Perceived Organizational Support and Job Satisfaction Among Platform-Based Gig Workers: The Mediating Role of Organizational Identification

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Abstract: With the rapid advancement of the digital and platform economy, the gig economy has witnessed substantial growth in China. As an emerging labor force, platform-based gig workers contribute significantly to the provision of flexible human resources in the labor market. However, compared with traditional employees, these workers often lack stable job security and adequate social support, which may result in heightened job-related anxiety and insecurity, ultimately reducing their job satisfaction. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, this study develops a theoretical model that examines the relationships among perceived organizational support, organizational identification, and job satisfaction. Based on a survey of 453 valid responses from platform-based gig workers in Yunnan Province, China, structural equation modeling was used for empirical analysis. The findings indicate that perceived organizational support has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction; it also significantly enhances workers' organizational identification. Furthermore, organizational identification positively influences job satisfaction and serves as a partial mediator between perceived organizational support and job satisfaction. Based on these findings, the study offers theoretical insights and practical recommendations to inform platform enterprise management.

Keywords: Perceived Organizational Support; Organizational Identification; Job Satisfaction; Gig Economy; Social Exchange Theory

1. Introduction

With the widespread advancement of information technology and the continuous development of the sharing economy, the gig economy has rapidly emerged as a new form of employment in China. It offers workers flexible job opportunities and diversified channels for part-time work. Typical platform-based gig workers include food delivery couriers, ride-hailing drivers, and instant service providers. While they contribute significantly to the supply of flexible labor and the efficiency of urban operations, these workers also face considerable challenges such as unstable income, lack of social security, and limited career advancement opportunities [1]. These issues not only impact their livelihoods but also influence their psychological well-being and attitudes toward the organizations they work for.

According to Social Identity Theory, when organizations offer emotional care and institutional support, employees are more likely to develop a stronger sense of belonging and satisfaction [2]. In digital platform contexts, previous studies have shown that when platform-based gig workers perceive institutional safeguards and responsive feedback mechanisms, their sense of organizational attachment and work engagement significantly increases [3]. However, existing research has largely focused on macro-level factors such as platform governance and incentive structures, while overlooking the subjective psychological mechanisms—especially the role of organizational identification—in shaping the relationship between perceived support and job-related outcomes.

Organizational identification, as a critical affective mechanism, has recently received growing attention in studies on gig labor. Gig workers who develop strong identification with their platforms tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction and stronger retention intentions [4]. Nevertheless, due to the highly flexible and ambiguous nature of platform employment, the process through which such identification is formed—and whether it mediates the effect of

perceived organizational support on job satisfaction—remains theoretically underdeveloped and empirically underexplored. Therefore, current research on the psychological mechanisms affecting platform-based gig workers suffers from fragmented theoretical frameworks and a lack of empirical validation. To address these gaps, this study draws on Social Exchange Theory to construct and test a mediation model in which perceived organizational support influences job satisfaction through the intermediary role of organizational identification. Using data from gig workers in Yunnan Province, China, this research aims to validate the applicability of the model in flexible labor contexts, enrich the explanatory power of Social Exchange Theory in non-standard employment settings, and provide theoretical and practical insights for platform management and policy formulation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory Social Exchange Theory (SET), proposed by Blau [5], posits that social relationships are formed and maintained based on the principle of reciprocal exchange—individuals evaluate the balance between what they give and what they receive to determine whether to sustain a relationship. The theory has been widely applied in organizational behavior research to explain informal psychological contracts between employees and organizations, as well as the behavioral responses that arise from perceived support. Cropanzano and Mitchell further elaborated that when organizations provide resources such as care, fairness, and support, employees tend to develop a sense of obligation and belonging based on the norm of reciprocity, which in turn fosters positive attitudes and behaviors toward the organization [6]. In the context of platform-based gig workers—where labor relationships are often informal and loosely structured—perceived organizational support can still trigger internal psychological responses such as organizational identification and job satisfaction. These responses may motivate workers to reciprocate through increased engagement and loyalty. Thus, even in the absence of formal employment contracts, Social Exchange Theory remains a valuable framework for explaining emotional and behavioral connections between

platforms and gig workers, demonstrating its applicability in non-standard employment contexts.

2.2 Definitions of Core Variables

(1) Perceived Organizational Support (POS): Coined by Eisenberger et al. [7], this term reflects employees' belief about the degree to which their organization acknowledges their contributions and attends to their personal needs. In traditional employment settings, such support is often expressed through benefits, promotion opportunities, and managerial care. In the platform economy, although employment relationships are more flexible and less formal, platforms can still signal support to workers through mechanisms such as task assignment systems, customer service responsiveness, transparency of platform rules, and fairness in performance evaluations. These factors collectively influence workers' overall perception of organizational support and their sense of psychological belonging.

(2) Organizational Identification (OID): Defined by Mael and Ashforth [8], organizational identification is a psychological bond through which individuals internalize their membership within the organization, linking its achievements to their personal sense of value. It includes both a cognitive understanding of belonging and an emotional connection. Among platform-based gig workers, even in the absence of formal organizational membership, a sense of identification may still emerge through alignment with the platform's culture, mission, and values. This identification can shape workers' attitudes, behaviors, and long-term engagement with the platform.

(3) Job Satisfaction (JS): Initially conceptualized by Brayfield and Rothe [9] and further developed by Spector [10], job satisfaction refers to an individual's overall emotional assessment and attitude toward their job, encompassing factors such as task content, work environment, interpersonal relationships, opportunities for advancement, and compensation. As a key component of work-related attitudes, job satisfaction is not only a predictor of job performance but also closely linked to organizational commitment and turnover intentions. In the case of platform-based gig workers, their satisfaction is primarily influenced by factors such as rule transparency, fairness of task distribution, and the perceived

reasonableness of customer evaluation mechanisms.

2.3 Hypothesis Development and Literature Support

Social Identity Theory suggests that employees derive self-worth, meaning, and emotional security from being part of a valued organization. When employees feel supported by their organization, they are more inclined to adopt its identity as part of their own, which fosters greater commitment and job satisfaction. This affective pathway has been validated in prior empirical studies. For instance, prior research found that POS significantly enhances job satisfaction [11]. Similarly, this effect has been demonstrated in a sample of food delivery workers [12].

H1: Perceived organizational support positively influences job satisfaction.

As a social feedback mechanism, POS reinforces the perception that workers are valued, which in turn promotes psychological attachment and identity formation. POS is a strong predictor of OID [13], and support encourages workers to see the organization as an extension of themselves [14].

H2: Perceived organizational support positively influences organizational identification.

When employees develop a strong sense of organizational identification, they are more likely to synchronize their individual goals with organizational objectives. This alignment enhances their sense of self-worth and psychological consistency, thereby contributing to increased job satisfaction. Moreover, organizational identification is a key factor in promoting employees' psychological well-being [8], and prior research has demonstrated a significant positive correlation between organizational identification and job satisfaction [12].

H3: Organizational identification positively influences job satisfaction.

From a mediational perspective, POS may not directly affect job satisfaction but instead operate through the emotional channel of organizational identification. This mediating role has been validated [15], and the transformation of POS into satisfaction relies on affective mechanisms [6].

H4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and job satisfaction.

3. Research Design

3.1 Conceptual Model and Variable Structure

Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, this Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory, this research constructs a structural framework to investigate how perceived organizational support impacts job satisfaction, with organizational identification acting as the mediating factor. In this model, perceived organizational support is treated as the independent variable, job satisfaction as the outcome variable, and organizational identification as the intervening variable. The model captures both direct and mediated pathways, offering an integrated perspective on the psychological processes through which organizational support shapes attitudes among gig workers.

3.2 Measurement Instruments

To guarantee the reliability and validity of the measurement tools, this study adopted widely recognized and previously validated scales. Perceived organizational support was evaluated using a 6-item instrument developed by Eisenberger et al. [7], while organizational identification was measured through a 6-item scale adapted from the work of Mael and Ashforth [8]. Job satisfaction was captured using a concise 3-item scale created by Smith et al. [16]. All items utilized a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the preliminary test, Cronbach's alpha values for each scale exceeded 0.80, demonstrating strong internal consistency, a result that was reaffirmed in the main study.

3.3 Sample and Data Collection

The study sample consisted of platform-based gig workers in Yunnan Province, China. Data were collected in April 2024 through a combination of online surveys and offline interviews. A total of 480 questionnaires were distributed, of which 453 were returned and deemed valid, resulting in an effective response rate of approximately 94%. The demographic characteristics of the sample showed a balanced gender distribution, an age concentration between 20 and 40 years, and an education level primarily at the associate degree level or above. The questionnaire included measurement items for the study variables, along with demographic variables such as gender, age, education level,

and years of work experience. To reduce the risk of common method bias, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

To enhance the robustness of the findings, four control variables—gender, age, education level, and work experience—were incorporated into the structural model. These variables are frequently used in similar research and are potentially related to job satisfaction. Controlling for these factors helped minimize confounding effects and improve the accuracy of the study's conclusions.

4. Data Analysis and Empirical Results
This study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze survey data collected from platform-based gig workers in Yunnan Province. SEM was selected for its capacity to estimate complex relationships among latent variables within a single model.

The analysis consisted of three key components: (1) descriptive statistics and reliability/validity testing to assess data quality; (2) structural path analysis to examine direct effects among variables; and (3) mediation analysis to test the indirect effect of organizational identification. The detailed results are presented below.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability
The demographic characteristics of the respondents were consistent with the expected distribution of platform-based gig workers in terms of age, gender, and job type, indicating good sample representativeness. Reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all key variables exceeded the threshold of 0.70, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency across scales. For construct validity, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.82, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming the data's adequacy for factor analysis and the appropriateness of further modeling. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and the results of reliability and validity testing for the core variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability/Validity Results (n = 453)

Variable	Mean	SD	α	KMO	Bartlett (p)
Perceived Organizational Support	3.82	0.71	0.89		
Organizational	3.65	0.68	0.86		
Identification					
Job Satisfaction	3.74	0.73	0.91	0.82	< 0.001

Note: All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. A Cronbach's α value above 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability.

4.2 Structural Path Analysis
The structural equation modeling results demonstrated that perceived organizational support exerted a significant and positive influence on both organizational identification and job satisfaction, with standardized path coefficients of 0.48 and 0.42, respectively ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, organizational identification was found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$). A summary of these standardized path coefficients and their corresponding significance levels is presented in Table 2. The overall model fit was deemed satisfactory, as indicated by key indices: CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, and RMSEA = 0.05 — all aligning with established benchmarks for acceptable structural model fit.

Table 2. Structural Equation Model Path Coefficients

Path	Std. Coef (β)	p-value	Sig.
POS → Job Satisfaction	0.42	<0.001	***
POS → Organizational Identification	0.48	<0.001	***
Organizational Identification → JS	0.36	<0.001	***

Note: *** indicates statistical significance at $p < 0.001$. Bootstrap method used for validation.

4.3 Mediation Effect
To examine whether organizational identification mediates the link between perceived organizational support and job satisfaction, this study employed the Bootstrap resampling technique with 5,000 iterations. The findings revealed that both the direct path from perceived organizational support to job satisfaction and the indirect path through organizational identification were statistically significant. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect excluded zero, providing evidence of a partial mediation effect. Table 3 outlines the mediation analysis results, detailing the direct, indirect, and total effects, along with the corresponding confidence intervals.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The empirical findings support all four hypotheses. Perceived organizational support directly improves job satisfaction and indirectly enhances it by fostering organizational identification. This dual pathway illustrates the central psychological mechanism through which support from digital platforms can influence the attitudes and experiences of gig workers.

Table 3. Mediation Analysis Results

Mediation Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Mediation
POS → OID → Job Satisfaction	0.25	0.17	Partial

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 Key Findings
This study empirically examined the mechanisms through which perceived organizational support influences job satisfaction among platform-based gig workers, incorporating organizational identification as a mediating variable. The findings confirm that perceived organizational support exerts both direct and indirect effects on job satisfaction, with organizational identification serving as a significant partial mediator. This result highlights the psychological importance of identification even in flexible and loosely structured labor environments such as digital platforms. The study enriches our understanding of how organizational dynamics can shape worker attitudes and offers a robust framework for analyzing labor-management relationships in the gig economy.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions
This research makes several noteworthy theoretical contributions. First, it extends Social Exchange Theory to the gig economy context by demonstrating its explanatory power among platform-based gig workers—an underexplored segment within organizational behavior research. Second, the study introduces organizational identification as a key psychological mechanism that links perceived support with job satisfaction, thereby advancing existing literature on identity, support systems, and worker outcomes. Third, the findings suggest that even in the absence of formal employment relationships, social exchange processes still manifest through perceived organizational practices and worker affective responses.

5.3 Practical Implications
From a practical perspective, the study provides actionable insights for platform enterprises and policymakers. Platform companies are advised to invest in mechanisms that visibly convey support—such as transparent communication, fair task allocation, and responsive feedback systems. Enhancing perceived organizational support can strengthen workers' emotional attachment to the platform, thus improving retention and satisfaction. Additionally, fostering a sense of shared values and mission through inclusive messaging and cultural alignment may enhance organizational identification. Policymakers should develop regulatory frameworks that encourage or mandate minimum support practices for platform workers, such as access to training, career development, and basic social protections. These measures can enhance not only job satisfaction but also the long-term sustainability of platform-based labor markets.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research
Despite its contributions, this study is subject to certain limitations that open up directions for further investigation. First, the data were collected exclusively from Yunnan Province, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include more diverse geographic samples and platform types. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference. Longitudinal studies or experimental designs could offer more robust evidence of causal relationships. Third, the focus was limited to organizational identification as a mediating variable. Future studies could explore other mediators (e.g., psychological safety, work engagement) and moderators (e.g., platform type, worker autonomy) to build a more comprehensive understanding of support-satisfaction mechanisms in gig work contexts.

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