

The Root Causes of Restrictions on Access to Information about Daily Waged Work: An Analysis from the Perspective of Social Capital Theory

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Abstract: In the digital era, there are still a large number of daily settlement workers in Majuqiao area of Beijing who stick to the traditional way of finding jobs offline and cannot obtain job information through online platforms. Based on the theory of social capital, this paper explores the restrictive root causes of daily settlement workers' access to work information by combining offline and online research in Majuqiao, Beijing. The study found that the offline social network of daily wage earners is based on cohesive social capital, and the information is homogeneous and closed. Due to the urban-rural dual structure, education level and age threshold, the lack of bridging social capital leads to the solidification of daily wage earners in the labor market. This research reveals how social capital plays a role, and provides a reference for the employment service and platform design in the era of casual economy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In 2025, China's flexible employment market reached 1,767.5 billion yuan, and is projected to grow to 7,670.442 billion yuan by 2030, with approximately 320 million people engaged in flexible employment [1][2]. Digital technology is reshaping the gig economy at an unprecedented pace. Groups such as food delivery riders and ride-hailing drivers have been absorbed on a massive scale by digital platforms, and the platformization of gig work appears to be an irreversible trend. However, on the flip side of the booming gig economy, in Majuqiao, Beijing, large numbers of daily waged workers still gather along the streets "waiting for work", which is a job-seeking method that has remained virtually unchanged from thirty years ago. Through interviews with more than 30 daily wage workers in Majuqiao, Beijing, it was found that they obtained work information through relatives, friends and fellow villagers. Their monthly income is below 5,000 yuan; 54% work 20 or more days per month, and the majority work more than 8 hours per day. While daily waged workers generally own smartphones and are familiar with online recruitment platforms such as "Yupao" and "58"—and thus have the ability to access digital resources—they still choose to "wait for work" at street corners. They prefer to accept lower wages and the uncertainty of waiting rather than use

online platforms to access a wider range of job opportunities.

1.2 Research Significance

By conducting an interview in Majuqiao, Beijing, the data indicates that the challenges faced by daily-wage workers go far beyond simply “not knowing how to use” online platforms; rather, they consciously “choose not to use” them. Even when they are aware of the existence of online platforms, they struggle to bridge the trust gap associated with online job searches. The research found that the city’s daily-wage worker population generally operates outside the city’s organizational systems in both work and daily life; they are typical “marginalized individuals” who are unable to connect with groups outside their social networks [3]. However, current research on the limitations faced by daily-wage workers in accessing job information remains insufficient. Drawing on social capital theory, this study analyzes the root causes of the constraints daily waged workers face in job search and access to job information, revealing that the excessive concentration of bonding social capital and the fragmentation of bridging social capital jointly shape the structural dilemma of daily waged workers, which is their tendency to “neither search nor change.” At the theoretical level, this study identifies the critical conditions under which social capital exerts its influence, providing a new analytical dimension for the entire process, from information acquisition to labor market entry, for informally employed groups in the sociology of labor. At the practical level, this study reveals how bonding social capital limits workers’ opportunities for upward mobility and demonstrates how the lack of bridging social capital exacerbates their employment difficulties, thereby providing a basis for optimizing the design of online recruitment platforms and improving information services for flexible employment as well as public employment support policies.

2. The World of “Casual Work” for Daily-Wage Workers

2.1 A Profile of Daily Waged Workers in Majuqiao

Located on Beijing’s Southern Sixth Ring Road, Majuqiao is the largest informal labor market and gathering place for migrant workers in North China, attracting an average of over a thousand people seeking work each day. According to field research, the daily waged worker population in Majuqiao is predominantly male with a relatively older age distribution; 73% are between the ages of 35 and 55. In terms of origin, most of the daily waged workers at Beijing’s Majuqiao come from other northern provinces such as Heilongjiang, and Hebei, while a small portion comes from regions like Shanxi and Hunan. The survey shows that the reason why it is difficult for daily workers to enter the formal employment market is that their diplomas are not high and their age is too old. 80% of daily workers have degrees below high school or technical secondary school, and their low education level leads to the lack of skills. Male daily waged workers primarily work as construction workers, factory sorters, and loaders or unloaders; female daily waged workers mainly engage in construction site cleaning. Survey statistics show that approximately 73% work more than 8 hours per day, with most jobs requiring high-intensity physical work. 60% have actual monthly incomes below 4,000–5,000 yuan, far below Beijing’s average wage level. However, the cost of living in the Majuqiao area is relatively low, which has fostered a certain degree of work inertia among them.

2.2 The Information Ecosystem of Majuqiao

Beijing Majuqiao daily settlement has a unique way to obtain job information, mainly including

intermediary recruitment, worker recommendation and other ways. First of all, intermediary recruitment is one of the most important ways. The daily settlement group will spontaneously form a gathering place. The intermediary will directly call for workers at the roadside or in the market. They stand in the middle of the road and write a letter, "the construction site 150 works 8 hours a day, is there anyone doing it", and then directly pull the workers to the construction site after agreeing on the conditions. Both sides of this recruitment method judge whether it is reliable through direct observation. Secondly, relatives, friends and fellow villagers will notify each other of work information. This way is to recommend reliable intermediaries or bosses by familiar people, thus forming a way of "veteran guide novices". Finally, the limited use of online recruitment apps. Only a small number of daily settlement workers try to use online platforms such as "Yupao" and "Getting Job as Quick as Possible" to obtain employment information, but such use is mostly sporadic attempts; At the same time, some human resources institutions have established wechat recruitment groups to release recruitment information, but the reaction efficiency of daily work settlement is not high. In a word, the information ecology of Majuqiao is characterized by mainly offline and introduced by acquaintances. Offline "waiting for work" has become the main channel for obtaining daily settlement information by virtue of embodied trust and community attribution.

2.3 The Information Ecosystem for Online Daily Waged Works

Compared with Majuqiao offline live mode, some daily waged workers rely on digital platforms such as wechat and other social media platforms to obtain work information. This study surveyed 100 daily employees who used online wechat to get jobs through questionnaire. Their education level was more than 50% in technical secondary school or above, of which 24% had bachelor degree or above, and about 76% were under the age of 40. First, online daily waged workers obtain information through various digital platforms, which is characterized by standardized presentation of labor information. Recruitment apps such as "yupao.com" and "live now" specifically display salary standards, working hours and work types, so that workers can compare and screen in a short time. The essence of this information presentation is to convert labor force into calculable standardized goods. In addition to the network platform, wechat group is also one of the sources of daily waged work information. For example, in the process of work, take away riders and local delivery staff establish wechat groups to share information. Sometimes, information exchange between different regions and industries can occur, and they can also remind each other of the risk of work information at any time. However, online channels have a certain threshold, and it takes a lot of energy to register accounts and understand information for daily settlement workers with low education. At the same time, it also has the problem of distrust. For the daily waged workers of Majuqiao, online channel is not the first choice.

3. The Safety and the Cage of Adhesive Social Capital

3.1 Building Adhesive Social Capital

Adhesive social capital refers to strong-tie networks based on kinship, geographical ties, and intimate relationships, emphasizing trust and mutual assistance within homogeneous groups [4]. Putnam argues that adhesive social capital is founded on strong ties, fostering greater trust among acquaintances within the same social circle [5]. For day laborers in Majuqiao, geographical ties form the foundation of adhesive social capital. Newcomers enter the market and secure their first job through referrals from fellow townsfolk, which is a process that characterizes the entry of most day laborers. Gathering on the street at 5 a.m. each day to "wait for work" is a scene that illustrates the daily operation of bonding social capital. Through their interactions, workers exchange

information, share their hardships, and build trust, transforming “waiting for work” into a social activity that sustains a sense of community belonging. Through their daily interactions, day laborers gradually establish reciprocal relationships, jointly seek job information, and strengthen these close ties through shared actions. The development of these relationships deepens emotional support, provides the driving force for cohesive social capital, and forms a closed and stable social network. Within this social network, the operational logic of cohesive social capital, which rooted in geographical ties, centered on “waiting for work” as a ritual, and driven by emotional belonging, highly restricts day laborers’ access to information to strong ties. Information flows along the paths of greatest trust, yet this also leads to the homogenization and insularity of information sources.

3.2 Information Security and Reliability

Adhesive social capital is a strong relationship network based on blood, geography and intimacy, emphasizing trust and mutual assistance in homogeneous groups. Patnam proposed that cohesive social capital is based on strong relationships, making acquaintances in the same circle more trust. For the daily waged workers in Majuqiao, the adhesive social capital is the support of their information source, and the strong relationship network of blood and geographical relationship provides help for them to enter the job market and obtain job information for the first time. Under the leadership of fellow villagers, the newcomers are familiar with the rules of the labor market. They gather at the intersection every morning. They are looking for jobs on the surface, but in essence, they are the daily scene of the operation of adhesive social capital. The daily waged workers accumulated trust in the process of information sharing. The newcomers were guided by the old members, and their emotions supported each other, so that the network could continue to operate. In this stable social network, information flows only within the circle and only along the path with the highest trust intensity. Although it is highly reliable, it makes the information source of daily settlement highly homogeneous.

3.3 Homogenization and Isolation of Information

Adhesive social capital ensures the security and reliability of information, but it also leads to the homogenization and closure of information. In the Majuqiao strong relationship network, information is transmitted by the way that people of the same kind pass on to people of the same kind. When the workmates are waiting for work together at the roadside, the villagers recommend the work they have done, and the workmates recommend the intermediary they know. No matter how many people pass it on from mouth to mouth, the information transmitted is roughly the same, so it is difficult for new information to flow in. In addition, when judging the cost performance of labor and wages through daily waged work, we refer to the experience of peers rather than the standard wage in Beijing. At the same time, most daily settlement workers have no awareness of comparison with the outside world, and lack trust in online platforms and formal recruitment information channels because they have not been verified by strong relationship networks. The more dependent on the strong relationship network, the more single the source of information; The more single the information source, the more dependent on the strong relationship network. Bonded social capital not only ensures the safety, but also locks the daily waged workers in a closed information world.

4. The Benefits and Costs of Bridging Social Capital

4.1 Building Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital is based on weak ties and emphasizes the ability to introduce heterogeneous information and resources not available within a group. Putnam argues that bridge social capital connects individuals from different information sources; the “thin trust” social relationships between these individuals are crucial for acquiring new knowledge [6]. In Majuqiao, Beijing, daily waged workers primarily rely on face-to-face “waiting for work” methods to obtain information, which is dominated by adhesive social capital, whereas job information provided by online platforms is predominantly bridging social capital. An online survey of 100 day-wage workers who obtain job information through WeChat groups revealed that approximately 67% of those seeking jobs online have a high school education or higher, and 80% expect an income of 180 yuan or more. Compared with Majuqiao, the daily settlement workers who apply for jobs online generally have higher education and the ability to apply the digital platform. Under the premise of obtaining relatively secure jobs, their wages are higher than those of Majuqiao offline. Majuqiao daily settlement workers do not have the ability to convert online information into effective information. They can only get work through relatives, fellow workers and workmates. This way can not connect the daily settlement workers with the recruitment party through bridging social capital. The information world of day-laborers is confined within the boundaries of bonding social capital; their failure to access better job opportunities is an inevitable consequence of the breakdown of bridging social capital.

4.2 The Consequences of a Lack of Bridging Social Capital

The lack of bridging social capital will have a corresponding impact on the acquisition of daily closing information and labor situation of Majuqiao. First, information constraints lead to structural barriers of opportunity. The survey data shows that the education level, income level and job quality of online job-hunting daily settlement workers are higher than those of Majuqiao offline daily settlement workers, while Majuqiao daily settlement workers are shielded from opportunities due to the lack of bridging capital. Secondly, the improvement of information screening ability is limited. Offline daily settlement workers often obtain job information based on relatives, fellow workers and workmates, which is limited to the strong relationship information network and cannot obtain the opportunity to independently identify information; At the same time, the institutional trust mechanism of online platforms cannot enter the trust structure of daily settlement. Finally, the reproduction of labor market and the solidification of stratum. Bourdieu’s social capital theory shows that what kind of social network people have determines what resources they obtain, and then determines their position in the social structure [7]. The social network of Majuqiao daily settlement is highly homogeneous. It is not only trapped in the low-end labor market, but also lacks social resources to change this social situation. In a word, the lack of bridging social capital makes the information access of daily workers within the boundary of cohesive capital. The homogenization of information and the limitation of opportunities make workers at the end of the labor market for a long time.

4.3 The Structural Roots of the Breakdown

The shortage of bridging social capital among daily-wage workers stems from the urban-rural dichotomy, educational attainment, and age barriers. First, there is the intergenerational accumulation resulting from the urban-rural dichotomy. The vast majority of daily waged workers

in Majuqiao come from rural areas such as Henan and Hebei, where there are inherent disparities in access to educational resources and information. The social networks formed early in life by these day laborers, who were born and raised in rural areas, consist of highly homogeneous, strong-tie networks. When they arrive in the city and enter the day labor market, their social circles remain unchanged, and the scarcity of bridging social capital carries over from the countryside to the city. Second, a lack of educational resources leads to limited digital literacy. Daily-wage workers come from rural villages and county towns across the country, where educational resources are scarce. Their hometowns often face economic backwardness and a lack of investment in education; most families rely on traditional farming, which limits the workers' access to formal education. When confronted with the interfaces and processes of online recruitment platforms, they encounter technical and cognitive barriers, leading to a breakdown in their diverse social networks. Third, age barriers are widespread in the labor market. Research shows that the majority of daily waged workers are middle-aged and older adults—precisely the group excluded from the labor market. Middle-aged and older workers who cannot find jobs in the formal employment market are forced to enter the daily-wage labor market; at the same time, daily waged workers aged 40 and above struggle to adopt and use digital platforms and lack extensive social capital and social networks. Consequently, older daily waged workers constitute a disadvantaged group within the workforce. Their lower educational attainment and limited experience with digital technology, combined with the breakdown of bridging social capital, keep them at the very bottom of the labor market.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1 Policy Recommendations

In view of the difficulties faced by daily wage workers in Majuqiao area in obtaining information, this paper puts forward the following suggestions. First, online platform operators should promote their own platforms, simplify design concepts, optimize user guidance, and establish a real-time work feedback mechanism to enable migrant workers to trust and adopt these platforms and integrate them into their own social networks. Second, the government should improve public employment services, promote the digital transformation of the casual economy, regulate the operation of the Majuqiao market, and explore ways to transition from casual work to formal employment, so as to promote the social connection of daily workers across class boundaries. Finally, at the national level, the government must guarantee the basic right of daily work settlement. Internationally, the Uber case has clearly pointed out that drivers are not independent contractors, but "workers" who enjoy labor rights such as minimum wages and paid leave. China can learn from the experience of the top-level design of the advanced employment model, establish a regulatory framework applicable to the casual economy nationwide, and effectively protect the basic rights of daily workers. In a word, through platform integration, service improvement and system guarantee, it will help the daily settlement to obtain more extensive labor market information.

5.2 Research Conclusion

Daily waged workers in Majuqiao seek job information through word of mouth from relatives, fellow villagers, and coworkers, forming a tight-knit network of strong relationships in North China's largest spontaneous labor market. Research has found that there are disparities in income and job opportunities between daily waged workers at Majuqiao and those who search for jobs online. The "information source dilemma" is a product of an imbalanced social capital structure where workers neither search for new opportunities nor change their sources. Adhesive social

capital, based on geographical ties and strong relationships, is highly concentrated, and the information world of Majuqiao's daily waged workers has long been confined within these strong relationships. Although job information obtained by individual daily waged workers through trusted sources is secure and reliable, information redundancy and psychological resistance have resulted in a severe shortage of bridging social capital or even a complete breakdown, which is essential for introducing heterogeneous information and facilitating cross-class connections. However, the urban-rural dichotomy, as well as the educational attainment and age of daily waged workers, have caused a breakdown in bridging social capital among Ma Juqiao's daily waged workers. This limits their access to job information, hinders their ability to evaluate information, and results in long-term class limiting within the labor market. Therefore, online platforms, training institutions, local governments, and the national government must collaborate to promote the standardization of the daily waged labor market, enabling these workers to transcend the boundaries of adhesive social capital and gain access to more effective job information.

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