Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency and Logistics Service Quality on Last-Mile Delivery Platforms: The Mediating Role of Rider Trust

Chunhui Wang

Department of Automotive Service Engineering, College of Automotive Engineering, Shanxi Vocational University of Engineering Science and Technology, Shanxi, 030619, China
wangchunhui_msu@163.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether the transparency of algorithmic dispatch systems is associated with the logistics service quality perceived by riders on last-mile delivery platforms, and whether rider trust accounts for part of this association. Drawing on procedural justice theory and research on trust in organizations and intelligent systems, the study analyzes survey data from 420 active delivery riders in China collected in 2025. Hierarchical ordinary least squares regression with heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors, together with a bootstrap analysis based on 5,000 resamples, was used to test the hypotheses. Perceived algorithmic dispatch transparency was positively associated with rider trust, which in turn was positively associated with rider-perceived logistics service quality. Transparency was also directly associated with perceived service quality, and rider trust partially mediated the association between transparency and perceived service quality. These findings contribute to research on logistics informatics and platform service systems by showing how the information platforms provide about dispatch decisions relates to the judgments riders form about platform coordination. The results also offer a basis for designing dispatch explanation, feedback, and appeal mechanisms on delivery platforms.

Keywords: algorithmic dispatch transparency; rider trust; logistics service quality; last-mile delivery; algorithmic management; platform governance

1. Introduction

Food, grocery, and instant-retail delivery platforms coordinate large fleets of riders through algorithmic dispatch systems that assign orders, set delivery windows, and monitor completion in real time. These systems are a prominent instance of algorithmic management, in which computational procedures take over task allocation and work coordination previously performed by human supervisors (Jarrahi et al. , 2021). Reviews of this phenomenon argue that technical design choices, including how decisions are explained to workers, need to be studied together with the attitudes workers hold toward platform governance (Benlian et al. , 2022). Within the field of logistics informatics and service science, this study examines one such connection at the rider level: whether the perceived transparency of the dispatch algorithm relates to the logistics service quality riders perceive, and whether trust in the platform accounts for part of this relation.

The setting of this study is China's last-mile delivery sector, where food and instant-retail platforms coordinate one of the largest algorithmically managed workforces in the world. The spread of instant retail has shortened expected delivery windows, and platforms compete on speed while overseeing riders

whose arrangements range from direct employment to fleet-stationed and crowdsourced modes. Public discussion of dispatch pressure and rider welfare has also drawn regulatory attention to how platform algorithms treat workers. In this context, dispatch transparency is a live governance variable rather than a technical preference, and the mix of platforms and arrangements produces real variation in what riders can see and understand.

Dispatch algorithms shape rider work in immediate ways, determining each rider's orders and time allowances and keeping the record of how the work unfolds. Research on algorithms as work designers describes how such systems set task pace, monitor performance, and structure autonomy, thereby shaping how workers experience their jobs (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). In practice, riders frequently report that they cannot see which rules govern assignment, why a particular order was allocated to them, or where to turn when a decision looks wrong. Field studies of food delivery work show that riders invest considerable effort in reconstructing the logic of the systems that manage them, often through trial, error, and peer comparison rather than through official explanation (Heiland, 2025). When the grounds of decisions remain hidden, workers may question whether the procedures treat them fairly, because automation can remove contextual information that people use to judge the propriety of a decision process (Newman et al. , 2020). Studies of ride-hailing drivers likewise indicate that acceptance of algorithmic control depends on whether the underlying governance is seen as justified (Wiener et al. , 2023). Dispatch transparency is therefore not a cosmetic interface property; it is part of the information governance of platform labor.

Two bodies of work speak to this problem, but neither addresses it directly. Research on logistics service quality has a long measurement tradition and has linked delivery performance to customer satisfaction, reuse intention, and platform sales (Lin et al. , 2023; Deshpande & Pendem, 2023; Rombach et al. , 2023). This work mostly measures quality from the customer side and treats riders as service deliverers whose working conditions matter to the extent that customers notice them (Belanche et al. , 2021). The judgments riders themselves form about the logistics process have received far less attention, even though riders are the actors who execute dispatch decisions under time pressure. Research on transparency and trust, for its part, has grown around general human-artificial intelligence interaction and information system acceptance (Wanner et al. , 2022; Zerilli et al. , 2022). It offers concepts that travel well to delivery platforms, yet quantitative evidence from riders who are managed by dispatch algorithms every working hour remains scarce, and the link from transparency to operational quality perceptions has rarely been tested.

This study addresses the limited understanding of how dispatch transparency relates to rider-perceived logistics service quality on last-mile delivery platforms. Two research questions guide the analysis. First, how is perceived algorithmic dispatch transparency associated with rider-perceived logistics service quality (RQ1)? Second, does rider trust carry a statistical mediation effect in this association (RQ2)? Using procedural justice theory as the main lens, and trust research on organizations and intelligent systems as the mechanism account, the study tests four hypotheses with survey data from 420 active riders in China. The contribution is threefold. The study conceptualizes algorithmic dispatch transparency as procedural justice information embedded in platform informatics, extends logistics service quality measurement to the rider side of the service system, and provides quantitative evidence on the transparency-trust-quality chain in a population that works under algorithmic coordination daily.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and develops the hypotheses. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 reports the results. Section 5 discusses the findings, and Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency

Algorithmic dispatch transparency refers to the extent to which riders can understand the rules that govern order assignment, the reasons behind specific assignments, the time logic applied to delivery windows, and the channels through which questionable decisions can be corrected. The construct builds on two theoretical traditions. Signaling theory holds that when one party cannot directly observe the quality of another, observable and credible signals reduce uncertainty in the exchange (Spence, 1973). Explanations that platforms provide about dispatch rules and reasons are signals of this kind: they convey information about the process behind decisions. The theory also counsels caution, because a signal informs the receiver but does not guarantee the underlying quality it appears to indicate. A platform could, in principle, publish plausible-sounding rules that misrepresent how the system actually operates, and riders who noticed the gap would revise their judgments accordingly. Transparency in this study is accordingly treated as perceived process information, not as proof of algorithmic accuracy; the trust and quality measures capture rider beliefs rather than verified platform conduct.

The second tradition is procedural justice theory. Greenberg (1987) separated the fairness of decision procedures from the fairness of outcomes and argued that the rules, consistency, and justifiability of a process shape members' judgments about their organization. Meta-analytic evidence supports this separation, showing that procedural justice operates as a distinct, measurable dimension with its own explanatory value for attitudes and behaviors (Colquitt et al. , 2001). Applied to dispatch, the visibility of assignment rules, the traceability of reasons, and the availability of appeal channels are procedural information from which riders judge how the platform governs their work. Studies of algorithmic decision-making reinforce this reading. Public employees report changes in procedural justice perceptions when managerial decisions move from humans to algorithms (Nagtegaal, 2021), and algorithmic reduction of decisions can strip away context in ways that raise fairness concerns even when bias is reduced (Newman et al. , 2020).

Transparency research in human-artificial intelligence interaction adds conditions on when information changes judgments. The effect of transparent information depends on the decision context, the content of the disclosure, and the capabilities of the user, so more disclosure does not automatically produce more trust (Zerilli et al. , 2022). Experiments on agency locus show that transparency reduces uncertainty in human-system interaction and that this reduction shapes how users evaluate the system (Liu, 2021). Work on algorithmic legitimacy argues that institutions should calibrate their transparency responses to the risk and audience of the decision rather than apply one uniform disclosure scheme (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2022), and evidence from algorithmic recruiting shows that the way a system is presented influences perceived fairness of its decisions (Ochmann et al. , 2024). Following these findings, this study defines transparency narrowly as the understandability of operational information that riders can act on: assignment rules, assignment reasons, time logic, and error-correction or appeal channels.

2.2 Rider Trust

Trust research in organizations provides the template for defining rider trust. In the integrative model of Mayer et al. (1995), trust is the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to the actions of another, built on perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity. Work on e-commerce measurement further distinguishes institution-based trust from trust beliefs and trust intentions, noting that these related constructs carry different measurement meanings (McKnight et al. , 2002). Rider trust in this study is a trust belief: riders' confidence that the platform's dispatch arrangement has the capability to coordinate orders, operates reliably, intends to treat riders fairly, and applies its rules consistently. It is a judgment about the governance relationship between rider and platform, not a satisfaction rating.

Research on trust in algorithms indicates that such judgments are sensitive to how systems present themselves. A review of user trust in algorithms distinguishes initial trust from trust that develops and updates through continued use, with transparency, experience, and system performance acting together over time (Cabiddu et al. , 2022). Experimental evidence on the automation of leadership functions shows that willingness to trust decision algorithms depends on how the automated function is framed and understood (Höddinghaus et al. , 2021). In platform labor settings, justice and dignity perceptions color these judgments. Workers evaluate algorithmic decisions differently depending on whether a human or an artificial intelligence is attributed as the decision maker (Bankins et al. , 2022), gig workers' acceptance of platform arrangements tracks their perceptions of whether algorithmic decisions are fair (Jabagi et al. , 2025), and ride-hailing drivers grant or withhold legitimacy from algorithmic control depending on whether its governance appears justified (Wiener et al. , 2023). Evidence from user studies ties these threads together: transparency and trust jointly influence the acceptance of intelligent systems (Wanner et al. , 2022).

The theoretical path from transparency to trust runs through procedural information. When riders can read the rules of assignment, trace the reasons for an allocation, and reach an appeal channel, they hold the raw material for judging the platform's capability and fair intent, which are the antecedents of trust in the model of Mayer et al. (1995). Procedural justice research predicts that accessible, consistent, and correctable procedures improve evaluations of the organizing authority (Greenberg, 1987; Colquitt et al. , 2001). Perceived opacity removes that information base and leaves riders to infer intent from unexplained outcomes, a condition under which trust is harder to sustain (Newman et al. , 2020; Zerilli et al. , 2022). Accordingly:

H1: Perceived algorithmic dispatch transparency is positively associated with rider trust.

2.3 Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality

Logistics service quality is conventionally defined as a process-based, multidimensional construct whose content depends on the segment being served (Mentzer et al. , 2001). Measurement traditions for digital services add dimensions such as efficiency, fulfillment, system availability, and privacy (Parasuraman et al. , 2005). In last-mile delivery specifically, customer experience research shows that evaluations form across multiple touchpoints rather than at a single moment of handover (Olsson et al. , 2023), and work on e-commerce logistics identifies reliability, responsiveness, and fulfillment performance as core operational dimensions (Akıl & Ungan, 2021). Studies in adjacent digital services confirm that service quality can be measured through distinguishable dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Karki & Dahal, 2024).

Most empirical work links these quality perceptions to customer-side outcomes. Logistics service quality predicts customer satisfaction and reuse intention in digital commerce (Lin et al. , 2023), logistics ratings relate to purchasing behavior and sales on e-commerce platforms (Deshpande & Pendem, 2023), service and platform factors jointly shape customer loyalty across markets (Rombach et al. , 2023), and on-time delivery connects to loyalty through transaction processes (Lubis et al. , 2025). Customer trust in mobile food delivery apps emerges from service experience together with data governance perceptions (Su et al. , 2022). Belanche et al. (2021) add an important nuance: customers observe riders' working conditions, and these observations feed into service evaluations and recommendation intentions. Delivery quality thus has two observation sides, the customer side and the labor side, yet the labor side is usually studied only through its effect on customers rather than as a perception in its own right.

This study takes the rider side. Rider-perceived logistics service quality is defined as the rider's overall evaluation of the delivery process the platform coordinates, covering reliability of order handling, timeliness, accuracy of orders and instructions, communication, and the handling of exceptions. Two

considerations support treating rider perceptions as meaningful quality data. First, riders observe the logistics process from inside, across many orders and conditions, which makes them informed raters of process quality even though their vantage point differs from the customer's. Second, a responsiveness perspective on logistics holds that the capacity to interpret changing demands and handle exceptions is central to supply chain performance (Richey et al. , 2022). Riders who understand dispatch logic are better placed to interpret changes and manage exceptions, and their quality evaluations plausibly reflect this interpretive position.

Treating rider perceptions as quality data does not displace customer measurement; the two perspectives answer different questions. Customer ratings capture the outcome as experienced at the doorstep, while rider evaluations capture the coordination process as experienced along the whole route. The two should correlate, since the same dispatch decisions drive both, but they need not coincide, because riders hold information about route conditions, instruction quality, and exception handling that customers never observe (Olsson et al. , 2023). Rider-perceived quality is therefore best read as a complementary indicator with diagnostic value: when it falls, the pattern points to coordination problems inside the process rather than to demand-side fluctuations alone.

Two hypotheses follow. If trust reflects confidence in the platform's coordinating capability and fair intent (Mayer et al. , 1995), then riders who trust the platform should evaluate the coordination process it runs more favorably, since trust beliefs generalize to evaluations of the trustee's conduct:

H2: Rider trust is positively associated with rider-perceived logistics service quality.

Independently of trust, transparency itself should relate to quality perceptions. Riders who can read assignment rules and time logic can align their effort with platform coordination instead of working against unclear instructions, and understandable exception channels reduce the friction that colors evaluations of reliability and communication (Mentzer et al. , 2001; Olsson et al. , 2023). Transparency also lowers uncertainty about why events happen in the process, which prior evidence connects to more favorable system evaluations (Liu, 2021; Wanner et al. , 2022):

H3: Perceived algorithmic dispatch transparency is positively associated with rider-perceived logistics service quality.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Rider Trust

Platform labor research supplies the context in which the transparency-trust-quality chain unfolds. Human resource practices on digital labor platforms are carried out jointly by algorithms, platform operators, and peer practices, so the rules riders work under emerge from several actors at once (Waldkirch et al. , 2021). Reviews of gig work emphasize that algorithmic management, platform dependence, and worker circumstances are intertwined, and that institutional arrangements need to be connected to worker outcomes (Wu & Huang, 2024). Income dependence on a single platform shapes work choices and how workers relate to the platform (Schor et al. , 2020). Delivery work is also embodied and mobile, subject to physical and temporal constraints that no interface information can fully remove (Popan, 2024). Evidence on the darker side of algorithmic management shows that control can provoke varied and even harmful worker responses depending on how control is experienced (Lu et al. , 2024), and algorithmic control relates to work engagement and exhaustion in gig settings (Lang et al. , 2023). These findings caution against assuming that any governance improvement helps all riders equally; they also confirm that how control is experienced, rather than only how it is designed, drives worker responses.

Research on digital operations frames the managerial stakes. Technology capability translates into operational outcomes only through accompanying organizational adjustment (Izunobi & Burinskiene, 2025), digital capability yields service results when paired with organizational agility under dynamic conditions (Ling et al. , 2026), and intelligent service functions reach broader service outcomes through user trust (Nguyen et al. , 2026). Studies in the same journal family routinely connect digitalisation and service quality to loyalty through mediating mechanisms such as satisfaction (Abbas et al. , 2026). Against this backdrop, dispatch transparency is best understood as an operational management practice of the platform, and rider trust as the judgment through which this practice may reach service evaluations.

The mediation argument assembles the two paths already developed. Transparency provides procedural information about rules, reasons, time logic, and appeal channels; this information feeds the capability, reliability, and fairness perceptions on which trust is built (Mayer et al. , 1995; Colquitt et al. , 2001; Cabiddu et al. , 2022). Trust, once formed, colors the overall evaluation riders give to the platform's coordination of the delivery process (Bankins et al. , 2022; Jabagi et al. , 2025). Part of the transparency-quality association should therefore pass through rider trust. The two paths are also unlikely to carry equal weight: trust judgments are general and slow-moving, built from accumulated experience (Cabiddu et al. , 2022), whereas the interpretive benefit of understanding a dispatch rule applies to every order at once. Because transparency also enables direct interpretive work by riders, as argued for H3, the mediation is expected to be partial rather than complete:

H4: Rider trust positively mediates the association between perceived algorithmic dispatch transparency and rider-perceived logistics service quality.

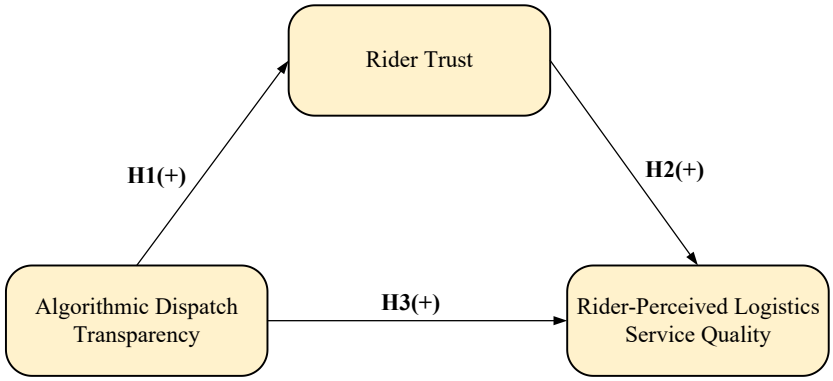


Figure 1: Conceptual Research Model

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The study used a cross-sectional survey design with the active delivery rider as the unit of analysis. The research setting was last-mile delivery operations in China in 2025, covering food, fresh grocery, and instant-retail platforms whose orders are allocated by algorithmic dispatch systems. Riders qualified for inclusion if they were performing delivery work at the time of the survey. Candidate records numbered 438, and 18 records were removed under the prespecified item-completion rules described below, leaving 420 records for analysis.

Data were collected between June and August 2025 via Wenjuanxing (a widely recognized professional online survey platform in China) and verified online delivery rider communities. To ensure data quality and participant eligibility, two screening questions were implemented at the beginning of the survey to verify that respondents were actively working on last-mile delivery platforms. An attention-check item (e.g., "Please select 'Strongly Agree' for this item") was embedded to identify and eliminate careless

responses. Participants were assured of strict anonymity and informed that there were no right or wrong answers, reducing potential evaluation apprehension. Because all measures were self-reported through a single instrument at a single time point, the study design supports cross-sectional associations rather than directional temporal ordering or causal inference.

3.2 Measures

All construct items used five-point Likert scales scored from 1 to 5.

Algorithmic dispatch transparency was measured with five items (AT1 to AT5) covering the understandability of assignment rules, the reasons given for specific assignments, the time logic applied to delivery windows, the data conditions feeding the dispatch system, and the availability of correction or appeal channels. Item content followed the procedural information emphasized in procedural justice research (Greenberg, 1987; Colquitt et al. , 2001) and the operational transparency content identified in work on trust in intelligent systems (Zerilli et al. , 2022).

Rider trust was measured with four items (RT1 to RT4) capturing confidence in the capability of the dispatch arrangement, its reliability, the platform's fair intent toward riders, and the consistency of its rules. The items follow the trust-belief tradition, which treats such confidence as a judgment about the governance relationship rather than general satisfaction (Mayer et al. , 1995; McKnight et al. , 2002).

Rider-perceived logistics service quality was measured with five items (SQ1 to SQ5) evaluating reliability of order handling, timeliness, accuracy of orders and instructions, communication, and handling of exceptions. The content draws on the process dimensions of logistics service quality (Mentzer et al. , 2001), electronic service quality measurement (Parasuraman et al. , 2005), and last-mile delivery experience research (Olsson et al. , 2023). A subscale formed by SQ1 and SQ2, the reliability and timeliness items most directly tied to dispatch execution, served as an alternative outcome for robustness checks.

Seven control variables entered the regression models: age in years, gender (female = 1), platform tenure in years, weekly working hours, platform income dependence (the share of total income earned on the platform, from 0 to 1), employment arrangement (direct employee = 1), and city tier (1 to 4, with 1 as the highest tier). Gig work research indicates that platform dependence and employment arrangement shape how workers relate to the platforms they serve (Schor et al. , 2020; Wu & Huang, 2024), which motivates their inclusion alongside the demographic and workload controls.

3.3 Scoring Rules and Missing Data

Construct scores were computed only under prespecified completion minima. Transparency required at least four of five items completed, trust required at least three of four, and service quality required at least four of five. Records failing these minima were removed before any composite score was calculated; the 18 exclusions in Section 3.1 follow exactly these rules. For qualifying records, the construct score was the mean of the completed items. No mean imputation, regression imputation, or other item-level imputation was applied. The low-rate item missingness that remained within qualifying records was handled by the available-case mean, and item-level screening preceded the computation of composite scores in every case.

3.4 Analytical Strategy

Five models were estimated. In M1, rider trust was regressed on transparency and the controls, testing H1. In M2, service quality was regressed on transparency and the controls, estimating the total association addressed by H3. In M3, service quality was regressed on transparency and trust together with the controls, which yields the test of H2 and the direct path relevant to H4. In M4, the reliability-and-timeliness subscale replaced the full service-quality scale as the outcome, serving as a robustness check. All regression models used ordinary least squares estimation with HC3 heteroscedasticity-robust standard

errors. HC3 was preferred because heteroscedasticity is common in cross-sectional survey data of this kind, and the estimator remains dependable under it without requiring a specific error structure.

The mediation question in H4 was tested in M5 with a nonparametric bootstrap based on 5,000 case resamples, reporting the percentile 95% confidence interval for the indirect association. This strategy evaluates the product of the two paths directly and does not require each path to reach significance on its own before the indirect term is interpreted (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Consistent with the study design, the indirect estimate is read as a statistical decomposition of cross-sectional associations rather than as an identified causal chain. All analyses were performed in Python. Prior to hypothesis testing, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to evaluate the potential risk of common method variance.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

Table 1 presents the profile of the 420 riders. The sample skews toward riders in their thirties, with half of respondents (50.24%) aged 30 to 39 and a further 18.10% aged 40 to 49. Men constitute 57.86% of the sample. Tenure concentrates in the two-to-five-year band (60.48%), and 22.86% have worked on their platform for more than five years. Working intensity is considerable: 51.19% report more than 40 hours per week. Income from the platform supplies 50% to 79% of total income for 61.43% of riders, and 17.38% depend on it for 80% or more. Slightly more than half (52.86%) work as independent or partnered riders rather than direct employees. The respondents spread across all four city tiers, with the largest group in tier 2 (32.38%).

Table 1: Sample Profile of Last-Mile Delivery Riders

Profile Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Age Group	18-29 years	107	25.48
Age Group	30-39 years	211	50.24
Age Group	40-49 years	76	18.10
Age Group	50 years or older	26	6.19
Gender	Female	177	42.14
Gender	Male	243	57.86
Platform Tenure	Less than 2 years	70	16.67
Platform Tenure	2-5 years	254	60.48
Platform Tenure	More than 5 years	96	22.86
Weekly Working Hours	40 hours or fewer	205	48.81
Weekly Working Hours	41-55 hours	163	38.81
Weekly Working Hours	More than 55 hours	52	12.38
Platform Dependence	Less than 50% of income	89	21.19
Platform Dependence	50%-79% of income	258	61.43
Platform Dependence	80% or more of income	73	17.38
Employment Arrangement	Direct employee	198	47.14
Employment Arrangement	Independent or partnered rider	222	52.86
City Tier	Tier 1	75	17.86
City Tier	Tier 2	136	32.38
City Tier	Tier 3	128	30.48
City Tier	Tier 4	81	19.29

Note: N = 420. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Validity

The three constructs sit near the midpoint of their scales: transparency at 3.08 (SD = 0.96), trust at 3.23 (SD = 1.06), and service quality at 3.35 (SD = 0.96), as shown in Table 2. The standard deviations run close to one full scale point, so riders in the sample differ markedly in how transparent, trustworthy, and well-coordinated they judge their platforms to be, and the midpoint means leave visible room for improvement on all three constructs. All three focal correlations are positive: transparency with trust (r = .41), transparency with service quality (r = .44), and trust with service quality (r = .35). Among the controls, the strongest correlation links age with tenure (r = .60), followed by platform dependence with weekly working hours (r = .42); neither reaches a level that would threaten the regression estimates. Transparency correlates positively with tenure (r = .21), direct employment (r = .21), and age (r = .11), and negatively with platform dependence (r = -.16).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency	3.08	0.96	–									
2. Rider Trust	3.23	1.06	0.41	–								
3. Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality	3.35	0.96	0.44	0.35	–							
4. Rider Age (years)	34.83	7.42	0.11	0.05	0.05	–						
5. Gender (female = 1)	0.42	0.49	0.02	0.06	-0.02	-0.06	–					
6. Platform Tenure (years)	3.70	1.86	0.21	0.08	0.08	0.60	-0.04	–				
7. Weekly Working Hours	42.64	11.24	-0.04	-0.08	-0.10	0.18	0.01	0.26	–			
8. Platform Dependence (income share)	0.64	0.17	-0.16	-0.18	-0.22	0.10	0.04	0.17	0.42	–		
9. Direct Employment Arrangement (employee = 1)	0.47	0.50	0.21	0.24	0.20	-0.03	-0.03	0.15	0.03	-0.14	–	
10. City Tier (1 = highest tier)	2.51	1.00	-0.09	0.02	-0.02	-0.06	-0.02	-0.06	-0.07	-0.03	-0.04	–

Note: N = 420.

Table 3 summarizes the measurement properties. Factor loadings range from 0.70 to 0.82 across the three constructs. Cronbach's alpha values are 0.79 for transparency, 0.81 for trust, and 0.79 for service quality; composite reliabilities are 0.86, 0.87, and 0.86. Average variance extracted reaches 0.54 for transparency, 0.64 for trust, and 0.54 for service quality, all above the 0.50 benchmark. HTMT ratios between construct pairs stay between 0.44 and 0.55, below conventional thresholds for discriminant validity concerns. The measures therefore show acceptable internal consistency and distinguish the three constructs from one another.

Because all survey items were collected simultaneously from the same respondents, common method variance (CMV) was evaluated using Harman's single-factor test. An unrotated exploratory factor analysis

incorporating all measurement items yielded multiple distinct factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the first unrotated factor accounted for 33.82% of the total variance. As this value is well below the conservative 40% (and conventional 50%) threshold , common method variance does not appear to pose a significant threat to the validity of the empirical findings.

Table 3: Measurement Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Items	Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	HTMT Range
Algorithmic Dispatch	5	0.71-0.78	0.79	0.86	0.54	0.51-0.55
Transparency						
Rider Trust	4	0.78-0.82	0.81	0.87	0.64	0.44-0.51
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality	5	0.70-0.77	0.79	0.86	0.54	0.44-0.55

Note: N = 420. HTMT = heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations.

4.3 Hierarchical Regression Results

Table 4 reports the regression estimates. In M1, transparency relates positively to rider trust (B = 0.396, SE = 0.051, t = 7.72, p < .001, 95% CI [0.30, 0.50]), supporting H1. Among the controls in M1, direct employment carries a positive estimate (B = 0.338, SE = 0.095, t = 3.57, p < .001), and platform dependence shows a negative estimate that falls short of the .05 threshold (B = -0.578, SE = 0.307, t = -1.88, p = .061). The remaining controls do not reach significance in this model.

M2 estimates the total association of transparency with service quality. The estimate is positive (B = 0.391, SE = 0.045, t = 8.70, p < .001, 95% CI [0.30, 0.48]), consistent with H3. Two controls also reach significance here: platform dependence is negative (B = -0.697, SE = 0.269, t = -2.59, p = .010) and direct employment is positive (B = 0.203, SE = 0.089, t = 2.28, p = .023).

M3 adds rider trust to the service-quality equation. Trust relates positively to service quality (B = 0.158, SE = 0.045, t = 3.56, p < .001, 95% CI [0.07, 0.25]), supporting H2. The transparency estimate remains positive in the presence of trust (B = 0.328, SE = 0.047, t = 6.91, p < .001, 95% CI [0.23, 0.42]) but is smaller than in M2, which is the pattern expected if part of the total association passes through trust. Platform dependence remains negative in M3 (B = -0.605, SE = 0.267, t = -2.27, p = .024), while the direct employment estimate no longer reaches the .05 threshold (B = 0.149, SE = 0.089, t = 1.67, p = .096).

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Results for Rider Trust and Logistics Service Quality

Outcome	Predictor	B	Standard Error	t	p	95% Confidence Interval
Rider Trust (M1)	Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency	0.396	0.051	7.72	p < .001	[0.30, 0.50]
Rider Trust (M1)	Rider Age (years)	0.0084	0.0083	1.02	p = .309	[-0.0078, 0.0247]
Rider Trust (M1)	Gender (female = 1)	0.143	0.093	1.53	p = .126	[-0.04, 0.33]
Rider Trust (M1)	Platform Tenure (years)	-0.015	0.035	-0.44	p = .660	[-0.08, 0.05]
Rider Trust (M1)	Weekly Working Hours	-0.0037	0.0047	-0.78	p = .434	[-0.0129, 0.0056]
Rider Trust (M1)	Platform Dependence (income share)	-0.578	0.307	-1.88	p = .061	[-1.18, 0.03]

Outcome	Predictor	B	Standard Error	t	p	95% Confidence Interval
Rider Trust (M1)	Direct Employment Arrangement (employee = 1)	0.338	0.095	3.57	p < .001	[0.15, 0.52]
Rider Trust (M1)	City Tier (1 = highest tier)	0.057	0.049	1.17	p = .241	[-0.04, 0.15]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency	0.391	0.045	8.70	p < .001	[0.30, 0.48]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Rider Age (years)	0.0038	0.0073	0.52	p = .606	[-0.0105, 0.0180]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Gender (female = 1)	-0.036	0.085	-0.43	p = .666	[-0.20, 0.13]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Platform Tenure (years)	-0.0010	0.0326	-0.03	p = .976	[-0.0650, 0.0630]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Weekly Working Hours	-0.0037	0.0041	-0.91	p = .365	[-0.0117, 0.0043]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Platform Dependence (income share)	-0.697	0.269	-2.59	p = .010	[-1.23, -0.17]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	Direct Employment Arrangement (employee = 1)	0.203	0.089	2.28	p = .023	[0.03, 0.38]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M2)	City Tier (1 = highest tier)	0.012	0.041	0.29	p = .769	[-0.07, 0.09]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency	0.328	0.047	6.91	p < .001	[0.23, 0.42]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Rider Trust	0.158	0.045	3.56	p < .001	[0.07, 0.25]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Rider Age (years)	0.0024	0.0071	0.34	p = .733	[-0.0115, 0.0164]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Gender (female = 1)	-0.059	0.083	-0.71	p = .479	[-0.22, 0.10]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Platform Tenure (years)	0.0014	0.0315	0.05	p = .964	[-0.0604, 0.0632]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Weekly Working Hours	-0.0031	0.0041	-0.76	p = .450	[-0.0112, 0.0050]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Platform Dependence (income share)	-0.605	0.267	-2.27	p = .024	[-1.13, -0.08]
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	Direct Employment Arrangement	0.149	0.089	1.67	p = .096	[-0.03, 0.32]

Outcome	Predictor	B	Standard Error	t	p	95% Confidence Interval
Rider-Perceived Logistics Service Quality (M3)	(employee = 1) City Tier (1 = highest tier)	0.0029	0.040	0.07	p = .942	[-0.08, 0.08]

Note: N = 420. All estimates use HC3 heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Decomposing the transparency-quality association (Table 5) separates the total estimate of 0.39 (SE = 0.04, t = 8.70, p < .001) into a direct component of 0.33 (SE = 0.05, t = 6.91, p < .001) and an indirect component through rider trust. The indirect association, estimated over 5,000 bootstrap resamples, is 0.06 (SE = 0.02, z = 3.21, p = .001), with a percentile 95% confidence interval of [0.03, 0.10]. Because the interval excludes zero, the indirect component is distinguishable from no association, and H4 is supported. The direct association remains clearly positive, so the mediation is partial: trust carries roughly one-sixth of the total association between transparency and perceived service quality, while the larger share travels through paths not captured by trust.

Table 5: Bootstrap Indirect-Association Analysis Through Rider Trust

Association Component	Estimate	Standard Error	Test Statistic	p	95% Confidence Interval	Source Model
Total transparency-quality association	0.39	0.04	8.70	p < .001	[0.30, 0.48]	M2
Direct transparency-quality association	0.33	0.05	6.91	p < .001	[0.23, 0.42]	M3
Indirect association through Rider Trust	0.06	0.02	3.21	p = .001	[0.03, 0.10]	M5

Note: N = 420. Bootstrap with 5,000 resamples; percentile confidence intervals. The test statistic is t for the total and direct associations and z for the bootstrap indirect association.

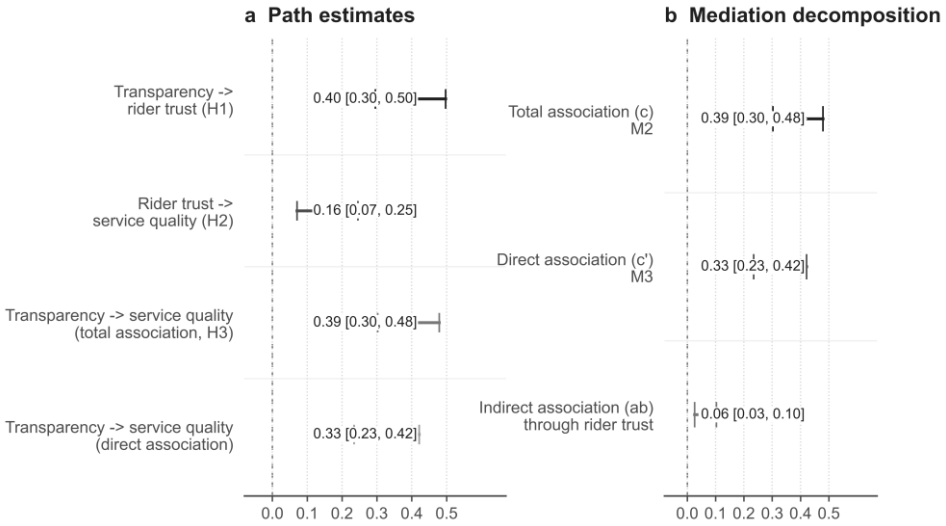


Figure 2: Estimated Path Associations and Mediation Decomposition with 95% Confidence Intervals

4.5 Robustness Analysis

As a check on the outcome formulation, the M3 specification was repeated with the reliability-and-timeliness subscale as the outcome (Table 6). The pattern matches the main analysis. Transparency relates positively to the subscale (B = 0.360, SE = 0.056, t = 6.41, p < .001, 95% CI [0.25, 0.47]), and trust retains a positive estimate (B = 0.152, SE = 0.050, t = 3.04, p = .003, 95% CI [0.05, 0.25]). Direct employment again shows a positive estimate (B = 0.218, SE = 0.103, t = 2.11, p = .036), and platform dependence remains negative but does not reach significance in this specification (B = -0.426, SE = 0.317, t = -1.34, p = .180). The model explains 22% of the variance in the subscale (adjusted R-squared = 0.20, F(9, 410) = 12.50, p < .001). The findings for transparency and trust therefore do not depend on the fuller five-item formulation of service quality.

Table 6: Robustness Analysis Using an Alternative Service-Quality Specification

Outcome	Predictor	B	Standard Error	t	p	95% Confidence Interval
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Algorithmic Dispatch Transparency	0.360	0.056	6.41	p < .001	[0.25, 0.47]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Rider Trust	0.152	0.050	3.04	p = .003	[0.05, 0.25]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Rider Age (years)	0.0064	0.0083	0.78	p = .437	[-0.0098, 0.0227]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Gender (female = 1)	-0.021	0.099	-0.21	p = .831	[-0.22, 0.17]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Platform Tenure (years)	0.0063	0.0370	0.17	p = .864	[-0.0664, 0.0791]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Weekly Working Hours	-0.0013	0.0047	-0.27	p = .788	[-0.0104, 0.0079]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Platform Dependence (income share)	-0.426	0.317	-1.34	p = .180	[-1.05, 0.20]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	Direct Employment Arrangement (employee = 1)	0.218	0.103	2.11	p = .036	[0.01, 0.42]
Reliability-and-Timeliness Service-Quality Subscale (M4)	City Tier (1 = highest tier)	-0.0068	0.0483	-0.14	p = .887	[-0.10, 0.09]

Note: N = 420. All estimates use HC3 robust standard errors. Model M4 R-squared = 0.22, adjusted R-squared = 0.20, F(9, 410) = 12.50, p < .001.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview of Findings

This study examined whether the perceived transparency of algorithmic dispatch systems is associated with the logistics service quality perceived by riders, and whether rider trust carries part of that association. Survey data from 420 active delivery riders in China provided support for all four hypotheses. Transparency related positively to trust, trust related positively to perceived service quality, and

transparency related positively to perceived service quality both with and without trust in the model. The bootstrap decomposition showed an indirect association of 0.06 through trust against a direct association of 0.33, a partial mediation pattern. The findings are discussed below in relation to each hypothesis, followed by the additional results from control variables, the theoretical contributions, and the practical implications.

5.2 Transparency and Rider Trust

The association between transparency and trust (H1) is consistent with the procedural justice account that motivated the study. When riders can read assignment rules, trace the reasons behind an allocation, and reach a correction channel, they hold the information on which judgments of capability and fair intent are built (Greenberg, 1987; Mayer et al. , 1995). The result extends earlier findings on algorithmic decisions in other settings. Public employees' procedural justice perceptions shift when managerial decisions move to algorithms (Nagtegaal, 2021), and workers judge automated decisions differently depending on attribution and presentation (Bankins et al. , 2022). This study adds rider-level evidence from a setting where the algorithm allocates work continuously rather than occasionally.

One reading of the finding follows the trust-development framework of Cabiddu et al. (2022): trust in a system updates through use, and each explained assignment is one input to that updating process. Riders interact with the dispatch system dozens of times per day, so small differences in the understandability of rules accumulate into meaningful differences in the confidence riders place in the platform. The association is moderate ($r = .41$) rather than strong, which is in line with the caution that transparency influences trust conditionally, depending on content, context, and system performance (Zerilli et al. , 2022). Perceived fairness of algorithmic decisions is one adjacent channel that this study did not measure separately (Jabagi et al. , 2025), and it may account for additional variance in trust.

5.3 Trust, Transparency, and Perceived Service Quality

Trust carried a positive estimate in the full service-quality model (H2), which fits the view of logistics service quality as a process evaluation formed over many order cycles (Mentzer et al. , 2001). A rider who trusts the platform's coordinating capability appears more inclined to rate the coordinated process favorably. A plausible mechanism comes from the responsiveness perspective on logistics (Richey et al. , 2022): trusted coordination gives riders a basis for treating exceptions as manageable events rather than signs of systemic failure, which colors evaluations of communication and exception handling.

The direct association between transparency and service quality (H3) was somewhat larger than the trust path. Read through uncertainty reduction (Liu, 2021), understandable time logic and assignment rules lower the interpretive work riders must do during execution, and this improved understanding appears in their quality ratings directly, not only through generalized trust. The finding parallels evidence that transparency and trust jointly shape evaluations of intelligent systems (Wanner et al. , 2022) while extending the outcome from system acceptance to an operational quality judgment. The two literatures usually stop at acceptance or intention; this study connects the same information mechanism to an evaluation of the logistics process itself.

The positive associations reported here should be read against evidence of the darker sides of algorithmic management. Control experienced as opaque or arbitrary can provoke gaming, disengagement, and resistance among platform workers (Lu et al. , 2024), and algorithmic control relates to burnout and weakened engagement in gig settings (Lang et al. , 2023). The rider judgments in this sample averaged near the scale midpoint, which leaves room for both favorable and unfavorable experiences within the same positive average pattern. The estimates therefore describe an association across riders on average, not a uniform response, and whether transparency helps the most disaffected riders most is a question for segment-level analysis.

5.4 The Partial Mediation Pattern

The mediation result (H4) is best described as real but bounded. Trust carried roughly one-sixth of the total association between transparency and perceived service quality, and the direct path retained most of the magnitude it held without trust in the model. Two explanations are plausible. First, transparency may improve quality perceptions through information processing alone: riders who understand the rules can align their effort with platform coordination, an effect that requires no change in trust. Second, the trust scale captures confidence in the governance relationship, and other mediators, such as perceived fairness or felt respect, may operate alongside it; ethnographic work suggests that riders actively construct explanations for algorithmic decisions and that official transparency reduces the burden of this sensemaking (Heiland, 2025).

Whatever the division of labor among mechanisms, the cross-sectional decomposition reported here is a statistical description, not an identified causal chain, and the bootstrap interval quantifies uncertainty about the size of the indirect component rather than about its direction of influence (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). This boundary condition should temper any claim that raising transparency will raise service quality through trust by a fixed amount.

5.5 Additional Findings from Control Variables

Two control results deserve comment. Direct employment related positively to trust in M1 and to service quality in M2, though the latter estimate weakened once trust entered the model. Platform governance is distributed across algorithms, operators, and intermediary arrangements (Waldkirch et al. , 2021), and a formal employment relationship carries institutional information, such as a contract and an accountable counterparty, that may partly substitute for algorithmic explanation in building confidence. Platform income dependence related negatively to service quality in M2 and M3. Dependence shapes how workers relate to platforms (Schor et al. , 2020), and riders whose livelihood rests on a single platform may evaluate coordination failures more strictly, since each error touches a larger share of their income. Both findings are exploratory, but they suggest that transparency is not the only information channel through which platform arrangements reach rider judgments, and that gig work research on heterogeneity among workers (Wu & Huang, 2024) is worth integrating into future models.

5.6 Theoretical Contributions

For theory, the study contributes to research on algorithmic governance and service quality in three ways. First, it extends procedural justice theory into the algorithmic dispatch context. The classic distinction between procedure and outcome (Greenberg, 1987) was operationalized here as the understandability of rules, reasons, time logic, and appeal channels in an algorithmic work allocation system, connecting the organizational justice tradition to current questions in algorithmic management research (Benlian et al. , 2022) and to the argument that algorithms act as work designers whose informational choices matter (Parent-Rocheleau & Parker, 2022). Second, it widens the observation point for logistics service quality. Existing work measures quality mainly from the customer side and links it to satisfaction, loyalty, and sales (Lin et al. , 2023; Deshpande & Pendem, 2023; Rombach et al. , 2023), while customer research acknowledges that riders' working conditions feed into evaluations (Belanche et al. , 2021). This study treats the rider as an informant on process quality in their own right and shows that governance perceptions align with those ratings. Third, it contributes to research on logistics informatics and service systems by tracing how an information governance practice, explaining dispatch decisions, relates through user trust to a service evaluation. The pattern parallels evidence that intelligent service functions reach broader outcomes through trust (Nguyen et al. , 2026), that digital capability requires organizational response to produce service results (Ling et al. , 2026; Izunobi & Burinskiene, 2025), and that mediation designs of the kind used in adjacent service research (Abbas et al. , 2026) can organize these questions in platform labor settings.

5.7 Practical Implications

Three design directions follow for platform operators. The first concerns explanation interfaces. Dispatch notifications that show only the result, an order with a countdown, leave riders to guess the logic. Presenting the applicable rule, the specific reason for the assignment, and the basis for the time estimate, in a short and retrievable form, addresses the understandability component directly. Calibrated transparency, matched to the decision types that generate the most confusion and disputes rather than applied uniformly, keeps the added information usable (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2022; Ochmann et al. , 2024). The second direction concerns feedback and appeal handling. The availability of a working correction channel is part of the transparency construct itself, so explanation design and appeal design rise or fall together. Platforms can define response-time standards for appeals, return the outcome with its reason, and feed appeal patterns into periodic review of dispatch rules, with priority on high-frequency exceptions such as bad-weather timeouts. The third direction concerns monitoring. Trust and perceived transparency can be measured regularly as operational indicators, and the control results suggest segmentation: riders outside direct employment arrangements and riders with high income dependence showed different judgment patterns, so transparency improvements can be targeted first at the groups whose evaluations respond most. A related caution concerns measurement cadence. Because trust responds to accumulated experience rather than to single events, point-in-time audits can miss downward drift between survey waves, which argues for repeating both measures on a fixed schedule. None of these steps requires exposing proprietary algorithm details; they require stating rules, reasons, and remedies at a level riders can use.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the association between perceived algorithmic dispatch transparency and rider-perceived logistics service quality on last-mile delivery platforms, with rider trust as a statistical mediator. Data from 420 active riders in China showed that transparency, trust, and perceived service quality relate positively to one another, and that trust partially mediates the transparency-quality association while the larger direct path remains.

Although procedural remedies and post-hoc statistical tests indicated that common method variance was not a pervasive concern in this study, the cross-sectional self-report design inherently limits causal inference and cannot fully eliminate measurement shared variance. Future research using longitudinal multi-wave tracking or multi-source designs (e.g., pairing rider survey responses with objective dispatch logs) would provide stronger causal verification.

The sample covers one country's delivery market in 2025, and the measures were tailored to that context. Future work can strengthen the evidence base by combining survey measures with platform logs and objective delivery indicators, tracing how trust changes with accumulated dispatch experiences over time, and experimentally varying explanation content to test causal effects on rider judgments (Cabiddu et al. , 2022; Ochmann et al. , 2024). Comparative designs across platforms, employment arrangements, and service-system contexts, including logistics operations beyond food delivery, would clarify where the reported associations hold. For research on logistics informatics and service science, the study indicates that how a platform explains its algorithmic decisions to the workers who execute them belongs in the analysis of service quality, alongside the customer-side factors that currently dominate the field.

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