated to the imagined human worker, Latour imagines that you need to erect a disciplinary regime akin to a hotel's management system to ensure that the human worker completes his delegated task (e.g., does not leave his post, etc.). Latour's example illustrates the never-ending enrollment between humans and non-humans. For our purposes, it delineates the relationship that exists between delegation, local adaptation, and labor control.

Building upon these approaches, I guide the reader into the process of delegation between humans and technology mobilized to adapt food delivery platforms to a cash-ridden Mexican metropolis and the consequences this has for labor control and worker's experiences, particularly as platform dependency structures delegation.

Case and Methods

Food delivery platforms, which algorithmically mediate between restaurants, consumers, workers, and platform companies, are now well established in Mexico City. In 2023, 24.2% of mobile phone users had food delivery platforms installed on their phones (Trecone, 2023). By that same year, there were approximately 350 thousand food delivery couriers (Milenio, 2022). The

presence of food delivery couriers has become a feature of the urban landscape of the city. Currently, Mexico, holds second place (after Brazil) on the platform-based food delivery market in Latin America, making it an important site to investigate the global diffusion and adaptation of food delivery platforms (Santiago, 2024).

Today, the three most popular food delivery platforms are Uber Eats, Rappi, and DiDi Food (based in the United States, Colombia, and China, respectively). All three platforms accept cash as a payment method and have instituted platform features to allow for these transactions for both workers and consumers. For consumers across all three platforms, the acceptance of cash translates into an available payment option that, once selected, allows for consumers to pay in cash upon the arrival of their order. For workers, the instituted platform features to allow for cash transactions were more complex, including metric and algorithmic techniques of labor control. As I elaborate on in the findings section, the digital features to control the labor of cash administration were highly similar across three platforms. One important variation, as I will elaborate on in the findings section, was regarding the amount of cash couriers were allowed to owe to the platform before getting blocked from the platform. There is no public information regarding the decisions of platform companies to institute digital techniques to control the administration of cash aside from online manuals that instruct workers and consumers on how to execute cash transactions through the platforms.[2] My analysis is based on these three food delivery platforms, as couriers often switch between them to increase their earnings.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology that includes participation observation in both offline and online spaces as well as 75 semi-structured interviews with food delivery gig couriers. From October 2022 to December of 2023, I conducted participant observation at a food delivery courier base in Mexico City. In Mexico City, *a base* is commonly known as a public space

where food delivery couriers who work for food delivery platforms congregate to wait for deliveries, charge their smartphones, eat meals, and hang out with other couriers. I was invited to join the base after strolling around the city distributing flyers to recruit couriers for interviews. For a duration of 14 months, I went to the base and hung out with 12 other couriers for approximately 20 hours a week. All couriers were men except for one. The youngest courier was 18 years old, while the oldest courier was 62. With the permission of the couriers, I recorded jottings in a small notebook or in my smartphone. Every day, I went home to transform my jottings into fully fledged fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2013). I signed in to Rappi, a Colombian Food Delivery Platform, given that according to couriers at the base, it was the easiest and fastest to get into. After uploading all my materials to the platform: including a national ID and debit card information, I was approved to work within two hours. I also joined another courier as a *coala* (koala). Coalas are assistants, typically women, to other couriers. Coalas assist couriers by hanging out on the backseat of a motorcycle (or, in my case, a bicycle), carrying the cooler backpack, and operating the smartphone to alert the assisted courier to city directions and tasks assigned by the platform. It is not hard to see why couriers have adopted this nickname for their women assistants. While sitting on the back of a motorcycle, coalas resemble a koala hugging a tree. While being a coala, I obtained access to other food delivery platforms.

In addition, I conducted ethnographic observations in online spaces. Specifically, I joined five Facebook forums dedicated to food delivery gig work in Mexico City. In each forum, I asked permission from administrators to join the forum, presenting myself as a researcher and telling administrators about my project. Once accepted the forums, I created a post to present myself and my project to other members. I included a post retrieved from a Facebook forum in this paper, which I anonymized to protect the members' identities.

I supplemented my ethnographic research by conducting 75 structured interviews with food delivery couriers. While at the base, I soon started to notice that *efectivos*—cash food orders, and more specifically, the task of administering cash—was an important topic among couriers. Following Timmermans and Tavory (2022), initial coding prompted further data collection. I then integrated the following questions to my interview guide: Explain to me the process of receiving a food order paid with cash. How do you navigate and administer your money once you receive a couple of food orders paid with cash? Do you prefer cash orders or orders paid with a credit card? Have you ever been rewarded/punished by the platform for not having paid or for having paid the money owed to platforms? These questions served merely as a guideline, as they were used to open a conversation on couriers' perceptions of the task of administering cash money for the platforms. Interviews took approximately 1-3 hours and were conducted in public spaces such as coffee shops and parks, typically in the neighborhoods where couriers worked. With the permission of couriers, I audio recorded interviews to facilitate later transcription. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. I translated fieldnotes and interview excerpts from Spanish to English for the purpose of this article.

To better understand the delegative process of cash administration, I relied upon methodological triangulation (Tracy, 2019). Ethnographic observations at the base helped me understand the practices that couriers employed to navigate the algorithmic, metric, and virtual system of platforms, particularly in regard to cash administration, while ethnographic observations in online spaces helped me understand the visual and written representations that couriers mobilized to make sense of the delegated task of cash administration. Finally, interviews helped me understand how couriers experimented and understood the work of cash administration and how platforms organized this work.

I used an abductive approach to analyze the data (Timmermans and Tavory 2022). Abductive analysis allows for a constant dialogue between theoretical orientations and data. The researcher typically begins with a surprise that emerges in the data and then attempts to integrate or explain this surprise by relying on and expanding existing theories. I started with the surprising finding that cash administration was central to the experience of platform-based work in Mexico City, a task that was not documented in accounts of platform work elsewhere. I then engaged with the literature on the gig economy, technological diffusion and adaptation, and theories of delegations to "make sense" of this anomaly.

Findings

Platform to Human: Delegating the Labor of Cash Administration

One sunny afternoon while working as a *coala* with Jose Luis, we received a food order to deliver a pizza to a co-working space for programmers in the business district of Polanco. After receiving his food order, the customer gave us a 100-pesos bill. Given that it was one of my first deliveries, I was quite confused about this transaction. After we made the delivery, Jose Luis and I sat on a bench, where he proceeded to explain to me the earnings we made: "The guy gave us 100 pesos. We owe the platform 13 pesos; the cost of delivery was 17 pesos and the pizza costs 56 pesos." "There are 14 pesos left," I said. He replied, "That's our tip," (Fieldnotes, March, 2 pm, Polanco). This means that from the 100 pesos bill that we received, only 31 pesos (approx. 2 USD) belonged to us—the tip and the cost of delivery. The rest of the money belonged to the platform. Despite owing the platform 69 pesos (approx. 4.25 USD), we had the 100 pesos bill in our hands.

Whenever couriers received a food order paid with cash like the one, I outlined above, couriers had to deposit the commission that belonged to the platforms in an affiliated bank or in Oxxo, a popular convenience store. In other words, they had to perform the physical act of

digitizing the money for the platform, which depended on global algocratic mode of revenue extraction (Aneesh, 2009). While in theory this delegated task seemed simple, in practice it demanded an extensive labor of money management and administration. Not surprisingly, some couriers dreaded this labor. As expressed to me by Francisco, a 30-year-old courier who previously had been a gym coach, "I don't like the whole cash orders thing. It's so hard to keep track of what is mine and what is not. I am not an accountant. I am just delivering food."

Given that depositing the money took time away from their piece-rate based work, couriers did not typically deposit the money right after receiving a food order paid with cash. As expressed by Jose Ramon, a 40-year-old courier, "When you receive the cash, you keep the cash. You don't go and deposit it right away. I mean, who does that, really?" This meant that after a busy day of work making several deliveries—ones paid with cash and others paid with a credit card—the lines between what amount of money belonged to couriers and what belong to platforms became blurred. Further, couriers often used the cash money they had received to buy everyday necessities such as food or gas. This was specially the case given the low price of deliveries and the fluctuation of demand. In this manner, couriers had to keep a close record of what they owed to the platform. One strategy to administer the cash money was given to us at the base by Jose Luis:

> Look at my fanny pack. It has two compartments. In this compartment, I place the money that I owe to the platform. In the other comportment, I place my actual earnings. Until I have my account in zeros, I move the money that I owed to the other compartment.

Similarly, Sensei, a 60-year-old courier whose nickname came from his love of Japanese anime, tried to explain to me how to administer your finances as a food delivery courier. He opened the Uber-Eats platform:

> Look here [in the platform]. It says I have a negative balance of 300 pesos (approx. 20 USD). The cash that you have, you can save it in case there is an emergency while you are working. But you always have to be conscious of what is truly yours. One way I liked to do it is to pay a little bit of my debt with cash. Let's say if I have a negative balance of 300 pesos, I pay 100 pesos (approx. 5 USD) and the rest I pay with work. That way you have a safety net and you have an easier time administering yourself and avoid being disconnected from the platform.

As the above quotes illustrate, failing to adequately administer your money—that is, failing to pay the commission that was owed to platforms from cash orders—resulted in punishment. Given that couriers could technically pocket the money they received from cash orders, platforms had to institute a form of control to assure that commissions were paid. The task of labor control was then delegated to the virtual and algorithmic functions of the platform.

Back to the Platform: The Institutionalization of Labor Control

To assure that the task of cash administration was done adequately, and mainly that couriers did not keep cash money that belonged to the platform, labor control was instituted through several platform features. It is to these features—the digital sticks and carrots—that I now turn.

Paying with Work

As mentioned before, when couriers were assigned a food order paid with cash, they had to make a cash deposit to pay the commission that platforms charge for each food order. To deposit this money, couriers had to go to an affiliated bank or convenience store. This was a task that took significant time and energy from their already physically taxing job of delivering food. First, couriers had to locate a bank in a relatively safe neighborhood to avoid armed robbery, and further, as Mexico City is a heavily populated city, banks and convenience stores had a guaranteed waiting line. However, platforms instituted a feature allowing couriers to pay back this commission with work

instead of depositing the commission. Specifically, when couriers had a negative balance for receiving a food order paid with cash, the price of a delivery made with a credit card goes automatically towards this balance. In general, couriers liked this feature as it allowed them to avoid stopping their work to deposit the cash to the platforms. For platforms, allowing couriers to pay their cash debts with work achieved two things. First, it served as disciplinary control to ensure that couriers paid back with work the physical money given to them from cash orders. Second, it simultaneously allowed platforms to extract guaranteed effort from couriers. Given that during the time of my fieldwork, the price of a delivery order (the money that belonged to couriers) ranged from 17 pesos (approx. 1 USD) to 40 pesos (approx. 2.50 USD), couriers had to conduct several delivery orders before they cleared their balance. In other words, couriers were given an advanced payment in the form of cash orders, and to pay this back, couriers guaranteed continuous effort to the platform. However, given the low price of delivery orders, paying cash debts with work did not guarantee a clear balance. Recall Sensei's strategy for cash administration that combined both work and depositing money. For this reason, an extra layer of control was instituted: if couriers persisted with a negative balance, they were punished by the platform.

Punishment (Digital Sticks):

All three food delivery platforms present couriers with a version of a tab entitled "Wallet" upon login; this tab displays their accumulated earnings from deliveries. If the accumulated quantity appears in red next to a minus sign, this signals that the courier has a negative balance from cash orders.[3] The negative balance that couriers were allowed to have before getting punished varied from platform to platform and from courier to courier. Consistently, couriers reported that Uber Eats allowed couriers to have a greater negative balance (between 1,500-2,000 pesos, or approx. 95-125 USD) than other platforms. On the other hand, Rappi only allowed for 100-300 pesos (approx. 5-20

USD) and DiDi Food fell somewhere in the middle. Yet the logic of punishment was consistent across all three platforms. Halfway before couriers surpassed their limit, they were restricted from receiving food orders paid with cash, and instead could only receive orders paid with a credit card. This was a significant punishment given that only receiving orders paid with card limited their already-restricted possibilities of getting algorithmically assigned a food order, thus limiting the revenue that couriers were able to generate when logged-in to the platforms. Couriers could opt to deposit the cash money (at least the certain amount required to be allowed to receive cash orders again) or could continue paying off the remaining balance with work. If couriers surpassed their maximum negative balance, they were blocked from the platforms and stopped receiving food orders altogether. At this point, couriers had no option but to deposit the money to regain access to the platforms.

Figure 1. Wallet in Rappi. Yellow zone indicates that the user will stop receiving cash orders. Red zone indicates blockage. This courier has been blocked for having a negative balance of $150 pesos (approx. $9 USD). Retrieved on May 20, 2023, from: https://soyrappi.com.co/limites-deuda.

Rewards (Digital Carrots)

The obvious reward that couriers received from adequately administering the cash money was to *not* get blocked from food delivery platforms. However, there were other rewards not explicitly stated by platforms that were *sensed* by couriers in their daily working experience with the algorithmic and metric systems of food delivery platforms. Specifically, couriers revealed to me in conversation that they felt platforms kept an unreported, rigorous record not only of the money that you owed, but also the amount of time it took you to clear your negative balance—similar to credit scores (Fourcade and Healy, 2017). This perceived unreported tracking of paying back habits, according to couriers, determined the algorithmically assigned food orders that you received. Mario, a 33-year-old food delivery courier, told me:

> M: I like to pay right away, because if you don't, the algorithm starts detecting that I delay my payments and it stops giving me orders.
>
> A: You mean before the cash order restriction?
>
> M: Yes, way before. I noticed this because when I pay my balance right away, the platform rewards me by giving me more food orders. And when I don't pay, even if I haven't surpassed my cash orders limit, I don't get as many food orders.
>
> A: And do platforms explicitly tell you this?
>
> M: No, it's my theory. But based on experience and the time I have been on the platforms (5 years), I am pretty sure the algorithm keeps track of this.

Similarly, Goyo, a 40-year-old courier who had been on Rappi since it arrived in Mexico City, claimed that because he was very diligent in paying back any cash orders, the platform—or, as

the couriers referred to it, "the algorithm"—rewarded him accordingly. During an interview, Goyo told me proudly:

> Whenever they pay me with cash, I go immediately to the bank and pay. There are other guys that immediately spend that money. I don't. When you have your account without a negative balance, the platform knows that you work like that and starts to give you more and more food orders that are paid with cash. The other day, the platform started to give me all food orders paid with cash. By the, end I had 4,000 pesos (approx. 250 USD) in my hands and the platform allowed me to continue working. I know other guys that if they owe 250 pesos (15 USD), they get disconnected.

Given algorithms' opacity (Burrell, 2016; Pasquele, 2015) in food delivery platforms, couriers could not corroborate that they were in fact rewarded *or* punished beyond what was explicitly stated by platforms. This resulted in folk theories regarding how algorithms worked (Siles et al., 2020). Nevertheless, beyond digital sticks and carrots, in social interactions among couriers in both digital (Facebook forums) and public physical spaces (bases), symbolic boundaries were drawn among couriers. Symbolic boundaries refer to the cultural attitudes and practices mobilized to draw distinctions between people (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). In this case, through jokes and public reprimands, distinctions were drawn between those who had a clear balance, *los disciplinados* (the disciplined), and those who failed to adequately administer the cash from cash orders and were blocked from platforms, *los deudores* (the debtors). This was evident at the base, where other couriers cited Daniel, a 30-year-old psychology student as an example to not follow in my job as a courier, while couriers encouraged me to receive advice from Goyo on how to best administer my cash money. However, adequately administering cash was not simply a matter of being disciplined; as I

will demonstrate in the following section, existing socioeconomic divides structure the delegative task of cash administration.

Not All Delegation is Created Equal

Consistent with other scholars' accounts that document a heterogenous workforce (Lee, 2023; Schor et al., 2023), in this study I found that the workforce of food delivery platform was stratified along class lines. As a result, the task of cash administration was not experienced equally among couriers; rather, the level of dependence on their income from the platforms stratified this delegated task (Schor et al., 2020). When interviewed, some couriers expressed indifference towards the labor of administering cash for the platform. For others, it acquired an entirely different meaning. Socioeconomic differences were palpable to couriers. As expressed to me by Ramon, a 34-year-old courier who also worked in his family business, "I think the whole cash and debt thing is only a problem for people who live day by day and who have children and this [food delivery gig work] is the only source of income."

Often, couriers in precarious situations used the cash from cash orders as borrowed money, similar to a credit system where instead of credit, you paid with work. Couriers used this money to pay for daily necessities, mainly food, without having to wait for the direct deposit to hit their bank accounts every week. This was explained to me by Andres, a 31-year-old courier who, in a period of his life, was unhoused while working for Rappi: "There was a time when I was really struggling. I did not have a home. I would log in to Rappi and work until I received a cash order, you know, to have something to eat." Given that platforms randomized cash orders, Andres had to take other orders paid with a credit card until he got a cash order. Andres expressed to me that he thought the platform knew he was looking for cash and made him work several orders before he received a cash order. He thought this because he saw that fellow couriers received cash orders more often. Similar

to Andres, a courier created a post in a Facebook forum where he asked advice on how to get food orders paid with cash as he was currently in a difficult situation. Other couriers commented on his post advising him to log in to food delivery platforms in low-income neighborhoods. According to other couriers, given that people in low-income neighborhoods typically paid with cash, working there increased the probability of getting algorithmically assigned a cash order.

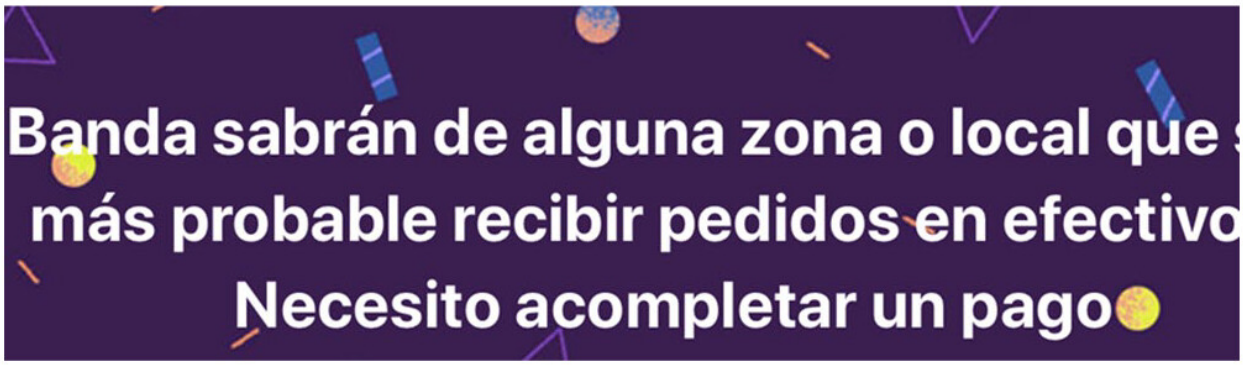

Figure 2. Translation: Do you guys know of any zone or establishment where it's more probable that I receive a food order paid with cash? I need to complete a payment. Retrieved February 22, 2024, from: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1562853210473760.

However, like a credit system, borrowing too much money without paying back had its punitive consequences. As mentioned before, the first punishment for having an increased negative balance was to stop receiving food orders paid in cash, while the last punishment was to get blocked from receiving orders altogether. This meant that couriers first experience limits on their source of income, and then subsequently lose access to what was often the only source of income they had. This is illustrated by an encounter I observed at the base:

Gloria arrived one sunny afternoon at the base yelling angrily: "Does anybody have a metallic chain? I swear I want to kick Little Caesar's Pizza ass." According to Gloria, she was charged for a pizza order that she never received. She was close to her borrowing limit and feared

that she was going to get blocked from Rappi. She was especially fearful of this blockage as she already had debt in DiDi Food and Uber Eats and feared that she was going to lose her remaining source of income. Moments later, Gloria, far from her cellphone, received a notification for a food delivery. We all looked at her cell phone to see what type of order was in storage. We yelled at her, "It's a cash order!" She ordered us, "Cancel that shit, I cannot afford to get blocked." As we hit the reject button, Jaime quickly logged in in hopes of getting algorithmically assigned to the same order as he needed the cash. While Gloria did not want to continue borrowing cash money as it would put her close to getting blocked from food delivery platforms, Jaime needed the money. However, he did not get assigned to the delivery order (Fieldnote, July, 5 PM, Glorieta Insurgentes).

Like Gloria, other couriers often signed into another platform to generate income when they got blocked from a platform for having surpassed their negative balance. This practice is illustrated by an encounter I had with Daniel, another member of the base:

> D: I owe Rappi 1,000 pesos (approx. 65 USD) and I owe DiDi 1,500 pesos (approx. 95 USD).
>
> A: And you cannot work to pay your debt?
>
> D: It would be wonderful if I could. I surpassed my borrowing amount and now I am blocked from both platforms.
>
> A: What are you going to do?
>
> D: Well right now I am in Uber so I can pay my debts to Rappi and DiDi. The problem is that I barely work in Uber, so I am not getting assigned any deliveries. I think I am going to have to sell my computer.

(Fieldnote, November, 10 PM,

Glorieta Insurgentes.)

Overall, dependence on platforms structured the delegated task of administering the cash. First, given the physicality of cash, couriers could have access to revenue faster than direct deposit. This prompted couriers who were already in a precarious situation to utilize this money to pay for their daily necessities. Second, because their economic precarity made it harder for them to pay their negative balance, they were punished by the platform by losing access to revenue they desperately needed.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article presents the case of how food delivery platforms in Mexico City are adapted to rooted local economic practices. Specifically, given the centrality of cash as a medium of economic exchange in Mexico City, food delivery platforms facilitate cash payments. For consumers, this translates into a simple feature that allows them to pay with cash upon the arrival of their food. For workers, this translates into an added task of cash administration, and subsequently to an added layer of algorithmic control. Moreover, this task is not experienced uniformly among workers, as platform dependency results in different experiences of algorithmic control. I now discuss the contributions of this case to our understandings of heterogeneity in algorithmic management of labor platforms and its consequences for workers.

First, this article moves away from treating labor platforms as a fixed and closed digital system. This approach is not new. Digital labor scholars have already begun to document the ongoing human labor necessary to make platforms operable on the ground. For instance, scholars have pointed to the reparative human work needed to address inconsistencies between algorithmic

systems and the sociotechnical environments in which they operate (Anwar and Graham, 2020; Li, 2024; Qadri and D'Ignazio, 2022). This human work often remains hidden and unacknowledged (Casilli, 2017; Graham and Thrift, 2007). By mobilizing the Latourian concept of delegation, which attends to the ongoing enrollments of humans and non-humans, this article addresses how repair work circles back to algorithmic control. In this case, the delegation of repair work is not only *a priori* baked into the design of algorithmic management as the concept of algorithmic unfitness reveals (Li, 2024), but additionally, reparative tasks are then subject to labor control, as platforms need to ensure that these tasks are performed adequately. This has important implications for our understandings of heterogeneity in algorithmic control as labor platforms diffuse across the globe. In the case presented here, the delegated task of cash administration resulted in an added algorithmic layer based on debt relations by which workers—functioning as if in a credit system—had to remain disciplined and monitor their paying and spending habits (Mahumud, 2012). This added layer is not documented in other accounts of algorithmic control of food delivery platforms where the prevalence of cash is not as salient (Galière, 2020; Huang, 2023; van Doorn and Chen, 2021; Veen et al., 2020). This reveals that despite technological visions of scale in which a single abstract design is exported everywhere, local contexts shape technologies themselves (Hannah and Park, 2020). Here, I only focus on one element of the local context—the prevalence of cash—and its ramifications for labor and algorithmic control. Future research can mobilize the concept of delegation to investigate how the repair work needed to address other inconsistencies between algorithmic systems and local environments shapes algorithmic control beyond the case of Mexico City.

Moreover, by being attentive to how platform dependency shapes delegation, this article answers the research call to address heterogeneity among experiences of platform work for different workers (Joseph-Goteiner, 2024; Lam and Triandafyllidou, 2022; Schor et al., 2020). In this case, platform dependency—the degree to which workers depend upon platforms as a source of

income—specifically resulted in different experiences in the delegated repair task of cash administration. This contributes to our understanding of repair work and delegation. Specifically, enrollments between humans and technology do not occur in a vacuum. Contrary to the image of an abstract and homogenous worker performing repair tasks to address design inconsistencies (Li, 2024), this article addresses how workers come from different socioeconomic contexts and have different platform dependencies which, in turn, deeply shape experiences in repair work. Analytical attention to how existing socioeconomic divide's structure repair work in and beyond labor platforms can be extended to other local sociotechnical contexts.

Overall, zooming in on the process of adapting food delivery platforms to cash-centric Mexico City revealed heterogenous experiences of repair work and subsequently different experiences with algorithmic control. Zooming out to a global scale reveals that algorithmic management does not follow a universal template. Rather, enrollments between humans and technology in addressing inconsistencies between design and local practices result in local articulations of algorithmic control. An important limitation of this study is that I only focus on one set of platform features as they relate to the facilitation of cash transaction. Other studies can address other features. In addition, future research could address the ongoing process of delegation to adapt labor platforms in different contexts and conduct a comparative analysis focused on different iterations of algorithmic management. Finally, an important limitation of this study is that I focus on a specific period of time between 2022 and 2023 and thus cannot address how platforms have changed their platform's cash administration features over time. This is particularly important as platforms continuously change their design in response to user experiences (de la Cruz Paragas and Lin, 2016). Since my departure from the field, I have been informed by couriers that Rappi now allows couriers to deny cash orders without getting blocked; however, they still get punished through declining acceptance metrics, preventing them from gaining algorithmic priority for food order

assignment. Additionally, Uber Eats no longer blocks couriers from platforms but restricts them from receiving cash orders. These changes—apparently made in response to courier's experiences on the ground—point to the possible role of workers as important local agents of global technologies.

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APPENDIX D

Interview Schedules

Personal History

-Tell me about yourself.

- How old are you?
- Where were you born?
- How would you describe yourself to someone that does not know you?
- Aside from work, what do you like to do?
- Are you the head of your household?

Labor History

-Tell me a little bit about your past employment history and the jobs that you have had before.

- How old were you when you began working?
- Tell me about the jobs that you have had. How many jobs have you held?
- Walk me through the jobs that you have held.
- Tell me about the job that you had previously had that you enjoyed the most. What did that job consist of? How were your bosses? Why did you like that job? How did you feel in that hob? How much money did you earn in that job? Why did you leave that job?

Signing In: Entrance to Food Delivery Gig Work

-Tell me why you decided to start working in food delivery gig work.

- Tell me when you decided to start working food delivery gig work. Why did you decide to sign-in? Who inform you about food delivery platforms? Did you have other options beside food delivery gig-work?
- [In case the person signed-in due to unemployment]. What were your options when you were unemployed? What lead you to finally decide to work in food delivery platforms?
- Tell me about the process you went through to sign-in to food delivery platforms. Did someone help you? What resources did you have before working in food delivery platforms? To what food delivery platforms did you signed-in to? Why did you decide to sign-in to those food delivery platforms?
- How long have you been working for food delivery platforms? Are you in just one or multiple food delivery platforms? Do you log-in to all platforms in each working day? Why did you decide to sign-in to several food delivery platforms?
- What mode of transportation do you use while delivering?

Logged-In: One typical day for food delivery gig couriers

-Tell me about your day-to-day experiences working for food delivery platforms.

- Tell me how your day is before logging-in, while logged-in, and while logged-out of food delivery platforms.
- What days do you log-in to food delivery platforms?
- In what city zones do you usually log-in to food delivery platforms? Why did you choose those zones? Do you return to that same zone or you let the food delivery platform algorithm drag you to whatever zone?
- What do you do with bour body the hours that you are connect it to food delivery platforms?
- What are your daily earnings? Do you set yourself a goal? Are you able to accomplish that goal?

Interaction and Perception of Platforms and Algorithms

- The food delivery platforms that you use. Are they easy to use? Do you consider yourself an expert when using food delivery platforms? Is the design of food delivery platforms easy and intuitive? Who taught you how to use food delivery platforms?
- Do you consider that food delivery platforms have a good notion of the streets and the city? Apart from the map embedded in food delivery platforms do you use mobilize other strategies to navigate the city?
- How many food orders do you receive per day? How long do you wait between each food order? Do you believe you receive more or less the same food orders as other couriers?
- Are the food orders that you received properly paid? What do you think influences that you receive more food orders?
- What do you think influences for you to receive better paid food order? Do you think that your effort is properly proportionate to the food orders and pay that you receive?
- What metrics do the food delivery platforms that you use employ evaluate you? How are you with the classification metrics? Do you think you have better or worse or the same metrics than other couriers? What effects do metrics have?
- How do the food delivery platforms that you use determine the level that you are in? In what lever are you in? Does the level affect your food orders and pay? Or how does it influence your work?
- How are you with debts? What effects does have a significant debt on food delivery platforms has for work?
- Have they ever suspended you or blocked you from food delivery platforms? Did you consider this punishment to be just? What did you do after getting blocked?
- How do you think that the algorithms that power food delivery platforms work? How do you think that the algorithms used in food delivery platforms see you as a worker?
- Do you think that the algorithms that food delivery platforms use to determine the number and price of food orders just?

Interactions and relationships with others in food delivery gig work

- Tell me about the relationship that you have with technical support. Tell me about the process that you have to go through when you have a debt or a challenge while working

arises. How do you think that technical support perceives you as a worker? Are they able to solve any inquiries that you have?

- How are your interactions with restaurant employers?
- How are your interactions with clients?
- Are you part of a base? Why did you decide to form part of a base? If you are not in a base, why did you decided not to form part of a base?
- Do you relate to other couriers?

Reflections on Food Delivery Gig Work

-Tell me about your general experiences in food delivery gig work.

- What has food delivery gig work taught you?
- Do you feel that you have changed since entering this line of work? How do you think you have changed?
- How do you feel about your decision about joining food delivery gig work?
- Do you like this work? Do you like in relation, and relative, to other jobs that you have had?
- What do you like about this job? What do you dislike about this job?
- Do you like working in food delivery platforms or you prefer to have a flesh-and-bones boss?
- Do you consider that your earnings are proportionate to your effort?
- How do you see yourself as a courier? How do you think others—your family, friends, strangers—perceive you as a courier? Do you feel proud to be a courier?

Signing Out: Future plans

- Tell me about your future plans.
- How much longer do you plan to work in food delivery platforms?
- How do you see yourself in 5 years? In 10 years?
- Do you feel being a food delivery gig worker has helped you with your future plans?

Historia biográfica

- Cuéntame un poquito de ti de quien eres.
    - ¿Cuantos años tienes?
    - ¿En donde naciste?
    - Como te describirías a una persona que no te conoce.
    - Aparte del trabajo que es lo que te gusta hacer.
    - ¿Eres jefe de familia?

Historia laboral

- Cuéntame un poquito de tu historia laboral y los trabajos que has tenido.
    - ¿A los cuantos años empezaste a trabajar?
    - Cuéntame de los trabajos que has tenido. ¿Cuántos trabajos has tenido? Cuéntame un poquito de tu trayectoria laboral, encamíname por todos los trabajos que has tenido.
    - Cuéntame un poquito del trabajo que has tenido que mas te ha gustado. ¿En que consistía ese trabajo? ¿Cómo eran tus jefes? ¿Por qué te gustaba ese trabajo? ¿Cómo te sentías cuando tenias ese trabajo? ¿Cuánto ganabas en ese trabajo? ¿Por qué dejaste ese trabajo?
    - Ahora cuéntame un poquito del ultimo trabajo que tuviste. ¿En que trabajabas? ¿En que consista ese trabajo? ¿Te gustaba ese trabajo? ¿Cómo te sentías cuando tenias ese trabajo? ¿Por qué dejaste ese trabajo?

Signing-In: Entrada al Trabajo de Reparto

- Cuéntame un poquito de porque decidiste entrar a trabajar a las aplicaciones de reparto.
    - Cuéntame cuando decidiste entrar a las aplicaciones de reparto. ¿Por qué decidiste entrar? ¿Quién te informo de estas aplicaciones? ¿Tenias otras opciones aparte de las aplicaciones?
    - [En caso de que la persona ingreso por desempleo] ¿Cuales fueron tus opciones cuando estabas desempleado/a? ¿Qué te llevo finalmente a decidirte a trabajar en las aplicaciones de reparto?
    - Cuéntame un poquito del proceso por el que pasaste para inscribirte a las aplicaciones de reparto. ¿Quien te ayudo a inscribirte? ¿Qué recursos tenias al entrar a repartir en las aplicaciones? ¿A que aplicaciones te inscribiste? ¿Por qué decidiste inscribirte a esas aplicaciones?
    - ¿Desde cuando entraste a las aplicaciones? ¿A que aplicación entraste y porque decidiste entrar a esa aplicación? ¿Te conectas nomas a una aplicación o te conectas varias aplicaciones? ¿Por qué decidiste conectarte a esa aplicación? ¿Por qué decidiste conectarte a varias aplicaciones?
    - ¿Que modo de transporte usas? ¿Porque decidiste usar este medio de transporte?
-

Loggin-In: Un Día de Trabajo para un Repartidor de Aplicaciones de Reparto

- Cuéntame un poquito de tus experiencias de día a día en las aplicaciones de reparto.
  - Cuéntame de como es tu día desde antes a conectarte, al conectarte y al desconectarte? (Preguntas relacionadas/probing questions =
  - ¿Qué días te conectas? ¿Qué horas te conectas?
  - ¿En que zonas trabajas, porque decidiste trabajar en esas zonas? ¿Regresas a una misma zona o dejas que la aplicación te jale?
  - ¿Qué tienes que hacer con tu cuerpo en tu día y día y en las horas que estas conectado? ¿Y en las horas que estas desconectado?
  - ¿Cuales son tus ganancias por día? ¿Te pones alguna meta de ganancia por día? ¿Logras cumplir esta meta de ganancia?

Interacción y Percepción de Plataformas y Algoritmos

- ¿Las plataformas que usas, son fáciles de usar? ¿Te consideras un experto al usar la aplicación? ¿El diseño de la aplicación es fácil e intuitivo? ¿Quién te ense;o a usar la aplicación?
- [¿Consideras que la aplicación tiene una buena noción de la calle y la cuidad? ¿Aparte del mapa que usa la aplicación que otras estrategias usas para navegar el terreno?
- ¿Cuántos pedidos recibes por día? ¿Cuánto esperas entre pedido? ¿Crees que recibes mas, menos, o iguales pedidos que tus compañeros?
- ¿Los pedidos que usas son bien pagados? ¿Qué influye que recibas mas pedidos?
- ¿Qué influye que recibas pedidos mejor pagados? ¿Crees que tu esfuerzo en el trabajo equivale a los pedidos y los precios que recibes?
- ¿Cuales son las cualidades mas importantes que tu consideras debes tener para ser un buen repartidor o para tener buenas ganancias en el trabajo de reparto?
- ¿Qué es lo que califican las métricas de las plataformas que usas? ¿Cómo vas con tus métricas? ¿Crees que llevas mejor, peor, o iguales métricas que tus otros compa;eros? ¿En que influyen las métricas?
- ¿Como es que las aplicaciones que usas determinan el nivel en que estas? ¿En que nivel estas tu? ¿En que influye en el nivel en el que estas?
- ¿Cómo vas con tus deudas? ¿En que influye tener deudas?
- ¿Alguna vez te han suspendido o bloqueada de las aplicaciones? ¿Consideras que este castigo fue justo? ¿Qué hiciste cuando te bloquearon/suspendieron?
- ¿Cómo vas con tus deudas? ¿En que influye tener deudas?
- ¿Cómo crees que funcionan los algoritmos que utilizan las plataformas que usas? ¿Cómo crees que los algoritmos que utilizan las plataformas te perciben a ti como trabajador?
- ¿Crees que los algoritmos que usan las plataformas para determinar numero de pedidos, y precio de pedidos te parecen justos?

Interacciones-Relaciones con Otros en El Reparto

- Cuéntame un poco de tu relación con soporte. Cuéntame del proceso por que el que tienes que pasar cuando tienes una duda o surge un desafío. ¿Como crees que soporte te percibe a ti como trabajador? ¿Logran resolver tus dudas?
- ¿Cómo son tus interacciones/relaciones con los empleados de los restaurantes?
- ¿Cómo son tus interacciones con los clientes?
- ¿Formas parte de una base? ¿Por qué decidiste formar parte de una base? ¿Por qué decidiste no ser parte de una base?
- ¿Te relaciones con otros repartidores?

Reflexiones Acerca de las Aplicaciones de Reparto

-Cuéntame acerca de tus experiencias en general de las Aplicaciones de Reparto.

- ¿Que te ha ensenado las aplicaciones reparto?
- ¿Crees que has cambiado desde que entraste a trabajar por medio de las aplicaciones? ¿De que manera has cambiado? [ ]
- ¿Como te sientes de tu decisión de haber ingresado a las aplicaciones de reparto?
- ¿Te gusta ese trabajo? ¿Te gusta este trabajo a comparación con los otros trabajos que has tenido en toda tu historia laboral?
- ¿Qué es lo que te gusta de este trabajo? ¿Qué es lo que te disgusta de este trabajo?
- ¿Te gusta trabajar por medio de aplicaciones o prefieres tener un jefe de carne y hueso?
- ¿Consideras que tus ganancias equivalen a tu esfuerzo que haces en este trabajo?
- ¿Cómo te ves tu como repartidor? ¿Cómo crees que la otra gente, tus familiares, amigos, o extraños te ven como repartidor? ¿Te sientes orgulloso de ser repartidor?

Signing- Out: Planes a Futuro

-Ahora cuéntame un poquito acerca de tus planes a futuro.

- ¿Cuánto mas tiempo planeas trabajar como repartidor?
- ¿Cómo te ves en cinco años? ¿Cómo te ves en 10 anos?
- ¿Sientes que el trabajar como repartidor te haya ayudado a tus planes a futuro?