

Research on the Occupational Stigma Perception and Turnover Intention of Informal Employees under the Platform Economy in China

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Abstract. In 2018, the International Labor Organization (ILO) released a report stating that there are currently 2 billion practitioners worldwide who were in informal employment, accounting for a total of 61 total employed people. In China, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, by the end of 2021, the flexible employment personnel in China had reached 200 million, and informal employment has become an important form of employment in the country. Takeaway riders and other positions have the characteristics of occupational stigma due to the poor working environment and the lack of perfect labor rights protection. Meanwhile, the nature of the work of these informal employees will increase the great pressure on the them to be controlled by the time and the environment. Based on the combination of social identity theory and motivation theory, the paper presents and verifies the theoretical model of the impact of occupational stigma perception on turnover intention in the platform economy. On the basis of the data from 135 workers, it tests the study hypotheses. The results show that under the platform economy, the occupational stigma perception of informal employees increases the turnover intention, while emotional exhaustion plays an intermediary role, and the sense of work significance negatively regulates the role of emotional exhaustion on the turnover intention.

Keywords: Informal Employment; Occupational Stigma Perception; Turnover Intention; Emotional Exhaustion; Sense of Work Significance.

1. Introduction

Under the Internet economy there are a large number of flexible, loose employment relationship, in promoting the reasonable allocation of labor resources, improve the labor market flexibility at the same time, some negative news and public opinion, low social status, poor working environment and low autonomy also makes the service industry informal employment stigma. At the same time, the informal employment under the platform economy is characterized by high turnover rate and strong personnel mobility, which is not conducive to enterprise management and sustainable development.

The emotional exhaustion of employees has an important impact on personal mental health, organizational commitment, turnover intention, etc. At the same time, informal employment often ignores the employment health, and the rights of employees are often infringed upon, resulting in the reduction of their work enthusiasm, and easy to produce dissatisfaction. (Li Min et al., 2006) The sense of work meaning can stimulate employees' internal motivation and increase their organizational commitment. However, few people in the academic circle have studied the sense of work significance and happiness of informal workers. Therefore, this study introduces emotional exhaustion and a sense of work significance to explore the internal mechanism of the turnover intention decision-making of informal employees based on the platform economy.

And current stigma research focused on the traditional industry, and use more case studies such as qualitative research methods, and the Internet economy informal workers have new changes to career stigma, career stigma may hinder informal workers enjoy labor results, may increase the turnover

intention, the current research is still a certain contradiction (Wang Yumei, et al,2022) Therefore, this study hopes to provide a new research perspective for the subsequent "stigma" of informal workers.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Occupational Stigma and Turnover Intention in an Informal Employment Economy

Informal employment was originally defined as an informal employment relationship, where employees are employed in small-scale enterprises that are not managed by the state, and are not taxed and regulated by the government. (Zhao Li and Hu Angang, 2006) believe that the individual economy in towns, private enterprises, micro enterprise, and rural transfer to cities are all informal economic workers. (Xue Jinjun and Gao Wenxian, 2012) believe that workers who signed labor contracts but did not enjoy social insurance benefits should also be regarded as informal workers. In fact, those who lack social security, working hours and unstable places should also be classified as informal economic workers.

Occupational stigma is the current, negative social impression of the profession. An employment group will be bored, satirical and despised by the public because they work in a dirty environment or come into contact with dirty people and objects. Practitioners perceive career stigma (occupational stigma perception) when their profession is judged negative by the public (Huang Xu, Zhou Ye, 2018). Workers will have a series of negative consequences, such as high psychological pressure, job burnout, inefficient work, and frequent resignation.

According to social identity theory (social identity theory: Tajfel et al., 1986), an individual's self-perception largely depends on their role in society and the views of others, and when engaged in a stigmatised profession, workers' self-perception is challenged, resulting in negative feelings. Some digital odd jobs workers, namely food delivery workers and online ride-hailing drivers, also face varying degrees of professional stigma (Wei Wei, Liu Beni and Ling Yaru, 2022). Due to the large uncertainty of their work safety, time, weather, traffic and other unstable factors, they will obtain tasks through an application software, and need to compete for orders in real time. The platform also has a certain reward and punishment mechanism, which leads to the mental tension of practitioners, and always maintains a sense of urgency. According to the "Blue Riders' Development and Security Report" and the "2021 Research Report on The Mobility Platform in China's First-tier Cities", 37 % of the food delivery workers and the 22.49 % of the online ride-hailing drivers are all informal economic practitioners. They all have their own jobs, only earning extra income after work through food delivery and driving an online ride-hailing drive to pick up customers partly.

It has been documented that occupational stigma perception is positively correlated with worker willingness to leave in general employment relationships. However, the informal economy is characterized by high liquidity, low cost and no contract constraints, and new variables that may appear. With their free working time and place, practitioners are prone to risk aversion and defensive psychology, resulting in the turnover intention (turnover intention). Second, according to the theory of planned behavior (Theory of Planned Behavior, TPB: Ajzen, 1985), individuals are affected by social pressure when taking action. Some digital zero trade unions with informal employment aggravate their willingness to retreat due to the common pressure of being controlled by the platform for time and being evaluated by consumers.

2.2 Intermediary Role of Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a state in which employees consume their own emotional resources due to harsh working conditions and stress (Maslach C, 1982). Factors affecting emotional exhaustion include work stress (Leiter M.P., Maslach C., 1988), emotional labor (Chen Ruijun, Qin Qiwen, 2011), and social support (Akbar F., Akhtar S., 2018). Informal workers are mainly engaged in services, requiring emotional labor and being vulnerable to social stigma; sometimes delivery workers in bad weather, where uncertainty and risk increase their physical stigma (Wei Wei, Liu Beni, Ling Ya Ru, 2021). And these problems partly lead to the emotional exhaustion of informal workers. Occupational stigma perception can also affect the social status of workers, making workers also at a disadvantage in social relations (Golfman, 1974), resulting in less social support, which also aggravates the depletion of emotional resources for informal workers.

According to the Conservation of Resources Theory (Conservation of Resources Theory: Stevan. E. Hobfoll, 1989), individuals who suffer from emotional exhaustion tend to adjust their own behavior to reduce the loss of emotional resources. Informal workers need to face problems such as excessively long working hours, short-term high pressure, and lack of protection of labor security rights and interests (Cooke et al., 2019). High work pressure and insufficient social support can easily cause emotional exhaustion. Studies have shown that employees who suffer from emotional exhaustion are less productive and tend to quit their current jobs (Skaalvik, 2018).

2.3 The Regulation Effect of the Sense of Work Significance

Sense of work significance refers to a positive emotional experience and motivation state at work, which can directly bring about individual positive attitude and behavior (Song Meng, Huang Zhongjin, Hu Heyang, 2018). A sense of work meaning is a positive motivation that enhances employees' sense of professional mission and identity and experience fewer negative work experiences such as emotional exhaustion and depression.

According to the social information processing theory (Salanick G R & Pfeffer J A., 1978), the sense of work significance will directly affect the employees' internal perception of the work. When the employees feel the sense of work significance, they may have more interest in the work, thus increasing the work input.

3. Research Methodologies

3.1 Variable Measurement

The variable measurement scales used in this study are Maturity Scales widely used by the academic community, which have good reliability and validity. This study strictly follows the translation-retranslation procedure and conducts fine-tuning to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire. The overall scale adopts the Likert five-point scoring method, 1 is completely inconsistent and 5 is completely consistent.

Occupational stigma perception

The measurement of occupational stigma perception is mainly based on Pinel and Paulin's research, including six items, like "my professional identity affects the way people interact with me" and "Many people have negative views about my work, although they have not expressed it". In this study, the coefficient of Cronbach's α of this scale is 0.933.

Emotional exhaustion

The scale of emotional exhaustion is taken from Watkins's study in 2014, including 3 items, like "I think work squeezes me hard" and "my work makes me too tired". In this study, the Cronbach's α has a coefficient of 0.859.

Sense of work significance

The measurement scale of sense of work significance comes from the work significance scale compiled by Steger and Dik et al., with 10 items in total, including "For me, this work is very meaningful". In this study, the coefficient of Cronbach's α of this scale is 0.930.

Turnover intention

The measurement of turnover intention comes from a study by Scott et al., including 4 items like "I want to find a better job than the present one" and "I have seriously considered job-hopping since I worked here". In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.922.

3.2 Research Assumptions

In our research of literature, it can be found that informal employees may choose to leave because of their perception of occupational stigma, which may be indirectly affected by various factors. In previous studies, there were many studies on the influencing factors of turnover intention and the mediating effect between occupational stigma perception and turnover intention, but little attention was paid to the possible regulatory variables involved. As a motivational mechanism, sense of work

significance may change the psychological pressure and emotional perception of informal employees, which may have an impact on their turnover intention. Therefore, this study made the following assumptions:

Hypothesis 1: The occupational stigma of the employed in the informal economy is positively correlated with turnover intention.

Hypothesis 2: The occupational stigma perception is positively associated with emotional exhaustion

Hypothesis 3: Emotional exhaustion among informal workers plays a intermediary role between occupational stigma and turnover intention

Hypothesis 4: Work significance sense negatively regulates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention, that is, the higher the sense of work significance, the weaker the positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention.

The final formation model is as follows:

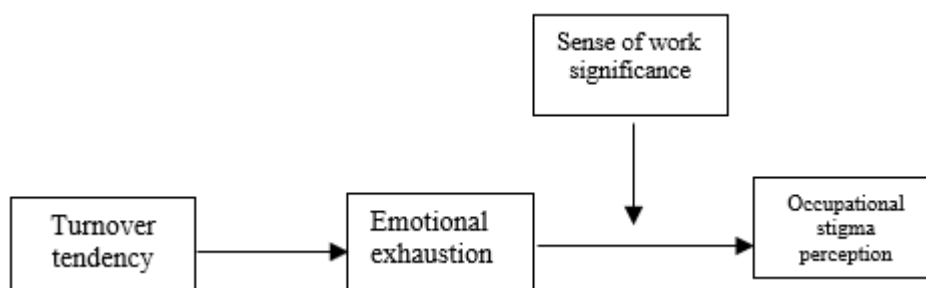


Figure 1. Research model

3.3 Data Compilation

The survey subjects of this study are new informal workers in the platform economy in Guangdong province, including food delivery workers and Didi drivers, and the survey period is from September 14 to September 18, 2022. The questionnaire was released through the credamo platform. As of the 18th, the team had received 213 questionnaires. After checking the unqualified questionnaires and proposing the suspicious questionnaires, the final valid questionnaires were 180.

Some demographic variables of the respondents are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Basic Information of the Respondents

Title	Option	Frequency	(%)Percentage	Accumulative perception
Gender	Male	74	41.11	41.11
	Female	106	58.89	100.00
Age	Under 25 years old	48	26.67	26.67
	26-35 years old	82	45.56	72.22
	26-35 years old	32	17.78	90.00
	46-55 years old	13	7.22	97.22
	Over 56 years old	5	2.78	100.00
Educational background	Below Junior college	14	7.78	7.78
	Junior college	43	23.89	31.67
	Regular college	105	58.33	90.00
	Master	17	9.44	99.44
	Doctor	1	0.56	100.00

4. Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this paper, AMOS24.0 software is used to establish a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model for analysis. The effective sample size of this analysis is 180,10 times beyond the number of analysis items, and the sample size is moderate. Testing the goodness of fit between the study model and the data, the results show a good fit between the observed data and the four-factor hypothesis model, indicating the overall fit of the theoretical model.

In this paper, by examining the aggregation validity of AVE values and CR values, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is conducted for 4 factors and 16 analysis items. The AVE values corresponding to the four factors are all greater than 0.5, and the CR values are all higher than 0.7, which means that the analyzed data have good aggregation (convergence) validity. The analysis results of the differential validity are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Model AVE and CR indicator results

Model AVE and CR indicator results		
Factor	Mean variance-extracted AVE values	Combined reliability CR value
Occupational stigma perception	0.702	0.934
Emotional exhaustion	0.672	0.860
Work sense of significance	0.816	0.930
Turnover intention	0.748	0.922

Table 3. Discrimination validity analysis

Discrimination validity: Pearson correlation with AVE square root values				
	Occupational stigma perception	Emotional exhaustion	Sense of work significance	Turnover intention
Occupational stigma perception	0.838			
Emotional exhaustion	0.511	0.820		
Sense of work significance	-0.353	-0.525	0.903	
Turnover intention	0.524	0.713	-0.536	0.865

Note: The diagonal number is the AVE square root value

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 4. Correlation analysis of each variable

		Gender	Age	Education	Working years	Occupational stigma perception	Emotional exhaustion	Sense of work significance	Turnover intention
Gender	Correlation coefficient	1							
Age	Correlation coefficient	0.026	1						
Education	Correlation coefficient	0.054	-0.006	1					
Working years	Correlation coefficient	-0.080	0.708**	0.079	1				
Occupational stigma perception	Correlation coefficient	-0.032	-0.267**	-0.096	-0.266**	1			
Emotional exhaustion	Correlation coefficient	0.106	-0.252**	0.020	-0.315**	0.511**	1		
Sense of work significance	Correlation coefficient	-0.075	0.253**	0.053	0.216**	-0.353**	-0.525**	1	

Turnover intention	Correlation coefficient	0.105	-0.337**	0.008	-0.389**	0.524**	0.713**	-0.536**	1
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$									

Table 4 lists the correlations of the variables, and the data show that there is a significant positive correlation between turnover intention and occupational stigma perception ($r=0.524$, $p < 0.01$) intention and emotional exhaustion ($r=0.713$, $p < 0.01$). There is a significant negative relationship between the turnover intention and the sense of work significance ($r= -0.536$ $p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient values between occupational stigma perception and emotional depletion are significantly and positively correlated ($r=0.511$, $p < 0.01$).

4.3 Hypothesis Test

Intermediation effect test:

This paper uses multiple regression analysis to first examine the relationship between occupational stigma perception and turnover intention, and Table 5 shows that the positive correlation between occupational stigma perception and turnover intention is significant ($\beta = 0.495$, $p < 0.001$), so hypothesis 1 is verified. Occupational stigma perception and emotional depletion are significantly positively associated ($\beta = 0.473$, $p < 0.001$), so hypothesis 2 is verified, i. e., between independent and mediating variables.

The mediation effect was studied using Bootstrap sampling test with 5,000 samples:

In the perspective of the intermediary path of occupational stigma perception \Rightarrow emotional exhaustion \Rightarrow turnover intention, the 95% interval does not include the number 0 (95% CI: 0.181~0.343), thus indicating that this intermediary effect path exists, so hypothesis 3 is verified.

Table 5. Regression analysis results

Variable	Emotional exhaustion		Turnover intention		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 5	Model 6
Gender	.084	.101	.084	0.230	0.101
Age	-.068	.009	-.135	-0.070	-0.075
Education	.035	.075	.026	0.095	0.034
Working years	-.263	-.193	-.289	-0.262*	-0.135
Occupational stigma perception		.473		0.495**	0.212**
Emotional exhaustion					0.610**
R ²		0.312		0.358	0.570
Adjusted R ²		0.292		0.340	0.555
VIF		F =15.791 P=0.000		F =19.402	F=38.205 P=0.000

Regulation effect test

According to Table 7, Model 1 includes four control variables: independent variable (emotional exhaustion), including gender, age, education level, and enterprise working life; Model 2 adds adjustment variable (sense of work significance) on the basis of the model, model 3 adds interaction term (product of emotional exhaustion and sense of work significance), and the results show that the interaction term in Model 3 is significant in the process of emotional exhaustion affects the intention of resignation. ($t= -2.802$, $p=0.006 < 0.05$), while the effect of emotional depletion on the turnover intention decreased with the increasing level of work significance, but still showed a positive correlation. Hypothesis 4 is validated.

Table 6. Summary of the mediation effect analysis processes

Effect	Item	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	Occupational stigma perception⇒Turnover intention	0.212	0.064	3.300	0.001	0.086	0.338
Indirect effect process	Occupational stigma perception⇒Emotional exhaustion	0.464	0.065	7.163	0.000	0.337	0.591
	Emotional exhaustion⇒Turnover intention	0.610	0.066	9.233	0.000	0.480	0.739
Indirect effect	Occupational stigma perception⇒Emotional exhaustion⇒Turnover intention	0.283	0.041	6.878	0.000	0.181	0.343
Total effect	Occupational stigma perception⇒Turnover intention	0.495	0.069	7.198	0.000	0.360	0.630

Note: LLCI refers to the lower limit of the estimated 95% interval, and ULCI refers to the upper limit of the estimated 95% interval

Table 7. Results of the regulatory effects analysis

Results of regulatory effect analysis (n=180)															
	1Model 1					Model 2					Model 3				
	B	Standard error	t	p	β	B	Standard error	t	p	β	B	Standard error	t	p	β
Constant	3.282	0.317	10.338	0.000**	-	3.205	0.309	10.385	0.000**	-	3.031	0.309	9.810	0.000**	-
Gender	0.066	0.120	0.554	0.580	0.029	0.049	0.116	0.418	0.676	0.021	0.080	0.115	0.700	0.485	0.035
Age	-0.105	0.085	-1.236	0.218	-0.091	-0.060	0.083	-0.727	0.468	-0.052	-0.058	0.082	-0.714	0.476	-0.051
Education	0.004	0.077	0.056	0.955	0.003	0.027	0.075	0.356	0.722	0.018	0.040	0.073	0.547	0.585	0.027
Working years	-0.140	0.089	-1.569	0.118	-0.118	-0.160	0.086	-1.846	0.067	-0.135	-0.163	0.085	-1.924	0.056	-0.138
Emotional exhaustion	0.714	0.060	11.964	0.000**	0.650	0.600	0.066	9.034	0.000**	0.546	0.605	0.065	9.284	0.000**	0.551
Sense of work significance						-0.215	0.062	-3.475	0.001**	-0.206	-0.129	0.068	-1.903	0.059	-0.124
Emotional exhaustion * sense of work significance											-0.155	0.055	-2.802	0.006**	-0.159
R ²	0.543					0.573					0.591				
Adjusted R ²	0.530					0.558					0.575				
F value	F=41.319 p=0.000					F=38.635 p=0.000					F=35.548 p=0.000				
ΔR ²	0.543					0.030					0.019				
ΔF value	F=41.319 p=0.000					F=12.073 p=0.001					F=7.849 p=0.006				

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

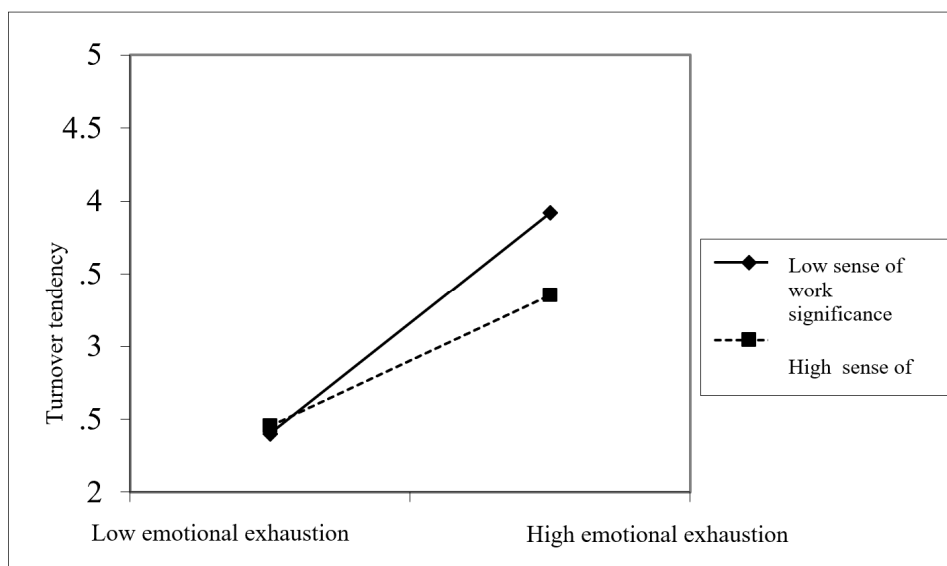


Figure 2. The adjustment effect of sense of work significance on emotional exhaustion and turnover intention

5. Conclusion

This paper uses social identity theory and motivation theory to verify the mechanistic model of the perception of occupational stigma of informal employees under the platform economy. Through the questionnaire survey and data analysis, the research results illustrate that the occupational stigma perception of informal employees under the platform economy increases the turnover intention, while emotional exhaustion plays a mediating role in it, and the sense of work significance negatively regulates the role of emotional exhaustion on the turnover intention.

Theoretical and practical significance

First, this paper validates this theoretical model of the perception of occupational stigma on turnover intention. Occupational stigma leads to situations where informal workers face neglect, discrimination, and more general identity threats, and the perception of this stigma leads to the depletion of emotional resources, thereby increasing the intention of workers to leave. Although the academic circle has paid attention to this problem, but China is still in the initial stage, the lack of relevant research and the integration of existing research, this paper through the "informal employment" this group of research, the psychological mechanism analysis.

Secondly, this paper introduces the work sense of meaning as a regulatory variable, to explore whether and how the internal motivation to affect the influence of cognitive intention to leave, the academic internal motivation and emotional relationship research is less, and at the same time the value of informal workers and work sense of attention is not enough, from this point of view, this paper has innovative significance.

Practical significance:

Informal employment is an important scarce resources for sustainable development of the platform economy, and this paper found that professional stigma perception can lead to emotional exhaustion, affect their working status, efficiency and organization commitment, and eventually lead to departure, which brings inconvenience to enterprise management, so deep understanding of the professional stigma perception affect the psychological mechanism is particularly important, this paper to sell distribution man psychological mechanism research has a certain practical significance.

Research limitations and perspectives

To begin with, the survey subjects in this study are few, mainly for food delivery workers and online ride-hailing drivers, without involving more types of workers in the platform economy. When controlling for the effects of other factors, it also partly limits the universality or generalizability of this study, so future studies can enrich the sample types. Secondly, the scales used in this study are all proposed by western scholars, and it is still doubtful whether it can fully adapt to Chinese research situation.

At present, there are few influence mechanisms on occupational stigma at home and abroad in the organizational context. This paper only considers the influence of personal emotions and motivation on turnover intention. The future research can be studied in depth from the organizational level, and it can focus on leadership style, workplace environment and other research perspectives.

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